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# **Capabilities for Peace? A Critical Realist Study of International Graduate Scholarships Impact in Palestine**

**Anas Nazmi-Nihal Almassri**

a thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
School of Education,  
Durham University



September 2025

# **Capabilities for Peace? A Critical Realist Study of International Graduate Scholarships Impact in Palestine**

Anas Nazmi-Nihal Almassri

## **Abstract**

This doctoral study investigates the potential impact of international graduate scholarships on peace in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT). It challenges the predominant explanation of scholarships' relevance to peace on account of advancing human and global capitals and fostering Western-style liberal-democratic socialisation. Interview and documentary data collected from 32 Palestinian scholarship alumni were analysed in a three-stage process, guided by a meta-theoretical framework of critical realism and a synthesis of Amartya Sen's (2001) Capability Approach with Roger Mac Ginty's (2021) theorisation of Everyday Peace. First, descriptive findings showed the participants perceive significant gains from their funded graduate education abroad in their academic, career, and multidimensional identity development. Second, inferential findings demonstrate that these gains represent increased effective ability of the participants to apply functions of everyday peace and disrupt some of the disciplining effects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Finally, dispositional findings clarify that this potential contribution to micro-level peace in the OPT may arise from positive interaction between effective freedoms extended by scholarships and pro-peace forces embraced by Palestinians. These findings demonstrate that the story of education abroad impact (on peace) may not be so complete or truthful to reality if told in terms foreign to the home-country context. Overall, this thesis makes four main contributions to the body of research on international higher education scholarships. Empirically, it presents one of the first studies to explore the multi-fold significance and contingent impact of (funded) graduate education abroad for Palestinians, approaching this exploration from a historically-informed, context-driven perspective. The participants' profiles, experiences, perceived outcomes, and post-completion trajectories described here may inform current and future practice and research on scholarships as opportunities for peacebuilding in the OPT. Theoretically, the thesis proposes a context-informed alternative to neoliberally oriented approaches that limit appreciation of scholarships impact to terms of technical, economic, and certain ideological returns on investment. This alternative theoretical approach challenges simplistic aspects of the otherwise legitimate criticism of education abroad as involving the risk of brain drain, among other risks often ascribed to scholarships in Global South contexts. It also offers actionable implications for researching, evaluating and potentially scaling and optimising scholarships impact (for peace) in and beyond the OPT. Finally, the thesis is based on an original full application of critical realism. This application offers useful illustration of the power of this research philosophy to guide critical, interdisciplinary, reflexive, and practice-informing research in, and potentially beyond, the field of International Education.

## **Keywords**

Critical realism; graduate education abroad; impact; international scholarships; Palestine; Peace

## ملخص

تستقصي الأطروحة الأثر الممكن للمنح الدراسية على السلام في فلسطين المحتلة، حيث تُخالفُ التفسير السائد بأن أثر المنح على السلام يعودُ لتعزيزها رأسي المال البشري والدولي ولتنشأة متلقيها على قيم ليبرالية-ديموقراطية غربية النمط. تطبيقاً لفلسفة الواقعية النافذة وضمن إطار يدمج نظرية الامكانية (Sen, 2001) مع تنظير السلام اليومي (Mac Ginty, 2021) تمّ اتباع ثلاث مراحل في تحليل بيانات المقابلات والوثائق التي كان قد شاركها 32 خريجاً وخريجةً فلسطينيين من منح دولية لدرجة الماجستير. أظهرت النتائج الوصفية أن المشاركين في البحث يدركون تحقيق مكاسب قيمة متعلقة بتنميتهم الأكاديمية والمهنية وتنمية أبعاد متعددة من هويتهم؛ ثمّ بيّنت النتائج الاستدلالية أن هذه المكاسب تمثل زيادةً في القدرة الفعلية للمشاركين على اتباع سلوكيات بناءة ومقاومة للآثار القسرية المنبثقة عن الصراع الإسرائيلي-الفلسطيني؛ ومن ثمّ أوضحت الاستدلالات النزوعية أن الأثر الممكن للمنح الدراسية على المستوى الفردي من السلام في فلسطين المحتلة قد يعودُ للتفاعل الإيجابي بين ما تزيده المنح من قدرة فعلية لمتلقيها وما يتبعه الفلسطينيين من قوى مُكوّنة للسلام. تؤكدُ هذه النتائج على أن تفسير أثر التعليم في الخارج (على السلام) قد لا يكون كاملاً أو متماثلاً مع الواقع طالما تمّ قصُّه بأفكار غربية عن سياق البلد الأم. تساهم الأطروحة في تقديم المعرفة والأبحاث الخاصة بالمنح الدراسية الدولية في أربع اتجاهات. أولاً، تمثل الأطروحة واحدة من أولى الدراسات التي تستقصي أهمية التعليم (الممول) للدرجات العليا في الخارج بالنسبة للفلسطينيين وتكشف وأثره المحتمل وتتبع في ذلك الاعتبارات التاريخية والسياقية، وهو ما قد يجعل النتائج الوصفية الموثقة فيها دليلاً مفيداً للباحثين والمهنيين المعنيين بانعكاسات المنح الدراسية على السلام في فلسطين المحتلة. ثانياً، تقترح الأطروحة نهجاً نظرياً مستنداً إلى السياق المحلي كبديل عن النظريات ذات الطابع النيوليبرالي والتي تقلص من مدى تبيين أثر المنح عبر قياسه بمعايير تقنية واقتصادية وأيديولوجية معينة، كما أن النهج البديل يتطلب تفكيراً أعمق في النقد المشروع لما يحتمله التعليم في الخارج من خطر تسهيل هجرة العقول والمخاطر الأخرى المقترنة به في الجنوب العالمي. ثالثاً، تقدّم الأطروحة اقتراحات وتوصيات يمكن تطبيقها عملياً في ممارسات البحث والتقييم والممارسات الخاصة بتعزيز وتعميم ومأسسة أثر المنح الدراسية (على السلام) في فلسطين المحتلة وربما في سياقات مشابهة أخرى. أخيراً، تقدّم الأطروحة تطبيقاً كاملاً للواقعية النافذة كفلسفة بحث وهو ما قد يفيد في توضيح قوة هذه الفلسفة في إرشاد ممارسات بحثية ذات طابع ناقد وعابر للمجالات، وإلهام الانعكاسية لدى الباحثين، واستخلاص نتائج قيمة عملياً في وربما أيضاً خارج مجال التعليم الدولي.

## الكلمات المفتاحية

الأثر؛ الدراسات العليا في الخارج؛ السلام؛ فلسطين؛ المنح الدراسية؛ الواقعية النافذة

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## **Declarations**

I confirm that the material presented in this thesis has not previously been submitted for any degree at Durham University or any other university. The material presented in this thesis is the independent work of myself.

This thesis was not written with the assistance of any Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology, including ChatGPT or other support technologies.

I confirm that the word count of this thesis is 103,996, excluding tables, figures, appendices, and the bibliography.

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## **Funding**

The PGCE training and doctoral research leading to this thesis were funded by the Economic and Social Research Council through a 3.5 studentship from the Northern Ireland and North East Doctoral Training Partnership (NINE DTP) [training grant number ES/P000762/1]. The studentship was further extended by 0.25 to support an overseas institutional visit for research dissemination and researcher development.

A generous grant for travel and visa costs was provided by the Durham Palestine Educational Trust.

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This work is also a product I share with the 32 research participants. The insights they shared make this work a shared product of ours, Palestinian scholarship recipients; a documentation of struggles, successes, and aspirations previously discussed only among ourselves and in selective events. May this knowledge that they so much helped create be useful to the pursuit of quality, inclusive, contextualised, and politically significant education in and beyond Palestine.

I am immensely grateful to each of my three supervisors, Prue Holmes, Oakleigh Welply, and Carly Beckerman. They have made my PhD experience the best I could have ever asked for. I am forever so thankful to them for their always constructive feedback, which helped me grow better as a writer, researcher, and reflexive agent; for their constant support and generous kindness, including and especially through the bleakness of the post-7 October 2023 world; and for their unwavering encouragement of my autonomy and empowerment throughout. In particular, I owe so much gratitude to Prue, my primary supervisor, for her exceptional support of my applications for numerous conference, publication, grant, and researcher development opportunities.

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financial. The social and intellectual hospitality of its people has always warmed my heart, even through the freezing world of post-7 October 2023.

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I would not have approached my research, publication, write-up, and professional development activities as confidently or enjoyably if it were not for Amelia J. Dietrich, of the Forum on Education Abroad. Working with her and the editorial board of *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad* challenged me to achieve deeper understanding of the academic publication landscape. I am forever grateful to her for her transformative mentorship and support, which allowed me to grow meaningfully in my role with the Journal and thereby to achieve better in my doctoral trajectory.

I finally acknowledge the peers, mentors, and senior academics I met at Durham and in conferences worldwide who helped me refine and deepen my thinking about this study and/or my broader research goals. I am thankful to them for their time, feedback, and inspiration.

## **Dedication**

To mama Nihal, as Fairouz sings our shared favourite line of *بعدك بقلبي وردة الوردات*. To the life you lead, the life philosophy you preach, and the unparalleled love and wisdom you have lavished on us. And, to baba Nazmi and to my siblings, Ihsan, Omar, Mohammed, Reem, and Kareem, as I grow to better realise the single most significant meaning of life that you are.

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## Note on Advance Publication and Research Dissemination and Recognition

Outputs arising from and in connection with this doctoral study have been published and presented as outlined below. This dissemination effort, together with other research (and education and service) activities, has been selected for several institutional and external grants and awards as outlined further below.

This advance publication meant that all the profile and experiential findings presented in Chapter 3 have already been published in a series of three peer-reviewed journal articles (Almassri, 2024a-c). All the inferential findings presented in Chapter 3 have also been published in a special issue, *The Ripple Effect: Understanding the Societal Implications of International Student Mobility* (Almassri, 2024d). A concise summary of all findings with a note on their decolonial significance is published in the Emerging Scholar Research Summaries issue of the *Journal of Comparative and International Higher Education* (Almassri, 2025). I have further published a sixth article in connection with this doctoral study, where I proposed critical realist autoethnography as a key methodology for researching scholarships impact (Almassri, 2023). This advance publication meant that several points in the literature survey (1.2), research critique (2.1) and the discussion in Chapter 4 have already been published in the four-article series and disseminated through conference submissions and presentations.

I noted in all of these publications that they were developed from this doctoral study, and I have published all the articles on an open-access basis, on a Creative Commons license ([CC BY 4.0](#)), which permits the republication in this thesis of the findings appearing first in them. That said, this thesis provides an edited, elaborated, more complete, and better integrated version of the findings and discussion points reported there.

### *Journal Articles*

Almassri, A. N. (2023). Critical realist autoethnography in international scholarships impact research: An illustrative proposal. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 122, 102254. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2023.102254>

Almassri, A. N. (2024a). Appreciating international scholarships impact in Palestine's extreme context. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 110, 103118. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2024.103118>

Almassri, A. N. (2024b). International higher education scholarships: A pathway for Palestinians' academic recovery. *Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-024-01271-5>

Almassri, A. N. (2024c). Rethinking international scholarships as peace interventions in the Palestinian context of conflict. *Social Sciences*, 13(7), 336. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci13070336>

Almassri, A. N. (2024d). Scaling research and practice of scholarships impact for peace: The role of theory. In J. Kwak, & M. Chankseian (Eds.), *The Ripple Effect: Understanding*

the Societal Implications of International Student Mobility. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 128, 102467. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2024.102467>

Almassri, A. N. (2025). Decolonizing Links Between International Scholarships and Peace: Insights from a Critical Realist Study in Palestine. *Journal of Comparative & International Higher Education*, 17(3), 9.  
<https://digitalcommons.lib.uconn.edu/jcihe/vol17/iss3/9>

### ***Manuscripts Under Review***

Almassri, A. N. (under review). Scholarships for Palestinians in a historical and contemporary perspective: The case for *owning* impact. Chapter submitted for inclusion in an edited monograph on international assistance to education in conflict-affected contexts.

### ***Conference and Summer School Presentations and Posters***

Almassri, A. N. (2025, June). *Actioning critical realism: Analysing the potential relevance of international graduate scholarships impact to peace in Palestine*. Poster at the 2025 NINE DTP Summer School, Queen's University Belfast, Belfast, UK.

Almassri, A. N. (2025, May). *Theorising as (re-)contextualising: International scholarships impact on peace in Palestine*. Presentation at the Theorising in PhD Research retreat, Centre for Lebanese Studies, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK.

Almassri, A. N. (2025, April). *Challenges and Enablers of the Right to Education: The Case of Palestinian Students*. Virtual panel presentation (with Rille Raaper, William Lo Yat-wai, and Kun Dai): Power, Politics, and Student Rights in Contemporary Higher Education, "The Quest for Internationalisation of Higher Education: Comparative Perspectives and International Experiences", The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong.

Almassri, A. N. (2025, April). *Scholarships for Higher Education Reconstruction? Towards a Balance of Appreciation and Critique*. Presentation to the Conference on Rebuilding Higher Education in Gaza, Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Doha, Qatar.

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- Almassri, A. N. (2023, September). *Critical realist autoethnography in international scholarships impact research: An illustrative proposal*. Presentation to the 2023 Oxford Ethnography and Education Conference, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK.
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# **Chapter 1**

## **Revisiting Scholarships Research in the Palestinian Context**

### **Introduction**

This thesis is focused on the impact of international higher education scholarships and its potential relevance to peace in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT). This topic has received scant research and policy attention from Palestinian and international actors, despite a long history of offering scholarships to Palestinians and the individual and societal significance of such education opportunities. In this chapter, I introduce the background, country context, scope, and purpose of this research. Departing from a brief account of my positionality, I demonstrate the significance of this research topic, at a dual time of increasing scholarship programming for Palestinians yet also of persisting absence of the OPT in the emerging subfield of education research on international scholarships. I go on to explain how this understudied country context requires the use of new research designs and procedures that ensure context-sensitivity in interpreting scholarships impact and its potential relevance to peace. This delayed introduction of the thesis scope and aims is intentional, aimed at emphasising its design as a context-driven critique of concepts and approaches dominating the body of scholarships research. Throughout the thesis, I regularly discuss how the research design and procedures may be valuable to attempts at advancing current research on scholarships in new theoretical, interdisciplinary, and critical directions.

I organise this first chapter into four parts. In the first subchapter, I briefly tell a personal story that began in Gaza in 2009 and has since evolved there and in the UK and the US before ultimately leading me to do this doctoral study. This story illuminates the positionality I brought to this research, and it foregrounds the reflexive practice I went on to deploy throughout the doctoral study. In the second subchapter, I offer a state of the field by surveying empirical and other academic and non-academic (grey) literature on international higher education scholarships. I continue this literature survey in the third subchapter, shifting the focus to an historical and contemporary account of scholarship opportunities, stakeholders, and impact in the OPT. In the last subchapter, I conclude this survey of the literature and of the pertinent country context by distilling its implications on the research problem, scope, and questions addressed in the doctoral study.

## 1.1. Researcher Background

In a single a week in the summer of 2009, I received two text messages on my Nokia phone. One was to join a military training summer camp with Hamas, a Palestinian group seen by many Western governments as politically illegitimate for its use of arms against the Israeli occupation. The other text message was to join the Access Micro-scholarship Program, an English language and personal development programme with AMIDEAST, an American non-governmental organisation prominent for its role in promoting English language study and educational and cultural exchange between the US and the Middle East.

I was 15 then. I had the tiny world of a Palestinian boy living in an average neighbourhood of a small town, Dair Al-Balah, in the Gaza Strip. All that seemed to matter in this tiny world was doing well in school, praying five times a day in the mosque, being a good member of my immediate and extended family, and being manly—the more, the better.

The Hamas summer camp seemed to me to better fit the worldview reproduced in this tiny world. By joining the camp, I thought, I would be translating my religiosity, manliness, and social connection into a concrete form of training to help defend my people, fellow subjects of a decades-long foreign military occupation. But, my parents wanted me to take up the other offer, to join the AMIDEAST-run, US Department of State-funded Access programme. In that boy's world—itself a product of long-fomenting ideas in a tiny, blockaded strip of Palestinian geography, Access sounded to me to be only another *mission* of the US to Americanise the world, defeat Islam, and graduate sympathisers, if not collaborators, with foreign colonisers and world conspirators. Only the forceful advice of my parents to go to Access instead of the summer camp helped me overcome perhaps not that perception but its effect on my decision then.

I joined Access. Soon, I found myself riding fast and high on its track to graduate competent, confident English speakers armed with a little more nuance in their worldview, including a positive outlook and a sense of hope for the future. This track was more of a relay race. As soon as I graduated from Access, I joined two other AMIDEAST-run programmes, one involving pre-university academic counselling and the other involving leadership training through community service activities. When I finished both, I was well-prepared to excel in my undergraduate study of English and Education. I did exactly that. I was equally well-prepared to excel in my simultaneous engagement in extracurricular and career activities.



Again, I did exactly that. Excelling in both my academic and extracurricular engagement kept the relay race going for me.

By the time I finished university, I had what is by Gaza's standards a dream job. I was hired full-time, paid well and on time, and in a relatively strong position to plan for an even more positive future. On that account, I perhaps ranked among the top one-percenters of Gazan youth in their early twenties. Beyond this materialist account of "success", I also enjoyed joining communities of like-minded young Palestinians who aspired to a good education, a good career, and simply a future of safe and prosperous family life. All of these experiences had an effect on me similar to that on my friends and on many Gazans and Palestinians who shared a similar position: Those experiences qualified and motivated me to apply to scholarships for graduate study abroad. As I acted on this motivation, a ripple effect of participation in Access, the memory of the other invitation—to join the Hamas training camp—still lingered in my mind. "What would have been the equivalent moment of this had I pursued the other invitation instead," I thought to myself in 2018. I was then taking the flight to the UK for a scholarship to study a Masters degree in peace studies at Durham University.

I have since continued to chase this thought. In the seven years since, I have focused my thinking on whether and how education relates to peace. My Masters in peace studies was a good starting point because it exposed to me the naïveté with which I had (not) conceptualised 'peace'. The following quotation from my Masters dissertation then captures this starting turn in my understanding of peace. Writing of my prior expectations of the Masters programme, I stated:

I [had] an expectation that everything would be certain and clear, that I would learn 'recipes' for building peace, and that the theoretical and practical knowledge I would gain would be readily applicable to the context back home. I was more wrong than right in my expectation. Through lectures, seminars, workshops, and readings, I constantly asked myself whether what I was learning was something I would be able to practice or preach back home and whether my future employers, including academic institutions, but also people to be affected by my work, including students, would like or welcome it. More often than not, the answer was no. ... [through my dissertation research,] I found many sound arguments as well as impassioned calls for improvement in the field of International Relations as the currently overarching framework for peace studies. Most of these arguments and calls were by people who—I discovered only now,

outside the chains and shackles on Gaza—are like myself, born and raised in contexts of peace-seeking, and they always demanded that their ways of lives be recognized. (Almassri, 2019, p. 4)

Peace, I now discovered, had no recipes. It was, as I learned, a contested concept of contested applications. Its very “ontology” and “epistemology” are contested. Neither the two terms, ontology and epistemology, nor the proposition of their contestation in conceptualising peace had been familiar or comprehensible to me at the time. As I advanced academically, I went on to complete another Masters in Arab Studies at Georgetown University. I had another full scholarship that enabled me to do so. My appreciation then deepened towards the extended opportunity I had to learn and think more about peace but also, and more importantly, about how ideas like ‘peace’ can be contested, how academia serves as a good place for this contestation, and how contestation outcomes can and often do have concrete effects on people’s lives. For example, in classes at Georgetown, I became conscious, critically so, of the proposition that education is a tool of human capital development (Becker, 1993), the influence that this proposition brings to bear on World Bank and International Monetary Fund policies on education, and the real effects these specific policies have on (disadvantaged) people’s access to education worldwide.

The reality and processes of this ‘trickle-down’ of concepts into policies that affect people’s lives should not have been surprising for me to learn. Or perhaps it should. After all, “the chains and shackles on Gaza” are directly shaped by the trickle-down of contested (or, cynically, twisted) concepts not just like self-defence, terrorism, and antizionism, but also concepts like free markets, food security, professionalisation, “quality” education, “world-class” research, and “evidence”. Still, learning about contestation of such concepts and their trickle-down into sometimes devastating effects challenged me to reflect on (i) why I did not, or could not, not learn about it at school, university, or elsewhere in the OPT but now did; and (ii) how, if at all, might it be different for us, Palestinians, if we had been key contestants of the concepts by whose trickle-down our very daily lives are affected. My reflection on these two prompts is still ongoing and has only grown more expansive. One aspect of this reflection relates to scholarships, the funding opportunities to enrol at higher education institutions abroad. Without these scholarships, it has never been lost on me, neither I nor many otherwise qualified Palestinians would be able to study at foreign institutions.

This reflection motivated me to serve, in voluntary and paid roles, at AMIDEAST, at other education organisations, and through ad-hoc initiatives to contribute to efforts to promote fellow Palestinians' access to funded education abroad. Between 2014 and 2023, I was privileged to interact with hundreds of fellow young Palestinians eager to apply to universities abroad—usually setting their eyes first on the likes of Harvard, Stanford, and MIT. My interactions in this vein varied widely. They included in-person and virtual, casual and extended one-on-one and group conversations, and reading and providing feedback on hundreds of personal statements and other essays for admission, financial aid, and scholarships. I also offered advice on lists of universities and scholarships targeted for application. A spirit of great passion made me enjoy this work tremendously—not least when seeing the determination of (under-)graduate applicants producing and reproducing multiple essay drafts in a foreign language to send to institutions that probably knew very little about what these students' life, education, and thus themes and styles of writing mean about their potential and aspirations. This work, and all the moments of hope and success but also despair and disappointment involved in it, cultivated in me deep appreciation for what funded education abroad, even just the process of preparing for it, may mean for young Palestinians. It also fuelled my continuous reflection on what this access to education abroad may mean for a future Palestine, a reflection I keep resuming after each social gathering with fellow Palestinians on scholarships abroad.

Given this personal background, I focused my doctoral study on international scholarships impact and its potential relevance to peace in the OPT. I present on this doctoral study in this thesis, attempting a response to the following overarching research question: *Whether and how do international higher education scholarships relate to peace in the OPT?*

I begin contextualising this research effort by surveying the academic and grey literature on scholarships in the following subchapter, followed by a thorough overview of the history, stakeholders, and impact of scholarships in the OPT. Taken together, these three parts of this chapter establish the personal perspective, scholarly insights, and contextual reality that informed the purpose, scope, and design of the doctoral study, which I present in the fourth subchapter (1.4).

## **1.2. State of the Field: A Literature Survey of Scholarships Research**

In introducing their edited volume on international scholarships, Dassin et al. (2018a) write that international scholarships have a long history of being used as instruments of foreign

aid, diplomatic outreach and engagement, and nation-building. This history seemed to consolidate in the aftermath of World War II, especially during the Cold War, as education abroad and international exchanges became instruments of the hearts and minds battle (Dassin et al., 2018a). As the Cold War waned, funding by governmental and non- and inter-governmental bodies to send citizens abroad and/or bring foreign citizens for educational and exchange purposes took on a new policy goal, of channelling development assistance (Dassin et al., 2018a). Then, in 2015, the United Nations endorsed international scholarships, which Campbell (2017, p. 56) defined as “financial grants that cover the majority of costs associated with higher education study outside of the recipient's home country”. Scholarships formally became a means of implementing the fourth Sustainable Development Goal on quality education (Target 4.b): “By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries... for enrolment in higher education... in developed countries and other developing countries” (UNESCO, 2016, p. 14).

A reader of this evolving history might get the impression that such a global interest in scholarships has been met with equivalent attention from academic researchers (perhaps more from the field of International Education than from the that of International Relations). Yet, research on scholarships is still nascent, and the number of authors with a published record of commitment to researching scholarships remains modest, although increasing. For example, based on my literature review, I could identify Anne C. Campbell, of the California-based Middlebury Institute of International Studies, and Mirka Martel, of the New York-based Institute of International Education, as the most published and cited authors on scholarships, each with about a dozen contributions—the former through academic studies and the latter through scholarship programme evaluation studies.

In this “burgeoning” state of research on scholarships (Mawer, 2018), certain themes, methods, theory and, to a lesser extent, critiques seem to be gaining traction. In this subchapter, I present a literature survey, a rather descriptive account, of the thematic, methodological, theoretical, and critical trends in scholarships research. By scholarships research, I refer to the body of existing academic and grey literature dealing with empirical, conceptual, methodological, and/or critical dimensions of international higher education scholarship programmes, experiences, and impact. Existing academic literature is comprised mostly of empirical studies but has increasingly included historical studies, conceptual and systematic contributions, methodological critiques, and critical reflections. Existing grey literature includes impact evaluations, policy and programme documents, and key stakeholder

reflections, e.g., from international education practitioners and policy makers. I decided to include grey literature because of the nascence of academic literature on scholarships and because of the former's seemingly greater production and take-up for programming and policy purposes. Each of these literatures is surveyed in the three following sections, proceeding from empirical studies (1.2.1) and other academic studies (1.2.2) to grey literature (1.2.3) on scholarships.

In terms of identifying these sources, I followed 3+2 primary techniques of searching the literature. One technique was checking reference lists in key publications, e.g., Campbell and Neff's (2020) systematic review of scholarships to Global South students, Campbell and Mawer's (2019) well-cited article on theory in scholarships research, Dassin et al.'s (2018b) edited volume on international scholarships, and King's (2011) edited special issue on the geopolitics of international scholarships. Another technique was checking specialist reference databases, e.g., the [\*Scholarships for Change\*](#) special collection of pertinent reports and cases studies. The third technique was running Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar searches using combinations of key topical terms like "scholarship", "bursary", "fellowship", "grant", "international student funding", "merit-based awards". I complemented these techniques by retrieving academic and grey sources from relevant work I had completed when I was studying at Georgetown. I further complemented these techniques by considering pertinent studies I came across at conferences, on LinkedIn, through my editorial roles at a few relevant journals, and in the course of my broader reading.

### 1.2.1. Academic Literature Survey: Empirical Studies

Most of the academic literature on scholarships is published in journals of international education, higher education or, less frequently, education policy, theory, or philosophy, as well as in doctoral theses completed at Australian, US, and UK universities, e.g., Alzubaidi (2016), Al Yousef (2016), Barker (2022), Baxter (2014), Campbell (2016), Dzotsenidze (2021), Shtewi (2019), and Pikos-Sallie (2018) and Masters dissertations, e.g., Abbas (2015), Ahmed (2016), and Jung (2020). This body of research is mostly empirical, at least that published in English. Scholarships research in Arabic seems to be extremely limited, with Arab authors publishing in English (e.g., Alqahtani, 2015; Al Yousef, 2016; Alzubaidi, 2016; Shtewi, 2019) or focusing in their few but valuable contributions on historical events and regional dynamics of offering and seizing scholarships to build education and political ties across Arabic-speaking countries (e.g., Al-Rashoud, 2019; Alsafwani, 2019). Barely did I obtain any relevant results by running

a search on Google Scholar for terms like “منح”, “منح دراسية”, “منح دراسية دولية”, “ابعثات”, “تعليم في الخارج”, “تعليم دولي”, which are translations and equivalents of “scholarships”, “international scholarships”, “education abroad”, and “international education”. Where I found relevant results, they frequently focused on, and were published in, Egypt, with loose focus on international scholarships and other types of international academic mobilities (e.g., Alghamdi, 2021; Naser, 2018).

Existing empirical studies have investigated a variety of topics, for example: cross-cultural experiences and soft skills development among scholarship recipients (Alqahtani, 2015; Chalid, 2014), the political contexts of scholarship programmes (Del Sordi, 2018; Hilal, 2013; Hilal et al., 2015), the role of scholarships in improving access to higher education (Cosentino et al., 2018) and in inducing brain drain (Oosterbeek & Webbink, 2011), the comparative influence of scholarships to study abroad vis-à-vis to study locally on alumni’s civic engagement (Dzotsenidze, 2021), the contribution of certain modes of analysis to research and practice of scholarships (Baxter, 2014), the quality management of institutional scholarship programmes (Alghamdi, 2021), and the use of scholarships for nation-branding and as a tool of international development and cultural and public diplomacy (Abimbola et al., 2016; Aras & Mohammed, 2018; Atabaş & Köse, 2024; Ayhan et al., 2022; Ayhan & Snow, 2021; Lin & Chan, 2024; Wang, 2022).

However, the bulk of empirical studies is consistently focused on one broad topic: scholarship alumni’s post-completion career trajectories and their contributions to national development in Global South contexts. This consistent focus makes it unsurprising that of all the journal articles reviewed for this doctoral study, the single one with the largest number of articles was the *International Journal of Educational Development*, whose stated purpose is to report on the role of education in development, encompassing “economic growth and poverty reduction; human development, well-being, the availability of human rights; democracy, social cohesion and peace-building; resilience and environmental sustainability” (e.g., Campbell, 2017; Campbell & Baxter, 2019; Campbell, Lavallee et al., 2021; Cosentino et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2024; Makundi et al., 2017; Novotný et al., 2021; Perna et al., 2015a; Singh & Jamil, 2021). Against this brief background, this section surveys the findings and methods reported in this segment of empirical scholarships research.

In their study of Turkish alumni of the US government Fulbright scholarship programme, Demir et al. (2000) used a mixed-method questionnaire to collect self-reports of

the professional, social, and personal effects of the scholarship on the alumni. Applying descriptive statistics and content analysis to the self-reported data, Demir et al. found that the alumni perceived making key academic, research, language, and intercultural gains of direct value to their academic careers at local universities in Türkiye as well as to their contribution to broader development in their home-country, including through engagement in policymaking. As repeatedly demonstrated in this section, these findings are echoed in more recent studies, using similar research methods.

In their study of Ghanaian and Nigerian alumni of a Ford Foundation scholarship programme, Campbell, Kelly-Weber et al. (2021) used semi-structured interviews, informed by extensive archival review of programme documents, to collect the alumni's perceptions of their contributions to the development of their home countries. Applying thematic analysis to the self-reported data, Campbell, Kelly-Weber et al. found that the alumni believed they contributed to national development mainly through teaching, both formally at postsecondary institutions and informally in the areas of citizenship, human rights, and voter awareness. In a separate, similarly qualitative study, Campbell, Lavalley et al. (2021) focused again on Ghana and Nigeria, this time investigating perceptions by alumni of the same scholarship programme of whether and how their work, mostly in government, helped them implement social change and social justice. The researchers found that among their sample, employment in government jobs was not commonly perceived to be conducive to social change promotion, although Ghanaians were more likely than Nigerians to have/report that perception.

Similar and other pathways of contribution to the home country were demonstrated in Jonbekova's (2024) study of Kazakhstani alumni of Bolashak, the national government scholarship programme. Using the similar data collection and analysis procedures as the previous two studies, Jonbekova (2024) found that the alumni drew on their scholarship experiences in improving educational and research opportunities and quality as well as educating members of their social circles on education and career opportunities. Based on the data alumni self-reported in interviews, Jonbekova (2024) identified four further pathways through which they mobilised their scholarship experiences for social change in Kazakhstan: driving positive development in their workplaces and communities; contributing to widening access to international educational opportunity, including for girls and women; building international understanding and actioning it through collaborations globally and advocacy activities locally; and building networks to strengthen their contributions (also see Jonbekova, Serkova, et al., 2022). In another interview-based qualitative study including Bolashak alumni

and peers locally educated in an international university, Jonbekova and colleagues highlighted that scholarships led to greater demonstrated effect on the Bolashak alumni's graduate capital—that is, their human, social, cultural, identity, and psychological capitals (Kim et al., 2024).

In a more explicitly comparative study, Campbell (2018a) used the case of returning Moldovan alumni versus that of those staying abroad to address the key question of whether physical return to the home country is a must for sufficient diffusion of the gains made through a scholarship. Using interviews with returning and abroad-staying alumni, Campbell collected their perceptions of their own and their scholarship peers' contributions to social and economic development in Moldova. Applying thematic analysis in a comparative case study approach, Campbell (2018a) found that both groups believed that returning alumni have more opportunity to be engaged and effective in contributing to national development, e.g., through direct policy engagement, initiative leadership, mentoring and education, work for international organisations and businesses, and simply contending with everyday life challenges.

As indicated previously, this focus on alumni's post-completion career trajectories and (pathways of) their contribution to national development is salient across empirical works of scholarships research. Across these empirical studies, critical discussion is sometimes offered regarding the efficacy of scholarship alumni's contributions being contingent on national context considerations. In Kazakhstan, Jonbekova, Serkova, et al. (2022) pointed out that alumni's contributions were “shaped and restricted” by various factors related not only to the scholarship programme, e.g., the post-completion requirement to serve in a certain sector, which many alumni saw as a cause for skills mismatch, but also to the home country's context. For example, economic factors such as low salaries and lacking job opportunities, and technical ones like suboptimal working conditions, inefficient systems, bureaucratic and hierarchical processes, and shortage of good equipment all were reported by participants in Jonbekova, Serkova, et al.'s study as impeding their contributions (2022, pp. 135-137; also see Jonbekova, Kuchumova, et al., 2022). In Campbell's (2019) interview-based study of Georgian and Moldovan alumni of US-based scholarship programmes, she focused precisely on how these alumni's post-completion trajectories were shaped by revolutions in Georgia and Moldova, showing that these two critical events opened doors for the alumni to consider and seek new means of contribution, which they still had to navigate amidst institutional and systemic effects of a post-Soviet legacy often inconducive to their endeavours.



Discussion of contextually contingent efficacy of scholarships impact is also found in several studies of alumni in countries beyond former Soviet republics. In Enkhtur's (2020) interview-based study of Mongolian alumni of scholarship programmes undertaken in Japan, she demonstrated that the alumni, despite their great reported motivation, faced significant technical and administrative impediments to their attempts to contribute to their home country, all within a climate of political instability. Enkhtur (2020) demonstrated these impediments were particularly detrimental to the (quality of) contributions that the alumni could make through their employment—especially with the government and even despite binding agreements with scholarship providers and employers—paralleling the case reported above of Kazakhstani alumni.

The moderation of scholarships impact by contextual forces is also noted in the very few empirical studies originating from Arab and other countries in the greater Middle East (Ahmad et al., 2017).

In their study of Saudi scholarship alumni working at local universities, Alzubaidia and O'Tooleb (2015) used cross-sectional survey data from 566 alumni to examine, inter alia, how well their competence was utilised in their academic jobs. The researchers showed almost a third of the participants self-reported low, very low, or no level of competence utilisation, compared to only about a fifth perceiving a high level of competence utilisation. Although the researchers went on to discuss the implications but not potential causes of these results, the first author offered in a later study that this large extent of underutilisation is just one of other illustrations of market inefficiency in Saudi Arabia (Alzubaidi, 2021). Shtewi (2019) offers greater clarity of such influence of the country context on scholarships impact. In his doctoral study of Libyan scholarships impact on the performance of local academics, Shtewi (2019) employed mixed-methods to compare the performance of foreign- versus locally-educated academics and of those educated in developing countries vis-à-vis those educated in developed ones. Among other findings, Shtewi's study revealed that the scholarship alumni who studied abroad and in developed countries contributed more to knowledge dissemination and exchange than did their peers who studied in Libya or abroad in developing countries. The study also revealed the latter group contributed more to knowledge transmission than the former. Shtewi (2019) further demonstrated that the contribution of both groups is shaped by gendered expectations and disciplinary affiliations and, in all cases, hindered by a range of contextual conditions: missing educational infrastructure, lacking financial resources, suppressive political circumstances, and institutionalised preference for scientometrically measurable

achievement rather than contextually sensitive means of academic engagement and influence. Ahmad et al. (2024) used similar methodological procedures, and they reported some similar and dissimilar substantive findings. They showed that, compared to their locally educated peers, Pakistani scholarship alumni serving at local universities performed relatively better in a few teaching aspects, although their teaching performance was shaped by multi-scale challenges in the immediate, institutional, and broader environments of their academic service.

In a unique empirical study, Atabaş and Köse (2024) interviewed 13 North Macedonian and Ugandan alumni of the Turkish government scholarship. Instead of investigating these alumni's careerist outcomes, Atabaş and Köse first framed the investigation within the context of Türkiye's efforts to use scholarships, among other tools, to reach out to its neighbours and to the world. Departing from this context, the authors used 'everyday diplomacy' as their theoretical framework, against which they went on to analyse the alumni's reported gains in "linguistic proficiency, intellectual engagement, professional acquaintances, relational networks, and spatial familiarity" (p. 1). Atabaş and Köse interpreted these gains in terms of their contribution to the alumni's role as informal ambassadors, serving in the everyday sphere of positive relations between Türkiye and their home countries. By deploying this context-driven theoretical choice and interpretation, Atabaş and Köse demonstrated that scholarships impact "extends beyond mere academic or professional performance" (p. 9); moreover, their study outlines the significance of attending to context and to different theoretical choices in uncovering a broader range of scholarships' potential effects for recipients and their host and home countries.

Demonstration of the need for such contextuality in scholarships research appears clearly in the smaller segment of empirical research not focusing on post-completion but instead on the pre-sojourn stage, specifically on push and pull factors driving individuals' interest in scholarships (see Roy et al., 2022). Ahmad et al. (2017) show that, in post-Saddam Hussein Iraq, the Kurdistan Regional Government launched its graduate scholarship programme to help reintegrate Kurdish higher education institutions into the global academic community after decades of isolation. In this context, Ahmad et al. focused on exploring motivations for participating in the scholarship programme. They collected from the scholarship alumni self-reported data through a survey and interviews. Triangulating results from thematic analysis and descriptive and basic inferential statistical analysis, they demonstrated that the alumni's motivation stemmed directly from this context where their completion of a "world-recognised qualification" from a "world-class education system" was

rewarded with academic and intercultural fulfilment followed by professional, leadership, and salary advancement (Ahmad et al., 2017, pp. 110-113).

Similarly, Perna et al. (2015b) examined the range of factors that motivate or suppress participation in the Bolashak scholarship programme of the Kazakhstan government. Using archival research and interviews with alumni employers, programme administrators, and government officials, they found that scholarship participation seems to be influenced by a mixed variety of not only individual background characteristics (e.g., gender, rural location, economic background) but also programmatic features (e.g., financial offer, selection criteria, obligation to return) and contextual forces (e.g., quality of prior education, inclusive access to opportunities). In the context of Australian and Japanese support to governance development and reform in Indonesia, Haupt et al. (2021) conducted a mixed-method study to investigate not only the motivations but also the outcomes of participating in graduate dual-degree scholarships offered in this context by the governments of Australia, Indonesia, and Japan for Indonesian civil servants. In terms of motivations, the researchers found that the study participants were motivated by the (social) prestige of education abroad and were more motivated by the prospect of life abroad, foreign language development, and personal growth than by the potential career benefits. In terms of outcomes, Haupt et al. (2021) found that the participants enhanced their knowledge and soft skills during their education abroad, as well as their potential for contributing to development beyond their individual self.

Three further studies demonstrating the need for contextuality in scholarships research stood out to me as unique: the first in its methodological approach, conceptual originality, and population and sampling focus; and the other two in their explicitly gendered focus. In their study, King et al. (2023) used the concept of “Southern Agency” to frame their investigation of Timorese scholarship applicants, recipients, and alumni’s navigation of “influences that both constrain and enable [their] action, namely local infrastructure, family and kinship groups, literacies, and the colonial legacy” (p. 178). By integrating this conceptual framework into a multi-sited longitudinal ethnography, King et al. offered an in-depth account of how discursive, technical, social, economic, and global (rather than merely academic or careerist) factors shape the pre-, during-, and post-sojourn decisions of scholarship awardees. King et al. drew on their findings in ultimately *critiquing* scholarships on the account that they can reproduce inequalities in the postcolonial country context. This critique, as legitimate in Timor as potentially in other contexts, can be meaningfully contrasted with Saudi student Noor Ahmed’s (2016) Masters dissertation at a Canadian university and Mughal’s (2021) chapter on Saudi

Arabia's King Abdullah Scholarship Program—the two other studies that stood out to me as unique. The former used in-depth interviews with Saudi female scholarship recipients and the latter used large-scale assessment to appraise the Program's impact. Mindful of the gender dynamics in Saudi society and education, both applied a gendered contextual lens to investigating the Program's impact before concluding its powerful potential to advance Saudi women's progress and thereby the country's development.

The attention to (g)local realities inspired by King et al.'s (2023) use of Southern Agency and the contrast between the case there of scholarships potentially reproducing social inequalities in Timor but challenging gender inequalities in Saudi Arabia further invite care in making cross-country or gender-neutral claims about scholarships impact (further see Lee & Snow, 2021). However, the country contexts in which scholarships are offered, sought, undertaken, and supposed to be utilised are often only described. Consider still the case of Saudi Arabia. Political, economic, social, and cultural forces of change in the country have shaped the inception and continuation of its King Abdullah Scholarship Program, the world's largest scholarship programme (Hilal et al., 2015). But, these forces barely influenced Alzubaidia and O'Tooleb's (2015) analysis of scholarship alumni's competence utilisation at Saudi universities or Al Yousef's (2016) analysis of human capital and market gains delivered through the Program. Nor did those contextual forces shape or even make it into the Alzubaidia and O'Tooleb's (2015) discussion of the great extent of underutilisation that they discovered. In the more critical case of Libya, the context of conflict in the country was virtually omitted from the text and analytical framework of Shtewi's (2019) doctoral study of Libyan scholarship alumni. Both cases point to a strong pattern in empirical scholarships research where the political, economic, cultural, and other contextual conditions shaping interest in, experiences of, and individual and broader effects of scholarships are rarely reflected—or their implications seriously considered—in research stances or designs, e.g., in choices and justification of philosophical, methodological, theoretical, or conceptual frameworks. A small but growing body of research beyond empirical studies is labouring a change of course, as surveyed in the next section.

To summarise, the literature survey presented in this section demonstrates the extent and scope of focus of empirical studies, which constitute the main body of scholarships research. In these empirical studies, the focus is mostly on scholarship alumni's post-completion career trajectories and their perceived contributions to national development. The literature surveyed begins to show the need for more contextualised approaches not only to

discuss findings of scholarships impact but, earlier in the process, to sensitise the research design to the contexts in which it is to be implemented. The section also demonstrated that this empirical segment of scholarships research has been produced usually through one or both of the following methods, often together with documentary review: in-depth interviews with scholarship alumni and quantitative and/or qualitative surveys of them, occasionally also collecting data from other scholarship stakeholders like programme administrators or government employers. Continuing this literature survey, the next section turns to the smaller segment of other academic literature on scholarships that helps us consider key issues of context, theory, and method in scholarships research.

### 1.2.2. Academic Literature Survey: Other Studies

In this section, I continue the survey of academic literature on scholarships, focusing on historical studies, conceptual and systematic contributions, and methodological critiques dealing with scholarships or with scholarships research. The goal of this section is to demonstrate that much needed reflection is being done to point out directions to advance contextuality, theoreticality, and methodological rigour in scholarships research.

Using archival documents and official records in her 2015 study, Kalisman focused on the transnational and regional identity-building experiences of recipients of scholarships by the Mandatory governments of Iraq, Palestine, and Transjordan to study at the American University of Beirut. She demonstrated that these experiences equipped the scholarship alumni with the technical tools but also the political mindsets with which they went on to influence education systems, shape learning experiences, and promote a sense of pan-Arabism across the region in the 1920-30s (Kalisman, 2015). The same multidimensional scholarship impact is reported in Al-Rashoud (2019) and Alsafwani's (2019) historical studies, although they mix consideration of school- and tertiary-level scholarships for Arab students to come to Kuwait and for Yemeni students to go to Egypt in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Similarly, Williams (2017) used historical research methods to demonstrate how scholarships to Namibians in the 1960s offered not only access to locally unavailable education opportunities but also to global experiences that, being shaped by places of study and Cold War politics, enriched Namibians' spectrum of political subjectivities and postcolonial visions.

Indeed, these historical studies show more clearly than most of the empirical studies reviewed in the previous section that scholarships are offered and seized amidst a dynamic

interaction between individual, group, national, regional, and international contexts. In other words, scholarships are offered and seized for reasons that may include but also may well exceed the purpose of building technical capacities and widening access to international higher education. This claim is evidenced in Campbell and Neff's (2020) systematic literature review of international higher education scholarships to Global South students. Based on 105 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters published from 2010 to 2019, Campbell and Neff (2020) identified six main rationales for scholarships. In order of the size of research covering each, these goals are human capital development, diplomatic outreach and influence, social change promotion, relief and development aid, higher education internationalisation, and inclusive participation in (global) higher education. Similar overarching goals of scholarships are observed in Dassin et al.'s (2018b) edited volume on international scholarships, although 'social change' is given prominence throughout the work. Each of these rationales is summarised in the following paragraph.

First, scholarships develop recipients' human capital through equipping them with knowledge and skills that they will then use in advancing their careers and contributions to the home country (Campbell & Neff, 2020, pp. 835-839). Second, scholarships build and strengthen international relations through immersing recipients—presumably future leaders—in life, intercultural, and other experiences that cultivate their understanding and sympathy toward the host country (pp. 839-840). Third, scholarships promote social change and social justice in the home country by exposing recipients to multidimensional diversity during their sojourn, triggering their appreciation and subsequently advocacy of progressive values (pp. 840-842). Fourth, scholarships are a tool of channelling humanitarian and (sustainable) development aid to the home country, where selected students receive education abroad, sometimes in fields of determined need or interest in the home country, before transferring their newly acquired specialised knowledge to their workplaces and sectors (pp. 843-844). Fifth, scholarship recipients contribute to the internationalisation and diversification of their host academic institutions (pp. 844-846). Finally, scholarships remove economic barriers to access (international) higher education and therefore serve a widening-participation purpose (p. 847).

While these goals are distinguishable, they are often interrelated and overlapping and can sometimes be conflated or at competition or conflict with each other (Campbell & Neff, 2020; also see Hong, 2025). This complex interrelationship among scholarship programme goals has rightly invited critical reflection from researchers, in and beyond the field of education, who have worked or continue to work on scholarships. Key attempts in such critical

reflection have been made to demonstrate “drifting” in objectives of scholarship programmes (Wilson, 2015), to “clarify mixed messages” about the intended goals of scholarships (Campbell & Mawer, 2019), to explore the “unfulfilled promise” of scholarships (Barker, 2024), to illustrate “why theories matter” for coherence in the design, evaluation, and research of scholarships (Novotný et al., 2021), and to critique predominant reliance on human capital theory (Saling, 2023). These critical reflections are surveyed in the rest of this section.

In his approach to scholarships from a foreign policy perspective, Wilson (2015) reviews the historical evolution of policy discourse on three different inbound scholarship programmes offered by the UK government. He demonstrates that the stated objectives of these programmes have “drifted” in accordance with UK’s navigation of changes in its place in the world and its relationship with former colonies and with the US as the new superpower. Wilson illustrates this drifting with multiple programme cases. One such case is the Marshall Scholarships, created in 1953 as an expression of the UK’s gratitude for America’s support during World War II. By reviewing and comparing archival and modern records on the Marshall Scholarships, Wilson (2015) shows their objective drifted from “expressing gratitude” in the aftermath of WWI to one of graduating a group of Americans who, with their exposure to and education in Britain, may go on to help consolidate the ‘special relationship’ between the UK and the US. Such drifting of objectives is minor although nuanced in this case as the Scholarships rationale moved from gesturing goodwill to Americans to graduating agents of potential influence on American public opinion, still within the rationale of “diplomatic outreach and influence”.

Such drifting of scholarship objectives can in other cases be more significant and more detrimental to effective management of scholarships impact. In their documentary review, Novotný et al. (2021) find that developing the recipients’ human capital is the most explicit rationale given for development-oriented scholarships offered by the Czech government to foreign publics. The authors then illustrate the poor performance of these scholarships against this stated purpose, with high rates of non-completion of study programmes, non-return to the home country, and uncertainty about the match between the human capital acquired by recipients and that needed in their home countries. Judging the Czech scholarships by another stated rationale of them, widening access to higher education, Novotný et al. (2021) also find evidence to suggest similarly poor performance, with many scholarship recipients coming from foreign countries with academic and socioeconomic backgrounds incoherent with the scholarships purpose of targeting less-privileged students. From a third perspective of

diplomatic outreach and influence, also stated explicitly as a rationale for the Czech scholarships, Novotný et al. (2021) find anecdotal evidence to suggest the scholarships may be effective in fostering positive attitudes towards Czechia but that their remit on the country's international engagement is underutilised due to poor engagement with the alumni as well as to the high rates of non-completion and non-return. Furthermore, Novotný et al. (2021) find empirical evidence that the scholarships performed well against a less intentional rationale, this one aligned with Sen's (2001) Capability Approach, where recipients believed their scholarship experiences contributed to their multidimensional life learning and overall development. This finding may be ironic given the unintentionality of applying a Capability Approach in programming or evaluation of Czech scholarships, yet not so ironic when considering the strengthening support the Capability Approach enjoys in scholarships research, including in this thesis, as elaborated further in this section and the next chapter. Finally, Novotný et al. (2021) demonstrated that alternative perspectives of path dependency and organised anarchy could better explain the policy processes leading to the inception and continuation of the Czech scholarships. Drawing on Wilson's (2015) thesis of "drifting objectives", Novotný et al. (2021) conclude that these scholarships, originally conceived as a means of development cooperation, continue to be promoted as such but are in fact vaguely and ineffectively serving disparate goals. Barker (2024) drew similar conclusions about Australia's Endeavour scholarship programme, which she demonstrated lacked clear or coherent objectives.

Novotný et al. (2021) are not alone in concluding that theory should be used more and better in scholarships design, evaluation, and research. Nor are they alone in their endorsement, albeit tacitly, of Amartya Sen's (2001) Capability Approach as a good framework to inform scholarships research theoretically. In one of the most cited conceptual contributions in academic literature on scholarships, Campbell and Mawer (2019) examine the implications of framing scholarships as a tool of sustainable development in terms of human capital vis-à-vis human rights vis-à-vis human capabilities. They highlight several plausible critiques of using human capital theory to frame that contribution, citing, *inter alia*, its overemphasis on the economic and technical dimensions of scholarships impact on alumni and its little regard for these alumni's multifaceted agency, for potential complexities of their return process, and for contextual nuances in their home-country contexts. In this regard, Del Sordi (2018) illustrates from the case of Kazakhstan that strict enforcement of a human capital logic in an authoritarian context can border on actual repression. This is contrasted with the case in the Netherlands where Oosterbeek and Webbink (2011) contemplate how a less strict human capital logic in a



democratic context may open doors for greater economic benefits, though in the long-term, for the home-country (also see van Houte, 2014, for an illustration of the strategic efficacy of *voluntary* return in Afghanistan).

Campbell and Mawer (2019) further raise serious questions about applying a human-rights lens to the contribution of scholarships to sustainable development, asking whether *international* higher education qualifies as a human right and whether an access-driven massification of scholarships for affordable higher education would cause compromise on the quality of students benefiting from those scholarships and the higher education now accessed by these students. Campbell and Mawer (2019) finally discuss the better fit of Sen's (2001) Capability Approach, for its stronger consideration of the multidimensional forces that may shape scholarship recipients' pre- and post-sojourn trajectories as well as of the agency that recipients may exercise in navigating these forces. Still, Campbell and Mawer (2019) critique the Capability Approach on the grounds that designing and evaluating scholarships against it requires recognition of individual recipients as free agents who may or may not choose to apply their scholarship impact in ways consistent with sustainable development needs in their home countries. Campbell and Mawer (2019) ultimately hypothesise that the Capability Approach may be "the most viable" lens through which to try to appreciate scholarships impact without dismissing the complexity of home-country contexts or the free agency that scholarship recipients may exercise to negotiate their roles in those contexts. King et al.'s (2023) study reviewed in the previous section further illustrates this optimal viability, as does Walker's (2012) discussion of the superiority of the Capability Approach to human capital theory in the broader field of Education.

In a comprehensive reflection, Saling (2023) first deepens criticism of applying human capital theory in scholarships research. He criticises the theory's ontological genesis in an ultraconservative American politico-economic project. This project, he contends, is predicated on collapsing "complex ideas about the value of education into a simple economic investment-return model" where individual investment in education is rewarded by higher individual productivity and wages (p. 2001). Explaining the continued predominance of human capital theory, Saling cites its simplicity in "captur[ing] the value of education in an easily commensurable dollar figure" (p. 2002; see Tan, 2014, for a holistic criticism of the theory). Saling (2023) also ascribes the predominance of human capital theory to its resonance within a higher education and a global economy both increasingly shaped by neo-liberalism, which refers to the ideological view that free markets, operating withing (Western-style) systems of

liberal-democratic governance, are capable of and should be trusted with developing solutions to challenges facing humanity (Harvey, 2005; Shamir, 2008). Saling (2023) moves on to also criticise the neocolonial contours of the “diplomatic outreach and influence” rationale for scholarships, where recipients may be seen as subjects of colonial influence and agents of imperial expansion rather than partners of equal contribution in (re)shaping international relations (also see Pietsch, 2011).

Saling (2023) offers both of the critiques above based on a rigorous review of both academic and grey literature on scholarships. Two further notes that he derives from this review are pertinent here. Echoing the claim made in the previous section about empiricism in scholarships research, Saling (2023) found that even when scholarships are “painstakingly and meticulously researched”, such research remains “largely descriptive” and/or “referencing a narrow set of theories prescriptively employed in the very scholarship programs [being studied]” (p. 2001). Further, he observed that research studies on scholarship programmes barely attend to “critical questions about program design, assumptions and impacts (intended and unintended) and focus mainly on examining the ‘effectiveness’ of the program vis-à-vis the internal logic employed by the program itself” (p. 2001). Saling (2023) drew on Mawer’s (2017) work in ascribing this prevalent and serious lack of critical research to the fact that “academic articles focused on scholarship programs are often produced adjacent to contracted evaluation studies which produce ‘grey’ literature” (p. 2001).

Indeed, evidence for Saling’s (2023) criticism of the predominant use of human capitalist and empiricist approaches to scholarships research is inseparable from methodological criticisms of academic and grey studies of scholarships. Dassin et al.’s (2018b) edited volume on scholarships is rich in such methodological critique, though focused more on grey than on academic studies of scholarships. In her chapter, Campbell (2018b) notes that different theoretical frameworks influence the design—and therefore evaluation and often also research—of different scholarship programmes. Considering the predominance of human capital theory as *the* rationale used to frame scholarship programme goals and outcomes, there is hardly any surprise in seeing the following methodological limitations of scholarships research: variables and foci limited to rates of completion, repatriation, and post-scholarship career advances (Dassin & Navarette, 2018); descriptive analysis and reporting of common topics like scholarship recipient satisfaction, post-completion trajectories and institutional and societal contributions, and continued links to funding organisations and countries (Mawer, 2017); a methodological view of scholarship recipients more as individual rather than social

actors (Dassin & Navarette, 2018); and limited, if any, attention paid to their agency at different stages of their funded sojourn (Baxter, 2019). The key example here is Donald Kirkpatrick's evaluative model for training programmes. The model is designed to meet the monitoring and evaluation needs of programme administrators and donors, presenting a framework to track individual training experiences and map their outcomes at the meso- and macro-levels, i.e., at organisations/workplaces and in society (Martel, 2018; Mawer, 2018). With this framework, the model can be useful to exploring scholarship impact but may often fail to focus, whether for exploration or explanation, on the agency exercised and structural and circumstantial forces faced by scholarship recipients like those in King et al.'s (2023) study (also see Dant, 2010; cf. Jonbekova, Serkova, et al., 2022).

This section, together with the previous one, has presented a survey of academic literature on scholarships. It demonstrates that there is some strong consensus forming regarding the need for alternative theoretical approaches to scholarships research, which would expand and diversify the substantive foci and analytic tools used in producing this research. That is, researchers working on scholarships increasingly recognise the need for theoretical-methodological approaches through which (i) scholarship recipients are viewed as social actors, (ii) their scholarship gains and application thereof as not limited to the technical and economic spheres of life, (iii) their application and dissemination of their scholarship impact being contingent on a dynamic interaction between their agency and a wide variety of actors shaping their exercise thereof, and (iv) methodologies that can put to research action the three preceding points. As the next final section on grey literature demonstrates, this search for more critical approaches to scholarships research cannot be isolated from the powerful forces shaping the parallel business of evaluating scholarships impact.

### 1.2.3. Grey Literature Survey

The UN's formal endorsement of scholarships under Target 4.b of the Sustainable Development Goal on quality education (UNESCO, 2016) consolidated a longstanding global interest in offering scholarships as *one* means of driving sustainable development. It also lent or enhanced a development-orientation to the purpose of scholarship programmes offered by state and non-state actors to foreign citizens, which can often be used simultaneously as a means of aid and/or diplomacy (Campbell & Neff, 2020). For example, across 11 countries investing in outbound scholarships to build their national human capital (Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Vietnam), Engberg

et al. (2014) found that the variety of rationales for these countries' outbound scholarships "can be distilled down to a common interest... to enhance the human-resource capacity among their citizens". Also, Mundy (2020) notes that higher education scholarships tend to be privileged in governments' channelling of education official development assistance. According to 2022 data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (n.d.), the value of scholarships embedded in official development assistance exceeded one billion USD. Abadia and Amaya (2020) further note that private foundations, the fifth largest provider of education aid to developing countries, channelled the largest share of their education-related funding in the form of scholarships and higher education degree and diploma programmes. Abadia and Amaya estimate this share totals up to around 549 million USD, representing 26% of private foundations' philanthropic giving for education, compared to 3% given to education research (see Talha-Jebril & Martel, 2021, for more reflection on such foundations' giving for scholarships).

This consolidating interest in international scholarships is joined by a parallel interest in evaluating their impact, amidst globally resonant "seductions" of quantifying development challenges (Merry, 2016) and peace outcomes (Firchow, 2018), managerialising work culture (Clapton, 2020; Klikauer, 2015), professionalising and effectivising foreign aid (James, 2016; Kenny, 2008), and being accountable to taxpayers (Wenar, 2006), including as related to scholarships (Mawer, 2014a). The consolidation of this dual interest in offering scholarships *and* evaluating their impact can be clearly seen in the case of the German Academic Exchange Service, which has been borrowing standards from the German Evaluation Society in developing an institutional approach to standardising monitoring and evaluation of its scholarship programmes (DAAD, 2021). In the US, the Institute of International Education (IIE, 2017) has championed the belief in the power of international education and in the measurability of this power. With this belief, the Institute has been implementing and publishing widely cited tracking studies on scholarship alumni worldwide (e.g., Martel & Bhandari, 2016; Murga & Martel, 2017; Kallick et al., 2017).

Amidst these declared commitments to measurability and cost-effectiveness, impact evaluations of scholarship programmes have grown to be more numerous and greater in their tracing timelines, international scopes, and often sample sizes than existing empirical studies. Yet, these impact evaluations tend to be substantively and methodologically similar to empirical studies—or, as Saling (2023) contends, it could be the other way around. For example, Mawer (2014a) demonstrates in his study of methodologies used in impact evaluations of scholarship programmes that they use mixed-methods, involving surveys

preceded by document review and followed by interviews (see ECA, 2005, 2017, for illustration from the US' Fulbright programme). Methodologically, impact evaluations barely differ from empirical studies in terms of the scholarship rationales and/or impact variables investigated. One example is Webb's (2009) mixed-method tracer study on Cambodian alumni of scholarships provided by Australia's Agency for International Development. Webb designed the study to address the monitoring and evaluation questions "specified" by the Agency, focusing on the following impact variables, which are also prevalent in empirical studies (1.2.1): "return to home country", "reintegration into the workplace", "linkages with Australia and networking with other awardees", "applying skills effectively", "contributing to national development", "strengthening organisational effectiveness", and "impact on gender, leadership and governance" (Webb, 2009, p. 55). These variables—and the mixed-methods used to investigate them—are also observed in global tracking studies of the Ford Foundation International Fellowships Program (Martel & Bhandari, 2016; Murga & Martel, 2017; Kallick et al., 2017) and of the MasterCard Foundation scholarship programme in Africa (Marsh et al., 2016).

In scholarships more aligned with a diplomatic purpose, investigation of such variables can be broadened to include additional pertinent ones. For example, the UK's Chevening (2019, 2021, 2022, 2023) programme has been publishing annual evaluation reports of its impact. In these (very) short evaluation reports, descriptive statistics generated through programme data and alumni surveys and anecdotal narratives of alumni impact are repeatedly used to report on such variables as alumni's increased positive opinion of the UK, interest in recommending the UK as a good study destination, pride in being associated with the scholarship, and attribution of individual success and wider societal contributions to the scholarship experience (also see Chevening evaluation report commissioned to KPMG, 2016).

As may be clear from the methodological similarities outlined above, impact evaluations and empirical studies share a predominant reference to careerist terms, evaluative models, and variables derived from or inspired by human capital theory (Mawer, 2014a, 2017; Perna et al., 2014; Saling 2023). Consistently framed—often implicitly—by this theoretical framing, impact evaluations, like academic studies, have expanded the international scope and base of empirical evidence of scholarships' technical impact, i.e., what career and other activities alumni do with the multidimensional gains they made through their scholarships. Impact evaluations like those by Martel and Bhandari (2016), Marsh et al., (2016), Murga and Martel (2017), Kallick et al. (2017), Kallick and Murga (2018), and Webb (2009) widen

appreciation of scholarships' potential to provide Asian, African, Middle Eastern, and other alumni with valuable academic, research, professional, intercultural, and personal qualities. Like the empirical studies surveyed (1.2.1), these impact evaluations improve knowledge of how alumni reportedly use their scholarship outcomes, often to land higher job positions through which they may be better able to advance their careers and institutional influence across the public, higher education, and other sectors. Like the empirical studies, these impact evaluations outline political, economic, social, and/or cultural challenges in the home country that may suppress alumni's advancement and influence. And like empirical studies, these impact evaluations are concluded at that point; the assessment and reflection effort is truncated at the generation of claims of reported usability of the scholarship experiences, with these claims often followed by an argument that even when limited, this usability justifies continued investment in scholarships. This truncation may not be universally acceptable, as shall be demonstrated in the next subchapter on the case of scholarships to Palestinians.

### Subchapter Summary

In this subchapter, I have surveyed some of the key thematic, theoretical, and methodological currents in scholarly and grey literature on scholarships. I demonstrated Mawer's (2018) still true claim of scholarships research as an area in infancy. This infancy is observed in several intersecting points. Thematically, the bulk of empirical studies and impact evaluations of scholarships is focused on alumni career trajectories and (contextual barriers to) their contributions to development in their home-countries, especially through employment in higher education and government jobs as well as through broader acts of public service. This body of empirical knowledge privileges description of the technical, i.e., what alumni self-report they gain from their scholarships impact and what they do with these gains. Apparent satisfaction with this description, however indeed valuable, is limiting the pursuit of deeper analysis of these gains and gain use vis-à-vis the three predominantly used (or other) concepts used to establish their significance: social justice (Campbell & Lavallee, 2020; Kallick et al., 2017; Martel & Bhandari, 2017; Talha-Jebril & Martel, 2021), social change (Campbell & Baxter, 2019; Clift et al., 2013; Dassin et al., 2018b; Hong et al., 2021; Jonbekova, 2024; Kallick & Murga, 2018; Musa-Oito, 2018), and sustainable development (Campbell, 2021b; Campbell, Kelly-Weber et al., 2021)

Furthermore, as emerging theoretical reflections and critiques clarify, there is need to engage in scholarships research using more critical and contextualised approaches, particularly

to part with human capital theory and its underpinning neoclassical economic assumptions in favour of multidimensional approaches like Graduate Capital (e.g., Kim et al., 2024) or non-prescriptive ones like the Capability Approach (Campbell & Mawer, 2019). Methodologically, scholarships research has benefited from the use of different methods, whether mixed or multiple qualitative ones. However, these methods remain consistently sourced from (a barely disclaimed or discussed) descriptive-phenomenological philosophy, focusing the design and use of research methods on “how alumni make meaning and judgements about their own experiences and that of their peers” (Campbell, 2018a, p. 578; also see Alqahtani, 2015; Campbell, 2016; Enkhtur, 2020). Again, this descriptive phenomenological practice is valuable in building knowledge of alumni’s own understanding of their scholarship experiences, impact, and the ways in which they mobilise that impact and the challenges they then face. Still, this research philosophy and the empiricism it foregrounds demonstrably forfeits potential to move from describing the perceived manifestations of scholarships impact to other research purposes. For example, descriptive phenomenology, at least as casually practised in scholarships research, seems to offer little metatheoretical guidance in analysing non-technical scholarship outcomes like epistemic changes and reflexive multidimensional growth during life and learning away from home. Nor does it seem to promote interest in the deeper structural forces and/or individual (pre)dispositions that may give rise to scholarships impact and whose re-creation in the home-country context may widen reach to scholarships impact.

The final point illustrating the infancy of scholarships research is the limited extent of (critical) engagement with concepts like “sustainable development”, “social change”, “social justice”. These concepts are used to establish the significance of scholarships for home countries but are used in a unidirectional way, where any alumni’s report of skill development or exposure to and subsequently advocacy for diversity count as a scholarship’s contribution to sustainable development or social justice/change. However, this linearity in approaching the concepts is unsurprising, as the latter are barely conceptually unpacked or methodologically operationalised in light of the social science research developing them or indeed critiquing their application in research *onto* “developing countries” (Toukan, 2017).

In this thesis, I take stock of the valuable substantive and methodological knowledge already surveyed in this subchapter as well as of the critical limitations distilled in this summary. Before presenting how I actioned this assessment of the field in my doctoral study, I must discuss how the context of scholarships in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT)

further illustrates the need to push scholarships research in more contextually engaged, theoretically informed directions.

### **1.3. Scholarships for Palestinians**

This subchapter offers an original review of scholarships for Palestinians. The dual goal of this review is to establish the national context by which the scope and design of the doctoral study were informed and to locate this country case in the body of scholarships research presented in the previous subchapter. The subchapter proceeds to this goal in two sections. The first describes the historical context of Palestinians' reliance on scholarships—or offerings similar to them—in accessing higher education abroad and then building their local universities. The second section offers an original overview of the contemporary reality of scholarships extended to Palestinians as well as of the rationales underpinning them.

While the subchapter is focused precisely on scholarships to Palestinians, the significance attached to these scholarships is itself an extension of the broader commitment Palestinians attach to education. In the context of chronic injustice and violent inflictions described in the subchapter, Palestinians have time and again asserted—and been recognised for—finding in education some psychological remedy for their mass displacement and dispossession, a resource of economic survival and social mobility, a means of resistance and liberation, and a space of creativity and imagination less policed by a foreign military occupation (Abu-Lughod, 2000; Alzaroo & Hunt, 2003; Barakat, 2008; Bruhn, 2004; Dickerson, 1974; Isaac et al., 2019; Jebril, 2018; Taraki, 2000; Zelkovitz, 2015). The manifestation of this commitment to education through seizing international opportunities is demonstrated in the following two sections. Both expand a brief account of scholarships to Palestinians that has already published in one of the articles arising from the doctoral study (Almassri, 2024e).

#### **1.3.1. Education Opportunities Seized in Forced Exile**

Palestinians have historically relied on accessing institutions abroad for their higher education. During the British Mandate for Palestine from 1918 to 1948, this need for education abroad reflected local realities in which capacities for tertiary education were as unavailable in Palestine as in many countries in and beyond the region (Kalisman, 2015). Fulfilment of this need during this period was also strongly shaped by privilege and deprivation, with access to education abroad being exclusive to the wealthy who could afford it, stratified along multiple



social categories like gender, religious affiliation and professional class, and mediated through meritocratic processes (Al-Hout, 1979; ‘Odeh, 2000). Until 1948, Palestinians attended regionally leading universities in Egypt, the American University of Beirut and that of Cairo, Damascus University, and the University of Baghdad (Abu-Lughod, 2000). In 1948, the year of Nakba (Catastrophe), Palestinians experienced mass forced displacement and violent dispossession as the British facilitation of “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people” was concluded with the formation of the State of Israel (Balfour Declaration, cited in Rhett, 2019). As British forces left Palestine, militias of the new state drove over half of the Palestinian people out of their homes and properties, with thousands of them sheltering in neighbouring Arab states (UN, n.d.; for more on this history, see Khalidi, 2020, and Pappé, 2007). Many of these now-refugees who had the appropriate academic qualification could have free access or scholarships to higher education in and beyond their host countries, which often had substantially more postsecondary institutions than pre-1948 Palestine (Abu-Lughod, 2000).

Soon, as Cold War politics extended its influence to international education (see Nye, 2008), it seems that it also increased and strongly shaped Palestinians’ access to higher education abroad. In her doctoral research involving key informant interviews and archival research, Barghuthi (2009) shows that Palestinians’ access to scholarships during the 1970s-80s was defined along ideological lines, with the proximity of their national leadership to the global left earning them 570-600 annual scholarships in the Soviet Union and a few hundred more across the Eastern Bloc and Cuba (as well as in India and Pakistan). In 1974, the Palestinian leadership declared a more pragmatic stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, after which Western countries began offering scholarships to Palestinians, with France being the first to do so in 1980 (Barghuthi, 2009). Access to these scholarships was also shaped by national politics and host-country expectations. As Barghuthi (2009) further notes, where academic distinction was required for successful competition for scholarships in Western countries, selection for other scholarships was primarily based on political affiliation, advantaging those with connections to political operatives and those of parents lost in combat through the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Barghuthi, 2009). For the few dozens of students who came from better-off families, they did not have to wait for these scholarships to start attending higher education institutions across Europe (Shiblak, 2005).

This increasing access to funded higher education in exile soon had remarkable results. Two decades after their Nakba, the ratio of higher education attendance among Palestinians

exceeded the ratios in their host Arab countries and in some advanced European countries like England and France (Hallaj, 1980, p. 76). In the Soviet Union, the number of Palestinian students soared from a meagre two in 1966/67 to 892 in 1979/80, exceeding the growth rate of Arab students by about 110 times (Katsakioris, 2010). This strengthening commitment to education persisted even after Israel occupied the remaining Palestinian territory of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, i.e., the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), during the Arab-Israeli War of 1967. While this education access achievement is remarkable in comparative terms and relative to Palestinians' increasingly protracted situation of dispossession and displacement, a geographic breakdown of it reveals a key discrepancy. In the academic year 1976/77, the ratio of higher education attendance among Palestinians stood at 2% for the entire Palestinian population but at only 0.48% for Palestinians in the OPT (Hallaj, 1980). This discrepancy, explained by the very small number of academic institutions in the OPT at the time, illustrates the continuation of Palestinians' dependency on institutions abroad for their higher education then. Hallaj (1980, p. 77) thought this dependency was so great that it "warrant[ed] the conclusion that higher education for the Palestinians has been an essentially expatriate phenomenon". Yet, this "expatriate phenomenon" soon extended to Palestinians in the OPT.

The Palestinians educated abroad who could return to the OPT brought home their talents, increasingly so after Israel alleviated its military rule in the early 1980s. With financing from wealthy Palestinian individuals and non-Palestinian philanthropists, returning academics started building local institutions of higher education, converting three community colleges into undergraduate institutions in 1977 and starting up more postsecondary institutions ever since. Writing at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, characterised by Edward Said as the foremost Palestinian academic, observed the significant systemic impact of Palestinians' access to higher education abroad and of continued external support to their education more broadly:

Many of the academic staff [at Palestinian higher education institutions], some 798 (about 45 percent) out of 1,726, obtained their highest degree (the Ph.D.) at a European or American university. ... Completion of the doctorate was made financially possible by a combined effort on the part of the universities themselves, which invested in their faculty development, and fellowship support from various European and American foundations" (Abu-Lughod, 2000, p. 85).

But even the part of investment made by Palestinian universities was itself made possible by financial support from outside of the OPT, as Abu-Lughod (2000, p. 86) continues to recount:

Although [Palestinian universities] had no “endowment” to speak of, they were able to attract financial support from wealthy Palestinians who donated generously and made possible the existing campuses. For all practical purposes, every university building in Palestine was made possible by gifts from either individual Palestinians working in the Gulf States or sympathetic non-Palestinian Arab philanthropists.

Almost two decades and a half later, the efficacy of such support for Palestinians’ education abroad, and subsequently for establishing and expanding their local education, seems quantitatively very strong. Compared to 1976/77, by 2021/22, the number of Palestinian higher education institutions had soared from five to 54, and the ratio of Palestinian university students to the total population in Gaza and the West Bank grew almost ten times, from 0.48% to 4.7% (Isaac et al., 2019; PCBS, 2023). Palestinians educated abroad, together with graduates of the institutions led largely by these foreign-educated Palestinians, have gone on to play defining roles in Palestinian politics (Barghuthi, 2009).

Systemic conditions ensuing, *inter alia*, from protraction of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict mean, however, that such strong quantitative efficacy has not led to as significant qualitative leaps in what Palestinian universities are able to offer Palestinians in the OPT. Among many other areas of needed improvements, productivity, quality, and social engagement of academic research remain low, as do gaps in gender participation in the academic service and in distribution of talent across fields of study (Isaac et al., 2019). Also, objectives of teacher education programmes remain unmet (Ayoub, 2024), as do challenges to institutional identity and sector governance (Abusamra, 2023; see Kassis et. al, 2022, for illustration). Even more crucially, key questions remain about the national mission of Palestinian universities in graduating globally conscious, intellectually competent, politically engaged, critical agents of national emancipation and development (see Abu-Lughod, 2000; Abu Awwad, 2024).

This suboptimal efficacy can be significantly (though not completely) explained by the severity and protraction of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Since their inception, Palestinian academic institutions have been subject to intensive structural and direct violence. In 2000, Abu-Lughod enumerated some of the forms of this violence: heavily taxing book and laboratory imports; banning, confiscating, and/or seriously censoring educational materials;

imposing curfews and enforcing closure of universities; expulsion of Palestinian intellectuals and academic leaders; and interrogation of the latter's acting deputies, and the arrest and incarceration of (former) student leaders. These forms of violence have only worsened since Abu-Lughod's observation.

In the West Bank, everyday access to universities and quality of the student experience are directly undermined by increasing movement restrictions in the form of physical barriers and military checkpoints (Abed al-Hadi et al., 2021; Harker, 2009). In the Gaza Strip, violence against higher education has been even more serious and direct. As Milton et al. (2021, p. 1024) report: "University staff and students have been killed whilst campus infrastructure has been attacked, rebuilt, and destroyed again". Since—and even long before—the latest eruption of violence in October 2023, strong terms have been attempted to describe the scale and scope of destruction of the human and material infrastructure of Gaza's higher education, e.g., scholasticide (Ahmad & Vulliamy, 2009; Riemer, 2019; OHCHR, 2024), educide (Gordon & Turner, 2024; Jack, 2024; Rabaia & Habash, 2024), epistemicide (Moaswes, 2024), and Gazacide (Nijim, 2024). Across both regions of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, Palestinian higher education is further undermined by the broader context of protracting occupation and chronic, systematic restriction of academic mobilities (Griffiths et al., 2022; Moughrabi, 2004). This de-development persists amidst unpunished apartheid (Amnesty International, 2022; Bletter, 2003; Human Rights Watch, 2021). It also persists in a consolidating reality of "politicide", a term that an Israeli sociologist proposed as early as 2003 to refer to the decimation of Palestinians' political life (Kimmerling, 2003).

This context severely undermines the political, economic, physical, and psychological means necessary for Palestinian higher education to be at pace with growing local demand or in a position to contribute significantly to national aspirations of freedom, emancipation, and development (Isaac et al., 2019; Pherali & Turner, 2017). It also significantly shapes the ability of Palestinian higher education institutions to connect with, benefit from, and contribute to foreign higher education systems (Koldas & Çıraklı, 2019).

Protraction of this state of conflict is sanctioned by international oblivion and complicity and is sustained through a complex local, regional, and global failure to end it (Dajani & Hussein, 2014; Mearsheimer & Walt, 2006; Ramsbotham, 2022). As it persists, this state makes continuous foreign academic aid indispensable to the survival and development of Palestinian higher education and thereby to the advancement of its contribution to peace and

emancipation in Palestine (Isaac et al., 2019). *One* pathway of channelling aid and supporting Palestinian universities' survival and potential development is scholarships. As reflected earlier in this section, it is free-of-charge access to public universities in mostly Arab countries, scholarships to study in and beyond neighbouring countries, and the philanthropy of Palestinian individuals and non-Palestinian actors that have historically made it possible for Palestinians to staff and build their local higher education and to fuel its contribution to Palestinian life. The enablement and investment represented by scholarships today make them a continuation of that history. I explore this continuation in the next section. Before doing so, it is worth briefly reminding that this reliance on foreign aid may often come with the real and indeed materialising risk of derailing the mission claimed of Palestinian higher education from one of national emancipation to one of reproducing neocolonial practices and hegemonic academic relations (Abu Awwad, 2024; Kassis et al., 2022). This risk arises in the broader context where a significant amount (72%) of foreign aid to Palestinians often end up in the Israeli economy (Hever, 2015). In Chapter 4, I revisit both points in reference to sensitising scholarships impact to Palestinian priorities and strategic interests.

### 1.3.2. Heterogeneity of Stakeholders and Rationales of Scholarships for Palestinians

I have thus far established the historical context and significance of Palestinians' dependence on and use of opportunities to access higher education abroad. I offer in this section an account of the contemporary reality of such opportunities for Palestinians. I focus this account on the many stakeholders involved in offering, supporting, or benefiting directly or indirectly from scholarships for Palestinians, as well as of the different rationales for continued investment in scholarships for Palestinians. Before commencing this account, it is worth noting that the OPT, along with Israel, is the second top location, just after the U.S., for peace and conflict-oriented international education programmes (Pugh & Ross, 2019). Yet, the OPT is virtually absent from academic and grey literature dealing with the intersection of international education and peace, a gap within a larger one of disproportionately little research on conflict-oriented international education programming in the Middle East and North Africa (Pugh & Ross, 2019).

This gap makes it unsurprising that scholarships to Palestinians have received virtually no (published) reflection from researchers or policymakers. In its evaluation of the economic and social impact of foreign aid between 1994 and 2009, the Palestine Monetary Authority

reports that data is unavailable for scholarships provided to Palestinian students or for support directly made to Palestinian educational institutions (Sarsour et al., 2011). In their more recent baseline study of higher education and research in the OPT, Isaac et al. (2019) noted that in their “attempt to assess donor funding for HE [higher education] and research in Palestine, a letter was sent on 14 July 2018 to 51 consulates and representatives offices. Except for one apology, there were no responses” (p. 46). These challenges of lacking data and systematic data collection, storage, and sharing seem common across the body of research on scholarships as well as relevant forms of short-term study and exchange abroad (Campbell, 2021a). One illustration of this common challenge is shared by Scott-Smith (2008), who reports that “the U.S. embassy in London discovered [British participants in US-based exchanges] were notoriously unwilling to respond to follow-up questions about their exchange experience afterwards” (p. 179; for further illustration, see Novotný et al.’s (2021) study on inbound scholarships by the Czech government). Additionally, such lack of data on scholarships for Palestinians persists with an absence of this national group from academic and grey literature on scholarships.

Relevant reports and impact evaluations offer very little, if any, insight specific to the OPT or the scholarship experiences of Palestinians (e.g., Campbell, 2021a; Chevening, 2019; DAAD, 2022; ECA, 2017; KPMG, 2016; cf. Kallick & Murga, 2018). Indeed, in the *Scholarships for Change*, a rare, now-archived collection of scholarships impact evaluations, looking up ‘Palestine’ or variants of the term returns only one result: Kallick and Murga’s (2018) report on the multi-country impact of the Ford Foundation International Fellowship Program. The authors demonstrate the scholarship offered equitable access to graduate education abroad for 147 members of disadvantaged groups in the OPT, e.g., refugees, women, people with disability, and first-generation students and others from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Kallick and Murga (2018) further find that these scholarship recipients pursued studies across the full spectrum of academic fields, with most going back to their home communities upon completing their graduate study and many working in the fields of education, community development, or gender. The report follows the same approach as most empirical studies and impact evaluations presented in sections (1.2.1) and (1.2.3), focusing on multidimensional skill gains, career progress, and multi-level contributions to their workplaces and communities as well as challenges thereto.

Another grey source identified as offering some insight into scholarships in the OPT is Harrow and Sola’s (2022) documentary review, focused on the policy challenges and donor

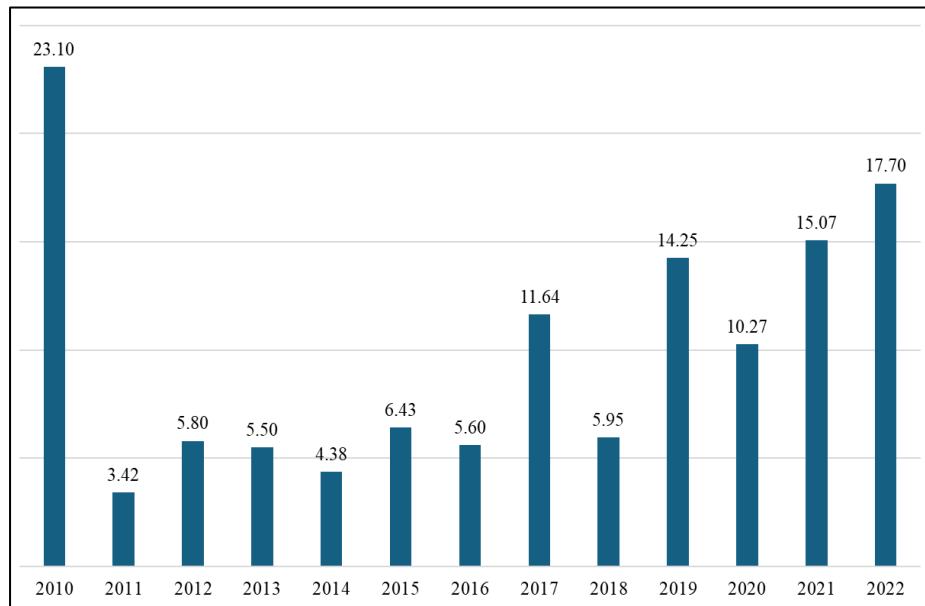
roles observed in the case of offering and managing scholarships to Palestinians. Although the authors seemed to mix *local* and international higher education scholarships, the issues they raised are of transferable significance across the two types of scholarships. That is, their critique of how philanthropic donors may balance investment in individual awards with that in education institutions and systems in the OPT is significant for thinking about the role of scholarships, both local and international, in pursuing sustainable positive progress there despite the national context of protracted violence (Harrow & Sola, 2022).

A key additional grey source identified as offering global, though only numerical, insight into scholarships in the OPT is a dataset by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (n.d.). By tracking progress against Target 4.b of SDG 4, i.e., the increase of international scholarships to drive sustainable development, the Institute shows that from 2010 to 2022, the OPT received an annual average of 9.93 million USD in official development assistance funding for scholarships (see Figure 1 on the next page). In 2022, this amount made the OPT the 16<sup>th</sup> country (out of 138) receiving the most amount of official development assistance flow for scholarships, down from being the 6<sup>th</sup> in 2010 and the 13<sup>th</sup> in 2021 but significantly up from any position in 2011-2020. By the total amount of official development assistance flow for scholarships that the OPT received from 2010 to 2022, it ranks as the 25<sup>th</sup> most receiving country—far above Georgia and Lebanon, well above Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Jordan, Iran, and just above South Africa; and far below Syria and Ukraine and well below Yemen, Thailand, Afghanistan, and Myanmar (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, n.d.).

A similar absence of the OPT is noted in academic literature, whether on scholarships or adjacent research areas. In her 2022 longitudinal doctoral study, Rawand Elhour, herself a two-time Palestinian scholarship recipient, investigated the sociolinguistic experiences of nine Masters Palestinian students in England. All of them were on scholarships, although that status did not fall within the scope of her study. Elhour (2022) found that the research participants perceived decreasing confidence in their competence as English language users, with this decrease mediated by experiences of being foreign and losing key linguistic and other resources with which to navigate the international academic sojourn. Elhour (2022) further found that they primarily socialised with members of their national or Arab backgrounds for support and familiarity, though some expanded their networks over time.

**Figure (1)**

Volume of official development assistance flow for scholarships to the OPT in constant USD (in millions)



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (n.d.)

In their conference paper, Akbaşlı and Albanna (2019) interrogated the academic, economic, and social challenges faced by Palestinian Masters and PhD students in Türkiye, as well as the support provided and solutions proposed to address them. Based on interviews with 16 such students, Akbaşlı and Albanna (2019) reported, among other findings, that the participants experienced challenges related primarily to the use of Turkish in their academic study and to the high demands of their graduate study, especially in science fields. Akbaşlı and Albanna (2019) further noted that the Turkish government scholarships awarded to most of their research participants helped them evade any major financial challenges during their study.

Although not focused on scholarships, Al-Hout's (1979) article on the backgrounds of Palestinian political elites during the period of British Mandate over Palestine and Barghuthi's (2009) PhD-based book on the backgrounds of Palestinian political leaders between 1991 and 2006 sketch the plausibility of integrating a political lens to researching Palestinians' (funded graduate) education abroad. This plausibility is cemented by the historical and contemporary case of foreign-educated Palestinians playing key roles in both high Palestinian politics—e.g., President Abbas, past prime ministers Rami Hamdallah and Salam Fayyad, and key peace negotiators Hanan Ashrawi and the late Saeb Erekat—and low politics and the very formation of Palestinian politics (Hilal, 2009; Shiblak, 2005).



The following contemporary account of scholarship stakeholders and rationales offers some foundation for future efforts to address the research gap and tangential reflection on the significance of scholarships for Palestinians. The contemporary account illustrates the great heterogeneity of actors providing and supporting scholarships for Palestinians as well as the diversity and often overlap of their rationales for doing so (see Appendix A for a methodological note on the development of this account). This contextualisation of scholarships for Palestinians and illustration of diverse stakeholders and rationales are useful for informing the scope and design of the doctoral study. They also make a direct contribution—from an unstudied country context—to the body of empirical, conceptual, and methodological research on scholarships, as shall be discussed in the conclusion of the subchapter.

#### 1.3.2.1. Scholarship Stakeholders

Scholarship stakeholders in Palestine can be classified into three groups: providers, supporters, and potential beneficiaries of scholarship. Each of these groups is described in this subsection.

##### *Scholarship Providers*

The range of scholarship providers to Palestinians is very wide, ranging from foreign governments to foreign nongovernmental and multilateral entities. Foreign governments are the largest of such providers in terms of the number and frequency of scholarships they avail to Palestinians. This may be unsurprising as soft power thinking and Cold War-instigated interest in ideological influence through education persist globally (Chia 2015; Enfield 2019). As of 2024, governments of the following countries include Palestinians among the foreign nationals eligible to apply for their scholarships: Azerbaijan, Belgium, China, Cuba, Cyprus, France, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Iraq, Ireland, Japan, Jordan, Malta, Mexico, Morocco, Pakistan, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Tunisia, Türkiye, and the Netherlands, UK, and US. This list is not exhaustive. As the Palestinian Ministry of Higher Education (n.d.) website shows, there can always be more countries that extend their scholarships to Palestinians.

Foreign governments may at times fund more than one scholarship programme for which Palestinians can be eligible. For example, in response to the current cycle of violence in Gaza, Morocco (Kasraoui, 2024), France (Campus France, 2024), Germany (DAAD, 2024), and the UK (British Council, 2024) have launched new scholarship streams to enable Gazans—and, in the case of Morocco and Germany, Palestinians—to pursue, resume, or continue their education in the respective country. A pattern is worth noting here: scholarships by

governments of Global South countries often tend to be administered bilaterally with the Palestinian Ministry of Higher Education (including in order to determine the areas of needed expertise and to specify eligible fields of study accordingly). This is contrasted with scholarships offered by governments of Global North countries, which are usually directly offered for Palestinian students to apply to, most often without any restriction on fields of (non-clinical) study. A second noteworthy pattern of these foreign government-funded scholarships is that they are often offered for more than one degree level. For example, France, Germany, Hungary, Mexico, Morocco, Türkiye, and Tunisia offer their scholarships for Palestinians for the MA and PhD levels, with Hungary, Mexico, Türkiye additionally offering BA-level scholarships.

Foreign nongovernmental entities are also active providers of scholarships to Palestinians. These providers include trusts, foundations, universities, and other foreign entities.

First, trusts, often university-affiliated, are active and committed providers of scholarships for Palestinians. These include the Rhodes Trust, for which Palestinians are eligible to apply to undertake MA- or DPhil-level study in virtually any discipline at Oxford University. Trusts also include Durham Palestine Educational Trust and St. Andrews Education for Palestinian Students, both of which are affiliated respectively with Durham University in England and St. Andrews University in Scotland. Both partner with the respective university in offering scholarships exclusively to Palestinians, to undertake MA-level study in any discipline at the affiliated university.

Second, nongovernmental entities offering scholarships to Palestinians include foundations, often family foundations. Daughters for Life, launched by a Palestinian father in memory of his three girls who were killed in an Israeli attack in Gaza, offers scholarships exclusively to women from the Middle East to pursue BA- or MA-level study at top universities in the region as well as in Europe, North America, and South Asia. Lutfia Rabbani Foundation's scholarships are extended to Palestinians for MA- and PhD-level study in virtually any discipline at Dutch universities. Saïd Foundation's scholarships, offered to students from the Levant, are exclusive to the MA-level study in virtually any discipline at partner universities in the UK. Yafa Foundation, an endowment-granting charity empowering communities in Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine, partnered with the American University of Beirut to offer two merit- and need-based scholarships for Palestinians: one for women interested in pursuing a

Masters degree in media studies in memory of Shireen Abu Akleh, the iconic Palestinian journalist killed by Israeli forces; and the other for an undergraduate student pursuing a bachelor's degree in political studies in memory of Nizar Banat, a prominent political activist killed by Palestinian forces.

Third, foreign universities are a key group of the foreign nongovernmental entities regularly offering scholarships to Palestinians. For example, Sheffield University and Oxford Brookes University each offer an annual scholarship exclusive to a Gazan, the latter in partnership with the British Council, to complete a Masters programme in any discipline at the respective university. So, too, do the universities of Exeter and Queen's Belfast, though the former restricts the programme of study to an MA in Palestine Studies, both extend eligibility to all Palestinians, and the latter has recently increased the number of available spots from one to four. Through its Centre for Islamic Studies, the University of Oxford extends to Palestinians eligibility for scholarships to undertake MA- or DPhil-level study at the University in a discipline of relevance or benefit to the Muslim world. In the wake of the current cycle of violence in Gaza, the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) has announced a new scholarship exclusive for a Palestinian student to complete any Masters programme at the School, and Ulster University launched a scholarship programme to support up to five Palestinian women to undertake BA-, MA-, or PhD-level study in any discipline at the University.

Other foreign entities regularly offering scholarships to Palestinians are multilateral institutions, intergovernmental bodies, and university associations. These include the Islamic Development Bank, for whose scholarships Palestinians are eligible to undertake doctoral study in science and technology. They also include the Organisation of Southern Cooperation, which, through partnership with the International Cooperation Group of Brazilian Universities, offers South-South academic mobility scholarships programmes for which Palestinians are eligible and through which they can undertake MA- or PhD-level study at Brazilian universities. In the case of Higher Education Scholarships for Palestinians (HESPAL), the UK Higher Education Institutes and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development in Kuwait have joined forces together, often along with other actors such as the UK Department of Education, the Pears Foundation, and the Amjad and Suha Bseiso Foundation, to offer scholarships to Palestinians to study in the UK for an MA or a PhD in a specified diversity of disciplines—from agriculture, architecture, and sustainability to STEM, politics, and education.

### *Scholarship Supporters*

No overview of scholarships for Palestinians can be complete without considering scholarship supporters, referring to actors distinct from scholarship providers who may play one or more of the following roles: promoting scholarship opportunities, advising potential applicants on scholarship requirements, guiding applicants through the application process, and/or administering scholarship programmes. Actors in this capacity range from formal ones like local and international nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) to informal ones like local youth initiatives.

AMIDEAST is an American international NGO specialised in international education programming across the Middle East and North Africa—considering the exploitation of education relations during the Cold War, it is quite unsurprising that in its early development in 1951, AMIDEAST, then the American Friends of the Middle East, received secret funding from the US Central Intelligence Agency, despite having an anti-Zionist, pro-Arab stance (Wilford 2017). Today, AMIDEAST is perhaps the most visible, if not the most impactful, scholarship supporter in the OPT, thanks to its longstanding work through locally staffed field offices across the OPT and its extensive network with US academic institutions, US-style universities in the region, and philanthropists in the US and the region. Its portfolio includes programmes that prepare Palestinian students to compete for institutional financial aid at US universities and that provide supplemental funding essential to the students' financial ability to attend their universities, e.g., the Hope Fund, Gaza Graduate Study Prep Group, and MENA (Middle East and North Africa) Scholarship Support Fund. Notably, because of this specialised portfolio, AMIDEAST has often been hired to implement local and international scholarship programmes even when the (foreign) country of study is not the U.S. e.g., the Ford Foundation International Fellowships Program (Kallick & Murga, 2018). Also, AMIDEAST administers the American and Irish governments' graduate scholarships to Palestinians. It also runs public programming to promote funded study opportunities in the US and to advise potential applicants on the language, testing, and application requirements, a role it is uniquely positioned to play as it hosts offices for EducationUSA, the Department of State network of international student advising centres. AMIDEAST is able to extend this support for scholarships to Palestinians with funding usually from the US Department of State. For example, as part of Barack Obama's attempt to reach out to the Muslim world after the Bush legacy of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, AMIDEAST received US government funding to run the Abraham Lincoln Incentive Grants programme, which provided technical and financial

support to selected high school students to undertake preparation for competing for institutional financial aid at US colleges and universities (USOPA, 2009).

As the case of the Abraham Lincoln programme begins to outline, international support for scholarships to Palestinians—whether exclusively or together with other people—can increase in response to specific events at home or abroad. In the wake of the October 7<sup>th</sup> cycle of violence in Gaza, the Center for Arab American Philanthropy (2024), a national community foundation dedicated to empowering Arab Americans, emerged as an impactful supporter of scholarships to Gazan students, assisting them with obtaining scholarships and supplying financial support to complement aid offers from US universities. In the same context, worldwide individual and group efforts by scholars, professionals, and activists to support Palestinians’ access to education abroad seems to have proliferated. One example is the Palestinian Students and Scholars At Risk, a voluntary association of Canadian academics that has responded to the latest destruction of Palestinian education by supporting 46 Gazan students in accessing Canadian higher education and helping hundreds more try to follow suit (PSSAR, 2024).

Turning now to Palestinian actors, between 2015 and 2021, a key scholarship supporter was Taawon, one of the largest Palestinian NGOs and a key donor to education and other community development projects in Palestine. Replicating on a larger scale AMIDEAST’s scholarship search and preparation programming, Taawon launched Bridge Palestine, a three-year long project through which 400 outstanding high school students were recruited and engaged in comprehensive language, academic, civic, and personal capacity-building with the goal of building their competitiveness for admission and financial aid at internationally acclaimed universities. Palestinian universities are another key local actor in supporting scholarships, whether by sharing scholarship opportunities or hosting events to promote interest and extend advice for available scholarships. Finally, different local student and youth groups regularly take initiative to run events to promote available scholarships and share advice on making effective applications, e.g., MD Guidance (n.d.) and Me to You Initiative (n.d.).

The importance of such scholarship supporters cannot be overstated. Where scholarship providers share the funding without which only the wealthiest Palestinians can access education abroad, it is scholarship supporters whose technical advice and networking support help more Palestinians, especially those from less privileged backgrounds, benefit from that funding (see Inge, 2018). Even more than that, the case of scholarship search and preparation

programming as that by AMIDEAST and Taawon shows that the work of scholarship supporters is potentially of a strategic and sustainable benefit to Palestinians' access to funded education abroad. That is, such programming helps more (disadvantaged) Palestinian students make stronger applications to the immediately available scholarships; the language, academic, civic, and application skills enhanced through such programming also serve the students in exploring and competing for a wide array of academic and other opportunities at home and abroad at and beyond the time of applying for scholarships.

This availability and strategic significance of scholarship supporters may begin to explain the progress observed of Palestinians' access to elite institutes abroad. Where Abu Lughod observed in 2000 that “[v]ery few [Palestinian academics] obtained their highest degree at an Ivy League or equivalent university” (p. 85), there is today regular news of Palestinians gaining study and scholarship places at the world's top institutions, from some of America's finest liberal arts and research institutions (AMIDEAST, 2021a-b, 2022, 2023) to Britain's Oxbridge and Russell Group universities (Gibson, 2022; Saïd Foundation, n.d.-b), while also maintaining their historical presence on the campuses of some of the region's top universities (Anera, 2021; MainGate Staff, 2021).

#### *Potential Scholarship Beneficiaries in the OPT*

The last group of scholarship stakeholders is the potential direct and wider local beneficiaries—the Palestinian individuals who are targeted for scholarship opportunities and the parties in Palestine that benefit from the service, i.e., scholarship alumni.

As outlined earlier in this subsection, certain tendencies seem particularly strong in terms of who are targeted by scholarships, although, again, the absence of systematic data on scholarships for Palestinians means the following tendencies are indicative rather than representative (see Appendix A for additional methodological reflection). In terms of sociodemographics, most available scholarships seem to extend eligibility to Palestinian students of any age group. Crucially, there seems to be no reason to doubt that Palestinian men and women are today equally eligible to apply for most scholarships and, in the case of a few scholarships, women are “strongly encouraged to apply” or have the scholarships offered exclusively to them.

Across most of the reviewed scholarships, no major reference, if any, is made to (desired) socioeconomic characteristics of applicants. Where such reference is made, it is often limited to indicating an inclusive approach where “qualified individuals regardless of race,

religion, national or ethnic origin, geographic location, socio-economic status, disability, or gender identity” are considered eligible to apply; or certain groups may be encouraged to apply, e.g., people with disability.

In terms of academics, a majority of available scholarships allow recipients the dual flexibility to choose their foreign universities and to undertake study in any field of their interest, and they most often require strong achievement in previous academic studies. Across the scholarships reviewed, English was predominantly indicated as the language of instruction, although certain scholarships to countries where English is not the mother tongue can often include support for learning the respective foreign language—or, less often, require prior proficiency in it.

Finally, in terms of career stages, while many scholarships explicitly or implicitly require applicants to have work experience, this required experience can stretch from one to five or more years and, in some cases depending on the specific rationale of the scholarship, must be attained at an academic institution.

This scope of targeting direct beneficiaries suggests there may be significant openness of scholarship opportunities to Palestinians from diverse demographic, socioeconomic, academic, and professional backgrounds. This suggestion is supported by the very little existing evidence in Elhour’s (2022) doctoral study and Kallick and Murga’s (2018) impact evaluation.

Also, the scope of targeting direct Palestinian beneficiaries of scholarships means that a wider range of local parties may benefit indirectly from these individuals’ funded education abroad. In the absence of data or systematic accounts on post-completion trajectories of Palestinian scholarship recipients, it is difficult to identify all such parties or to make claims about the frequency, size, or extent of their indirect benefit. Some relevant research exists to inform assumptions about potentially four common pathways through which alumni disseminate their scholarships impact. The first one is political leadership, where foreign-educated Palestinians have been recruited, hired, or elected to lead building, running, and developing national institutions (Barghuthi, 2009; Isaac et al., 2019). A second pathway is service in higher education, where foreign-educated Palestinians have been hired to teach at and develop local universities (Abu-Lughod, 2000; Isaac et al., 2019; Jebril, 2021). The third and fourth pathways are employment at local or international NGOs and informal service engagements (see Kallick & Murga, 2018). At (international) NGOs, the thematic expertise,

language and intercultural competencies, and leadership potential of scholarship alumni can be sought to support (most often foreign-funded) relief and development projects. In informal service engagements, scholarship alumni can engage in mentorship and advising activities that shape knowledge of and access to education and employment opportunities in their immediate social circles and the in the wider public. These four pathways of disseminating scholarships impact mirror those found in other contexts across Africa, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe (Campbell, 2018a; Campbell, Kelly-Weber et al., 2021; Campbell, Lavallee et al., 2021; Jonbekova, 2024; Jonbekova et al., 2023).

#### 1.3.3.2. Rationales for Providing and Supporting Scholarships

The preceding overview of the stakeholders providing, supporting, and potentially benefiting from scholarships to Palestinians shows the great heterogeneity of scholarship providers and supporters in terms of their global dispersion, institutional nature, and the model via which they offer their scholarship or support programming. It also shows how this heterogeneity of scholarship providers and supporters may contrast the relative homogeneity of potential beneficiaries in terms of their national belonging and common pathways of disseminating scholarships impact, as in other country contexts of relatively homogeneous sociocultural composition. I now extend illustration of this contrast by overviewing rationales for providing and supporting scholarships to Palestinians.

In their systematic review, Campbell and Neff (2020) demonstrated the frequent mix and conflation of the six most common rationales for offering international higher education scholarships for students from the Global South: human capital development, diplomatic influence and/or solidarity enhancement, social change promotion, contribution to sustainable development, higher education internationalization, and enhanced access to higher education (1.2.2). This mix and conflation of rationales can be clearly observed in the case of scholarships to Palestinians. In addition to foreign governments' rationale of diplomatic influence, at least four rationales can be considered prevalent across scholarships to Palestinians (see Harrow & Sola, 2022). First, many scholarships providers state their intention is to contribute to Palestine's development, chiefly through empowering future public leaders and building a new cadre of academics. Second, several scholarship and support programmes aim to realise or enhance the right of Palestinians to higher education by breaking down financial barriers and availing technical advice. Third, many scholarships to Palestinians invoke a statement of solidarity with them, including through particularising this solidarity with Gazans (e.g., Sheffield University, 2022) or women (e.g., Ulster University, n.d.) and through memorialising



influential Palestinian figures and Palestinian scholarship alumni killed in Israeli attacks (e.g., Glasgow University, 2024; King's College London, 2024). Fourth, various scholarships include in their stated rationale a key aim for enhancing international understanding and intercultural dialogue. An indicative sample of these rationales for providing and supporting scholarships for Palestinians is presented in Appendix A.

The mix and conflation of rationales of scholarships for Palestinians can be observed in the case of St Andrews Education for Palestinian Students Trust (STEPS). The stated aim of this scholarship spans the two rationales of enhancing Palestinians' right to educational attainment and of contributing to their development; moreover, this aim is also expressed in contextualised terms as one of solidarity. In the context where "[y]oung Palestinians who seek higher education face many barriers", Yasir Suleiman, an esteemed professor and patron of the St Andrews Education for Palestinian Students (STEPS) charity, described these scholarships as "speak[ing] to the Palestinians in the language of hope and humanity" (STEPS, n.d.). In turn, this rationale of solidarity itself—whether in the case of STEPS or other scholarships to Palestinians—often manages to accommodate the right-to-education notion as well as the human-capitalist logic of advancing scholars' careers, as Harrow and Sola (2022) note in their documentary review of policy challenges facing philanthropic foundations offering scholarships for Palestinians. Similarly, HESPAL's mission of developing Palestinian higher education, including through fostering Palestinian-British academic links, cuts across the two rationales of contributing to development in Palestine and bridging Palestinians' international connection (British Council, 2023). Such overlap can also be observed in the rationales of scholarship supporters. For instance, AMIDEAST's (n.d.) Hope Fund programme targets "deserving" and/or "refugee" Palestinian students to support their journey of realising "their academic and leadership potential", thus seeking to enhance their right to a higher education but also their potential for contributing to development in Palestine.

This overlap of scholarship rationales extends to foreign governments scholarships for which Palestinians are eligible. As is the case globally, foreign governments' scholarships are often justified in terms of exercising soft power, i.e., facilitating people-to-people diplomacy and cultivating connection with and possibly influence over foreign potential leaders (Gauttam et al., 2023; Nye, 2008; Wilson, 2015). In addition to this rationale of diplomatic reach and influence, government-funded scholarships often invoke additional (politically engaged) rationales, from internationalising higher education at home (Sicks 2023) and contributing to

development abroad (Barker, 2024) to scaffolding anti-extremism interventions (Carpenter et al. 2009) and certainly extending ideological influence (Nye, 2008; Wilson, 2017).

This section has presented an overview of the diverse and oft-overlapping rationales that motivate continued (and expanding) offer of scholarships and scholarship support programming to Palestinians. This diversity and overlap cement the impression presented in the previous section of geographic, institutional, and programmatic model heterogeneity of scholarship providers and supporters. It does so by showing the differing goals that specific (groups of) providers and supporters attach to their offer of scholarships and support, ranging from prioritising women's or Gazans' development to centralising the role of higher education and potential individual leaders in Palestinians' development and international engagement. What I find to be clear from this contemporary account of scholarship stakeholders in the OPT is a contrast between the heterogeneity, diversity, and dynamicity of scholarship providers and supporters and their rationales versus the relative homogeneity of potential beneficiaries in a national context of entrenched conflict. This contrast makes me believe it cannot be so much the job of scholarship providers and stakeholders as it is of Palestinians—scholarship alumni and leaders of governmental and nongovernmental organisations—to steer scholarships impact in the OPT. This belief about scholarships impact in the OPT has strongly influenced my design of the doctoral study. I discuss this influence in the next and final subchapter after summarising the historical and contemporary contextualisation of scholarships to Palestinians.

## Subchapter Summary

In this subchapter, I presented the historical context of Palestinians' access to free or funded education abroad and their reliance thereon to build their own universities and sustain intellectual survival amidst protracted conflict. I also demonstrated the global context in which many diverse state and non-state actors respond well to this national need for scholarships, whether for reasons of diplomatic engagement, political solidarity and expression of commitment to justice, (gendered) development aims, and/or higher education internationalisation. This historical and contemporary account of scholarships for Palestinians represents a basic contribution to the body of scholarships research. It illustrates the resonance in an unstudied country context of key rationales for scholarships to Global South students and of their frequent overlap (Campbell & Neff, 2020). It also adds nuance to some of these rationales, e.g., particularised and gendered solidarity in contexts of conflict where scholarships are under-researched (Baxter, 2014). In terms of scholarships impact, this subchapter has

sketched four main scholarship outcomes of macro-level significance to Palestinians: educating political leaders, training academics and higher education founders, and developing professionals and public servants who can drive relief and development activities in their local communities and society. Emerging in and despite the OPT's difficult context, these macro-level outcomes extend evidence of similar outcomes reported from several other contexts of more stability (Campbell, 2018a; Campbell, Kelly-Weber et al., 2021; Campbell, Lavallee et al., 2021; Haupt et al., 2021; Jonbekova, 2024; Jonbekova et al., 2023).

Equally importantly, this review of the history and contemporary reality of scholarships for Palestinians, alongside the survey in the previous subchapter of scholarships research, offered me compelling insights that I actioned in designing the purpose, scope, and procedures of my doctoral study. I explain this in the next subchapter.

## **1.4. The Doctoral Study**

In this first chapter, I have established the personal background informing my engagement with international higher education scholarships (1.1). I have also surveyed scholarships research, referring to the empirical and other academic research, and the grey literature on international higher education scholarships (1.2). In the previous subchapter, I introduced the case of scholarships for Palestinians and began locating it within scholarships research (1.3). In this last subchapter, I present the research problem, scope, and questions addressed in this thesis as informed by both this literature survey and the research country context.

### **1.4.1. Research Problem**

The first subchapter demonstrated the predominantly descriptive-technical approach used in scholarships research, that is, using empirical methods to collect self-reports from scholarship alumni on skill gains and career advances that followed their education abroad. Most often, these skill gains and career advances are linked to concepts like sustainable development, social justice, and social change. This approach and concepts may be valuable but not ideal in investigations of scholarships impact in contexts like that of the OPT. This section is focused on this research problem and its implication for the scope of the doctoral study.

The Palestinian context is one where social change, social justice, and sustainable development are needed, albeit certainly in more critical conceptualisations thereof than is routinely sketched in scholarships research (see Bargawi et al., 2021; Ezbidi, 2020; Keelan & Browne, 2020, for a (gendered) critique of applying such concepts in (researching) Palestine). More essentially, the Palestinian context is one of protracted violent conflict. The historical and contemporary accounts of scholarships for Palestinians presented in sections (1.3.1; 1.3.2) demonstrate the defining and ongoing influence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the multidimensional significance and, however limited, multisectoral efficacy of scholarships for Palestinians. The following is a concise but instructive illustration of the need to take stock of this influence. Amidst repetitive eruption of this conflict, scholarship alumni—including one participant in this doctoral study—have been killed, whether having recently or long started contributing to Palestinian academia and society (BBC, 2023; Gordon & Turner, 2024; Limb, 2024). As the latest joint report of the World Bank, European Union, and United Nations (2024) documents, Palestinians' workplaces and indeed their communities have been eviscerated in Gaza. Theirs in the West Bank remain increasingly at risk of no less destruction (OCHA OPT, 2023, 2025). In a descriptive-technical approach, this (standing threat of) killing of alumni and decimation of infrastructure would be well taken to indicate the end of their contribution to sustainable development, social justice, or social change in the OPT. In such an approach, it follows, the killing of alumni may be taken to indicate the insignificance of scholarships in the OPT on account of their technical futility, at least in current circumstances, in fulfilling any of the possible rationales of scholarships. This inference would strongly contrast the impression presented in the section on the proliferation of scholarship providers and supporters and their expanded offer of scholarships to Palestinians (1.3.2.1). It would also contrast with the history of Palestinians managing to translate their education abroad into concrete societal developments amidst, despite, and after mass displacement and dispossession and violent conflict eruptions (1.3.1).

The problematisation commenced above is of two points. The first and major one is the ontology of scholarships impact, and the second is the contextual fit of concepts used to benchmark scholarships impact in contexts of like the OPT's. The scholarships research surveyed in the first subchapter shows extensive empirical investigation of scholarships impact but a stark lack of metatheoretical engagement with it. In fact, very few empirical studies, other academic works, or impact evaluations reviewed for this doctoral study make any significant or even explicit *mention* of the philosophy (used interchangeably with metatheory to refer to

ontological and epistemological assumptions) underpinning the research or evaluation effort. Among the few noted exceptions, Atabaş and Köse's (2024) work stands out, for they offered a comparatively greater account of why phenomenology was fit for the purpose of their study and how they integrated it with a theoretical framework of 'everyday diplomacy' to understand the potential of scholarships in preparing informal ambassadors. The other few studies where explicit reference was made to the research philosophy used include Alqahtani's (2015) justification of using phenomenology to guide his doctoral research; Al Yousef's (2016) discussion of ontological and epistemological stances in her doctoral study; Shtewi's (2019) brief statement on pragmatism as the philosophy guiding his doctoral study; Campbell's (2016, 2017) similarly brief statement and mention of phenomenology in her doctoral study and subsequent journal article (also see Campbell, Kelly-Weber et al., 2021); and Enkhtur's (2020) also brief mention of phenomenology. Several studies similarly seem to rely on phenomenology but include no mention of it. For example, after collecting self-reports through interviews with foreign-educated Saudi and Emirati students, Hilal and Denman (2013) used analytical procedures that help "better understand the students viewpoints" (p. 31), "ascertain why a particular point is of importance to respective groups of students" (p. 32), and present student mobility as "a successful tool in fusing the gap/s between the East and West, *at least from Arabs' perspective*" (p. 34, emphasis added). Though relevant to—but not focused on—the philosophy underpinning scholarships research, Saling's (2023) criticism of the neoclassical economic assumptions of human capital theory stands out as perhaps the only work where critical philosophical engagement was observed.

With this limitation of philosophical approaches and deficit in philosophical reflection, aggravated by the predominant use of human capital theory, scholarships impact seems to be ontologically limited, characterised merely as upgrades of scholarship recipients' mainly technical competence, i.e., to develop their (career) skills and (thereby) their service to community and sustainable development in their countries. The qualities scholarship recipients bring into their scholarship experiences, the difficulties they experience in actioning these "technical competence upgrades", and the non-technical functions to which their scholarship impact may lend itself are all either ignored or seen as peripheral in this ontological approach to scholarships impact. This is well illustrated in empirical studies and impact evaluations that usually tend to list country contexts as involving difficulties for post-completion engagements but not playing a key role in the pre-sojourn or in the making of gains during the sojourn (cf. Baxter, 2014; King et al., 2023). Consequently, the epistemology of scholarships research has

received scant attention, keeping empirical approaches dominant and (critical) alternatives barely entertained.

One key concern here is that the development of knowledge of scholarships impact primarily based on alumni's reports of advances in their skills and career progress represents an "epistemic fallacy" (Farasoo, 2024). That is, scholarships impact is reduced to perceptions of it—and ones most often focused on the academic and career-relevant dimensions of this impact. I contend this amounts to a flattening of reality and a linearised knowledge of it: (self-reported) empirical data passing uncritical theoretical and analytical procedures and becoming substantive themes leading to knowledge claims that are then taken as the reality. This flattening of reality and linearisation of knowledge thereof are seriously problematic in researching scholarships, as in research on other topics across different fields (see Wiltshire, 2018). Scholarships impact may well involve upgrade in the technical competence of scholarship recipients, but it may also involve their development in the political, social, epistemic, and/or other spheres of their lives. Scholarships impact may also manifest in ways that exceed the recipients' awareness or, at least, their recollections at the time of interviews, focus groups, or surveys. Scholarships impact may further manifest in ways exceeding the researcher's own awareness, itself shaped by the extent of and limits in, *inter alia*, their life histories, disciplinary perspectives, academic training, philosophical biases, interpretive competence, etc (Lawson, 2003).

This doctoral study contributes to addressing this problem. It does so by following critical realist philosophy (Bhaskar, 2016) and offering a thorough account of its multidimensional implications on the design and procedures of the doctoral study and its contribution to the conceptualisation, research, and practice of scholarships impact. This philosophical engagement is commenced in Chapter 2, where I introduce the key premises of critical realism and elaborate on its guidance to me through developing and synergising the theoretical and methodological frameworks of the study. The philosophical engagement is then illustrated in Chapter 3, where I present the thematic findings developed from a data analysis approach anchored in critical realism. The philosophical engagement is finally concluded through Chapter 4, where I discuss the role of critical realism in foregrounding the contextual nuance, relevance-to-practice, and emancipatory potential of the implications of this doctoral study.

### 1.4.2. Research Scope

Beside this problematic ontological approach to scholarships impact, the OPT context demands more critical attention to the contextual fit of concepts used to benchmark scholarships impact. Concepts like social change, social justice, and sustainable development imply some minimum degree of systemic security, stability, and openness based on which organisational structures, institutional frameworks, and societal processes are able to incubate, sustain, grow, and translate back into some systemic change the impact that alumni gain of their scholarships and exercise in their attempts to contribute to their home countries. In simpler terms, such a degree of systemic potential of the national context for social change, social justice, and sustainable development allows for these positive concepts to materialise and to benefit in their materialisation from what can probably be a unique contribution of foreign-educated, high-calibre individuals selected for scholarships. The existence of such a degree of systemic stability in the countries and regions represented in scholarships research seems to be always presumed, even implicitly rather than explicitly, e.g., Eastern European countries like Georgia and Moldova (Campbell, 2017; Campbell & Baxter, 2019), across African countries like Ghana, Kenya, and Nigeria (Campbell & Baxter, 2019; Campbell, Kelly-Weber et al., 2021; Campbell & Lavalley, 2020; Musa-Oito, 2018), in Kazakhstan (Jonbekova, 2024), and across diverse Global South country contexts (Campbell & Baxter, 2019; Clift et al., 2013; Kallick & Murga, 2018; Kallick et al., 2017; Martel & Bhandari, 2016).

I do not follow that presumption of the OPT, namely, that it has a degree of systemic stability sufficient for the concepts mentioned above to materialise and to benefit in their materialisation from scholarships impact. Instead, as a first major research assumption, I contend such a minimum degree of systemic stability is missing in the OPT (see Ezbidi, 2020). The absence of systemic stability results from the protracted conflict demonstrated earlier in this chapter but also from its consequent and increasingly internalised segregation of Palestinian geography and leadership (see Dajani & Husseini, 2014). The most immediately relevant illustration of this internalised segregation is the lack of any initiative, let alone one across Gaza and the West Bank, to steer, strategise, or optimise scholarships impact in the OPT. Through over a decade of direct personal, professional, and scholarly involvement in scholarships, the only such efforts of which I was aware were two: an association of Gazan alumni from a foreign government-funded programme and an invitation from a local think-tank to build a network of Gazan scholarship alumni. The former never seemed active, and the

latter soon disappeared when only about five alumni responded to the invitation. In neither was it announced that links with West Bank alumni were or would be pursued. Therefore, two scope-related decisions followed this assumption of the absence of a minimum degree of systemic stability in the OPT. A third decision ensued of another scope-related assumption. These three decisions are explained below.

I planned to use ‘peace’ as the benchmark against which to investigate scholarships impact in the OPT. This concept is fully explored and its use in literature adjacent to scholarships research is reviewed and critiqued in Chapter 2. For the purpose here of clarifying the research scope, I think of this benchmark as entailing the replacement of material, structural, and symbolic violence with systemic conditions and opportunities for human progress and development (Galtung, 1996, 2012). ‘Peace’ in this broad sense takes precedence as a prior systemic requirement for sustainable social change, social justice, or development. It may also represent an integration of these three concepts, doing so without sacrificing the essential need for considering the context of multidimensional violence affecting Palestinian scholarship aspirants, applicants, recipients, and alumni.

As a second scope-related decision, I prioritised the focus of this doctoral study on investigating scholarships’ potential impact on micro-level over meso- and/or macro-level peace, i.e., at the individual rather than organisational or societal levels. As I wrote in an article developed from this thesis justifying this decision:

Analysis at the meso- and macro-levels presumes that Palestinian institutions and society enjoy a minimum degree of security and stability that allows trustworthiness in the categories against which such analysis may be pursued and/or in the impact diffusion patterns that may be identified through such analysis (Almassri, 2024e, p. 6).

I contend such a minimum degree of systemic potential for institutionalising and systemising scholarships impact is absent in the omnipresence both of Israel’s protracted foreign military occupation (Chomsky & Pappé, 2015; Khalidi, 2020; Mearsheimer & Walt, 2006) and of Palestinians’ persisting division and segregation as well as further internal factors suppressive to such systemic potential (al-Omari, 2023; Amnesty International, 2015; Baconi, 2018; Bishara, 2003; Dana, 2015a-b, 2020; Roy, 2004). Also, I decided on this prioritisation of the micro-level considering the lack of data and prior research on scholarships impact in the OPT, hoping that findings at this level, together with future larger-scale research, “may then serve the identification or construction and the adjudication of which categories of analysis to use in



investigating the institutional and societal ripple effects of scholarships’ potential relevance to peace” (Almassri, 2024e, p. 6).

The second scope-related assumption follows the contrast presented in the previous subchapter, that of the relative homogeneity of potential Palestinian scholarship recipients versus the heterogeneity, diversity, and dynamicity of scholarship providers and supporters to Palestinians and the overlap of their rationales (1.3.2). I stated earlier that this contrast makes me believe it is primarily, if not entirely, the job of Palestinians themselves—including scholarship alumni like myself—to steer scholarships impact in Palestine. Departing from this context-driven belief, I decided against limiting research participation to Palestinian alumni of a single scholarship programme and against segmenting my analysis of scholarships impact in the OPT by scholarship programmes represented by research participants. To do so would have involved ignoring Saling (2023) and Mawer’s (2017) previously presented critique of scholarships research being dragged behind the (ambivalent, drifting, and/or mixed but often human-capitalist) logics of scholarship programmes. Instead, I followed a deliberate strategy in this doctoral study of collecting empirical data from Palestinian alumni of different scholarships who studied in different fields and countries and came from diverse backgrounds. This strategy and its operationalisation and analytic implications are detailed in the Chapter 2 sections on sampling (2.4.1) and data analysis (2.4.4).

### 1.4.3. Research Questions

Within the research scope outlined above, this doctoral study investigates scholarships impact and its potential relevance to micro-level peace in the OPT. As elaborated in the following chapter, critical realist philosophy guides this investigation such that it proceeds from identifying empirical manifestations of scholarships impact for peace to exploring ontological links between scholarships and peace. Like empirical studies and impact evaluations surveyed previously, the doctoral study first seeks to identify Palestinian alumni’s perceptions of their scholarship and post-completion experiences. To do this, the doctoral study addresses three research questions.

First, *what are some of the profile characteristics of Palestinian recipients of international scholarships* (RQ1)? Findings in response to this question extend the very limited empirical evidence of Palestinian scholarship recipients’ profile characteristics, e.g., their sociodemographic, academic, and career backgrounds.

Second, *how do Palestinian scholarship recipients perceive their motivations for and experiences and outcomes of undertaking funded graduate education abroad* (RQ2)? Findings in response to this other descriptive question offer the first piece of empirical evidence on the ways Palestinian students characterise and probably appreciate scholarships impact.

Third, *does this characterisation of scholarships impact in the OPT warrant some rethinking of the potential efficacy of scholarships vis-à-vis peace* (RQ3)? This question prompts a research shift from the empirical to the inferential. It marks caution against committing the same empiricism extravagated in scholarships research in that it invites connecting, without collapsing distinction between, self-reports of Palestinian alumni's scholarship experiences and researcher claims about scholarships impact for peace in the OPT. This shift is then deepened in two inferential research questions.

*How do scholarships relate to peace in the OPT* (RQ4)? In addressing this question, I revisit the empirical data to infer some of the ways in which Palestinian alumni's reported scholarship experiences may relate to peace, i.e., whether and how their scholarship experiences influenced their freedom from material, structural, and symbolic oppressive effects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and their ability to resist, navigate, and/or potentially transform them.

Based on this empirically-driven inference of the relevance of scholarships impact to peace, I address the final research question: *what may explain the relevance of scholarships impact to peace in the OPT* (RQ5)? Responding to this question concludes the investigation of potential ontological links between funded graduate education abroad and the emergence of less violence and more positive progress in the OPT. That is, at the stage of addressing RQ5, I infer the connections (i.e., complementarities, continuities, or contradictions) between scholarships and peace where these connections are inferred from the empirical data and claimed to give rise to the relevance-to-peace demonstrated in the response to RQ4.

It is important to note that the five RQs presented here evolved significantly as I better calibrated the focus of the doctoral study and improved my understanding of critical realist philosophy and its application in the different research stages, especially in the data analysis process (see Appendix G for the tentative RQs with which I first started).

#### 1.4.4. Research Significance and Contributions

With this research scope and questions, this doctoral study represents a significant contribution to the body of scholarships research, at the empirical, theoretical, philosophical, and practical levels.

Empirically, it offers new evidence from an unstudied country context of scholarships impact, bridging a longstanding literature gap on the backgrounds, motivations, experiences, and post-completion trajectories of international Palestinian students. This empirical contribution is presented in the findings in Chapter 3 and critically discussed in Chapter 4.

Theoretically, Sen's (2001) Capability Approach and Roger Mac Ginty's (2021) theorisation of Everyday Peace are used to interpret the empirical evidence of scholarships impact in terms of its potential relevance to micro-level peace in the OPT. This theorisation extends existing support in scholarships research of the plausibility of the Capability Approach (1.2.2), while also demonstrating the value of interdisciplinarity to fuller exploration of scholarships impact, including in contexts of protracted conflict. By synthesising these two theoretical frameworks, in an overall context-driven research approach, the doctoral study adds critically to scholarships research, highlighting the potential of scholarships to play a positive role in contexts of conflict beyond serving as a mechanism of preparing academics, technocrats, and agents of liberal democratisation and global institutionalism. This critical theoretical contribution is commenced in the research critique in Chapter 2, illuminated in the findings Chapter 3, and discussed in Chapter 4.

Philosophically, the doctoral study represents one of the earliest attempts to introduce critical realism as a valuable metatheory for more careful, context-driven, rigorous, transparent, and accountable research design and procedures in investigating scholarships impact. These qualities and implications of critical realism are presented and illuminated throughout the subsequent chapters.

Practically, the thesis offers several actionable insights to optimise scholarships impact and its relevance to peace in the OPT, including lessons transferrable to scholarship programming and evaluation practices and a research-driven proposal of a cycle of reflective practice to empower Palestinian scholarship alumni and better plan, coordinate, and scale up their post-completion functions, societal contributions, and the emancipatory potential thereof. This practical contribution is elaborated in Chapter 4.

Crucially, the doctoral study will also be valuable to bridging the limited availability of research illuminating the philosophical significance and practical application of critical realism. This aspect of the research significance is elaborated particularly in Section 2.4.4.4. Additionally, the research significance of the doctoral study may extend beyond scholarships research. The empirical, theoretical, philosophical, and/or practical contributions listed above will be informative to, applicable in, and/or otherwise relevant to the work, including decolonizing work, of researchers and practitioners within (i) the field of Education, e.g., those working on international student mobility, education abroad, citizenship education, education for peace, and education for sustainable development; (ii) the field of International Relations, e.g., those working on peacebuilding, critical peace studies, exchange and public diplomacy, and norm socialisation; and (iii) the field of Palestinian studies, e.g., those working on higher education, development, and everyday peacebuilding. This broader potential significance of the doctoral study is sketched in the research implications discussed in Chapter 4.

## Chapter Summary and Thesis Overview

This chapter has thus far provided a complete background against which this thesis has been developed and is now presented. Here, I have established that international scholarships, which fund education abroad, are awarded for various reasons, from ‘winning hearts and minds’ in ideological contests to driving economic growth, intercultural literacy, and educational quality (Campbell & Neff, 2020). The bulk of existing research on international scholarships often limits appreciation of their impact to technical and careerist terms, usually of human capital import, career advancement, and contribution to social change, social justice, and sustainable development. This research rarely benefits from serious conceptualisation or critical theory in investigating wider and deeper impact of scholarships (Saling, 2023). The Occupied Palestinian Territory offers a good country context to challenge this limitation of existing scholarly and grey literature. In the context of protracted conflict, Palestinians’ historical and contemporary access to free or funded education abroad has been largely orchestrated through mass displacement and regular systemic violence. This education abroad has provided them with a pathway of academic survival and a means of building and, time and again, recovering their own higher education. However, how does scholarships impact, though, relate to the most pressing cause in this context, peace? I develop a response to this inquiry by addressing the five specific and interrelated research questions outlined earlier (1.4.3).

In the following chapter, I present the complete research toolkit I use in addressing these RQs, including critical conceptual approach, metatheoretical framework, theoretical synthesis, methodological tools, analytical procedures, and reflexive practice used in implementing the doctoral study. The overall purpose of Chapter 2 is to explain how this doctoral study departs from predominant approaches to scholarships research, how it does so in ways valid and conducive to its purpose of uncovering scholarships impact and its potential relevance to peace in the OPT, and how this alternative approach was constantly gauged in its internal coherence and rigour.

In Chapter 3, I share the findings I developed while applying this alternative approach. I first present a thorough description of the 32 research participants, in terms of their demographic and socioeconomic profiles as well as their academic, career, and post-scholarship trajectories. This participant description is followed by thematic findings, organised according to critical realism into three classes: experiential findings, describing patterns observed in the participants' interview and documentary data about their scholarships impact; inferential findings, interpreting the relevance-to-peace demonstrated in this data; and dispositional findings, articulating some of the factors that may be claimed to give rise to this relevance of scholarships impact to peace in the OPT.

Then, in Chapter 4, I discuss the empirical, theoretical, philosophical, and practical contributions and implications of these findings, as well as their instructive insights for engaging with some of the frequent criticism of the use scholarships of a mode of intervention in (education and/or peacebuilding in) the OPT. Towards the end of the chapter, I discuss the temporal, thematic, and epistemological limitations of the findings as well as the linguistic and population limitations of the doctoral study.

Finally, I dedicate Chapter 5 to summarising the content of this thesis as well as the implications and recommendations of the doctoral study for researchers, practitioners, and others involved with scholarships in (and beyond) the OPT.

## **Chapter 2**

# **Scholarships-for-Peace: The Research Critique, Meta-Theory, Methodology, and Reflexivity**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I pursue three interrelated objectives: accentuating the significance of building a context-driven approach to investigating (dis)connection between scholarships impact and peace, demonstrating the theoretical viability and greater ontological plausibility of the alternative approach proposed in this doctoral study, and illustrating its practical applicability.

First, I advance the argument for the need for a critical alternative approach to researching scholarships impact and its potential relevance to peace in the OPT. Having commenced in the first chapter, this argument is for moving beyond human capital theory and similar frames of reference detached from, if not even counterproductive to, peacebuilding in the OPT. Therefore, in the first subchapter (2.1), I build on the previous literature survey and complement it with a critical review of pertinent research from the fields of International Education and International Relations. While not dealing with scholarships, this research demonstrates some of the broader gaps and biases by which scholarships research is demonstrably influenced, e.g., the hyper-empiricism and the focus on neo-liberally inspired categories of analysis in research of adjacent topics like international student mobility, international exchanges, and public diplomacy programmes. I then critique this research and the influence it may extend to our thinking about scholarships impact and its potential relevance to peace in the OPT.

Actioning this research critique, I go on in the two subsequent subchapters to pursue the second objective of demonstrating which metatheoretical and theoretical assumptions were effective in building an alternative approach to researching scholarships impact and peace in the OPT. In the second subchapter (2.2), I present the three overarching assumptions of the research philosophy that guided me in undertaking the doctoral study. This philosophy (used interchangeably with metatheory) is critical realism (Bhaskar, 2009, 2016). I demonstrate that the three assumptions of ontological realism, epistemological relativism, and judgmental rationalism were thorough and effective in foregrounding a good alternative approach to addressing the RQs. These metatheoretical assumptions guided me in applying context-driven,

data-informed, and interdisciplinary adjudication of (i) which theories may be (im)plausible in researching scholarships impact and peace in the OPT and of (ii) how data collection and analysis may be pursued to generate knowledge marked by contextual truthfulness, empirical rigour, ontological plausibility, and interdisciplinary soundness.

In the third subchapter (2.3), I turn to the theoretical framework of the doctoral study, by way of continuing demonstration of the assumptions that were effective in building an alternative approach to researching scholarships impact and peace in the OPT. I present Everyday Peace Capability as a synthesis of Amartya Sen's (2001) seminal Capabilities Approach with Roger Mac Ginty's (2021) theorisation of Everyday Peace. I then start using 'meta-theory' to reference complementation between critical realist metatheory and the theoretical framework of Everyday Peace Capability. I finally discuss how this meta-theoretical framework helps us move beyond empiricist accounts of scholarships impact, integrate contextual and interdisciplinary perspectives in interpreting the relevance-to-peace of scholarships impact, and deepen this interpretation by considering the dynamics of individual agency and structural forces that co-constitute the potential connections between scholarships impact and peace.

Finally, my third objective is to demonstrate the practical applicability of this alternative approach to researching scholarships impact and peace. I do so in the fourth and fifth subchapters, where I recount and reflect on the sampling criteria, data collection methods, ethical commitments, analysis techniques, and reflexive practice that I derived from or synergised with the meta-theoretical framework of the doctoral study. I first explain the sampling criteria and techniques I followed in selecting the research participants, and I justify the final sample size of 32 participants as one that is both suitable for this doctoral study and consistent with sample sizes in similar scholarships research (2.4.1). Then, I discuss the types and nature of data that I sought from the participants, including about their demographic, academic, and career backgrounds and their perceived scholarship experiences and outcomes (2.4.2). I also elaborate on the 3+1 methods I used in collecting this data: in-depth semi-structured interviews, individual background questionnaires, review of relevant pre-existing documents from the participants, and ad-hoc rapid reviews of their scholarship and study programmes. Next, I focus on the pertinent ethical principles against which I conducted the data collection and findings reporting, and I outline the context-sensitivity I followed in applying these ethical principles (2.4.3). I conclude the fourth subchapter with an elaborate presentation of an original data analysis protocol that I derived from the meta-theoretical

framework of the doctoral study (2.4.4). Given the scarcity of literature demonstrating concrete practice of critical realism, I describe every conscious data analysis technique I used, and I explain it in reference to the research questions, scope, and/or purpose.

In the last subchapter (2.5), I discuss three major dimensions of my reflexive practice throughout the research process, that is, engaging myself in active, continuous, and self-critical dialogue on (i) my individual understanding of the phenomenon under study, (ii) others' reactions to this understanding and to the approach behind it, and (iii) the data on and members and stakeholders of that phenomenon, i.e., scholarships impact and its potential relevance to peace in the OPT.

Overall, this chapter further justifies the scope and focus of this doctoral study. It explains the meta-theoretical assumptions underpinning it and guiding its methodological procedures. The elaborate description of these procedures begins to demonstrate the potential contribution of this doctoral study to research on (funded) education abroad as well as to illuminating practical application of critical realism. This contribution is then illuminated in Chapter 3 and further discussed in Chapter 4.

## **2.1. Scholarships for Peace: An Interdisciplinary Research Critique**

In the previous chapter, I presented Campbell's (2017, p. 56) definition of scholarships as "financial grants that cover the majority of costs associated with higher education study outside of the recipient's home country." I also defined 'scholarships research' as the body of existing scholarly and grey literature dealing with empirical, conceptual, methodological, and/or critical dimensions of international higher education scholarship programmes, experiences, and impact (1.2). Both definitions served as a basic conceptual framework to the focus on scholarships research. This framework has now served its purpose of guiding the literature survey and reflections thereon, so it now requires further development to better fit the scope of the doctoral study on scholarships impact and peace. As I demonstrate in this subchapter, this further development of conceptualising scholarships impact and peace is needed because scholarships research has barely investigated links of scholarships to peace, although there is some relevant research on the impact of education abroad on certain proxies of peace, e.g., democratisation, economic liberalisation, etc. Also, this further conceptual development needs to be interdisciplinary in order to integrate some of the substantive and critical knowledge on peace that exists beyond research areas immediately relevant to scholarships research.



Guided by this assessment of needed development in conceptualising connections between scholarships impact and peace, I present in this subchapter a succinct, critical review of relevant literature drawn from a broader research area in the field of International Education and from the field of International Relations (IR). The broader area in International Education is international student mobility (ISM). This research area is more developed than the burgeoning scholarships research, and it is the one within which scholarships research may be best situated given the shared topical foci, population focus on international students, and the demonstrable influence of ISM on scholarships research in terms of metatheoretical assumptions, methodological procedures, theoretical frameworks (or lack thereof). This closeness between the two research areas is illustrated in the first section below (2.1.1). Also, there is a significant segment of IR research that deals with public diplomacy and international exchanges. This segment is pertinent because it features more conceptually and theoretically advanced treatment of the politico-economic impact of international (student) mobilities, especially those sponsored by governments in the form of educational, cultural, professional, and other exchanges. By reviewing this broader pertinent research, I demonstrate that current approaches to thinking about scholarships impact and peace are implausible in the Palestinian context, a conclusion I develop in the final section (2.1.3). Three points are worth clarifying before commencing this literature review.

First, ‘international student mobility’ refers to the mobility of “students who have crossed borders expressly with the intention to study [for a short or longer term, including for a degree programme]” (OECD, 2009, p. 311). This definition is commonly used in key publications, as discussed by Luo et al. (2023) in their commentary on the use of the definition by scholars and by UNESCO and the International Organization for Migration. I also use ‘ISM research’ to refer to the body of research on international student mobility.

Second, my focus in this literature review on the relevant segment of IR research reflects only the direction and limit of my knowledge and interests rather than a claim about IR being the only or most relevant field to think interdisciplinarily about the relevance-to-peace of scholarships. In other words, my past academic training in peace studies within an IR disciplinary perspective and my following of the field since have shaped the approach I take to the interdisciplinary critique presented in this subchapter. This approach includes deliberately overlooking research explaining peace in terms of the contact hypothesis (Paluck et al., 2019) or intercultural competency development (Deardorff, 2015; also see Steinberg, 2013). Both approaches might have been valuable had my research focused on contact/exchanges between

Palestinians and Israelis. However, such focus would have marked a diversion from the research scope already established (1.4.2), where peace entails not contact among individual members of two groups in conflict but the replacement of material, structural, and symbolic violence with systemic conditions and opportunities for human progress and development (Galtung, 1996, 2012). My decision against these alternative approaches was instructed by existing research that shows the contradictions and overall inefficacy of planned contact between Palestinians and Israelis amidst the persistence of systemic violence and its “radically asymmetrical” impact on Palestinians (Ramsbotham, 2022; Thiessen & Darweish, 2018).

Third, as may be clear from the introduction above, I apply interdisciplinarity as a key resource for this research, although I do so economically. Any serious treatment of interdisciplinarity must begin by conceding that it has been subject of extensive discussion and debate as a term, concept, approach, and measurable action in academic research and education (Frodeman et al., 2017). Mindful of its contested conceptual and operational parameters, I use interdisciplinarity throughout this thesis to simply refer to the integration of knowledges from across different fields of scientific inquiry (Tikly, 2015). Five main knowledges are integrated, at varying degrees, here. These knowledges are from empirical, conceptual, historical, and other research on (1) scholarships, study abroad, international student mobility, and the broader field of International Education; (2) on conflict processes, peacebuilding approaches, public diplomacy, and the broader field of International Relations; (3) on Palestinian history, politics, and education; (4) and on critical realism as a research philosophy; as well as from (5) personal knowledge pertinent to these four knowledges, gained through (5.a) academic training in education, peace studies, Arab studies, and research methods and (5.b) lived experience and active reflexivity as a Palestinian scholarship alumnus (1.3). I pursued the integration of these knowledges at the substantive and methodological levels, following Tikly’s (2015) advice. By this two-level integration, I refer to the use of assumptions, terms, concepts, and empirical evidence from across these five knowledges to inform my meta-theoretical, methodological, analytical, and narrative choices. Throughout this and subsequent chapters, I justify these choices and, when needed, reference this approach to interdisciplinarity.

### 2.1.1. Literature Review: International Student Mobility

In the introduction above, I stated my assumption that scholarships research is best situated within the broader research area on ISM. I present in this section the state of research substantiating that claim. My other objective of presenting this state of research is to zoom out

further from the empiricism extravagated in academic and grey studies of scholarships impact, and in so doing taking stock of the thematic, theoretical, methodological, and metatheoretical trends characteristic of the research area parent to scholarships research: ISM research. One resource-effective way to do so is to focus this section on field-wide, rigorous accounts of ISM research, that is, systematic reviews and thematic syntheses supplemented with bibliometric analysis and approaching ISM from different perspectives. I therefore use this section to highlight pertinent findings from and across six such systematic accounts published on ISM from 2017 to 2024. These findings are on research on international students, whether they are on scholarships or not. The findings from these six systematic reviews consolidate and further contextualise the claims about scholarships research that were made in Chapter 1, namely that extant research demonstrates predominant disregard of metatheory and theory, a consistent resort to technical/instrumental accounts, and common limitation of analysing data at the empirical level and barely at any deeper levels.

In their systematic review on the outcomes of short-term international mobility programmes, Roy et al. (2018) found that these programs were empirically studied in terms of three categories: cultural, personal, and employment and career outcomes. First, Roy et al. found that included studies have identified a broad array of cultural outcomes arising from short-term mobility: cultural awareness, cultural intelligence, global mindedness, cultural sensitivity and empathy, cultural adaptability, language skills, cross-cultural communication skills, and intercultural competence. Second, the included studies generated knowledge of personal outcomes resulting from short-term mobility, including improved academic performance and moral and ethical reasoning, increased self-confidence and -efficacy, and overall advanced personal development. Third, Roy et al. found that (comparatively fewer) studies on short-term mobility have examined their employment and career-related outcomes, showing such mobility leads to great and most often positive influence on students' professional development, perceived employability, career choices, transition into international careers, and career success. Based on this review, the authors make a similar observation on short-term mobility research as that by Saling (2023) on the largely descriptive state of scholarships research:

few prior studies draw on theory to explain how international short-term mobility programs influence cultural, personal, and employ-ment/career outcomes. This deficit means that we are not in a position to explain the processes by which participation in

such mobility programs influences students... and which individuals respond more positively to international short-term mobility programs. (Roy et al., 2018, p. 1638)

Indeed, the quote above from Roy et al. (2018) seems to be supported by a later systematic review in which Gümüş et al. (2020) used science mapping to determine, *inter alia*, current patterns in ISM research, including on short- and long-term student mobility. The limits of their bibliometric analysis notwithstanding, Gümüş et al. showed that the topical foci of ISM research do not seem to deviate significantly from those found by Roy et al.'s (2018), being overall focused on international students' sociocultural, emotional, and academic well-being as well as their language, pedagogical, and intercultural experiences and competencies (Gümüş et al., 2020). Centrality of these topical foci is also observed by Waibel et al. (2017) and even more clearly by Iskhakova and Bradly (2022), whose systematic reviews are respectively discussed below.

Waibel et al. (2017) focused their systematic review precisely on the career consequences of international student mobility. The authors set the stage for their review by criticising the predominant reference to human capitalist constructs and, as is the basis of Roy et al.'s (2018) findings, the overwhelming reliance on (only) experiential and anecdotal evidence in asserting the positive career impact of education abroad. Waibel et al. first synthesised quantitative studies on the career impact of education abroad in what they called the "Western World". By doing so, they developed findings that contrasted those reported by Roy et al. (2018), challenging strong, consistent assertions of education abroad having more than moderate positive association with higher income, facilitating transition into employment, or enhancing career planning and advancement. In concluding their study, Waibel et al. (2017) reflected on the same need for contextuality that was reported in the survey of empirical scholarships research (1.2.1). They highlighted that factors like gender, socioeconomic background, labour market sector, and home-country context all could moderate the career outcomes of an education abroad experience, with women and individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds potentially drawing greater such outcomes (for illustration, see Abeuova & Muratbekova-Touron, 2019; Jacob et al., 2019; Messer & Wolter, 2007; Van Mol et al., 2021).

Iskhakova and Bradly's (2022) systematic review of short-term study abroad (STSA), lasting from one to eight weeks, shifts the review in this section from topical foci to disciplinary and theoretical perspectives. They reviewed 156 articles—135 empirical (87%) and 21 conceptual (13%). In their findings, Iskhakova and Bradly showed that ISM research on STSA

is produced most frequently in the subject areas of management and business, followed by language, public health, and social sciences. With such disciplinary affiliations, or perhaps despite them, Iskhakova and Bradly (2022) identified that 71% of the studies in their review were purely empirical and lacked any theoretical basis. In the remaining 46 studies (29%), 32 theories were utilised, which Iskhakova and Bradly (2022, pp. 410-412) grouped into four categories:

- Ten learning theories (chiefly, experiential and transformational learning and contact theory),
- Eight cross-cultural theories (e.g., intercultural maturity and multicultural awareness frameworks and the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity),
- Seven social theories (e.g., community-based participatory framework, situated identity, and social capital); and
- Seven other theories drawn from tourism, language studies, and psychology.

These findings about the poor extent and diversity of theory in interdisciplinary ISM research mirror to a considerable extent those observed in other systematic reviews.

Luo et al. (2023) approached their systematic review of ISM research from a marketing perspective. By integrating bibliometric analysis with deeper review of, inter alia, theories and methods in ISM research, Luo et al. found that over a third of the 137 articles included made no mention of theory (for meaningful contrast, see Alfattal, 2016; Smith, 2025). Luo et al. found the remaining articles drew on motivation theory and immigration theory to study antecedents to ISM and on acculturation theory and learning theory, followed by capital theory and immigration theory, to study other themes in ISM research. They further found that 69% of the articles reported use of quantitative data collection methods (chiefly, questionnaires, followed by organisation databases and organisational surveys) compared to 17% that reported use of qualitative methods (primarily interviews, followed by documents and photographs). Of the remaining studies, 7% were conceptual papers; 4% reported using mixed methods; and 3% were reviews. Regression analysis and thematic or content analysis were the dominant methods of data analysis respectively in the quantitative and the qualitative studies included in Luo et al.'s (2023) study. In discussing their results, Luo et al. (2023) made a few compelling remarks about the need for more conceptualisation, theorisation, and methodological reflection effort, including in interdisciplinary modes, to make research capable of “explaining the *hows* and *whys*” of ISM’s relevance in a multidimensional and post-COVID global reality (p. 870,

emphasis in the original). In another systematic review, Hanley et al. (2025) drew a similar conclusion although they focused on international *professional* mobility.

In the latest published systematic account, Wang et al. (2024) tackled a question most directly relevant to this doctoral study: How do international student returnees contribute to the development of their home countries? Wang et al. had an initial pool of 1,515 studies that focus on returning students' impact in their societies and that were published between 1960 and 2022. They found only 53 studies (3.5%) addressed their review topic with sufficient relevance and rigour. Of these 53 studies, 49 (92%) were published since 2008, with 37 of them (70%) just in the last decade (further contextualising Mawer's 2018 claim of the infancy of scholarships research). Eighty-one percent of these 53 studies originated from the US, China, and the UK. None originated from or covered any Arabic-speaking country. These temporal and geographic representation gaps notwithstanding, Wang et al. (2024) find that their included studies sketch the following three major areas of contribution of returning foreign-educated students:

- Enhancing economic growth by driving innovative business development and international investments (p. 7),
- Spurring social and political transformations by promoting (gender) equality, (disability) inclusion, positive change in public institutions and rural areas (pp. 8-9) as well as by disseminating new political values, mostly of democracy, human rights, international (liberal) norms, and civic engagement (pp. 10-11); and
- Advancing higher education and research by building research cultures and infrastructures, elevating the scholarly reputation and impact of their home institutions and countries, and transferring their knowledge and skills through formal and informal teaching (pp. 9-10).

Unlike much ISM research, Wang et al. (2024) demonstrate good care in accounting for how their included studies signify the role of home-country contexts in shaping foreign-educated students' effective ability to make the abovementioned contributions. They highlight the following factors as ones oppressive to such effective ability: low levels of democracy and industrialisation, bureaucracy, corruption, nepotism, governance centralisation, conditioning public service on political affiliation and ideological loyalty, and the presence of institutional norms and culture resistant to change (pp. 12-13). Wang et al. (2024) further highlight another set of factors as conducive to the effective contribution of returning foreign-educated students, e.g., governance decentralisation and the existence of peer groups and communities of practice (p. 13).

Wang et al.'s (2024) synthesis is the most comprehensive to date of how foreign-educated students have and may be able to contribute to their home countries, in what capacities, and under what conditions. In Chapter 1, I demonstrated that the predominant focus of empirical studies on scholarships is on this topic—the post-completion career experiences and contributions of foreign-educated students (1.2.1). It is therefore unsurprising that 19% of the studies covered by Wang et al. came from such scholarships research, e.g., Abimbola et al. (2016), Campbell (2016, 2017, 2020), Campbell, Kelly-Weber, et al. (2021), Campbell and Lavallee (2020), Campbell, Lavallee et al. (2021), Campbell and Neff (2020). If anything, Wang et al.'s synthesis provides concrete evidence to reiterate Luo et al.'s (2023) call for more interdisciplinarity, critique, and creativity in conceptual, theoretical, and methodological approaches to ISM research—and, by extension, to scholarships research. The range of returning students' contributions demonstrated by Wang et al. shows that, *inter alia*, concepts from social science, other than careerist and human capitalist ones, may well be suited to undertaking this new direction in (scholarships and) ISM research, e.g., equity promotion, community organising, and civic participation.

This doctoral study uses *one* such concept, peace. To do justice to scholarships and ISM research, the rest of this section is dedicated to showing how the concept of peace and proxies thereto have been utilised in the few pertinent studies.

Among the studies included in Wang et al.'s (2024) thematic synthesis, only two (of 53) referenced the term 'peace'. One referenced it loosely by mentioning Ghanaian scholarship alumni's work to maintain peace during elections (Campbell, Kelly-Weber, et al., 2021). The other referenced it explicitly by showing how Afghan migrants who volunteered their return were served well by their European education in balancing their own security and well-being with their contribution to development and peace (van Houte, 2014). Peace in the former seemed to be operationalised as absence of violence. In the latter, it was operationalised as service in relevant government, industry, or NGO roles. In concluding their study of Turkish alumni of the US Fulbright programme, Demir et al. (2000) assert that these alumni "had close friends from different cultures and developed mutual understanding, benefits that may contribute to international peace as intended by the Fulbright programs throughout the world" (pp. 109-110). 'International peace' here was presumed to emerge from cross-cultural contact and friendship, with this presumption built on self-reports of such contact and friendship. In their study, Hilal and Denman (2013) more explicitly looked at whether education abroad can be a tool for peace. In the context of post-9/11 attacks, they contextualised their study in terms

of national attempts for change. Based on structured interviews with Saudi and Emirati students in Australia, Hilal and Denman presented, with little transparency about the analysis methods used, self-reported perspectives on the students' contact with the outer world and their envisioned roles of bridging international understanding between the world and their countries. Next, they interpreted these perspectives as specific dispositions fostered through the students' education abroad, characterising them as pro-peace dispositions. In this case, the contribution of (funded) education abroad to peace was established, tacitly, on the account education abroad induced international awareness and global competence, two capacities that Hilal and Denman (2013) took to be ones of world peace. A shift from this intercultural approach to peace to a technical one is observed in Jafar and Sabzalieva's (2022) study. Focusing on the role, *inter alia*, of funded academic mobilities in the post-conflict contexts of Iraq and Tajikistan, they established the role of these mobilities as one of importing foreign academic capacity and prestige, to staff and internationalise local higher education. Here, funded academic mobilities were claimed to contribute to peace insofar as the former facilitates post-conflict recovery through importing human capital, building institutions, and fostering internationalisation.

While not exhaustive, these five studies from ISM and scholarships research, out of the few that I could identify as relevant, are not surprising in their little treatment, conceptually of peace and methodologically of explaining the relevance-to-peace of scholarships impact. Where existing, scholarships research on/from contexts where peace is severely absent can sometimes go without touching on such contexts or establishing the contextual significance of scholarships impact, whether or not 'peace' is being referenced (e.g., Shtewi 2019). Even when ISM studies do not focus on peace, their reference to political and/or economic concepts is relevant to informing conceptualisation of the potential relevance-to-peace of scholarships. In such studies, the concepts used seem to centre human capital and economic growth (Kwak & Chankseliani, 2024; Rasamoelison et al., 2021) and democratisation (Chankseliani, 2018). Such concepts represent proxies of a neo-liberal peace, that is, peace as a project delivered through "rule of law, human rights and gender issues, liberal democratic institutions and elections, civil society and an open economy with market-based economic growth and access to education" (van Houte, 2014, pp. 570-571; also see Richmond, 2006). This projectisation, if not mythicisation (Selby, 2013), of peace is increasingly criticised in the field of Peace and Conflict Studies (Gonzalez-Vicente, 2018; Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015; Lipschutz, 1998; see Lewis, 2010, for illustration). Oliver Richmond (2009) summarises this criticism well. He writes of such peace to be perceived as "ethically bankrupt, subject to double standards,



coercive and conditional, acultural, unconcerned with social welfare, and unfeeling and insensitive towards its subjects... tied to Western and liberal conceptions of the state, to institutions, and not to the local” (p. 557). The ideology underpinning such peace, neo-liberalism, is also criticised in the field of (International) Education (e.g., del Cerro Santamaría, 2019; Fakunle, 2021; Mintz, 2021).

Why, then, the persistent reference to conceptual proxies of neo-liberal peace in scholarships (and ISM) research? Three points may be helpful by way of response. As evidenced by the systematic reviews covered in this section, neither does ‘peace’ fall within the dominant range of topical foci in scholarships and ISM research, nor do the (often lacking) metatheoretical and theoretical approaches to scholarships and ISM research help problematise the frameworks and procedures used in investigating connections between scholarships impact and peace. Reflection on both points seems to be structurally less demanded at a time when, as Hans de Wit (2020) observes,

Traditional values that have driven international activities in higher education in the past, such as exchange and cooperation, *peace* and mutual understanding, human capital development, and solidarity, although still present in the vocabulary of international education, have moved to the *sideline in a push for competition, revenue, and reputation/branding*. (p. ii, emphasis added)

Nor is this structural discouragement of contemplating alternative approaches to researching scholarships and peace exclusive to International Education. The third point I offer to understand the persistent focus on neo-liberal proxies—whether of sustainable development, social change, or peace—is the prevalence of such proxies in relevant research from the field of International Relations (IR). As the next section demonstrates, IR scholars as well as others engaged in international exchanges have produced more research and discourse to conceptualise, evidence, and advocate for the political significance of international student mobility, especially that sponsored by governments.

### 2.1.2. Literature Review: International Relations

In 2012, Tony Blair spoke at the Future of State Universities Conference in Texas. In his address on higher education internationalisation, he spoke about religion, tolerance, society, democracy, the Arab Spring, peace in the Middle East, and the rise of India and China (Risepoint, 2012). These phenomena were not divergences in his speech but ones he said are

and should be considered alongside higher education internationalisation. He explained their relevance on the account that international student mobility can bring people together to improve their mutual understanding and respect and therefore build stronger currents of global security, prosperity, and peace.

Even a U.S. Secretary of State under the first Trump administration agreed. He did though in (unsurprisingly) sharper, more explicit terms of national interest. Speaking during International Education Week, Mike Pompeo said: “Education exchanges... are among the most important tools in our diplomatic *arsenal*. They maintain America’s competitive edge and preserve our leadership in the world. The success of our foreign policy priorities depend [*sic*] on them,” (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, 2018).

The same assertions appear to be a point of wide consensus among (especially US-based) international education professionals, higher education leaders, foreign policy and security analysts, public diplomacy scholars and practitioners. This is repeatedly evidenced in their contributions to multidisciplinary discussion panels on exactly the links outlined by Blair and/or the terms used by Pompeo. These panels are occasionally hosted by such organisations as the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS, 2016, 2018), the United States Institute of Peace (USIP, 2015, 2019), and NAFSA: Association of International Educators (USIP, 2017).

Empirical reference in this consensus is not specifically to international higher education scholarships but generally to the phenomenon of international mobility—whether short-term cultural and professional exchanges or short-/longer-term academic education abroad—and its links to global security, prosperity, and peace. As such, the phrase “international (student) mobilities” is used in this section to capture this broader reference in the IR research cited.

Against this background, I proceed in this section to an interdisciplinary complementation of the literature review commenced in the previous section. I review a segment of IR research that deals with the political significance of international (student) mobilities. I show that this pertinent research, compared to ISM and scholarships research, offers more scholarly advancement in its investigation of potential links between international mobility and (proxies of) peace. Together with the previous one, this section concludes with a context-driven critique of the still neo-liberal bias with which IR research keeps being produced

and, as such, the spell-over of its ideological bias and associated metatheoretical assumptions onto much thinking about scholarships impact.

There are two pathways commonly invoked in IR research to establish the global political significance of international (student) mobilities, i.e., how these mobilities reflect on changes in societies and (thereby) on the conduct of international relations. These two pathways are diffusion of liberal-democratic values (DL-DV) and institutionalisation of world society (IoWS). IR research on these two pathways does not limit the global political impact of international (student) mobilities to peace. However, it clearly suggests that peace is an effect, even a byproduct, of that impact. This is demonstrated in the research reviewed below on each of these two pathways.

### *Diffusion of Liberal-Democratic Values*

For DL-DV proponents, they “theoretically specify a long causal chain linking the micro-phenomenon of the democratic socialisation of individual agents to the macro-phenomenon of regime-type change” (Freyburg, 2012, p. v). In simpler terms, the causal pathway between international education and peace here is as follows: (1) individuals from illiberal, non-democratic countries who are educated in liberal-democratic ones are more likely to gain appreciation of liberal-democratic values, to bring them home upon their return, and to action them through high-level public service; (2) thereby helping their home-countries transition to more liberal-democratic systems of government that (3) are posited to be less likely to threaten and/or more likely to build and maintain peace with other democracies.

There is some theoretical reasoning to adjudicate the DL-DV pathway in IR research. Within the structural and normative/cultural strands of Democratic Peace Theory, liberal democracies are less likely to engage in conflict with each other. They are so because the risks and losses associated with conflict make it unpopular with voters, who then exert pressure on their leaders to avoid it; moreover, liberal democracies follow values of compromise and cooperation that disincentivise conflict and escalation (Maoz & Russett, 1993; Mello, 2017). It follows that the potential contribution of ISM to peace can be established on account of ISM promoting liberal-democratic values.

Good empirical evidence exists to support this hypothesis. Based on quantitative analysis, Nieman and Allamong (2023) find that country leaders educated at autonomous and egalitarian universities, i.e., mainly Anglo-American ones, and who specialised in economics or law are more likely to pursue liberal reform in their home countries. Similarly, Spilimbergo

(2009) finds that individuals educated in democratic countries promote the democratisation of their home countries. In her longitudinal quantitative study of US-bound civilian and military exchanges for students and military officers, Atkinson (2010) finds that both types of exchanges, though the latter to a greater degree, were positively associated with democratic institutional development and, consequently, with improved measures of human rights protection. Atkinson (2010) draws on this finding in lending support to the assertion that “US-hosted exchange programs can play an important role in the diffusion of liberal values and practices across the borders of authoritarian states” (p. 1). In his study, using quantitative data and focused on leaders educated in the West, Barceló (2020) finds that the “effect of Western education on [such leaders’] involvement in a war is negative and statistically reliable at a 99 per cent confidence level across all models [of the statistical analysis]” (p. 552). Barceló goes on to argue that:

it is not the values, the skills or the networks that education alone provides to leaders, but that the kind of education is what matters in bringing the values, the skills or the networks that are associated with particular foreign policies. ... Western education provides the values, the skills, or the networks to Western-educated non-Western leaders that influence them toward a more peaceful foreign policy. (Barceló, 2020, p. 561)

In their still leader-focused quantitative study, Gift and Krcmaric (2017) find evidence strongly linking Western education with democratic reform. By these accounts, the contribution of ISM to peace may be explained in terms of their potential democratic-pacifying effect, i.e., their promotion of liberal-democratic values that make war and conflict less likely among states led by individuals educated in liberal democracies. This explanation has rightly been qualified and can further benefit from qualitative tests of its explanatory power.

More cautious in their conclusion than Barceló (2020), Gift and Krcmaric (2017) invite their readers to interpret their findings about the strong positive link between Western education and democratic reform in the following terms: “given preexisting constraints, the education backgrounds of leaders influence democratization. Further inquiry is needed to understand fully the interplay between leaders and structure in driving democratization” (p. 692). Similarly, Atkinson (2010) draws attention to the need for considering three factors before asserting the democratising effects of civilian and military exchanges: the extent and depth of exchange participants’ interactions in their democratic host countries, their “sharing of a sense

of community or common identity” with their hosts, and their service in a politically influential position when they return home. By focusing on a single country rather than cross-country data, Freyburg’s (2012) quantitative study illustrates the need for additional research to interrogate the association between democratisation and Western-bound academic, professional, and other sojourns. Indeed, she found no evidence of such systematic and positive association in her investigation, focused on state officials from a stable authoritarian country, Morocco, who participated in educational and professional exchange in Western liberal democracies. Prompted by this finding, Freyburg (2012) supports Atkinson’s (2010) conclusion about the extent and depth of exchanges as key to explaining their potential effect on pro-democratic attitude change. Further, Freyburg (2012) invites critical reflection on some of the methodological procedures and the theoretical premises of democratic diffusion. Specifically, she entertains the possibility that Moroccans who can afford to study abroad may often come from “families loyal to the regime with good connections to the political elite and thus [have] rather negative attitudes toward democratic governance” (p. 12).

This same contrast between studies using cross-country data and those focusing on single-country data can be observed in the little relevant ISM and scholarships research. Elsewhere (Almassri, 2024d), I cited Chankseliani’s (2018) finding, based on a quantitative study, that there is “a very strong correlation between the level of democratic development and the education abroad destination of students from post-Soviet countries.” Chankseliani (2018) further found that those countries who sent more of their students to Europe and the US experienced higher levels of democratic development than those who sent more of their students to Russia. Del Sordi’s (2018) qualitative investigation of the Kazakh government scholarship programme offers a contrasting assessment. It shows that the scholarship programme channels, rather than challenges, the government’s authoritarian rule and that it does so transnationally while also serving the continued stability of this rule (also see Ye, 2021, for an illustration of how state-sponsored student mobility serves the purpose of creating and legitimating governance elites in Singapore). Together with the IR insights presented above, this brief contrast from the scarce relevant ISM and scholarships research further invites critical attention to the theory, data, and methods used in appreciating DL-DV as *the* pathway through which scholarships may yield their potential contribution to peace. I discuss this point further after reviewing the second pathway in IR research that links international (student) mobilities with peace.

### *Institutionalisation of World Society*

IoWS is a second pathway offered to explain the relevance of international (student) mobilities' relevance to peace in the world. A fair summary of this pathway, based on Bean's (2021) research, is as follows: where international (student) mobilities are viewed as an institution of the international system, fostering contact and dialogue among different state members of a world society, they can help sustain peaceful mechanisms of international life, e.g., diplomacy and shared legal and technical frameworks; they can also simultaneously help mitigate against mechanisms of conflict, e.g., ultranationalism, prejudice, and resort to violence. In other words, educational, cultural, and professional exchanges, and longer-term student mobilities are not merely programmes whose effect, in technical terms, is of building human, global, and social capital and fostering international connections and transnational networks. Rather, their effect, in terms of a world society, involves establishing, spreading, and giving continuity to norms and worldviews shaping how people—whether politicians, physicians, lawmakers, scientists, researchers, development professionals, etc—engage with each other in the international arena (Bean, 2021; also see Lebovic, 2013, for historical examination of the case of the US Fulbright scholarship programme).

This IoWS pathway is seemingly less developed and frequently invoked than DL-DV, perhaps because of the latter's stronger resonance in the dominant IR approaches in the U.S. compared to the former's basis in the less dominant English School of IR (Bean, 2021; also see Knight, 2019; Lohaus & Wemheuer-Vogelaar, 2021). However, there is a good body of theoretical and conceptual works that makes this pathway plausible, e.g., Gordon Allport's contact hypothesis (1954; Paluck et al., 2019); Peter M. Haas' (1992) concept of epistemic communities and Etienne Wenger-Trayner and Jean Lave's concept of communities of practice (Bicchi, 2022); and sociological accounts of the socialising-therefore-pacifying effect of such communities, i.e., their facilitation of shared dialogue spaces and norms. In IR, empirical applications of these or equivalent perspectives help cement the plausibility of IoWS as a pathway to the contribution of exchange/education abroad to peace (Scott-Smith, 2008). One example here is professional contact among members of the international medical community. As Efrat (2015) demonstrates, this contact and epistemic community helped create the technical norms and political climate to better combat organ trafficking, reject transplant profiteering, and encourage ethical transplantation practices. Another example is Toczyski et al.'s (2022) historical account of the Europeanising effect of exchanges between West Germany and Poland in the period to 1989 (also see Pacher, 2018).

More broadly, the rising subfield of public diplomacy within IR increasingly lends credence to the IoWS pathway. It does so by illuminating how exchange diplomacy—i.e., diplomacy through educational, cultural, and professional mobilities—may be contributing to the establishment, dissemination, and continuation of norms and worldviews by which peaceful international relations are conducted. The definition of public diplomacy continues to be contested across the world but remains evolving around a country's instrumentation for global political purposes of its sources of soft power (Gregory, 2008; Melissen, 2005; Nye, 2004, 2008; Repnikova, 2022; Snow & Cull, 2020). Soft power, a term commonly referenced in research of scholarships and international education, refers to the attractiveness of a country's assets to foreign citizens (Nye, 2021a), or “the ability to affect others by attraction and persuasion rather than just coercion and payment” (Nye, 2021b, p. 1). An illustrative example of public diplomacy is international scholarships and exchanges, where bringing foreign students, youth leaders, opinion shapers, entrepreneurs, and military personnel to experience a host country's education, culture, civil society, political traditions, economic values, and/or military institutions is hoped to cultivate the former's understanding and capability for civil dialogue and, ideally, cooperation with the recruiting country (Chou & Spangler, 2018; Cromwell, 2022; Rugh, 2014; Wilson, 2014). The potential cultivation of international knowledge and interpersonal and intercultural sensitivities through exchanges and scholarships can enhance political actors' ability to command positive impressions and sincerity in the conduct of international engagements (Hall & Yarhi-Milo, 2012).

It is precisely this public diplomacy perspective that is the closest point at which scholarships and ISM research comes to investigate the potential contribution of (funded) student mobilities to IoWS as a pathway to peace. This claim is illustrated in the previously reviewed study by IR scholars Atabaş and Köse (2024), whose study showed the Turkish government scholarships may be preparing informal ambassadors of North Macedonia and Uganda. Similar findings about the Turkish government scholarships were reported by conflict resolution specialists Aras and Mohammed (2018). The claim is also illustrated in International Education scholars Lin and Chan's (2024) study of how international scholarships offered by Taiwan to foreign citizens help the latter build cultural repertoire with and affinity for “the society [that] does not have formal diplomatic relations with major countries” (p. 421), as well as gaining and transferring to their home countries academic and professional perspectives shared with their host country (also see Lin, 2024).

More research exists to expand and add nuance to this illustration of the role of scholarships, when framed as a tool of public diplomacy, in facilitating the institutionalisation of world society. In a special issue investigating this topic, led by public diplomacy and communication scholars (Ayhan & Snow, 2021), the gendered, academic, social, and other experiences of recipients of the Global Korea Scholarship were demonstrated to influence public global understanding of South Korea's culture and society. In a systematic review by a multidisciplinary team of educationists and international affairs specialists, Gauttam et al. (2023) demonstrated the long-evolving use of international higher education as a tool of projecting a polity's attractiveness—and dominance. By Gauttam et al.'s account, international student mobility, “the most salient feature” of international higher education, has always played some role in fostering the capability for dialogue (and resistance) among communities of the world (p. 11; also see Collins, 2020; Jain, 2020). Further elaboration of this claim can be found in (edited) volumes on the history, politics, and global and regional dynamics of exchanges and their relevance to world peace, e.g., Bevis (2016, 2019), King (2011), Mathews-Aydinli (2017), and Tournès & Scott-Smith (2018).

In this section, I have thus far presented two pathways through which links between scholarships impact and peace can be conceptualised. The first pathway comprises the diffusion of liberal-democratic values (DL-DV), and the second involves institutionalisation of world society (IoWS). Scholarships research seems negligent of both pathways, whether in terms of applying them in empirical studies (1.2.1), integrating them in impact evaluations (1.2.3), or critiquing them in conceptual studies (1.2.2). Also, neither pathway seems to be gaining currency—for empirical assessment and/or theoretical critique—in ISM research. Only IR research, especially that dealing with public diplomacy, seems to conceptualise them, apply them in rigorous empirical studies, and therefore produce knowledge shaping our understanding of how (funded) education abroad contributes to peace. This contribution of IR research is not without the geographic limitations and ideological biases characteristic of the field, e.g., its disproportionate focus on Western Europe and the US (Knight, 2019) and (therefore) its predispositions towards neo-liberal conceptions of peace (Barkawi & Laffey, 1999; Gonzalez-Vicente, 2018). Referencing the Palestinian context, I demonstrate in the next section the risk of overlooking these limitations and biases in importing either pathway to researching scholarships impact and peace in the OPT.



### 2.1.3. Concluding Critique

The diffusion of liberal-democratic values (DL-DV) pathway is blatant in its supposition of peace as a neo-liberal project. The essence of peace assumed in this pathway is a combination of prescribed technical processes: spread of democracy, ratification of human rights conventions, adoption of liberal social and other policies, and implementation of governance, economic, and privatisation reforms to make markets more free and globally accessible (Richmond, 2006, 2009, 2012; van Houte, 2014). It follows that the contribution of international (student) mobilities to peace can be established by demonstrating these mobilities' role in *serving* as a pipeline for preparing individuals to fulfil those prescriptions of peace in the imagined neo-liberal order. That is a Pax Americana kind of peace (Mueller, 2020). I would be colossally naïve to try in this thesis to take on the ontology of peace, i.e., what peace is, a task “thoroughly wracked with foundational contention” (Reagan, 2023, p. 2). However, suffice it here to make the two following points: one broad, and one specific to the OPT.

The field of Peace and Conflict Studies is not short on healthy criticism of ontologising peace in such neo-liberal terms, not least for its US-Eurocentrism and alienation of alternative systems of government and modes of life (Magalhães Teixeira, 2024; Rosato, 2003; Sabaratnam, 2013), as well as for its failure on practical and critical grounds (Dodge, 2021; Hughes, 2022). In the OPT, as Khalil (2008) made clear almost two decades ago, the Pax Americana model of peace has failed Palestinians. This failure has since grown to be more catastrophic. After years of state- and institution-building and economic liberalisation, especially during the premiership of American-educated economist Salam Fayyad, Palestinians seem closer to neither peace nor prosperity nor freedom nor justice (Khalidi & Samour, 2011). Instead, they have become even more deprived of peace, prosperity, freedom, and justice. The point being made here is that if DL-DV were to be used in researching scholarships and peace in the OPT, it would normalise the very ideological bias of the peacebuilding project in the OPT that has permitted the continuity and aggravation of Palestinians' deprivation of peace (see Abu Awwad, 2024; Dana, 2020; Farsakh, 2016; Tartir, 2015, 2018). It would also imply that Palestinians' entitlement to becoming part of the liberal-democratic world envisioned is possible *and* nationally wanted *and* internationally accepted. Except, it is not possible to exercise that entitlement from under protracted occupation (Khalidi & Samour, 2011). Nor is there confidence that the international community is serious about accepting Palestinians' demand (not even yet exercise) of their national rights as enshrined in international law (see

Imseis, 2021). Whether Palestinians want to follow the (Western-style) liberal-democratic traditions is an open question to be asked after the two prerequisite conditions of possibility and international acceptance are met.

Against this critique of the DL-DV pathway of explaining the potential contribution of international (student) mobilities to peace, it is now worth bringing the focus back on scholarships. As presented in the subchapter on scholarships research (1.2) and the previous section on ISM research (2.1.1), scholarships research is poor in conceptual reflection, theoretical diversity, and metatheoretical engagement. This limitation has allowed an unmitigated spill-over of neo-liberal thought onto ontologising scholarships impact in terms of advancing scholarship recipients' capacities and functions. This spill-over is demonstrated in the description of these capacities and functions as purely technical, i.e., skills developed, jobs secured, career activities completed, and community service delivered. The articulation of this technical nature of scholarships impact is barely offered with serious consideration, i.e., as demonstrated in theoretical choices or analysis methods, of the political and other contexts in which these technical gains are made through scholarships and actioned after completion. With this technical and decontextualised articulation of scholarships impact, we are left unconvinced by the potential assertion of scholarships to lead to "social change", let alone "social justice" or peace. When thinking about the relationship between these technical gains and peace, what we seem to be told is that they aid the prescribed processes of neo-liberal peace, specifically human rights advocacy and economic growth and development. That may be true and valid in certain contexts, although the current U.S. administration is stripping away confidence in this possibility (Lally & Blanco, 2025; also see Lomer, 2017).

In the OPT, the abovementioned effect of scholarships may not be true or valid, at least amidst (i) the protraction of a foreign military expansionist occupation, minimising possibility for human rights enjoyment and economic growth and (ii) the absence of international will to seriously accept Palestinians' claims to statehood, sovereignty, and political and economic freedoms. To apply DL-DV in this context would normalise the neo-liberal approach that has not only failed in delivering peace between Palestinians and Israelis but also perpetuated the two conditions outlined just above—that of protracted occupation and that of lacking serious international action to end it.

The latter condition—of serious international acceptance of Palestinians' membership in the world society—is why I believe the other pathway, institutionalisation of world society

(IoWS), may not be immediately relevant to explaining scholarships' potential contribution to peace in the OPT. My context-driven critique of this other pathway, IoWS, is less about the global social constructivist worldview underpinning it and more about its quality of fit for the current OPT context.

It can be plausible to use IoWS—certainly more than DL-DV—in investigating scholarships' potential contribution to peace in the OPT. Such an investigation would probably focus on how Palestinian scholarship recipients may be using their education abroad to join some of the academic, civic, and potentially other spaces where global norms, technical standards, and worldviews are established, discussed, and critiqued. This investigation may proceed to showing whether and how such global participation and exchange of Palestinians are facilitating progress towards political peace between Palestinians and Israel conflict and/or towards improved civil peace within the OPT. However, such application of IoWS presupposes that Palestinian individuals or institutions have a deliberate strategy, whether formally or not, of seizing scholarships in this manner of attempting to institutionalise their world society membership. The national context described and problematised in the first chapter (1.3; 1.4) casts much doubt *currently* on the plausibility of this presupposition, especially in the absence of data, research, and official and scholarly reflection on scholarships for Palestinians.

What emerges from this critique is a demonstration of the need for a new ontology of scholarships' potential contribution to peace. At the metatheoretical level, an approach is needed to explain links between scholarships impact and peace without presupposing or prescribing these links to be limited to career progress, economic growth, and liberal-democratic reforms. In this doctoral study, this ontological approach would help respond to RQ5: *What may explain the relevance of scholarships impact to peace in the OPT?*

This approach also needs to be theoretically informed. It should take stock of recent advances in theorising peace such that the relevance thereto of scholarships impact is framed not in prescribed terms of neo-liberalism but in terms derived from the country context in which scholarships impact is investigated. In this doctoral study, this approach would help respond to RQ4: *How do scholarships relate to peace in the OPT?*

Such an approach would necessarily move beyond the empiricism characteristic of scholarships research. The investigation cannot follow the usual protocol of being concluded at empirical-level analysis of the data, e.g., by focusing merely on perceptions of scholarships impact. It needs to move from such analysis to interpreting what this data means for peace in

the context under consideration. In this doctoral study, such interpretation is guided by RQs 4 and 5 as outlined above and discussed in the first chapter (1.4.3). This interpretation is preceded by empirical analysis focused on RQs 1 and 2: *What are some of the profile characteristics of Palestinian recipients of international scholarships? How do Palestinian scholarship recipients perceive their motivations for and experiences and outcomes of undertaking funded graduate education abroad?* The transition from this empirical analysis to theoretical interpretation is guided by RQ3: *Does the Palestinian scholarship recipients' characterisation of scholarships impact in the OPT warrant some rethinking of the potential efficacy of scholarships vis-à-vis peace?*

In the following four subchapters, I present how I actioned this research critique into a series of metatheoretical (2.2), theoretical (2.3), and methodological choices (2.4), constantly informed by active reflexive perspective (2.5). As I regularly reflect throughout the chapter, these choices were a series, a dynamic sequence of judgmentally rationalist choices, rather than a set, a collation of distinct, self-dependent rationales. The thinking behind each metatheoretical, theoretical, and methodological choice fed back and/or forward to the preceding or following research assumption and procedure. The presentation of these choices in subchapters within a single chapter is deliberately made to emphasise this seriality.

## **2.2. Metatheoretical Framework: Critical Realism**

The previous subchapter presented the case for a critical approach to researching scholarships' potential relevance to peace in the OPT. Together with the literature survey of scholarships research in Chapter 1, it highlighted the need for this critical approach to be explicit in its metatheoretical assumptions and thus accountable in its claimed fit to the phenomenon under study. My purpose in this subchapter is to do that. I present my understanding of what has been termed the "trinity" of metatheoretical assumptions of critical realism: ontological realism, epistemological relativism, and judgmental rationalism (Elder-Vass et al., 2023). I explain how I these metatheoretical assumptions guided my investigation of scholarships' potential contribution to peace in the OPT. I continue explaining this application of the metatheoretical framework in the next two subchapters, the first demonstrating its value for synthesising theory to meet the scope of this doctoral study and the second demonstrating its guidance of rigorous data collection and analysis procedures.

The following sections exhibit a heightened visibility of the singular first-pronoun, deliberately used to demonstrate the second core metatheoretical assumption of critical realism,

epistemological relativism, which I clarify in the second section. Also, the following three sections and two subsequent subchapters will give the impression of a smooth, almost linear progress from ontology to epistemology, then to theory, and then to methodology and analysis. This was not the case. I spent months trying to build the critical realist metatheoretical framework and to apply it to the topic, scope, and methodology of this doctoral study, often going back and forth through the metatheory, theory, and data collection and analysis plans. What follows is a *presentable* summary of this otherwise complex process. In offering it in this presentable fashion, I hope fellow newcomers to critical realism may find it useful in applying the research metatheory in their own studies. Acknowledging this complexity, finally, I intentionally refrain in this subchapter from discussing how critical realism helps advance scholarships research or how this critical realist doctoral study compares to existing scholarships research. Instead, I offer this discussion in Chapter 4. Overall, this introduces the metatheoretical assumptions underpinning this doctoral study and the guidance I derived from therefrom to addressing the five RQs.

### 2.2.1. Ontological Realism

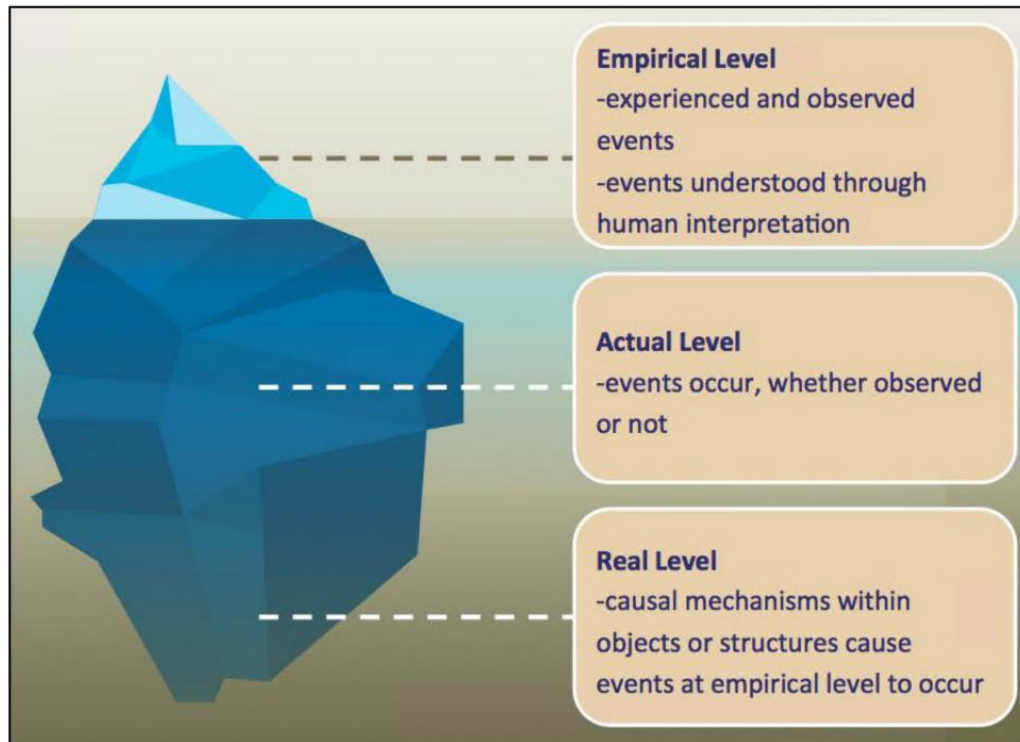
Reality is viewed in critical realism to be stratified into three domains. These are the empirical, actual, and real domains (Fletcher, 2016), as shown in Figure (2) on the next page. The empirical domain covers that which is observed and directly observable, e.g., manifestations of a phenomenon like a patient's reported/observable symptoms. In this doctoral study, I take the empirical domain to cover perceived scholarship experiences and outcomes. In keeping with empirical scholarships research (1.2.1), I consider these perceived scholarship experiences and outcomes as empirical manifestations of scholarships impact, guided in doing so by RQs 1 and 2: *What are some of the profile characteristics of Palestinian recipients of international scholarships? How do Palestinian scholarship recipients perceive their motivations for and experiences and outcomes of undertaking funded graduate education abroad?*

Second, the actual domain of reality covers that which is indirectly observable and thus is inferred from observed manifestations of a phenomenon, e.g., a patient's illness. In this doctoral study, I take the actual domain to cover the relevance-to-peace of scholarships impact. That is, I focus on the ways in which perceived scholarship experiences and outcomes may be relevant to peace in the OPT, guided in doing so by the consequent assessment of whether the Palestinian scholarship recipients' characterisation of scholarships impact in the OPT warrants

some rethinking of the potential efficacy of scholarships vis-à-vis peace (RQ3); and, if so, how scholarships relate to peace in the OPT (RQ4).

## Figure (2)

Fletcher's (2016, p. 183) iceberg metaphor for ontology in critical realism



Third, the real domain is concerned with the mechanisms that give rise to the phenomenon under research, e.g., potential causes of a patient's illness. In this doctoral study, I take the real domain to cover ontological links between scholarships impact and peace, that is, how scholarships impact may relate to peace. I therefore focus on structural and individual factors gleaned from perceived scholarship experiences and outcomes that may be claimed to generate the potential relevance-to-peace of scholarships impact. I pursue this focus guided by RQ5: *What may explain the relevance of scholarships impact to peace in the OPT?* I acknowledge here that the real domain could alternatively be taken to cover the structural and individual factors that give rise to the *perceptions* themselves rather than to the object perceived, i.e., scholarship experiences. This would likely be a valuable application of critical realism more suited for psychology research rather than the education research conducted in the doctoral study. This also means that a major assumption of this application of critical realism—and indeed of this doctoral study—is that perceptions can be used as an empirical entry into deeper levels of reality. I accepted this assumption for this doctoral study, but I concede that perceptions are not the only way to gain entry into deeper levels of reality, nor are

they free from bias. This concession and the relevant limitations of following these assumptions are further discussed in the fourth chapter (4.6).

In this ontologically realist stance, reality is posited to exist objectively and independently of human knowledge of it (Owens, 2011; Patomäki & Wight, 2000). Reality cannot be collapsed into attempts at knowing it, which would constitute what critical realists call “epistemic fallacy” (Farasoo, 2024; Wiltshire, 2018). Instead, the distinction between reality and knowledge claims about it should be maintained and perhaps critically discussed at pertinent stages of the research process. I tried doing so in this doctoral study, acknowledging that my attempt to observe manifestations of scholarships impact and to draw on these observations in making ontological-level claims about the potential relevance-to-peace of scholarships impact is shaped by the extent and limits of my knowledge. This distinction and subsequent acknowledgement lead to the second core metatheoretical assumption of critical realism.

### 2.2.2. Epistemological Relativism

Epistemological relativism refers to the view that researchers, by virtue of factors shaping their intellectual and broader life trajectories, influence the knowledge produced of reality. As Lawson (2003, p. 162) simply puts it, epistemological relativism:

expresses the idea that our categories, frameworks of thinking, modes of analysis, ways of seeing things, habits of thought, dispositions of every kind, motivating concerns, interests, values, [language,] and so forth, are affected by our life paths and socio-cultural situations, and thereby make a difference in how we can and do “see” or know or approach things, and indeed they bear on what we seek to know.

Consider the case of a child patient with symptoms of cancer. An oncologist’s focus of diagnosis and their scope of interpreting symptoms of the child’s case may well be more precise than those of a general practitioner or a paediatrician. In this doctoral study, the positionality described at the beginning of Chapter 1 and the reflexivity elaborated later in this chapter (2.5) informed my decisions on the research problem, scope, and questions (1.4). Someone of a different personal, academic, linguistic, and/or professional positionality or one who practises reflexivity differently may well take a different approach to the research problem, scope, and questions, if at all interested in the potential relevance-to-peace of scholarships impact in the OPT.

As may further be clear from the previous section on ontological realism, my application of critical realism follows my understanding of the research metatheory. As this understanding evolved, in Lawson's (2003, p. 162) terms, I could better gauge and calibrate what scholarships impact and what potential relevance thereof to peace I could and did see, as well as how I could and did seek to investigate them. Put more simply, the knowledge offered in this thesis of scholarships impact and its potential relevance-to-peace in the OPT is shaped by what *i* brought to the design of the research approach, in terms of the extent and limit of my (a) understanding of the Palestinian context; (b) relevant scholarly knowledge attainment; (c) competence in designing and implementing data collection, empirical analysis, and inferential interpretation procedures; and (d) quality of articulating research assumptions, procedures, findings, and implications in academic English.

In recognition of this epistemologically relativist stance, I took intentional and conscious actions to ensure this researcher influence on the research process was more a product of active dialogue with existing research rather than an undue and unchecked bias. I discuss this reflexive practice later in the chapter (2.5). I also keep clarifying this epistemologically relativist stance by using explicit references and increasing my authorial visibility in the text of this thesis. These references and increased authorial visibility simultaneously serve to explain my reasoning for making certain theoretical, methodological, analytical, and terminological choices, a function closely related to the final core assumption of critical realism, presented below.

### 2.2.3. Judgmental Rationalism

The last tenet of critical realism is judgment rationalism, which references the necessity for making "judgements and decisions about competing or contested epistemic accounts of reality and of developing the tools and criteria to do so to arrive at plausible and accurate accounts of phenomena" (Quraishi et al., 2022, p. 26). To revisit the illustrative case of a child patient with a broken leg, the emergency department at a hospital might better judge having him seen by a paediatric orthopaedist rather than by a paediatrician or an orthopaedist because the paediatric orthopaedist's tools of diagnosis may lead to a more complete and accurate account of the child's case. This decision by the emergency department and the rationale behind it exemplify a judgmentally rationalist practice. Indeed, it is such judgmental rationalism that makes the epistemological relativism of critical realism tenable in that "based on adequate



scientific methods, one can distinguish between better and worse... knowledge claims about reality” (Danermark, 2019, p. 280).

Judgmental rationalism, though fundamental in critical realism has been paid little attention. Limited work has been done to propose, expand, illustrate, or challenge specific criteria and practical tools of actioning it in (Isaksen, 2016), although this may be changing (Isaksen, 2024). Against this backdrop, I interpreted judgmental rationalism to be necessity not just of data analysis but of the entire research process.

I already began illustrating this extended scope of applying judgmental rationalism in Chapter 1. I delayed there the presentation of the doctoral study plan to follow—not precede—insights from the literature survey, thus clarifying the research-driven rationale for some of the key decisions I made regarding the scope of this research. More broadly, I have actioned judgmental rationalism, in tandem with epistemological relativism, as follows: I tried to be critically conscious of all theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices made in conducting the research. I also tried to use in this thesis a narrative practice that clearly and authentically articulates the procedures and findings of the doctoral study. By ‘critically conscious’, I refer to a three-step research-driven reflexive process of: (i) checking what existing research shows about the theoretical, methodological, and analytical options I considered and ultimately decided to use, (ii) reflecting on whether and how these research insights (dis)establish the plausibility of these options for this doctoral study, and (iii) continuing reflection on how well the choices I made delivered on their intended purpose of addressing the research questions. This show of judgmental rationalism, together with relevant researcher metacommunicative comments throughout the thesis, helps illuminate the process of applying critical realism in qualitative research and may therefore be useful to fellow newcomers to this research metatheory.

## Concluding Remarks on Using Critical Realism

My subscription to critical realism in this doctoral study is far from a marriage of convenience, i.e., a research metatheory “fit” for research purpose. Rather, my exposure to critical realism was like the arrival home, in a scholarly sense. It offered me an internally coherent metatheoretical structure for thinking about the world, with this structure being consistent with my personal worldview—including, if not primarily, as a Palestinian.

The ontologically realist stance of critical realism helped me develop and articulate in scholarly terms my personal inclination to believe that there *is* an external reality, that this reality exists independently of our knowledge of it, and that it does by virtue of the *tendencies* of its various forces to produce likely, contingent outcomes under specific circumstances (Fleetwood, 2011). *Tendencies*, rather than laws, and *contingent*, rather than constructed, are key terms of critical realism that particularly helped me appreciate it as a fair, even good, alternative to positivism and constructivism. At the risk of oversimplifying both alternative philosophies, the former seemed to me to be too deterministic and empiricist, seeing the world as a place governed by natural necessities and interpretable through only those necessities that may always be observed (Choo, 2022; Wiltshire, 2018). The latter seemed to me to be so emphatic of subjectivist, discursive, and social constructions of the world that it misses attempts to engage with that which just is (Choo, 2022; Wiltshire, 2018).

Furthermore, the epistemologically relativist stance of critical realism strongly appealed to me at the scholarly and personal level. My earlier, mostly critical, training in peace studies and Arab studies helped me relax, in a reviewer's words, the "high-mindedness" of views I had embraced about education and peace. This training, together with my lived experience of education under conflict, made me try to be conscious in identifying and rejecting acts of epistemic hubris, including the assumption that an individual or a team's research findings can mount up to laws of life (see Kidd, 2016). Acknowledgement of this stance was not only intellectually gratifying to me. It demanded of me greater visibility and transparency of the assumptions and rationales I used to guide my research approach and practice, including accounting for my researcher influence. In Lincoln and Guba's (1985) terms, this stance and practice of epistemological relativism may be conducive to increased research trustworthiness, or the confidence that may be warranted in the research process and findings by virtue of a thorough tracing and justification of the research approach, assumptions, methods, and procedures (also see Nowell et al., 2017).

Lastly, judgmental rationalism simultaneously offered me the metatheoretical guidance and challenge to be reflective and self-critical in what and which theoretical, methodological, analytical, and narrative choices I considered and finally decided. This guidance and challenge were valuable to me in undertaking this doctoral study, especially given its parting with DL-DV and IoWS as the two existing models of the potential relevance-to-peace of scholarships impact (2.1.3). The guidance and challenge of judgmental rationalism also served me well in adjudicating—rather than claiming the bracketing of—my researcher influence on the doctoral

study. The reflexivity outlined in the previous section and elaborated later in the chapter (2.5) served me in trying to be conscious, intentional, and self-critical in my influence of the doctoral study at its different stages, as well as in being explicit in this thesis about where I thought, most often in light of relevant research, that this influence might be merited.

In this spirit of ontological realism, epistemological relativism, and judgmental rationalism, I now continue explaining how critical realism has served me in synthesising two theoretical perspectives to meet the scope of this doctoral study.

## **2.3. Theoretical Synthesis: Everyday Peace Capability**

In the first subchapter here, I demonstrated the need for moving beyond the two models available from IR research to explain the potential relevance-to-peace of scholarships impact. I rejected the plausibility of applying the first of these pathways, diffusion of liberal-democratic values (DL-DV), because of its ontological bias towards defining peace and explaining contributions thereto in an economic lens borrowed from certain global contexts. I also rejected as untimely and immediately unapplicable the second pathway, institutionalisation of world society (IoWS). I clarified that this pathway offers contextually incoherent presuppositions, e.g., international acceptance of Palestinians' integration into the world society and the possibility of Palestinians' global integration from under protracted foreign occupation. Based on this critique, I concluded that an alternative, metatheoretically engaged, theoretically informed approach should be formulated to identify and explain potential links between scholarships and peace in the OPT. I also concluded that this alternative approach should not presuppose or prescribe these links to be limited to career progress, economic growth, and liberal-democratic reforms. I further concluded that this alternative approach should take stock of recent advances in theorising peace such that the relevance thereto of scholarships impact is framed not in prescribed terms (of neo-liberalism) but in terms derived from the country context in which scholarships impact is investigated.

In this subchapter, I demonstrate how I actioned this conclusion about what and how theory may help—and not prejudice—analysis of scholarships impact and its potential relevance to peace in the OPT. I present Everyday Peace Capability as the theoretical framework that guided me in advanced stages of the data analysis process for this doctoral study. I demonstrate how I developed Everyday Peace Capability by synthesising Amartya Sen's (2001) seminal Capabilities Approach with Roger Mac Ginty's (2021) theorisation of Everyday Peace and doing so within the critical realist metatheoretical framework established

in the previous subchapter. I start this demonstration in the first section below, where I present working definitions of Capabilities and Everyday Peace.

### 2.3.1. Defining Capabilities and Everyday Peace

In the Capability Approach (Sen, 1993, 2001, 2003, 2004), capability refers to one's potential to do something one has reason to do (also see Robeyns, 2006; Walker, 2010). In this conception, the process of acquiring or developing a capability is understood through interactions among five key tenets: capacity, rationale, function, structures, and agency. First, capacity refers to the ability to do an activity. Capacities include immediate individual possessions that make a person able to do something, e.g., the specialist knowledge or quantitative literacy an economist uses to produce economic forecasts. Second, rationale refers to one's reasoning for doing an activity, i.e., for applying their capacities in certain endeavours. For example, the economist in the previous example may apply their specialist knowledge and quantitative literacy in producing economic forecasts for their job, for engaging in public debate on economic policy, or for celebrating their expertise on LinkedIn. Third, function refers to the doing of an activity, that is, the application of capacities for reasoned purposes, e.g., the completion of a work task, engagement in public debate, or celebration of expertise on social media. Fourth, structures refer to material and social factors that influence one's ability to deliver certain functions, e.g., the existence of legal protections and digital infrastructure that make the economist in the previous example *effectively able* to share their economic forecasts and contribute to public debate (rather than prevented from or intimidated against doing so, or lacking access to digital tools through which they can apply their capacities of specialist knowledge and quantitative literacy). Fifth, agency refers individuals' exercise of their active will in applying their capacities in functions of their interest, e.g., the economist's decision to work in a job, participate in public debate, or engage online.

Another illustration of these five tenets is that of a politically-educated individual wishing to engage in advocacy campaigns for political reform. Their political education represents their capacities, their interest in advocating for political reform their reasoning, and their engagement in such advocacy their function. If they live in a democratic/authoritarian context permitting or punishing such advocacy engagement, democracy/authoritarianism can be considered structures influencing that individual's actual engagement in advocacy or lack thereof. Whether and how the individual still engages in political advocacy represent their agency, e.g., in participating, boycotting, and/or resisting the political system.

From this illustrated conception, capability can be thought of as an effective ability to pursue motivated functions. ‘Effective ability’ here comprises a dual, negative and positive freedom: freedom *from* structural influences oppressing one’s ability to apply their capacities in ways they wish, and freedom *to* function as one wills (Martins, 2007). Clearly, a capability can be expressed in different functions; for example, a fresh graduate’s function of securing employment offers in two different sectors may arise, *inter alia*, from their interdisciplinary capacities and interests as well as recognition in the two sectors of the value of such capacities. In this case, the positive interaction between the fresh graduate’s assets (of capacity and rationale) and market appreciation of those assets (conducive structure) contributed to the emergence of the former’s success in securing job offers in the two sectors (function).

As conceptualised here, it is not surprising to see some longstanding enthusiasm for using the Capability Approach within a critical realist paradigm (e.g., Owens et al., 2021; Smith & Seward, 2009), including in the field of Education (e.g., Fryer, 2022b; Saito, 2003). This enthusiasm for the Capability Approach in education research is commonly defended for its offer of a framework suitable for analysis not only of experiences, outcomes, and inequities in education but also of the agency-structure dynamics shaping them within educational institutions and broader societal structures (see Campbell & Mawer, 2019; Fryer, 2022b; Walker, 2010).

To summarise, the Capability Approach allowed me to move beyond the technical language of “capacity-building”, as in the provision of training and skill development. The language of the Capability Approach in a critical realist iteration was far more analytical, focusing on “capabilitisation”. This alternative language of capabilitisation allowed me to investigate not only what capacity gains the research participants made through their scholarships (RQ2) but also what peace-relevant functions they *could* achieve with these capacity gains (RQs 3 and 4) and how these functions became *effectively possible* for them to achieve (RQ5). The fit and efficacy of this alternative language are elaborated in the data analysis protocol (2.4.4) and further illuminated in the findings (Ch. 3)

As for Everyday Peace, it comprises “the modes of thinking, stances, and actions deployed by individuals and groups to navigate through life in a deeply divided society” (Mac Ginty, 2021, p. 30). From the critical work on peace by Mac Ginty (2013, 2014, 2019, 2021, 2022) and others (Åkebo & Olivius, 2021; Mitchell, 2011; Ware & Ware, 2022), these modes of thought and action are theorised to be politically significant insofar as exploring them helps

reveal people's interactions with(in) and responses to the structures governing their lives amidst conflict. These modes of thought and action are considered ones of peace when they involve rejection of conflict perpetuity, resistance to conflict ethos, e.g., of despair and (self-)harm, and/or positive reconstruction and progress in an individual's life or group's state of being (Mac Ginty, 2021).

Examples of everyday peace include friendship or the working relationship between an Israeli Jew and a Palestinian (Mac Ginty, 2021), youth engagement in non-formal education in Serbia (Kušić, 2023), and everyday commerce between various ethnic and religious communities in post-Islamic State regions of Iraq and between Rohingya and Rakhine villagers in Myanmar (Bourhrous & O'Driscoll, 2023; Ware et al., 2022). However, application of Everyday Peace has rightly been not restricted to contexts of inter-national or -ethnic conflict. Everyday peace has been observed in functions as “mundane” as authorship of messages of peace in song lyrics (Howell, 2023) and in ones as “ordinary” as engagement of Palestinian youth in service-based learning (Stewart, 2011) and continuation of education and thus maintenance of some structure and stability amidst the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Lopes Cardozo et al., 2015). Nor has the application of Everyday Peace been “reserved” for contexts of conflict. It seems to be increasingly applied in global contexts, including in examining the relevance-to-peace of various levels and aspects of education in the UK (Bevington, 2020) and beyond (Fry et al., 2023).

In their theorised political significance, the actions and modes of thinking in these examples represent everyday peace power (Mac Ginty, 2021, ch. 3). They represent a strength to hold and practise states of moral reasoning, social engagement, and personal self-conduct even when these states and the very practice of them deviate from or run counter to modes of thought and action dominant under conflict—whether conflict is defined as an immediate, macro-level event as in the OPT or otherwise. Following Johan Galtung's (1996) distinction of negative and positive peace, I understand this everyday peace to be the pursuit of *peace by peaceful means* in the sphere of everyday life. This pursuit is represented by nonviolent responses to conflict and responses through which individuals may seek in their everyday life relief from conflict impact, hope for peaceful resolution, and positive attempts at (re)building their lives, among other possible pursuits.

Before turning to my synthesis of Capabilities and Everyday Peace, it is important to clarify that Everyday Peace offers a theoretical approach alternative to that in which peace is a

sum of techno-economic functions—e.g., human capital import, institutional building and staffing, and economic growth—in a Western-style liberal democracy and in an overall neo-liberal world order (2.1). Instead of that prescription of peace, Everyday Peace requires significant exploration of context and everyday processes that unfold in the mundane but fundamentally political spaces there before determining the substance and conditions of peace. In other words, by considering how everyday individuals manage their competing interests, including vis-à-vis structural influences (e.g., of conflict), the knowledge claims about peace may emerge to be more contextually truthful, empirically rigorous, and ontologically plausible. I begin to demonstrate these knowledge qualities in the following synthesis of the Capability Approach with Everyday Peace, and it is through the findings (Ch.3) and the discussion (Ch. 4) that these qualities become clearer.

Before proceeding, I should note that the following theoretical synthesis of the two approaches is presented in a manner that best reflects its comprehensibility rather than the process through which I developed it or the order in which I applied it. I first began experimenting with this synthesis at the start of my doctoral project in early 2022. My review then of literature on each approach convinced me of the plausibility of synthesising them. At that early stage in my doctoral study, and until after the first data analysis phase described later (2.4.4.2), my thoughts on their synthesis together within critical realism kept evolving in light of the data collected and additional literature reviewed on each of the two approaches. I refrained from concluding my thoughts on their synthesis until then. I did so because I understood that theorisation in critical realist research does not necessarily have to be fully developed before data collection and can evolve with and after the first phase of descriptive data analysis. As I was completing that first phase of data analysis in late 2023, I started firming up the meta-theoretical synthesis of the Capability Approach and Everyday Peace within critical realism. As hinted in the first chapter (1.4.3), I finalised my RQs in light of this evolving understanding of how the meta-theoretical approach may guide me through the remaining phases of data analysis (see the original RQs in Appendix G). So, the order-of-presentation of the following theoretical framework in this thesis does not reflect its order-of-application in the doctoral study. This order-of-presentation is used pragmatically here for better flow in the chapter. Details of applying this (meta-)theoretical framework are shared in the data analysis protocol section (2.4.4).

### 2.3.2. Synthesising Capabilities and Everyday Peace Within Critical Realism

Informed by the scholarly work referenced in the previous section, I appreciated there was excellent potential to synthesise, within critical realist metatheory, the Capability Approach and Everyday Peace into Everyday Peace Capability, a framework to theorise scholarships' potential contribution to peace in the OPT. I present this two-level synthesis in this section.

In International Education, empirical and systematic research on international student mobility (ISM) has established that education abroad, whether for a full degree or a shorter term, can leave a significant, multidimensional impact on individuals studying abroad, including the intellectual, academic, professional, personal, and civic capacities and interests of those individuals who receive scholarships to study abroad. This was demonstrated earlier, in the review of ISM research (2.1.1) and survey of scholarships research (1.2). As further demonstrated in the literature review, relevant IR research, including that dealing with public diplomacy, has further tried to identify and explain the relevance-to-peace of such impact of education abroad (2.1.2). Similarly, conceptual and empirical work in Peace and Conflict Studies has been done to establish Everyday Peace as an approach to exploring peace and explaining its processes of emergence (2.3.1).

Looking across this body of knowledge from the two fields, I find it plausible to assume, theoretically, that any and all impact of scholarships is politically significant and thereby potentially relevant to peace in the OPT. In terms of the Capability Approach, I assume that scholarships involve a process of capabilitisation. This process entails provision of capacities (i.e., knowledge, skills, and experiences) through a period of change in structural and agentic factors. This change may have significant influence on scholarship recipients' effective ability to pursue functions for which they have their own rationales. I also follow the aforementioned assumption that everyday peace comprises the modes of thought and action that involve rejection, resistance, and potentially transformation of conflict ethos and effects. I synthesise these two theoretical assumptions by positing that the process of capabilitisation through scholarships may lead to new and/or enhanced functions of everyday peace. Scholarships may offer capacity developments *and* structural changes that, to the extent they are agentially seized by scholarship recipients, can enhance their functions of responding to conflict in pro-peace ways. Such enhancement of this functioning vis-à-vis conflict is seen as the contribution to peace, or scholarships' potential to develop recipients' everyday peace capability—their



effective ability to respond to conflict in pro-peace ways. Also, the interaction outlined between structural changes and agential behaviour that enhances everyday peace capability is taken as a potential explanation for the contribution to peace, or an account of how scholarships may help advance recipients' everyday peace capability. This synthesis follows Barnett's (2008) theorisation of Peace as Freedom, which he developed by synthesising the Capability Approach with Johan Galtung's work on larger-scale peace. The reason why I developed Everyday Peace Capability and did not use Peace as Freedom is the former's focus on smaller-scale, i.e., everyday, peace and therefore its better suitability for the scope of this doctoral study (1.4.2).

Having presented the propositions of Everyday Peace Capability, it is now opportune to demonstrate how these propositions work within the metatheoretical framework of critical realism. In the previous subchapter, I discussed the stance on ontological realism. According to this stance, reality is stratified into empirical, actual, and real domains. In the empirical domain, the concern is with perceptions and subjective experiences. In this doctoral study, this concern is with perceived scholarship experiences and outcomes, which offer empirical evidence of capacity developments, structural changes, and agentic behaviours. It is in this domain where the response to first two research questions is attempted: *What are some of the profile characteristics of Palestinian recipients of international scholarships (RQ1)? How do Palestinian scholarship recipients perceive their motivations for and experiences and outcomes of undertaking funded graduate education abroad (RQ2)?*

In the actual domain of reality, the concern is with that which is indirectly observable and thus is inferred from observed manifestations of a phenomenon. In this doctoral study, this would be the responses to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that are inferentially interpreted from the empirical domain, which comprises evidence of capacity developments, structural changes, and agentic behaviours. In theoretical terms of Everyday Peace Capability, these responses to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict represent functions of everyday peace capability. By engaging in such inferential interpretation of scholarships impact, I could address the third and four research questions: *Does the characterisation of scholarships impact in the OPT warrant some rethinking of the potential efficacy of scholarships vis-à-vis peace (RQ3)? How do scholarships relate to micro-level peace in the OPT (RQ4)?*

Finally, the real domain is concerned with the mechanisms that give rise to the phenomenon under research, that is, scholarships' potential contribution to peace. In this doctoral study, these mechanisms comprise the interactions between structural changes and

agentic behaviours as evidenced in the empirical data. In terms of Everyday Peace Capability, inferences of these mechanisms represent explanatory claims with which I could address RQ5: *What may explain the relevance of scholarships impact to micro-level peace in the OPT?*

This theoretical framework of Everyday Peace Capability, within a metatheoretical one of critical realism, further substantiates the departure in this doctoral study from the predominant practices in scholarships research. Like many of the empirical studies and impact evaluations of scholarships surveyed in the first chapter (1.2), this doctoral study does interrogate scholarship alumni's perceptions of their scholarships in terms of academic and broader experiences and outcomes as well as post-completion trajectories. Unlike these studies and evaluations, this doctoral study does not stop there, at a description of scholarships' technical value as opportunities for gaining capacity developments. Guided by critical realism and Everyday Peace Capability, it moves to inferential interpretation at two deeper levels, one focused on interrogating the relevance-to-peace of the observed capacity developments and the other on explaining the generation of this relevance-to-peace. As I demonstrate in the next subchapter, this two-level synthesis of theory and metatheory offered me good guidance in planning and implementing the data collection and analysis. As a brief terminological note, I use 'Everyday Peace Capability' to refer to the theoretical framework and 'everyday peace capability' to the effective ability to respond to conflict in pro-peace ways.

## Concluding Remarks on the Theoretical Synthesis

Five remarks are pertinent to conclude this subchapter. First, Everyday Peace Capability responds well to the micro-level scope of the investigation here of scholarships' potential contribution to peace in the OPT. In this theoretical framework, everyday peace capability is viewed as a capability of individuals. In the *Research Scope* section (1.4.2), I justified this focus on individuals on the basis that investigating the contribution at organisational or societal levels would ignore the dual absence of (i) prior studies on scholarships impact in the OPT, which would be helpful, if not essential, to informing such a scale of investigation; and (ii) a minimum degree of systemic stability currently in the OPT context that allows for any such scaled research to lead to reliable results.

Second, Everyday Peace Capability in its iteration here lays some potentially good foundation for future research and practice that help address this dual absence. This implication

of using Everyday Peace Capability and, more broadly, employing theory for the research and practice of scholarships impact is elaborated in Chapter 4.

Third, Everyday Peace Capability as a theoretical framework coheres with the more critical and innovative directions in which scholarships (and ISM) research seems to be heading. I already discussed Campbell and Mawer's (2019) endorsement of the Capability Approach as "the most viable" theoretical lens to apply in scholarships research (also see Fincham, 2020; Novotný et al., 2021; Saling, 2023). Lo's (2018) argument for the Capability Approach extends this endorsement, focusing on the unique potential of the Approach, at least compared to human capital theory, to illuminate non-instrumentalist significance of the greater phenomenon of international student mobility. Also, in Chapter 1, I reviewed Atabaş and Köse's (2024) study, in which they focused on scholarship recipients' engagement in *everyday* diplomacy during their study in Türkiye. Most recently, Mittelmeier et al. (2025) applied the conceptual lens of 'everyday multiculturalism' to explore "how (international) students encounter, enact, and engage with multiculturalism in their local communities in more *micro* ways through *banal acts* of daily living among international students" (p. 1, emphasis added). This reference to the everyday, the banal, and the micro echoes exactly the space considered primary to Mac Ginty's (2021) theorisation of Everyday Peace. From an epistemological standpoint, this reference marks a shift from the approaches reviewed at the start of this chapter, where high-profile country leaders and state policies were *the* subjects and objects for analysis of the political and peace-relevant impact of ISM.

Further to the point above, I concede that (funded) education abroad itself may not be an "everyday" phenomenon, that it may mark an eventful rather than a "banal" or "mundane" period of one's life, and that it remains accessible to far too few students—commonly those of backgrounds perhaps excluded by the overtones of "everyday." I had two major reasons to still apply the "everyday" lens in this doctoral study. Conceptually, "everyday" was not defined restrictively for this doctoral study. Rather, it has been stated to comprise people's interactions with(in) and responses to the structures governing their lives amidst conflict (2.3.1). By this loose definition, a Palestinian student's decision to study abroad, to specialise in a subject, to interact with fellow and/or foreign nationals, and to return home or stay abroad are all viewed to comprise such interactions with(in) and responses to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. My second reason for still applying the "everyday" lens in this doctoral study is teleological. Demonstration of how funded education abroad may contribute to everyday peace capability can help produce knowledge that, when/if transferred to local education, can widen that

contribution to the everyday peace capability of “everyday” people. This other implication of using Everyday Peace Capability and, more broadly, employing theory for the research and practice of scholarships impact is elaborated in Chapter 4.

Fourth, research on Zionism and settler-colonialism is pertinent to theorising the political significance and potential relevance-to-peace of scholarships impact in the OPT. This body of research may illuminate the ways in which the conflict trajectory and dynamics currently prevent the opportunity window for larger scales of scholarships’ contribution to peace (e.g., King et al., 2021). For example, research on Israel’s settler-colonial expansion has documented practices of violence, land theft, economic devastation, and other structural oppression, explaining their effect such that they fragment Palestinian politics, geography, peoplehood, and epistemology (Amoruso et al., 2019; Giacaman, 2023; Seidel 2019; Seidel et al., 2021). This framing of the Palestinian context can be helpful to uncovering the low opportunity structure against which the extent and scalability of scholarships impact—and its potential contribution to peace—may be minimised (see 1.4.2). I acknowledge the theoretical significance of this body of research and have cited different works from it (e.g., Chomsky & Pappé, 2015; Hilal, 2015; Khalidi, 2020; Zureik, 2020). However, I do not try to centre it in this thesis for reasons of focus (1.4.1), scope (1.4.2), and intellectual orientation (2.2.2). The primary goal of this thesis is to illuminate the potential relevance-to-peace of scholarships impact in the OPT, using new meta-theoretical terms and analytic perspectives, and in so doing, contributing to scholarships research (1.2). To engage in the debate on the ontology and axiology of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would be relevant but not within the immediate scope of this research goal. Nor would centring this literature represent my chosen approach to the study of Palestine/Israel. It is therefore my assessment that, in fairness to the focus and scope of this thesis, to the representation of my intellectual orientation, and to the seriousness of literature on Zionism and settler-colonialism, a separate work should deal specifically with scholarships and that literature.

Finally, I wish to credit Murphy and Costa’s (2022) work for much of the confidence but also self-critique that inspired me throughout building Everyday Peace Capability. In their chapter in *Social Theory and Education Research: Understanding Foucault, Habermas, Bourdieu and Derrida*, Murphy and Costa (2022) shared a clear and compelling call to pursue critical, creative approaches to education research that is innovative and interdisciplinary. Such approaches, they argued, could be achieved by embracing theory-driven methodologies where theory is used to conceptualise and to drive research design; could involve “hybridisation”, or synthesis, of theoretical ideas to respond to “highly complex and rapidly shifting” forms of

education (p. 30); and should be developed with ontological and epistemological vigilance (Murphy & Costa, 2022). My hope is that, thus far in this chapter, I have clarified my subscription to this call by hybridising Everyday Peace with the Capability approach, within an ontologically clear stance, to offer a new approach to researching scholarships' potential contribution to peace in the OPT. In the following subchapter, I further demonstrate how I made methodological progress while taking great continuous guidance from the meta-theoretical framework of Everyday Peace Capability.

## **2.4. Research Materials and Methods**

In the previous subchapter, I synthesised the Capability Approach with Everyday Peace to develop the theoretical framework guiding this doctoral study, Everyday Peace Capability. I also defined everyday peace capability as the effective ability to respond to conflict in pro-peace ways. In the OPT context, this is the effective ability to respond in ways counter to the ethos and effects of despair and destruction begotten amidst violent protraction of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I also demonstrated the coherence of Everyday Peace Capability with the overarching, metatheoretical framework guiding this doctoral study, critical realism. Working with this meta-theoretical framework, and guided by Murphy and Costa's (2022) previously mentioned work on hybridising theory and methodology in education research, I developed a series of methodological objectives and assumptions to guide my procedures of sampling, data collection, analysis, and reflexive practice. I dedicate this subchapter to explaining these methodological objectives, assumptions, and procedures, as well as the ethical guidelines I used throughout to honour research participants' rights and preferences.

### **2.4.1. Sampling**

I developed the sampling protocol based on the purpose of this doctoral study, i.e., to investigate the potential contribution of international higher education scholarships to peace in the OPT. I therefore took a purposeful approach to sampling (Patton, 2002); I sought the participation of Palestinian individuals whose accounts of their scholarship experiences and can enrich understanding of the potential contribution of international higher education scholarships to peace in the OPT. I supplemented this purposeful approach with techniques of criterion sampling and convenience sampling. I did so by setting justified inclusion criteria and applying them in recruiting participants whom I could contact. In this section, I explain these inclusion criteria as well as the effort I took to search for participants meeting them. I also

reflect on the results of this search effort, including the final sample size of 32 research participants ( $N = 32$ ).

The participants had to be Palestinian, ordinarily living in the OPT, and to have graduated from an undergraduate degree programme there. I set this dual criterion to ensure the trajectories of the research participants offer a fair basis against which to infer scholarships' potential contribution to peace in the OPT. If a Palestinian scholarship recipient ordinarily lives abroad and/or has pursued their undergraduate education abroad, their effective ability to respond to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict might be markedly different from the population with which this research is primarily concerned, Palestinians in the OPT. This difference might then cause some validity concerns about the inferences drawn from the data about *scholarships'* potential impact on recipients' everyday peace capability *in the OPT*, where no research or other insights suggest that undergraduate education abroad is common.

Another set of inclusion criteria were that the research participants had to have received a Masters scholarship and to have undertaken with it an in-person study programme at a higher education institution outside of the OPT. The focus on master-level scholarships follows assessment of this level being the most common across scholarships offered to Palestinians (1.3). Openness to participants who had received any Masters-level scholarship follows the scope-related decision stated in the *Research Scope* section (1.4.2). I made this decision because I wanted to avoid making this doctoral study an(other) evaluation of one or more scholarship programmes, in so doing actioning Saling (2023) and Mawer's (2017) critique of scholarships research being dragged behind the logics of scholarship programmes, which can often be ambivalent, drifting, and/or mixed but often human-capitalist. Also, as demonstrated in the first chapter (1.3), this doctoral study is the first research attempt at documenting scholarships impact in the OPT. The openness to all scholarship and study programmes and foreign destinations reflects interest in ensuring this documentation has some degree of inclusion.

Finally, the research participants had to have successfully completed their funded graduate education abroad 1 to 6 years before the time of their research participation. This criterion was applied to ensure the participants had time to process and perhaps apply some of their scholarship outcomes. It is also in keeping with typical practice in similar scholarships research where scholarship alumni were interviewed after they completed their funded education abroad, often by a few years (1.2).

Three research invitees had completed two different MA-level scholarship programmes. In their case, I still deemed them eligible for participating in the research because two of them completed both programmes within the timeline mentioned above. The third completed her latter programme still within six years before her participation in this research. I originally planned to use this criterion together with another one, being in the age group between 23 and 35 years at the time of participation. I dropped this latter criterion because I thought it might be unjustifiably restrictive for the purposes of this research.

Using the criteria mentioned above, I proceeded to searching for potential research participants, using three primary platforms: (i) alumni webpages of scholarship programmes like that offered by the [Saïd Foundation](#); (ii) two private Facebook groups of Palestinian scholarship alumni, of which I had been a member; and (iii) scholarship alumni with whom I had been connected on social media, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram. I contacted all those I identified as potentially meeting the selection criteria. I further complemented my search in two ways: contacting scholarship alumni in my own social circle whom I believed would meet the selection criteria and inviting them to nominate others in their own circles whom they believed would meet the selection criteria and be interested in taking part.

This search effort yielded invitations to a total of 49 individuals to participate in the research, 29 from Gaza (59% of invitees) and 20 from the West Bank (41%). This discrepancy in the outreach effort may reflect the greater extent of my network in Gaza than in the West Bank, a discrepancy that in great part is a consequence of the prohibited contact between the two regions. A total of 32 accepted the invitation, for an overall positive response rate of 65%. Three of the remaining 17 invitees declined the invitation. The remaining 14, who were sent one reminder, did not respond to the original invitation or the reminder message. A table of the 32 participants' pseudonyms and relevant data is not provided in this thesis. I explain this decision later in this subchapter (2.4.3).

Twenty-six of the 32 research participants were from Gaza (marking a positive response rate of 90%) and six from the West Bank (marking a positive response rate of 30%). This discrepancy in the positive response rate between invitees from Gaza vis-à-vis from the West Bank may be a result of the heightened sense of suspicion in the West Bank about participating in a research study whose title includes the word 'peace'. Two friends and a colleague—all Palestinian scholarship recipients from the West Bank—confirmed this attributability, explaining that the word 'peace' raises suspicion about the study being one involving

normalisation of Israeli occupation and/or of inclusion of Palestinian along with Israeli voices. A fourth Palestinian scholarship recipient, from Gaza, reminded me that one reason could be militarised surveillance. Practised by Israel and by the Palestinian Authority, which has some authority in the West Bank but very little in Gaza, militarised surveillance could further contribute to the heightened sense of concern about participation in studies where ‘talk of politics’ could be expected (see Zureik, 2020). This point may indeed be plausible given my completion of data collection virtually while based distantly and safely at a UK university. Based on the data collection experiences, I think this attributability is further merited in light of the interview experience with four research participants. Two from the West Bank and a third from Gaza volunteered expressions of confusion when they realised I never uttered the word ‘peace’ during their interviews. These volunteered expressions might indicate the participants’ active anticipation of engagement with the concept of ‘peace’. I share further details of such reactions later in this subchapter (2.5.2.1).

As foregrounded in the first chapter (1.3), I assumed the population of Palestinian Masters-level scholarship recipients to be relatively homogenous in terms of the academic records, career experiences, and personal and leadership qualities that they had to have in order to qualify for the range of Masters scholarships to which Palestinian students are eligible (see *Potential Scholarship Beneficiaries in the OPT*). Considering this assumption and varying recommendations on sample size vis-à-vis methods of data collection in qualitative social research (Sim et al., 2018), I deemed the sample size of 32 suitable for this study. I also deemed it so by considering sample sizes in similar qualitative studies of scholarships impact. The number of research participants in this doctoral study ( $N = 32$ ) seems to be on the upper end of sample sizes in scholarships research using similar methods to consider international scholarships impact. In such studies, samples have ranged in size from 20 (Campbell, 2018a; Campbell, Lavalley et al., 2021; Campbell, Kelly-Weber, et al., 2021), to 24 (Enkhtur, 2020), and to 32 (Jonbekova et al., 2022), to 35 (Kim et al., 2024). In their mixed-method study, Ahmad et al. (2017) had interviews with 15 scholarship recipients and alumni.

Progress from data collection to analysis confirmed the suitability of the sample size. The data contributed by the 32 participants helped me arrive at a point of epistemological closure. In critical realist research, epistemological closure is a step further than data saturation (Easton, 2010). It moves beyond “the point at which no new information, codes or themes are yielded from data” (Braun & Clarke, 2019b, p. 202) to a point where the empirical data is deemed to offer sufficient evidence for the explanatory claims ultimately developed through



data analysis (McAvoy & Butler, 2018; Oliver, 2012; Price & Martin, 2018). This belated confirmation of sample size sufficiency in critical realist practice is in keeping with Braun and Clarke's (2019b) caution that "judgements about 'how many' data items, and when to stop data collection, are inescapably situated and subjective, and cannot be determined (wholly) in advance of analysis" (p. 201).

#### 2.4.2. Data Collection

The 32 research participants were invited to share two types of data. The first type was of contextual data about their demographics and socioeconomic backgrounds. The second type of data was substantive, i.e., their perceived scholarship experiences, outcomes, and post-completion engagements. Focusing on collecting this second type data followed the aforementioned assumption about accepting perceptions as an empirical entry into deeper levels of reality (2.2.1). The substantive data, of perceived scholarship experiences, outcomes, and post-completion engagements, represented empirical manifestations of scholarships' potential contribution to peace in the OPT. By seeking them, I sought to build a strong base of empirical evidence from which I could proceed to more inferential analysis of this potential contribution. By considering contextual data, I sought to capture some of the individual nuances—of age, gender, prior travel and career experiences—that might be current in and/or salient across the reported empirical manifestations of scholarships' potential contribution to peace in the OPT.

I used three methods to collect contextual and substantive data. First, I circulated to the participants a simple background questionnaire form where they were given free choice to indicate demographic and socioeconomic information like age, gender, class, category of residence location in the OPT, type of school attended, extent of engagement in extracurricular activities, prior access to need-based financial aid, prior experience of travel and/or international exchange, and details of their Masters scholarship and study programmes. A copy of the background questionnaire form is presented in Appendix B.

Second, I invited the participants to share one or more pre-existing documents of theirs that would be relevant to the doctoral study. I gave the following examples of what such pre-existing documents may be: CV/resume, scholarship application form, personal statement, and cover letter for post- and pre-scholarship job applications (see Appendix B). Such documents offer context and chronology for thorough and situated understanding (Bowen, 2009), in this

case of the participants' pre- and post-scholarship trajectories. Crucially, I did not see these documents as merely records of the participants' social life but also windows into the fields of power and influence that shape their social life, including the forces motivating, compelling, and/or guiding their decision to apply for scholarships (see Dalglish et al., 2020). For example, consider how a curriculum vitae may be a site of people's expression of their self-identity but also of their subjection to economic and broader influences in their environments that help explain their career trajectories (Bawazeer & Gunter, 2016). Or, consider how personal statements submitted as part of applying for scholarships or cover letters submitted during job applications may reflect the author's expression of their relationship to Palestine's current context and future, but also their self-narrative and navigation of personal ambitions, national emergencies, and institutional expectations by foreign universities and scholarship providers. I thus thought these documents could reveal a great deal of data that can increase in-depth, contextualised, and temporalised understanding of scholarships impact and its potential relevance to peace, that is, how this impact emerges over time and in context.

Third, I held in-depth interviews with the 32 participants. These interviews were virtual, hosted on MS Teams and, in the case of one participant, on Messenger due to a technical issue that the participant experienced. All participants were offered a choice to conduct the interview in Arabic or English and to switch to either language as they pleased in course. All of the interviews were semi-structured. I approached each with the same set of pre-planned broad prompts about the pre-, during-, and post-scholarship stages, and I customised follow-up prompts as needed, e.g., to elicit examples and further details (see Appendix C for the interview protocol). I further adapted delivery of the general interview protocol depending on the progress of each interview and depending on whether the participant had already completed the background questionnaire and/or shared pre-existing documents.

I started this data collection in January 2023. My original plan was to continue it through 2023 (see Appendix G), including by having a second round of interviews and/or a round of respondent validation with (some of) the participants after making progress with processing and descriptively analysing their data, the first of three phases of data analysis (2.4.4). My purpose of these rounds of data collection and/or respondent validation was to engage the participants actively in the data analysis stage and, together with cross-disciplinary expert respondents, in the data interpretation stage. By expert respondents in a respondent validation context, I had in mind Palestinian, Arab, and international peace and/or scholarship scholars, researchers, and practitioners whom I would have invited to review and discuss

descriptive summaries and inferential interpretations of the empirical data (perceived scholarship experiences and outcomes) vis-à-vis peace in the OPT (Torrance, 2012). Together with the research participants as respondents, this respondent validation would have perhaps marked a form of participation greater in scale and interdisciplinary scope than typical member-checking (Torrance, 2012). I wanted to organise these rounds of data collection and/or respondent validation in-person while in the OPT, or at least Gaza, given the Israeli restrictions on movement across Gaza and the West Bank.

However, it took me longer than I had anticipated to complete the first, descriptive phase of data analysis (2.4.4.2) and to consequently develop the meta-theoretical framework of Everyday Peace Capability (2.3). On 4 October 2023, I emailed my supervisors a draft report on my near-completion of both milestones. I wanted to receive their feedback before finalising my progress and planning what I then decided to be just a round of respondent and expert validation. Three days later, 7 October 2023 happened, and the cycle of violence that ensued in the OPT forced me to drop this plan (see Appendix E for more information on this research plan disruption). I therefore limited descriptive analysis and inferential interpretation to the contextual and substantive (interview and documentary) data collected in early 2023.

As prefaced in the previous section, the data collected ultimately helped the research arrive at a point of epistemological closure. A stronger participant engagement and involvement of expert respondents would have, *inter alia*, increased assurance of this epistemological closure as well as of rigour in data analysis and trustworthiness in the overall research procedures and findings. These measures are explained later in the *Data Analysis* section (2.4.4). The missed opportunity of increased participant engagement and involvement of expert respondents was compensated with stronger application of these measures of rigour and trustworthiness, and a higher degree of reflexivity as elaborated in final part of this chapter (2.5).

Other than this disruption to my plans, my collection of contextual and some substantive data through the background questionnaire and pre-existing documents went largely well but not as well as I had hoped. Only 16 of the 32 research participants completed (sections of) this background questionnaire. Eleven ultimately shared a copy of their CV/resume, and six of them further shared another pre-existing document, e.g., their scholarship application, personal statement, or job cover letter, for a total of 18 documents. This limited and inconsistent contribution of pre-existing documents made me standardise item

3.1. in the general interview protocol “*What scholarship(s) were you awarded? For what study programme(s)? At which institution(s)?*” (see Appendix C). This item helped me ensure consistency in getting such basic contextual data for all the participants. For any other contextual data essential for the research but missing in the background questionnaire, I used the follow-up element of the interview protocol to invite the participants to share it.

The interviews lasted on average for 65 minutes. Determined in quartiles, they ranged in duration from short (30-46 minutes) and standard (47-63) to moderately long (64-77) and long (79-119). This duration is in keeping with relevant scholarships research which reports durations of around 60 minutes (Kim et al., 2024), 40-120 minutes (Campbell, Kelly-Weber, et al., 2021), 50-120 minutes (Campbell & Lavallee, 2020), and 50-90 minutes (Campbell, 2018a). Following participants’ preference, 16 of these 32 interviews were conducted in colloquial Palestinian Arabic, 13 (mostly) in English, and three in both languages. I reflect on this multilingual aspect of the research later in this chapter (2.5.3).

In addition to these main methods of collecting contextual and substantive data, I used rapid reviews on an ad-hoc basis to collect further data about the scholarship and study programmes and institutions of attendance reported by the participants. By ‘rapid reviews’, I mean looking up the website of a scholarship/study programme and reviewing it to learn additional information such as its purpose, selection criteria and, if available, alumni trajectories. For study programmes, my rapid reviews were focused on the admission criteria required, modules delivered, and (employability) outcomes intended of these programmes as stated on their websites. This additional data, together with that from pre-existing documents, further supplemented the substantive data collected through interviews from the participants about their scholarship experiences and outcomes. Where a claim is made in this doctoral study, based in whole or in part on these rapid reviews, I indicate it as such and cite the relevant public-domain source.

Overall, the contextual and substantive data collected through background questionnaires, interviews, pre-existing documents and, where appropriate, rapid reviews served their intended purpose in this doctoral study, offering a base of empirical data whose descriptive analysis and inferential interpretation within the established meta-theoretical framework led to findings responsive to the five research questions. This is demonstrated in Section 2.4.4. on Data Analysis. Before moving to that section, I dedicate the next to discussing the ethical procedures followed in and after the data collection process.

### 2.4.3. Research Ethics

I conducted data collection after receiving ethical approval of the doctoral study from the School of Education Ethics Sub-Committee at Durham University (see Appendix D for a copy of the approval). At the time of formal invitation to participate in the research, my email to each participant included a consent package that briefed them on the research purpose, expectations of their participation, their rights to privacy, anonymity, confidentiality, and their right to free withdrawal from the research, including by removal of their data. All participants provided, before or at the time of their interviews, their written consent to the use of their data in the parent project and in any publications associated with it. The consent form (see Appendix F) offered an opportunity for the participants to customise their consent preferences regarding the use of data from their background questionnaire, pre-existing documents, and interviews. Also, I reminded each participant of their rights at the beginning and at the end of their interviews, and I sought their continued consent to recording these interviews (see the general interview protocol in Appendix C).

Building on the ethical guidelines on anonymity that are set by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018, 2024), I followed a context- and topic-driven assessment of what participant data to share and how to report it in a way that minimises identifiability. A proverb common in the OPT and beyond is, *حارتنا ضيقة وبنعرف بعض*, *haritna daiqaa wa bna'raf ba'ad* [our neighbourhood is narrow, so we know each other]. The instruction I took from it for this doctoral study, and which I relayed to the participants, is that it might be easy for the research participants to be identified if certain segments of their data were shared together. This interpretation followed my assessment that identifiability of Palestinian scholarship recipients is relatively easy because of the close-knit local, academic, and/or professional communities they—we, actually—tend to come from and often go on to form and/or join.

One hypothetical example is this: It would be an easy guess for some of the assumed Palestinian readers of this thesis to know who pseudonymous Jawad is if Jawad's gender, scholarship, university, specialisation, their pre-scholarship engagements, and/or year of study abroad are revealed altogether. An instructive real example is Harrow and Sola's (2022) previously cited documentary review. Although they anonymised the three scholarship-providing organisations whose policies they analysed, all three were easily identifiable to me—as they probably would to any Palestinian student who received or applied to them or is broadly familiar with the scholarships scene in the OPT.

I shared this assessment explicitly with most participants, to positive reception across the board—which might explain why most participants ignored the chance to suggest a pseudonym when completing their consent form. The following example illustrates the participants’ own assessment. In the course of his response to the interview question on whether he met fellow Palestinians while studying in the UK, a participant was speaking (in English) about the connections he still keeps when he said of someone—whom I indeed could easily identify:

... he messaged me when he came [back], when he landed in the UK to catch up, but I'm afraid we didn't. I did not get the chance to go to [X city] and he did not get the chance to come to [Y city]. *I suspect you know him, but ah yeah. Because everybody knows everybody, I think.* (emphasis added)

I actioned this assessment throughout my narrative practice of reporting the participants’ data. As illustrated in the findings chapter, I refrained, for example, from reporting names of employers next to participants’ quotes. Nor am I including a list of each participant’s demographic, academic, and career background. I sometimes described a participant was studying in the UK rather than specifying their foreign institution of attendance. At times, I invisibilised contextual data like gender to minimise identifiability; at other times, I visibilised it to reflect a participant’s gendering of a point but withheld other contextual data like their scholarship. Where participants explicitly expressed their preference against having their workplaces reported, I honoured their preferences. Where participants’ metacommunicative expressions—their sudden pauses, mini-silences, changes of tone and, in the case of participants who chose to turn their cameras on, face expressions—suggested a similar preference, I also honoured it. I did so mindful of the tendency towards some indirect and high-context communication patterns in the OPT, e.g., avoiding a blunt “no” or as explicit expressions and using instead nuanced phrases, gestures, or metacommunicative features to express disagreement, dissatisfaction, or other negative responses (see Hall, 1976). I also did so mindful of similar efforts in scholarships research to minimise scholarship recipients’ identifiability, e.g., the removal of academic details of participants in Campbell, Kelly-Weber, et al.’s (2021) study of Ghanaian and Nigerian scholarship alumni. I did not, however, take such metacommunicative expressions to suggest that the participants reported perceptions that differed from their actual ones. My observation was that most of the participants seemed to be at ease and/or trusting in sharing their responses and, in the case of a few of them, clear in

demarcating their openness/trust. I discuss this observation further in my reflexive statement (2.5.2.1).

#### 2.4.4. Data Analysis

So far in this chapter, I have presented the research critique informing the approach I took in my doctoral study (2.1). I also outlined the metatheoretical assumptions followed in this study, about reality being stratified into empirical, actual, and real domains (2.2.1); about knowledge of reality being relative and subject to researcher influence (2.2.2); and about the commitment to adjudication of competing knowledge claims about reality and about processes of developing knowledge about reality (2.2.3). In the third subchapter, I presented the theoretical assumptions driving the doctoral study. I explained the hypothesis that scholarships impact is politically significant, that this significance makes scholarships impact potentially relevant to peace in the OPT, and that this relevance can be interrogated in a process of empirical analysis and inferential interpretation (2.3). In the current subchapter, I have explained the methodological choices I made following this research critique and meta-theoretical framework, specifically about sampling and data collection. I complement this explanation in this section, turning to the method, modes, and techniques of analysis I applied on the collected data to address the RQs.

I should reiterate here that the following account of the data analysis process is offered in a *presentable* manner rather than one reflecting the many confusions felt, roadblocks reached, and U-turns taken in trying to action all of the preceding scope-related decisions and meta-theoretical assumptions into concrete practice of data analysis. In offering this acknowledgement, I lend my voice to that of those before me who experienced the same complexity of putting critical realism into work (see Stutchbury, 2019, 2021). I also offer this acknowledgement to point out, in the spirit of epistemological relativism, that what follows is *my* attempt of applying critical realism on the topic with which my study is concerned, scholarships impact and its potential relevance to peace in the OPT. Also, I made the decisions on what and how to apply analysis techniques in still a spirit of judgmental rationalism. I reflect this spirit in explicit justification of the decisions made as well as in frequent citation of research consulted in making that justification. Additionally, I offer this acknowledgement hopeful that future newcomers to critical realism may find in the following not a data analysis protocol to replicate but *one* example to critique, adapt, and re-create.

#### 2.4.4.1. Choosing a Data Analysis Method

As a newcomer to critical realism and someone who learns best by example, I struggled to find examples that illustrate how qualitative data is processed in critical realist research. I first came across Fletcher's (2016) work in which she reported the same observation. Other authors have further confirmed this observation, whether directly by offering guidance (e.g., Hastings, 2021; Hu, 2018) or indirectly by missing to offer or offering too brief accounts of how data is to be/was analysed (e.g., Gorski, 2013; Irfan & Wilkinson, 2020; Scott, 2005). I began developing a clearer understanding of data analysis in critical realism by reviewing the works of Bisman (2010), Danermark et al. (2019), Easton (2010), Fletcher (2016), Isaksen (2016), McAvoy and Butler (2018), Oliver (2012), and Vincent and O'Mahoney (2018). These authors drew on or contributed to one another's work, often simplifying the founding contributions of Roy Bhaskar (2007, 2009, 2016) and Margaret Archer (1995, 2003, 2007, 2012). While valuable to my metatheoretical knowledge of (and beyond) data analysis, these works still left me unclear about how to practice critical realism in analysing the data collected for the purpose of this doctoral study. As I kept trying, and failing, to develop a practical approach, I found consolation in the observation by teacher educator Kris Stutchbury (2021, p. 114): "Published accounts of critical realism tend to be rich in philosophical explanation but fail to translate this into a practical methodology for gathering... and interpreting data".

Stutchbury's observation served me well in mustering up extended tolerance for the confusion I felt while reading further works on data analysis in critical realism. The following long list of works seemed to me to go in multiple directions, each recommending, applying, and/or reporting data analysis with varying degrees of conceptual clarity and procedural transparency (Bygstad et al., 2016; Eynon, 2022; Galazka & O'Mahoney, 2021; Heeks et al., 2024; Henfridsson & Bygstad, 2013; McAvoy & Butler, 2018; McGhee & Grant, 2017; Oliver, 2012; Saxena, 2019; Steffansen, 2016; Thapa & Omland, 2018; Ton et al., 2021; Willis, 2019; Wynn & Williams, 2012). Part of this struggle was the lack of much critical realist work in the field of (international) education (cf. Scott, 2005; Sharar, 2016; Tikly, 2015). Almost no empirical study in the field seemed to report in sufficiently elaborative or illustrative terms the critical realist procedures of data analysis (e.g., Brown, 2015; Kahn, 2017; Lundgren-Resenterra & Crosta, 2019; Lundgren-Resenterra & Kahn, 2020; Rozas & Henry, 2022). Throughout this months-long confusion, I remained clear, however, that my search was for a method that enables serious application of critical realism together with the theoretical assumptions of Everyday Peace Capability.



It was thus great relief when I finally found Wiltshire and Ronkainen's (2021) proposal of critical realist thematic analysis (CRTA). Their proposed method helped me bring that search and uncertainty to a good conclusion. The authors build as directly on concepts from critical realism as on the work of Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke on thematic analysis (e.g., 2006, 2019a-b). I felt more confident in choosing CRTA as my method of analysis when I soon later found it received support, albeit with some proposed adaptations, from Tom Fryer (2022), an education researcher. I was assured of the suitable choice of CRTA as a method of analysis when I applied it in an article connected to the doctoral study (Almassri, 2023). Much later, in July 2024, I became more assured of CRTA as a suitable choice when I received positive feedback on my presentation of applying it at the annual conference of the International Association of Critical Realism. The following account of my data analysis protocol using CRTA is primarily built on Wiltshire and Ronkainen's (2021) proposal but has also benefited from Fryer's (2022) further discussion of it.

By using CRTA, I approached the data analysis with the goal of building three sets of themes (Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021, p. 164):

Experiential themes, referring to subjective viewpoints such as intentions, hopes, concerns, beliefs, and feelings captured in the data;

Inferential themes, referring to inferences and conceptual redescriptions using more abstract language; and

Dispositional themes, referring to theories about the properties and powers that must exist in order to produce the phenomena being studied.

Each of these three sets of themes, the process of data analysis leading to them, and the reporting of them were directly guided by the RQs and the meta-theoretical assumptions of this doctoral study. My application of CRTA with this guidance is detailed in the following three subsections, offering a thorough account of the three stages of data analysis I completed for this doctoral study. Again, the following data analysis protocol is offered more in a *presentable* fashion than one reflecting its evolution. Indeed, Wiltshire and Ronkainen's (2021) proposal was so clear that I developed a version of it suited to the RQs of this doctoral study, its meta-theoretical aspects, and the number and types of data items in it. This version was a tentative data analysis plan. I approached it with the conviction that I needed to refine it as I make progress through applying, or trying to apply, it.

For example, as part of developing this tentative plan, I had thoughts on the third stage of data analysis, corresponding to the real domain of reality. I kept revisiting and refining these thoughts as I progressed through the first stage of data analysis, corresponding to the empirical domain of reality. I further refined these thoughts as I progressed to and through the second stage of data analysis, corresponding to the actual domain of reality. This actively reflective and self-critical approach helped me adapt Wiltshire and Ronkainen's (2021) work in ways that made it a better fit to my doctoral study but also a stronger distillation of the works cited above about critical realist practice of data analysis. In reference to Murphy and Costa's (2022) work, this active approach to data analysis was valuable to me in ensuring balanced progress, between meta-theory and methodology, towards answering the RQs. This is illustrated in the following elaborate account of applying CRTA.

#### 2.4.4.2. Working in the Empirical Domain of Reality

I present here the process and result of applying CRTA to develop experiential themes. These themes describe empirical manifestations of scholarships' potential contribution to peace in the OPT. In critical realism, the empirical domain of reality is concerned with that which is observed, experienced, or perceivable. In this doctoral study, that is the research participants' perceived scholarship experiences and outcomes (2.1.1). By applying CRTA (Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021), I followed five steps of data-driven, descriptive analysis to develop experiential themes, focused on addressing RQs 1 and 2: What are some of the profile characteristics of Palestinian recipients of international scholarships? How do Palestinian scholarship recipients perceive their motivations for and experiences and outcomes of undertaking funded graduate education abroad? The five steps I followed in this stage of data-driven descriptive analysis are: organising data items, deepening my familiarity with the data, building descriptive codes, consolidating them into experiential codes, and developing experiential themes. In planning and applying these steps, I was guided by Wiltshire and Ronkainen's (2021) work while also consulting Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019a-b, 2022) relevant work on thematic analysis and Fryer's (2022) on CRTA.

##### *Organising Data Items and Deepening Familiarity with the Data*

First, I organised all collected documents and data. I ensured that for each of the 32 participants, I had a secure folder containing their signed consent form, interview recording and transcript, any notes of mine taken during their interviews and, if shared by the participant, pre-existing documents. I also built an Excel spreadsheet into which I organised all available contextual data, i.e., of each participant's demographic and socioeconomic background,

scholarship programme and source of funding, and academic, career, and post-completion trajectories (see 3.1. *Participant Profiles*). Second, I deepened my familiarity with the data through five actions: (i) listening to interview recordings, (ii) revising Teams-produced transcripts while re-listening to interview recordings to ensure the former's accuracy; (iii) reading and, whenever needed, translating revised interview transcripts; (iv) studying my interview notes and any provided pre-existing documents; and (v) annotating data items with initial thoughts while uploading them, later, to NVivo 12.6.

At this point, I also checked the scientific quality of all provided pre-existing documents. I did so by checking them against four criteria (Scott, 1990, cited in Mogalakwe, 2009, pp. 51-56): (i) that they are authentic and of a trusted origin; (ii) that they are credible and free from distortion; (iii) that they are representative and their content is typical of their type; and (iv) that they offer meaningful, clear, and comprehensible evidence. I deemed authentic and credible all 18 documents that 11 (34%) of the 32 participants provided because these participants themselves shared them directly with me; moreover, both the content and the metadata of these documents showed they were of the participants' own production for various purposes, e.g., applying for scholarships or jobs (prior to participation in the research). I also deemed these documents representative because they reflected exactly the purpose for which they are typically used, e.g., a CV/resume or personal statement as part of applying for jobs or scholarships. I also deemed them useful in this research because they offered additional insights that confirmed, broadened, or further enriched substantive and contextual data gleaned from the participants' interview transcripts and, where completed, their background questionnaire.

### *Building Descriptive Codes*

My third step towards building experiential themes involved data-driven, descriptive coding of interview transcripts and pre-existing documents. I began this step on MS Excel, following Wiltshire and Ronkainen's (2021) proposal of CRTA, which they illustrated by referring to two transcripts. However, I soon realised the process would be inefficient, if at all manageable, given the amount of data I had. I then transferred my data items to NVivo and restarted building data-driven codes that described the data as it appeared. A data-driven code is a label I assigned to, and through which I summarised, certain parts of text in these sources based on whether I identified these parts of text as describing closely similar experiences (Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021). For example, one participant said:

BTI [Business and Technology Incubator] offered a first-of-its-kind training in data science, and I joined it for eight months, during which I learned the basics of working as a data scientist, especially in freelance roles. I then started looking up jobs online, and doing so helped me become clearer on which field I want to complete my Masters in. (translated)

Using the Node feature of NVivo, I coded this as *earlier training in the field*; as *earlier job search in the field*; and *program choice reportedly associated with earlier experiences*. As I progressed through this data-driven coding, I began a continuous process of annotating reactions to the transcripts (using the Annotation feature) and memo-ing my reflections on the content and process of analysis (using the Memos feature).

A later action in this step of data-driven, descriptive coding was logical deduction, checking whether resulting data-driven codes are available in more than one participant's profile (Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021). Using NVivo allowed me to apply logical deduction mostly simultaneously with data-driven coding, and it made it quite a straightforward process with the guiding principle of descriptive validity: if a new excerpt offers descriptive insight *and* this descriptive insight is captured in an existing data-driven code, the excerpt is added to that code. For example, another participant said:

My work in social media at GGateway exposed me to marketing, of which social media is a small part of the organization's marketing. I wanted to do my course because it approached marketing as a core activity of businesses, not as a separate department. (translated)

I added this to a new Node on NVivo, *earlier work experience in the field*, and to the Node resulting from the previous participant's case, *program choice reportedly associated with earlier experiences*. Codes resulting from this dual step of data-driven coding and logical deduction are hereafter referred to as descriptive codes, i.e., data-driven codes grouped together according to descriptive similarity and substantive coherence. Data-driven codes that were not detected to exist in another participant's profile—i.e., lacked prevalence—were subjected to one of two actions: Those I did not deem of much relevance or sufficient meaning to the research were discarded; those I deemed otherwise were advanced as descriptive codes on their own.

After finishing coding the interview transcripts, I turned to coding pre-existing documents in a similar way. For example, I observed that one participant's CV shows that they published an academic article after their funded graduate education abroad. I added this observation in a new section at the end of the participant's interview transcript File in NVivo, prefaced it with "Documentary Data:". I then coded it in a new Node as *DD - post-completion publication*, with "DD" indicating this data-driven code was sourced from documentary data. I also extended logical deduction to codes sourced from pre-existing documents. For example, I observed in documentary and interview data similar instances of several participants publishing or engaging in knowledge production activities after finishing their scholarships. These observations were all added to the same Node, which I now renamed from *DD - post-completion publication* to *post-completion knowledge activity*. The latter was now a descriptive code.

### *Consolidating Descriptive Codes into Experiential Codes*

In the fourth step of this stage of data-driven descriptive analysis, I developed experiential codes by consolidating descriptive codes and applying quality checks for prevalence and meaning-significance. In doing so, I followed an adapted practice proposed by Fryer (2022), Ronkainen and Wiltshire (2019), and Wiltshire and Ronkainen (2021). By consolidation, I mean combining descriptive codes of significant empirical relevance to each other into new nodes, now containing nascent experiential codes. Wherever applicable, I edited each nascent experiential code to reflect substantive nuances of different descriptive codes combined into it. In this step, I also continued memo-ing my reflections on the content and process of this analysis. I illustrate this work in the example below and the subsequent table.

I grouped several descriptive codes into more than one tentative experiential code because they had significant empirical relevance to more than one. In Memos on NVivo, I reflected on the potential insights this cross-code connection could offer. Table (1) shows the descriptive code *Dealing with the writing challenge*. I consolidated this descriptive code into the experiential code stated in Table (1) as well as into another experiential code, *Exerting "high" or "unprecedented" individual learning effort*. In my memo on this double-coding, I noted the agentic behaviour potentially demonstrated by the connection between dealing with writing challenges and exerting what many research participants described as "high" or "unprecedented" individual effort in progressing through their studies. Analysis of agency is primarily done in later stages (see 2.4.4.3. *Working in the Real Domain*), but the reason why I noted it here was because I knew it was essential to applying the meta-theoretical framework

of the doctoral study, Everyday Peace Capability in a critical realist paradigm. In an NVivo memo, I also noted how the participants' reports of dealing with the writing challenge came in early, sometimes earliest, in their response to the interview question, how would you describe your experience during your study of X at Y institution? I reflected this note in the phrasing of the experiential code as shown in the following table.

**Table (1)**

Experiential code example

	<p><b>Dealing with the writing challenge</b></p> <p><u>Illustrative extract</u>: “I used to gather notes from my peers, study them, predict what questions may be asked in the essay exam, draft a few essays based on readings and my own thinking, memorize them, and try to use them in answering the essay questions at the time of the exam.” (translated)</p> <p><u>Illustrative extract</u>: “My first assignment was in December, and I spent 12 days working it, going to the library at 8am and leaving at 10pm. I was just trying to understand how to complete it. It was very difficult because the learning style was different and required us to read and then write our views...” (translated)</p>
<p><b>Sample</b></p> <p><b>Descriptive</b></p> <p><b>Codes</b></p>	<p><b>Experiencing a compound research reading and writing challenge</b></p> <p><u>Illustrative extract</u>: “It was, it was torturing for me because I never really in my life made research. I never read a scholarly article in my life. I graduated from Birzeit but without really reading any academic paper in my life. So, it was hard, very hard to read, to write, to be critical, to keep up with what they’re talking about. And another thing is that like how to do research, how to write, how to be critical.”</p>
	<p><b>Experiencing stress while writing</b></p> <p><u>Illustrative extract</u>: “I remember while stuck writing one of my summative essays, I felt stressed about it and I shared a Facebook blog on why our universities never introduced us to written assignments! I mean, all our assessments were of exams and tests, which didn’t help us learn how to write or do these kinds of written assessments.” (translated)</p>

**Experiential  
Code**

Several participants began their accounts by describing initial and/or constant struggles in dealing with the quantity and quality of (research) reading and writing in their study programmes.

Before confirming experiential codes, I ensured each was empirically adequate through checking it against four criteria. The first was meaning saturation, whether an experiential code delivers a fully understandable empirical pattern (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The second was prevalence, the number of participants to whom an experiential code applies. In metatheoretical terms of critical realism, prevalence refers to the extent to which a “demi-regularity” is observed in empirical data (Fletcher, 2016). The third and fourth criteria were descriptive and interpretive validity; that is, I constantly checked that experiential codes accurately describe and fairly represent raw data (Fryer, 2022; Ronkainen & Wiltshire 2019; Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021). Where needed, I adapted the experiential code to better meet these two analysis quality standards. A nascent experiential code without sufficient degrees of empirical adequacy, descriptive validity, or interpretive validity was refined through deconsolidation (into new freestanding experiential codes) and/or reconsolidation (into other, now adapted, experiential codes). Thirty-seven experiential codes resulted from this process and were adopted as empirical patterns—or empirical demi-regularities, in critical realist terms. Seven of these experiential codes were considered secondary, i.e., falling under a larger experiential code. Following Wiltshire and Ronkainen’s (2021) example, I made sure to reflect the level of prevalence of these codes in phrasing them (also see Fryer, 2022). Prevalence of codes is consistently reflected in quantified expressions as presented in Table (2) on the next page, in addition to more specific expressions, e.g., (about/over) a fourth/third/half of the participants.

**Table (2)**

Quantified expressions of prevalence

Quantified Expression	Reference ( <i>n</i> )	Reference (%)
Nearly all	29 - 31	91% - 97%
most	23 - 28	72% - 86%

many	18 - 22	56% - 69%
several	12 - 14	38% - 44%
some	6 - 11	19% - 34%
A few	3 - 5	1% - 17%

### *Developing Experiential Themes*

The fifth, final step of descriptive analysis was experiential theme development. Confirmed experiential codes, along with the reactions and reflections recorded on NVivo while coding, were developed into experiential themes. In this study, experiential themes refer to broad data-driven, descriptive categories according to which the participants' perceived scholarship experiences and outcomes were finally organised and presented. This thematic development followed a straightforward process of consolidation through classification vis-à-vis the first two research questions: What are some of the profile characteristics of Palestinian recipients of international scholarships? How do Palestinian scholarship recipients perceive their motivations for and experiences and outcomes of undertaking funded graduate education abroad? This step involved three actions. I first developed nascent experiential themes based on grouping together experiential codes of significant empirical relevance to one another. Next, I revised nascent themes based on whether and how well they demonstrated a coherent class of substantive findings. Finally, I checked revised nascent themes for empirical adequacy, descriptive validity, and interpretive validity. This process yielded four major themes, each representing a prevalent and significant segment of the participants' perceived experiences and outcomes of their funded graduate education abroad. These themes are presented in the next chapter (3.2).

### *Summary*

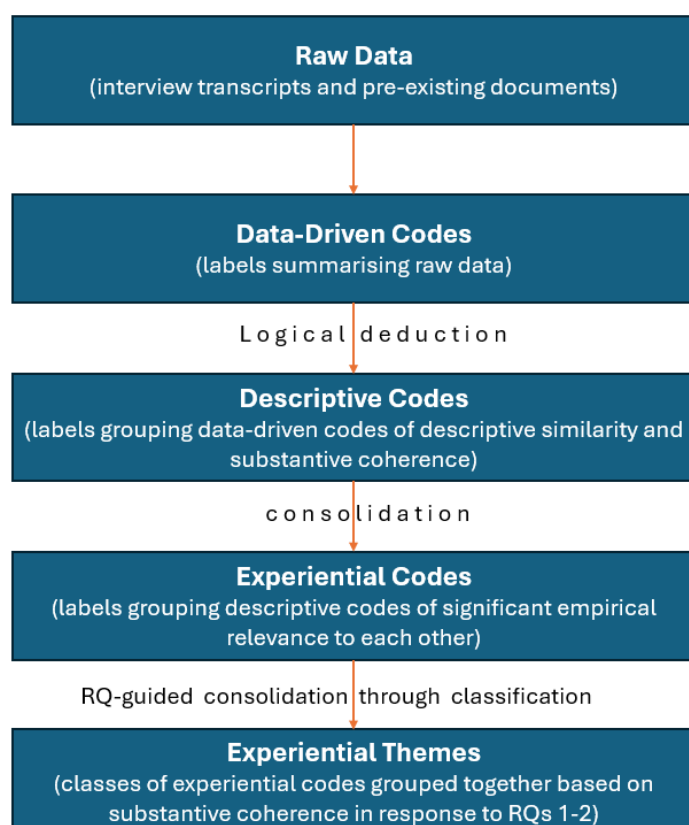
In this subsection, I have presented the five steps I followed in analysing the 32 research participants' interview and documentary data (Figure 3). All of these steps were in the empirical domain of reality; that is, my goal of completing them was to develop a "descriptive summarization" (Dan Wan et al., 2022) of the participants' reported backgrounds (RQ1) and of their perceived scholarship experiences and outcomes (RQ2). As demonstrated in each of the steps, although some abstract language was inevitably used in building and consolidating codes, I used neither a theoretical framework nor a pre-determined interpretive agenda in guiding my progress through this code-building and -consolidation process. Instead, I



deliberately tried to uphold faithfulness to the data and to the descriptive codes developed *up from* them, constantly checking them against clear measures of rigour and quality. This means that, inter alia, the empirical results presented in the next chapter are the data analysis outputs closest in language to the raw data—and, inevitably, in conceptual framing (see Murphy & Costa, 2022). As a final note here, and as I wrote in an article developed from this thesis, the descriptive summary developed from this stage of analysis “helps fulfill the essential, albeit often underestimated, role of description in social science research (Gerring, 2012), a role most crucial to building a baseline understanding of a topic as unresearched as scholarships for Palestinians” (Almassri, 2024b, p. 6).

**Figure (3)**

Steps of data-driven, descriptive analysis (working in the empirical domain of reality)



#### 2.4.4.3. Working in the Actual Domain of Reality

In the previous subsection, I presented the process of working in the empirical domain of reality. This process involved data-driven, descriptive analysis of the research participants’ perceived scholarship experiences and outcomes in order to address the descriptive-exploratory RQs 1 and 2: *What are some of the profile characteristics of Palestinian recipients of international scholarships? How do Palestinian scholarship recipients perceive their*

*motivations for and experiences and outcomes of undertaking funded graduate education abroad?* In this subsection, I present the process and result of moving from descriptive analysis to theoretical analysis of the empirical data to address the inferential-exploratory RQs 3 and 4: *Whether the Palestinian scholarship recipients' characterisation of scholarships impact in the OPT warrants some rethinking of the potential efficacy of scholarships vis-à-vis peace; and, if so, how do scholarships relate to peace in the OPT?*

In critical realism, the actual domain of reality is concerned with that which is indirectly observable and thus is inferred from observed manifestations of it. In this doctoral study, this domain covers the participants' responses to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that are represented in their data about their scholarship experiences and outcomes. These responses are inferred through applying the theoretical lens of Everyday Peace Capability to the data (see 2.3. *Theoretical Synthesis: Everyday Peace Capability*). The objective of this theoretical analysis is to explore the potential functions of everyday peace that are observable in the research participants' reported experiences of funded graduate education abroad. By continuing the application of Wiltshire and Ronkainen's (2021) CRTA, I planned and operated the abductive analysis process described in the rest of this subsection.

Abductive analysis refers to the analysis of empirical data against theoretical propositions (Earl Rinehart, 2020; Tavory & Timmermans, 2012). In this doctoral study, my objective of applying abductive analysis was two-fold. First, in response to RQ3, I needed to re-read, using the theoretical lens of Everyday Peace Capability, the research participants' data to determine whether the data extend empirical evidence to the research critique presented in earlier in this chapter (2.1.3), that is, whether the participants' reported scholarship experiences and outcomes offer some evidence of a link between scholarships and peace that is different from the pathways of diffusing liberal-democratic values (DL-DV) and institutionalising world society (IoWS). In response to RQ4, and still guided theoretically by Everyday Peace Capability, I needed to infer the ways in which scholarships may be said to relate to peace in the OPT based on the 32 research participants' data. I progressed towards this two-fold objective of abductive analysis in the three steps detailed below: theoretical re-reading of the empirical data, developing inferential codes of demonstrated functions of everyday peace, and developing an inferential theme of scholarships' potential relevance to peace. Here, it is worth sharing another reminder that although these three steps are described perhaps neatly, my experience of abductive analysis often involved cyclical progress through these steps rather

than linear advancement from one to the other—an observation about this stage also noted by Wiltshire and Ronkainen (2021) in their proposal of CRTA as a method of analysis.

### *Theoretical Re-reading of the Empirical Data*

First, progress from working in the empirical domain to abductive analysis was pre-initiated through multiple rounds of re-reading the experiential findings, i.e., those generated from data-driven descriptive analysis, as well as all the reactions and reflections I had noted in NVivo during that earlier work. These rounds of re-reading were for (i) checking overall descriptive and interpretive validity of experiential findings; (ii) editing for language clarity and presentability; (iii) addressing feedback and comments from my supervisors, mainly to further clarify used terms, improve development of certain sections, and deepen exploration of potential relationships among the experiential findings; and (iv) drafting the experiential findings for publication and addressing reviewer feedback. As I was completing these rounds of re-reading the data, I was perhaps taking a pause from “actual” analysis. Earl Rinehart’s (2020) enumeration of the benefits of such a pause in abductive analysis helped me approach it meaningfully, to *slide* reflectively away from a descriptive to an inferential mode of analysis, i.e., taking time to experiment with abductive thinking; and to zoom out a little to assess whether and how well my analysis progress coheres with the meta-theoretical framework of this research (also see Tavory & Timmermans, 2012). In practice, this “analysis pause”, or re-reading of the data and of NVivo notes, helped me focus on RQ3, that is, whether the 32 research participants’ accounts offer empirical evidence to the critique of DL-DV and IoWS as ways to explain scholarships’ potential relevance to peace in the OPT (2.1.3). Only by advancing through the abductive analysis process could I substantiate the initial inferences I began drawing amidst this pause.

### *Developing Inferential Codes*

With this further deepened knowledge of the substantive and methodological aspects of my study, my next step of abductive analysis was to draw on empirical data and theoretical concepts in exploring the phenomenon under consideration (Fletcher, 2016; Danermark et al., 2019). That is, I needed to explore the potential relevance-to-peace in the OPT of scholarships impact, in response to RQ4: *How do scholarships relate to micro-level peace in the OPT?* Relying on Everyday Peace Capability as a theoretical framework, I re-searched the empirical data for ways in which the participants’ reported scholarship experiences could be said to demonstrate responses to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This re-search involved going back through experiential themes and experiential codes to corresponding raw data, as well as to the

reactions and reflections I had noted in NVivo. In this re-search, I looked for empirical demonstration of modes of thought and/or action that involve rejection of, resistance to, and/or transformation of the conditions under and ensuing from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These modes of thought and/or action are theorised as functions of everyday peace, i.e., expressions of everyday peace capability (see 2.3. *Theoretical Synthesis: Everyday Peace Capability*).

As I conducted this re-search, I made inferences of functions of everyday peace represented in the data, and I constantly reflected on the ontological plausibility of these inferences (Ronkainen & Wiltshire, 2021), i.e., how putatively they may reflect the reality of everyday peace in the OPT. I then developed these inferences into inferential codes after assessing, refining and, whenever necessary, re-labelling them against two quality criteria: empirical adequacy, sufficient support for an inferential code in the participants' data; and interpretive validity, fair representation of empirical data in inferential codes (Ronkainen & Wiltshire, 2021; Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021). In NVivo, I created new nodes to represent inferential codes and to document my thoughts and reflections on the coding process. I then moved into these nodes the earlier-developed nodes containing experiential and descriptive codes of empirical data supporting the inferential code. This digital coding facilitated my constant reflection on the ontological plausibility, empirical adequacy and interpretive validity of inferential codes. It was also very helpful to me in keeping track of my progress.

To illustrate, the participants shared that during their funded graduate education abroad, they connected for the first time with co-nationals from other Palestinian backgrounds and engaged in academic and civic settings on Palestine. I had captured these reports in primarily two experiential codes and saved them as nodes in NVivo. In my re-search of both nodes, I drew an inference of a function of everyday peace. In my interpretation, the connection with co-nationals and the continued, now globalised, engagement on Palestine represented a degree of national resocialisation and international connection that, in their peaceful conduct and reconstructive effect, seemed to disrupt and contradict the socioterritorial fragmentation of Palestinians and the isolation of them from the outer world. I created a new Node to save this inference as an inferential code, refining it and ensuring its empirical adequacy and interpretive validity based on checking raw data captured in the two pertinent experiential codes as well as relevant data in other experiential codes connected to these two. Seven inferential codes resulted from this step, each representing a distinct function of everyday peace.

As this example may show, it is at this step of inferential coding that I realised I needed some additional conceptual terms not readily available in Everyday Peace Capability to express my inferences. This turned out to be the first of three instances where I needed additional conceptual terms to apply Everyday Peace Capability in this doctoral study (the second recounted later in this subsection and the third in the next subsection). Mindful of the epistemological relativism inherent to my choice, I chose to use conceptual terms familiar to me, those of governmentality and counter-conduct (Foucault, 1991; Senellart et al., 2009). I understand the former of these Foucauldian terms to refer to modes of complex control enlisting direct and structural power in disciplining the lives of populations, and the latter to refer to engagements through which this control is resisted and/or disrupted. In the OPT context, I understand ‘conflict governmentalities’ as any systemicity of material, social, and/or epistemic conditions that have an overall effect of governing conflict perpetuity (Gordon, 1991; Senellart et al., 2009). I also understand conflict governmentalities as deliberate and emergent; conditions making up a governmentality may be intended (deliberate) and, in their total effect (emergent), conducive to conflict perpetuity (see Chilmeran & Pratt, 2019).

As may be further clear from the example given above, inferential coding had three qualities: abductive, interdisciplinary, and reflexive. It was abductive because it involved redescribing empirical patterns in theoretical terms, shifting from a description of scholarship experiences to a theorisation of these experiences in terms of Everyday Peace Capability.

Also, inferential coding was deeply reflexive. I discuss this reflexivity in greater detail in the next subchapter, but the two most relevant aspects of this reflexivity here are that in making inferences, I based much of my interpretation on my understanding of the significance of represented scholarship experiences in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And, in doing so, I always drove and/or checked my interpretation against relevant work by a broad diversity of Palestinian educationists, academics, and (postgraduate) researchers (e.g., Abu-Lughod, 1973, 2000; Affounch, 2007; Alijla, 2019, 2020; Alijla & Al-Masri, 2019; Alzaroo & Hunt, 2003; Dana, 2015a-b, 2020; Elhour, 2022; Ismail, 2025; Jebiril, 2018, 2020, 2021; Khatib, 2018, 2022; Khayyat & Mousa, 2022; Marie et al., 2016; Nijim, 2020, 2023, 2024; Shibib, 2024; Tartir, 2015, 2018; Tartir et al., 2021).

Further, as asserted in critical realist research (see Danermark, 2019; Price, 2014; Wiltshire, 2018), inferential coding in this doctoral study was interdisciplinary because it required integration of knowledge across different fields, in this case International Education,

Peace and Conflict Studies, and Palestinian studies. Crucially, these three qualities begin to illustrate the legitimacy of critical realists' key assumption of epistemological relativism. The abductive, reflexive, and interdisciplinary nature of inferential coding meant, *inter alia*, that the coding process was shaped by the extent and limit of my interpretive competence and of my substantive and metatheoretical knowledge in/across these fields and areas. This recognition of epistemological relativism is constantly actioned in my narrative practice of reporting inferential findings, e.g., by using qualified language like "may," "can," and "potential", following the example of Wiltshire and Ronkainen's (2021).

### *Building Inferential Themes*

My final step of the abductive analysis process was consolidating inferential codes into themes. Whereas experiential themes represented descriptive summarisations of the participants' perceived impact of their scholarships, the inferential themes developed from this work in the actual domain of reality represent theoretical claims about the potential ways in which this perceived impact of scholarships is empirically demonstrated to be relevant to peace in the OPT. To build these themes, I examined the relationships between the different functions of everyday peace that were identified in the inferential coding step. I then grouped these functions together based on whether and how well they represented a coherent class of action counter to governmentalities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While doing so, I kept adjudicating the empirical adequacy, interpretive validity, and ontological plausibility of the consolidated inferential codes and subsequently refining the three emerging subthemes within, ultimately, one overarching inferential theme, *Facilitating Disruption of Conflict Governmentalities*. This theme is presented in the next chapter (3.3.1).

### *A Terminological Note on Abductive Analysis*

While identifying functions of everyday peace and examining relationships among them, I was served well by a few abstract terms with which I could offer the theoretical redescription key to abductive analysis (Fletcher, 2016). These abstract terms and the redescription purpose they served helped me conceptualise and express connections between empirical and inferential findings. I use 'abstract terms' rather than 'theoretical terms' to acknowledge my use of these terms in their generic conceptual reference rather than their specialised theoretical reference—though I did review the latter to ensure there was no major terminological-conceptual deviance. In other words, these abstract terms offered me the condensed expression of empirical findings that I believed facilitated theorising the latter in terms of Everyday Peace Capability. This condensed expression helped me keep track of and

trace my thinking through abductive analysis, and it guided my writing of the inferential findings. The following is a list of all such terms and their generic conceptual reference as used in inferential findings:

- Consciousness: used in a Freirean sense to indicate a particular state of critical awareness, i.e., that focused on oppressive forces (Freire, 2014; for illustration of its development through education abroad, see Byker & Xu, 2019).
- Self-efficacy: Confidence through individuals' execution of their capacities through courses of action for specific objectives (Bandura, 1989; for illustration of its growth through education abroad, see Petersdotter et al., 2017).
- Subject repositioning: Negotiation of one's subjectivity through interactions with and in relation to structural factors and social actors (Törrönen, 2001; for illustration of its exercise through education abroad, see Marginson, 2023b; Tran, 2016).
- Subjectivity: one's internal experience of the world and its flows of power, capital, and logics (Das & Kleinman, 2001; also see Marginson, 2014).

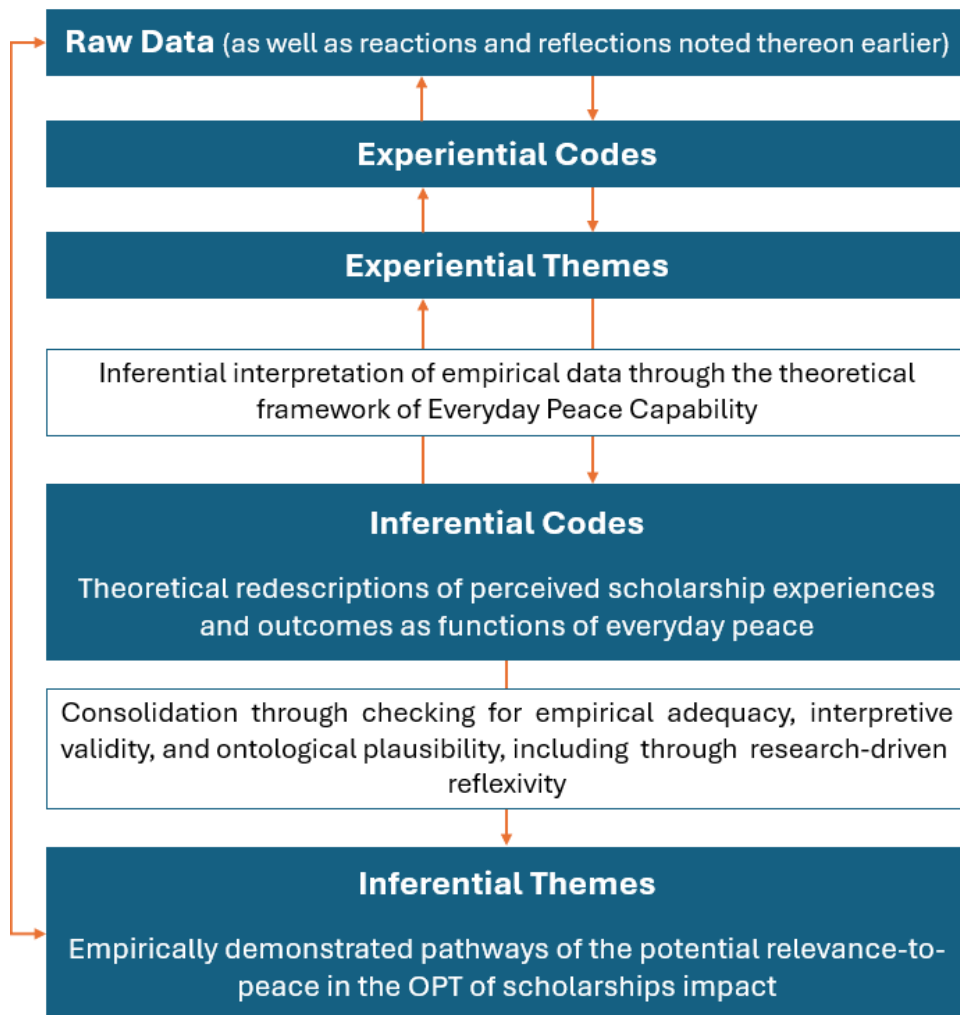
As Wiltshire and Ronkainen (2021) note in their proposal of CRTA, this simultaneous advancement of analysis and abstraction “rest[s] on acceptance of certain theoretical premises” (p. 174). In this case, accepted premises include those presented earlier of Everyday Peace Capability. They also now include the premises that may be associated with ‘consciousness’, ‘governmentality’, ‘counter-conduct’, ‘self-efficacy’, ‘subjectivity’, and ‘subject positioning’.

### *Summary*

In this subsection, I have presented the methodical process I followed in responding to RQs 3 and 4: *Whether the Palestinian scholarship recipients' characterisation of scholarships impact in the OPT warrants some rethinking of the potential efficacy of scholarships vis-à-vis peace; and, if so, how do scholarships relate to peace in the OPT?* This process involved dynamic dialogue between the empirical evidence, the theoretical framework, and constant assessment of the context-specific significance of findings resulting through this dialogue (Figure 4). Guided by Everyday Peace Capability and its operationalisation through conceptual terms drawn from Foucauldian, psychology, and critical theory, I looked for representations in the empirical data of functions of everyday peace. I then grouped these functions into three subthemes within an overarching inferential theme. Overall, this stage of data analysis led to a coherent theoretical claim about three potential ways in which scholarships impact is demonstrated to be relevant to peace in the OPT.

**Figure (4)**

Steps of abductive analysis (working in the actual domain of reality)



#### 2.4.4.4. Working in the Real Domain of Reality

The final stage of data analysis involved working in the real domain of reality. Before presenting my work in this last domain, it is worth highlighting that functions executed by individuals are not only outcomes of an individual's reasoning and possession of certain capacities. In the Capability Approach, functions are further theorised to be outcomes of a dynamic interaction between an individual's agency and various structures, where this interaction gives rise to capability (Smith & Seward, 2009). So, the functions of everyday peace presented in inferential findings are theoretically seen as outcomes not only of the research participants' reported capacity developments and directions of interest through their funded graduate education abroad. These functions of everyday peace are further theoretically seen as outcomes of interactions between structural changes and agentic behaviours demonstrated in these research participants' interview and documentary data. This theoretical position is



translated into method as follows: it provides that (i) where functions of everyday peace are inferred from the empirical data and (ii) where these inferred functions indicate some gain in the research participants' everyday peace capability, (iii) this gain can be explained on account of such interactions between structural changes and agentic behaviours. In critical realism, it is the purpose of working in the real domain to identify these interactions, to account for how they contribute to the occurrence of observable phenomena, i.e., functions of everyday peace. By developing this account, I could address RQ5: *What may explain the relevance of scholarships impact to micro-level peace in the OPT?*

At this last stage of data analysis, I continued application of Wiltshire and Ronkainen's (2021) method of CRTA. In the two previous stages, the techniques of this method involved data-driven description and logical deduction in the empirical domain and abduction, or theoretical redescription, in the actual domain of reality. In this stage, the mode of analysis is retroduction. In critical realism, retroductive analysis refers to a reasoning process of moving from the concrete and empirical to the abstract and ontological (Fletcher, 2016; Lawson, 1998). A mode of retrodiction is sometimes also invoked, referring to a similar reasoning process but one moving from the abstract and ontological to the concrete and empirical (McAvoy & Butler, 2018; Mukumbang, 2021). The goal of both is to explain factors and processes leading to the occurrence of observable phenomena (Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021), retroduction by considering observed occurrences first and then inferring the pertinent factors and processes, and retrodiction by considering plausible factors and processes first and then inferring their contribution to the occurrence of the observed phenomenon (McAvoy & Butler, 2018). As McAvoy and Butler (2018) note, "researchers often use the term retroduction to cover both retroduction and retrodiction, and sometimes neither term are [*sic*] used even if the principles are being followed" (p. 164). In this thesis, I only reference retroduction as the mode I used. I acknowledge that the nuanced techniques of retrodiction might have been necessary had this doctoral study involved multi-country or cross-case study investigation.

#### *Purpose of Retroduction*

In this doctoral study, my purpose of retroductive analysis was to develop ontological-level explanatory claims about the relevance of scholarships impact to micro-level peace in the OPT (RQ5). Based on empirical-level analysis of the research participants' data, scholarships impact was described as entailing significant development in their academic, career, and multidimensional identity capacities. Then, based on theoretical-level analysis, this scholarships impact was demonstrated to be relevant to everyday peace in the OPT; that is, the

inferred functions of everyday peace indicated some gain in the research participants' everyday peace capability. Then, the analysis advanced to an ontological level, examining the potential factors and processes that could be said to play a role in generating such gain in the participants' everyday peace capability. 'Factors' here comprise the structural changes and agentic behaviours demonstrable in the research participants' data, so they can be structural factors or individual factors. 'Processes' comprise the inter-factor interactions demonstrable in the research participants' data. When these processes involve interactions between structural factors or individual factors, they are referred to as 'structure-agency dynamics'. I had two reasons to choose these two terms here instead of 'causal structures', 'causal mechanisms', and other terms typical of critical realist metatheory (Hartwig, 2009). One reason, at the recommendation of several reviewers and colleagues, is to avoid the metatheoretical complexity often associated with these terms. However challenging to grasp at first, this metatheoretical complexity was valuable to me in calibrating my practice of critical realism but may be distracting to unpack here. The other reason is that I see this part of the doctoral study as one of articulation and not causal explanation, a distinction I unpack later in this section (see *Terminological Notes*). To use '*causal structures*' or '*causal mechanisms*' may well be counterproductive to reflecting this precise intention of this section.

### *Theory and Scope in Retroduction*

In progressing towards the abovementioned purpose of retroductive analysis, I continued relying on the theoretical framework of Everyday Peace Capability. In this framework, everyday peace capability refers to the effective ability to deliver functions of everyday peace. As stated previously, effective ability comprises a dual, negative and positive freedom: freedom *from* structural influences oppressing one's ability to apply their capacities in ways they wish, and freedom *to* function as one wills (Martins, 2007). And, functions of everyday peace comprise modes of thought and/or action that involve rejection of, resistance to, and potentially transformation of the conditions under and ensuing of conflict. Within this framework, I posited that any generation of gain in the participants' everyday peace capability is associated with simultaneous increase in both their effective ability to advance their functions of everyday peace and their agentic claim of this increased effective ability.

Simon Marginson's (2014, 2023a-b) work on student self-formation in international higher education was particularly useful for me here to further operationalise 'effective ability' as a composite explanatory category, i.e., a concept against whose multiple dimensions empirical data can be analysed to explain something. In his 2014 article, Marginson drew on

Amartya Sen and others' work to delineate three dimensions of freedom central to 'effective ability.' These dimensions are (i) negative freedom: removal of external threats and constraints on individuals' ability to function as they will; (ii) positive freedom: addition of capacities, resources, and social arrangements to allow individuals to exercise more of their abilities; and (iii) agency freedom: individuals' exercise of their active will in applying their abilities in functions of their choice (Marginson, 2014). This delineation was useful to me in establishing the scope of my ontological-level analysis, as was Lo's (2018) affirmative proposition that, from a Capabilities perspective, international mobility can promote individual freedom. I stated earlier that retroduction is the process of moving from the concrete and empirical to the abstract and ontological. I took the research participants' perceived scholarship experiences to be the concrete and empirical. The composite explanatory category of 'effective ability' was now my tool to make this retroductive move, to go back through inferential and experiential findings to the data and check empirical insights vis-à-vis each of the freedoms defined above. This seemed to me to be a good plan to apply the relevant segment in Wiltshire and Ronkainen's (2021) proposal of CRTA as a method of analysis, and one coherent with Fryer's (2022) adapted proposal thereof. I thought by doing so I would be able to find some of the factors and processes that can be said to play a role in generating such everyday peace capability gains and therefore give rise to the relevance of scholarships impact to micro-level peace in the OPT. I found assurance that, at least from a data analysis perspective, this would be a plausible approach. I did so when I saw the expanded contribution to the topic of student self-formation in international higher education that Marginson (2023a-b) made by drawing on authors who had driven my own thinking about structure-agency dynamics in my doctoral study, among them Amartya Sen (2001), Anthony Giddens (1991), Margaret Archer (1995, 2003, 2007, 2012), and Michael Foucault (1991; Senellart et al., 2009).

Based on this purpose and scope intended in this data analysis stage, I continued relying on Wiltshire and Ronkainen's (2021) CRTA proposal as well as on pertinent discussions of retroduction (Jagosh, 2020; McAvoy & Butler, 2018; Mukumbang, 2021). I set a tentative retroduction protocol to infer (i) dispositional effects of (ii) structural and individual factors that, when considered together, may suggest the existence of (iii) processes to which the demonstrated increase in the research participants' everyday peace capability is ascribable. I elaborate each step of this protocol below. I also defined a tentative scope for my search for structural and individual factors. The former can be of the Palestinian context, of scholarships, or of graduate education abroad that, as inferred from the empirical data, may be affecting any

or all of the participants' three freedoms. Individual factors can comprise attitudes and behaviours shown in the data to reflect the participants' exercise of their active will in pursuing the functions of everyday peace inferred during the abductive analysis stage.

### *Developing Retroductive and Dispositional Codes*

I began ontological-level analysis by building a list of retroductive codes, each representing inference of a dispositional effect. These effects are of changes in the structural and/or individual factors that influence the participants' effective ability to respond to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the pro-peace ways demonstrated in inferential findings and evidenced in experiential findings. Each of these structural and/or individual factors may have more than one dispositional effect, with these effects being dispositional precisely because the factors to which they ascribed may not always produce them. Their efficacy is contingent on other elements within the open system of the social world (Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021). I drew inference of dispositional effects through experimenting with different retroductive thinking prompts like those in relevant works on retroduction (e.g., Danermark et al., 2019; Fryer, 2022; Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021). My thought experimentations can be summarised in the following "neat" prompt: What specific structural and behavioural changes must be occurring for the research participants to be able to deliver the functions of everyday peace inferred from their scholarship experiences. I adjudicated results of this retroductive thought experimentation against three criteria of rigour and quality. The first two were interpretive validity and empirical adequacy, where I checked that the dispositional effects I inferred fairly represented and were sufficiently supported by the participants' data. The third criterion was ontological plausibility, where I checked that the retroductive inferences fairly reflected the reality of everyday peace in the OPT. Dispositional effects that I deemed empirically adequate and of interpretive validity and ontological plausibility were finalised as retroductive codes and added to new nodes in NVivo. As during abductive analysis, doing retroductive coding in NVivo made it seamless to check inferences for empirical adequacy and interpretive validity, as well as to keep track of my progress.

I then consolidated retroductive codes into dispositional codes, each representing a structural or individual factor to which one or more dispositional effects are ascribable (a term distinct from 'attributable' and carefully chosen to fit this research as explained later in this subsection). My application of this code consolidation was guided, again, by checks against the three criteria of rigour and quality mentioned above, e.g., whether and how well both the

participants' data and the reality of everyday peace in the OPT supported the ascribability of inferred dispositional effects to a certain structural or individual factor.

This sequenced retroductive-dispositional coding benefited greatly from my reflexivity. In determining whether a dispositional effect is ascribable to a particular structural or individual factor, I complemented my reliance on the participants' data with a research-informed, reflexive assessment. This assessment was of whether (and why I believed) extant research supports the plausibility of ascribing the concerned dispositional effect to a specific structural or individual factor. In making this assessment, as in the previous stage of abductive analysis, I often drew on relevant work of Palestinian educationists, academics, and researchers as well as on published materials by providers and supporters of scholarships for Palestinians (1.3).

An illustration of this step of dispositional coding may be helpful before continuing presentation of my retroductive analysis protocol. The participants reported scholarship experiences that demonstrate their education and life abroad involved not only knowledge advancement but also epistemic capacity-building. From this (and other) empirical demonstration, I inferred two activities: diversifying knowledge pursuits and advancing knowledge literacy. I considered both activities functions of everyday peace because they represented a mode of thought and action that involved active rejection of and resistance to the forces and ethos of knowledge de-development bred in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This inferential interpretation was guided by relevant publications on the reality of knowledge de-development and education destruction in the OPT (e.g., Gordon & Turner, 2024; Hammond, 2011; Jebril, 2021; Moaswes, 2024; McGahern, 2024; OHCHR, 2024). In retroductive analysis, I needed to infer the factors that can be claimed as making it possible for the research participants to deliver these functions of everyday peace, of diversifying knowledge pursuits and advancing knowledge literacy. To draw this inference, I first looked for cues in the participants' own reports of their scholarship experiences. For example, one participant volunteered a comparative comment on the quality of her learning experiences abroad by attributing it to the greater availability of research resources at her foreign university compared to those at her alma mater in the OPT. Another participant enumerated several aspects of everyday life in Palestine that made genuine, sustained learning engagements "very difficult." These and similar empirical insights, together with research-driven reflexive thinking about the broader context of education and life in Palestine, guided me in addressing the retroductive thinking prompt relevant here: What specific structural and behavioural changes must be occurring for the research participants to be now better able to diversify their

knowledge pursuits and advance their knowledge literacy? This thought experiment, in tandem with others about the other demonstrated functions of everyday peace, led me to infer certain dispositional effects and to ascribe these to specific structural and/or individual factors. However, it was not always that the participants' data included such (clear) cues. In such cases, I engaged a (i) higher degree of dependence on research-driven reflexive thinking in drawing empirically adequate, interpretively valid inferences and (ii) stronger check of the ontological plausibility of drawn inferences.

### *Building Dispositional Themes*

The third step of retroductive analysis involved building dispositional themes, each identifying a specific process of interaction between the structural or individual factors inferred in the preceding retroductive and dispositional coding steps. As mentioned earlier, I use 'process' and 'structure-agency dynamics' instead of 'causal structures', 'causal mechanisms', and other pertinent terms of critical realism (Hartwig, 2009) to avoid the potential distraction that may ensue of unpacking such loaded terms here.

To identify structure-agency dynamics and build dispositional themes, I examined relations among the dispositional codes by addressing a series of prompts, e.g., what does the data show about the potential relationship between different dispositional codes? How well does the data support the inference of a certain relationship between two or more dispositional codes? Is this inferred relationship plausible in the context of everyday peace in the OPT? As may be clear, these retroductive prompts were calibrated against the rigour and quality criteria outlined previously, and they invited continuation of the research-informed, reflexive assessment that was used in building dispositional codes—including through referring to the reactions and reflections I had recorded in NVivo during the two previous stages of descriptive and abductive analysis.

To illustrate, I inferred from the research participants' data a structural change that I coded as 'outscaling contact'. This dispositional code represented the change in the participants' effective ability to encounter, relate to, and/or connect with themselves, national and international peers, global perceptions of Palestine and of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and professional and/or epistemic communities of interest to them. I also inferred from the research participants' data a structural change that I coded as 'expanded opportunity through structured progress'. This other dispositional code represented the change in the participants' effective ability to access and benefit from educational resources and spaces that, by virtue of

their curricular and institutionalised nature, offered a coherent framework for learning progress. By considering the potential relationship between these two dispositional codes, I inferred a process to which the demonstrated advancement in the participants' everyday peace capability could, at least in part, be ascribed. This process was of altering the structural influences on the participants' everyday peace capability such that their rejection of ethos of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was not just enabled but also proactively supported (see 3.4.3). I drafted this process as nascent dispositional theme, *Structural Alteration*.

By (i) examining the potential relationships among four other dispositional codes and (ii) using terms of the theoretical framework of Everyday Peace Capability, I developed this nascent dispositional theme into a final one of *Guiding Conflict Disruption*, or the process to which advancement in the participants' functions of everyday peace, e.g., domestic-global connection and epistemic capacity-building, could be ascribed. Like other dispositional themes, this one helped me address RQ5: *What may explain the relevance of scholarships impact to micro-level peace in the OPT?*

Before turning to an explanation of some of the terminological choices I made throughout this chapter, it is worth reiterating that, as in the previous data analysis stage, the steps of retroduction were *nothing* as linear as presented above. Planning this retroductive analysis protocol required revisiting the core meta-theoretical assumptions of the doctoral study, and progress through this protocol usually required revisiting the previous step and/or considering the subsequent one. To ultimately build and systematically follow this protocol, it took me over four months of re-reading relevant works on the metatheoretical, methodological, and practical aspects of retroduction; experimenting with applying these aspects to my own doctoral study; running into roadblocks; taking U-turns; and making partial breakthroughs with some U-turns and despairing a little at the failure of others. When neither deliberate time lapses nor new experimentations led to breakthroughs, I acted pragmatically to embrace my *evolving* understanding of critical realism and proceeded to the next step.

### *Terminological Notes*

I cited earlier Wiltshire and Ronkainen's (2022) explanation for calling themes developed from retroductive analysis 'dispositional', for "they do not always produce actual events in the real-world" and their efficacy is contingent on other elements at work within the open system of the social world (p. 173). It therefore follows that what these themes offer is qualified *articulation* rather than causal explanation. This articulation is of what structure-

agency dynamics are pertinent to consider when trying to explain the generation of demonstrated gain in the participants' everyday peace capability. In clearer terms drawn from the work of sociologist-methodologist Noortje Marres (2024), these dispositional themes “formulate categories, cultivate sensibilities, so as to [make the relevance of scholarships to peace in Palestine] observable, explorable, and communicatable”; they enable “some entites [*sic*], some dimensions to stand out, to gain traction” in the study of the topic (p. 356). In a critical realist's words, articulation begins a process of “making complex abstract determinations about” scholarships and peace in the OPT, where “these [determinations] can be understood as holistic theorizations about the overarching [dynamics] underlying the reality” of scholarships' potential contribution to peace in the OPT (Knio, 2025, p. 2). Producing these determinations through articulation helps break down our understanding of the topic “into systematic simple abstractions that we iteratively develop over the course of our interactions with” scholarships and peace (Knio, 2025, p. 2).

To enable this articulation, I embraced the ‘ascribability’ of dispositional effects to structural or individual forces, as presented in the second step of retroductive analysis. By ascribability, I refer precisely to the empirically and ontologically supported, research-informed *plausibility of assigning qualities*, i.e., dispositional effects, to a certain structural or individual force. Following research scholar Ann Taves (2008), this ascription precedes and differs from ‘attribution’, which refers to attributing causal efficacy. By embracing ascribability in this sense, I accepted certain premises that enabled me to advance through the steps of retroduction. The following example may be illustrative. Some participants' data implied that scholarships had a symbolic power that, among other effects, seemed to elicit increased ambition and greater self-direction as well as confirm the viability of hope for continued academic, career, and broader success and fulfilment. A review of the webpages of scholarships for which the participants were selected and for which Palestinians are eligible (1.3) further suggested that these effects of scholarships' symbolic power could be at play in terms of inspiring advancement in everyday peace capability. Thinking back of how my Palestinian students, mentees, and fellow alumni spoke about scholarships made this empirically supported suggestion even more ontologically plausible. As did my thought further about relevant research on symbolisations of everyday resistance to conflict ethos in the OPT (e.g., Ebileeni, 2023). Because I accepted this premise, of empirically and ontologically sufficient support for scholarships having symbolic power of such effects in the OPT, I ascribed these effects to the



symbolic power of scholarships, coded them as retroductive codes, and ultimately included them in the relevant dispositional theme (3.4.1).

This embrace of ascribability, however, is not to claim permanent, complete, or necessary (characterisation of) relations between the dispositional effects and structural or individual forces presented in this thesis. On the contrary, it highlights these structural and individual forces as worthy of further research. For example, the first dispositional theme presents correspondence of scholarships' symbolic power with context-driven predispositions to education development in the OPT. This correspondence may be a logical, ontologically plausible assumption but one empirically disconfirmable. I, however, accepted it in this doctoral study in light of (i) extant research supporting it, (ii) absent evidence disconfirming it, and (iii) past experiences of mine in working and engaging with scholarship supporters and beneficiaries as well as of being socialised into those predispositions through primary, secondary, undergraduate, and informal education in the OPT.

Throughout dispositional themes, I highlight such premises and the limits of the claims I have produced through retroduction. I do so through using certain vocabulary and qualified expressions e.g., “claim”, “*identified* mechanisms”, “*demonstrated* gain”, and “considering available empirical evidence”, “it is *plausible* to suggest”, etc. I also hope that this narrative practice illustrates the importance of Taves' (2008) distinction of ascription from—and as a basis for—attribution and Marres' (2024) argument for articulation as a prerequisite of quality explanation in social research. It may be fitting to further illuminate this point with the following adaptation of Tave's precise note (2008):

Only if a person first ascribes efficacy to practice [studying abroad] relative to a goal [influencing everyday peace capability], in effect creating an efficacious practice [scholarships' influence of everyday peace capability], can they *then* attribute causality to the practice [scholarships' generation of everyday peace capability gain]. (p. 129, emphasis added).

Continuing in this spirit of terminological calibration, it became clear to me during retroductive analysis that Everyday Peace Capability as a theoretical framework had further terminological limitations—as was the case in the earlier stage of abductive analysis (2.4.4.3). At this stage of retroduction, I experienced these limits of the theoretical framework when I was trying to articulate the forms of agency demonstrated by the participants in their reported scholarship experiences. I overcame this limitation by turning back again to Simon

Marginson's works (2014, 2023a-b), discussed earlier in this subsection. I also turned back to more concepts in my repertoire that I believed would maintain fair representation of the participants' data and deliver coherent terms with which I could better articulate patterns of behaviour observed in the participants' data. A synthesis of Taleb's (2012) conception of antifragility with some concepts in Yosso's (2005) seminal model of Community Cultural Wealth seemed to me to fit that dual purpose well. This synthesis availed to me two key conceptual terms: aspiration, "maintain[ing] hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77), and antifragility, resilience in *and* development through navigating and resisting structures of disadvantage (Yosso, 2005, 80-81; Taleb, 2012). By using these terms in redescribing the participants' agentic behaviours through their scholarship experiences, I could more clearly think about interactions between structural and individual factors identified through the retroductive process. In the interest of clear delineation of the participants' agency, individual forces—patterns of agentic behaviour prevalent in the data—that are articulated with these conceptual terms are presented in a theme of their own (3.4.4). Such clarity of delineation, as emphasised in research on international students (Marginson, 2014), is significant in illuminating the emancipatory and relevance-to-practice potentials of critical realism, both of which I discuss in the fourth chapter (4.4). Finally, besides its potential to lay some foundation from which future (attributional) research may begin, I see this work of articulation as particularly important both in the Palestinian context and in the research, evaluation, and discourse of scholarships. I discuss this other implication in the fourth chapter (4.4).

### *Summary*

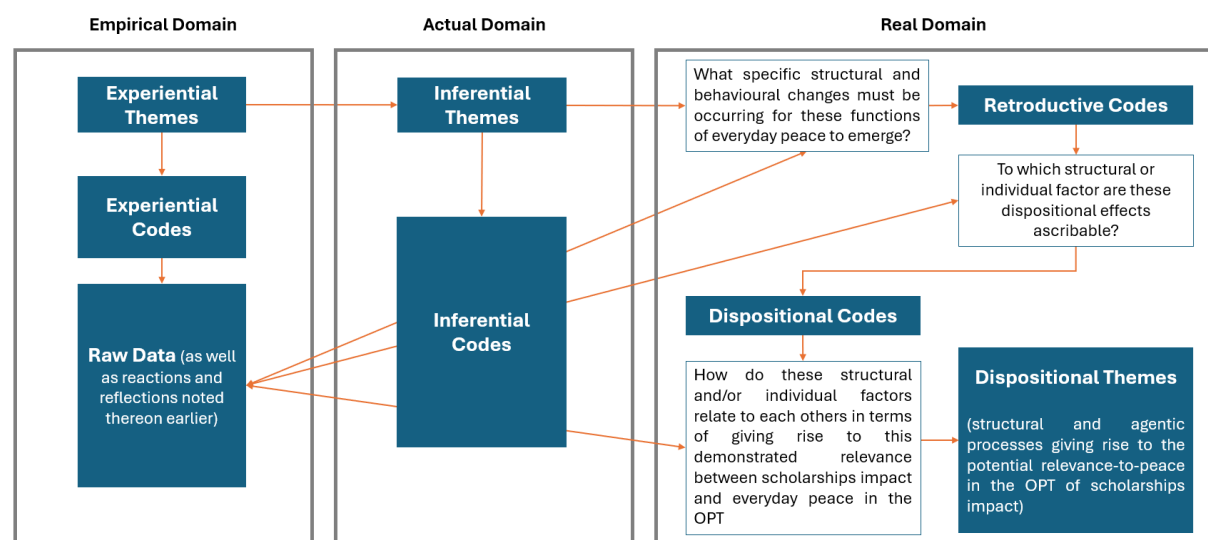
In this subsection, I presented the last stage of the data analysis process. This stage involved working in the real domain of reality, that concerned with the mechanisms that give rise to the phenomenon under research. In this doctoral study, the purpose of working in this domain was to address RQ5: *What may explain the relevance of scholarships impact to micro-level peace in the OPT?* Therefore, the focus of this last stage was to advance the analysis from a description of scholarships impact (empirical domain) and a redescription thereof in theoretical terms of Everyday Peace Capability (actual domain) to an articulation of ontological links giving rise to this demonstrated relevance between scholarships impact and everyday peace in the OPT. To undertake this advanced stage, I first revisited the meta-theoretical assumptions of this doctoral study, namely those about how the generation of demonstrated gain in the participants' everyday peace capability may be identified and explained. By these

assumptions, I enjoyed theoretical guidance through my methodological re-search of the empirical data for structure-agency dynamics to which the demonstrated increase in the participants' everyday peace capability could plausibly be ascribed.

With this purpose and scope of retrodution, I went on to apply a three-step protocol of analysis. The first step was building retroductive codes, of changes in the structural and/or individual factors that influence the participants' effective ability to respond to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the pro-peace ways demonstrated in inferential findings and evidenced in experiential findings and empirical data. The second step was consolidating retroductive codes into dispositional codes, each representing a structural or individual factor to which one or more dispositional effects are ascribable. The last step was building dispositional themes, each identifying a specific process of interaction between the coded factors that illustrates the structure-agency dynamics behind the demonstrated gain in the research participants' everyday peace capability gain. This retroductive analysis process and its dependency on preceding data analysis states are summarised in the Figure below.

**Figure (5)**

Steps of retroductive analysis (working in the real domain of reality)



This retroductive analysis led to ontological-level explanatory claims about the relevance of scholarships impact to micro-level peace in the OPT. These explanatory claims are distinct, on at least two major counts, from outcomes of positivist inquiry. Unlike the latter, these claims are not developed only based on empirical data. The retroductive mode behind their development included a degree of speculation about, again, what must be true for the empirical manifestations to arise, i.e., the functions of everyday peace demonstrated in the

participants' reported scholarship experiences. Although this ontological-level analysis was rooted in the empirical data, it ventured beyond it in order to produce plausible explanations of how scholarships impact may relate to peace in the OPT (RQ5). Because of the internal checks within critical realism, those of epistemological relativism and judgmental rationalism, this venturing was principled against criteria of interpretive validity and ontological plausibility, i.e., fidelity of retroductive inferences to both empirical data and the reality of everyday peace in the OPT. This principled nature of retroduction, including its speculative dimension, made me make good, oftentimes self-critical, use of pertinent existing research that helped me gauge—and reflect in my writing—the basis-in-evidence and ontological plausibility of the retroductive inferences I drew. This is markedly different from the tradition in positivist research of limiting inferences to empirical assessment (Kurki, 2007; Tikly, 2015). It follows, second, that the explanatory claims developed from retroductive analysis are not concerned with offering the deterministic or probabilistic formulas of reality that are typical of positivist inquiry (Kurki, 2007; Tikly, 2015). Rather, their function is of articulation, of new “categories”, “sensibilities”, and “entities” that may add to our understanding of and ability to explore and communicate about reality (Marres, 2024, p. 356).

It is fitting here to close by highlighting Kurki's (2007, p. 365) clarification of the distinction of critical realism from positivism:

In conceptualising ontological reality, scientists always draw on the conceptual and metaphorical tools available to them and, in this sense, science is always social process. Epistemologically, critical realists emphasise pluralism and ‘opportunism’: the nature of the ontological object has an important role in defining which ways of knowing are appropriate to it.

An appropriate complementarity to the “opportunism” described in the quote is that the ways of coming to know an ontological object may be shaped by the positionality of the claimed knower and the “conceptual tools” that may be offered by this positionality. This was very much the case during retroductive analysis and indeed, as reflected previously, throughout this doctoral study. My positionality significantly aided me in the “social process” of trying to explore and explain the potential relevance-to-peace of scholarships impact in the OPT. I described this positionality at the beginning of this thesis. In the next and final subchapter below, I extend this description by recounting the ways in which I made active use of this positionality through different activities of the research and writing process.

## 2.5. Reflexive Practice

In the previous subchapter, I presented the materials and methods used in the doctoral study. I demonstrated there how I translated into methodological practice the research critique and meta-theoretical assumptions presented earlier in this chapter. I had routinely explained why I made certain decisions regarding the stance, scope, design, and plan of this doctoral study, often signposting that reflexivity was key in making those decisions, as was the personal background presented at the start of this thesis. I did that primarily following two works. One was by Leon Anderson (2006), which highlighted reflexivity as an analytic and relational activity. This work was useful to me in locating reflexivity within the metatheory and practice of critical realism (see Almassri, 2023). The other was by Soedirgo and Glas (2020), whose work offered accessible guidance on doing and demonstrating “active reflexivity” in social research. I draw on both works in making this reflexivity statement. I follow Soedirgo and Glas’ (2020, p. 530) recommendation that researchers should “show” their exercise of reflexivity when sharing their work. I have already begun this show, with many references throughout this thesis to what assumptions and rationales guided my planning, implementation, and reporting on the doctoral study. Therefore, my goal of this reflexivity statement is not to recount every way in which (I realise) my positionality did or could have influenced my approach to planning, conducting, and reporting on the doctoral study. Rather, I wish to consolidate—by way of elaboration or extended illustration—some of the key reflexive experiences involved in my implementation of the study and writing of this thesis. I do so by presenting the analytic, relational, and linguistic dimensions of my reflexivity in the following three sections.

### 2.5.1. Analytic

On the analytic and relational dimensions of reflexivity, Anderson (2006) wrote, “it entails self-conscious introspection guided by a desire to better understand both self and others through examining one’s actions and perceptions in reference to and dialogue with those of others” (p. 382). In this vein, reflexivity is not self-analysis conducted in isolation from the world. Much rather, it comprises dialogic self—critique, so spelled to represent an extended process of active dialogue between my understanding of the phenomenon under consideration, reflective and self-critical engagement with the participants’ data about it, and actors pertinent to the research, e.g., supervisors, reviewers, and potential readers. Prior to my doctoral study, I

had been prepared well for this dialogue (1.1). My status of active, multi-role, almost decade-long membership in the phenomenon under study offered me “intimate familiarity” (Anderson, 2006) of many different, though certainly not all, aspects of scholarships’ potential relevance to peace. This intimate familiarity acted as one major criterion—beside existing research and feedback from supervisors, reviewers, and others—against which I critiqued my individual understanding of scholarships’ potential relevance to peace in the OPT. I presented a major example of this dialogic critique in the first subchapter here (2.1). The genesis of this critique formed in a personal feeling of “intellectual discomfort at limiting the value [of scholarships] to economic terms, where employment, job title, work sector, and level of income are interpreted as sufficient and valid evidence of good scholarship impact” (Almassri, 2023, p. 2). As I demonstrated in an autoethnography associated with this doctoral study—and built significantly on Anderson’s (2006) work, this personal feeling arose from the dissonance I perceived between this careerist characterisation of scholarships impact and the broader ways in which I had seen this impact unfold for fellow Palestinian scholarship alumni, within a context of potentially broader societal significance of this impact in the OPT (Almassri, 2023). Because of analytic reflexivity, I needed to bring this personal feeling and individual perception into active, critical dialogue with scholarships research and with empirical data on scholarships impact in the OPT. This dialogue led to the critique presented earlier, one reflecting an examination of my perception in reference to both fellow researchers’ work on scholarships and fellow Palestinian scholarship alumni’s appreciation of scholarships impact.

As may be clear from this example, reflexivity conceived as an analytic dialogic exercise was a key resource for me to practice the third tenet of critical realism: judgmental rationalism. In the relevant section (2.2.3), I said that I tried, to the best of my ability, to be critically conscious of the theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices made in conducting the research. By these ‘critically conscious attempts’, I referred to the dialogic process of (i) checking existing research on the theoretical, methodological, and analytical approaches I considered, (ii) reflecting on whether and how I thought these research insights establish or disestablish the plausibility of these approaches for this doctoral study, and (iii) continuing reflection on how well the choices made delivered on their intended purpose. For example, in the account of *Theory and Scope in Retroduction* (2.4.4.4), I referenced the assurance I found of my retroductive analysis plans when I saw Marginson (2023a-b) drew on the same authors as myself when he expanded his contribution to the topic of student self-formation in international higher education. In this case, analytic reflexivity entailed being alert

to whether and how empirical and conceptual work relevant to my doctoral study warrant continuation, re-evaluation, or revision of premises and analytic actions accepted and taken.

In another case, my analytic reflexivity took a proactive form. I looked for works corroborating the soundness of premises and analytic procedures I was considering. In the account of *Developing Inferential Codes* (2.4.4.3), I mentioned *what* terms I used to help operationalise the theoretical framework of Everyday Peace Capability. These were governmentality and counter-conduct (Foucault, 1991; Senellart et al., 2009). I also explained there *how* I understood each of these terms, the former referring to modes of complex control and the latter to engagements through which this control is resisted and/or disrupted. *Why* I decided to go on with using these terms followed my search for works that corroborated my assessment of the soundness of my conceptual and operational understanding of these terms. This search led me, among other works, to a special issue of *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* (see Joronen et al., 2021). The entire special issue, on *Palestinian futures: anticipation, imagination, embodiments*, offered consistent, rich illumination of why ‘governmentality’ and ‘counter-conduct’ were appropriate, indeed precise, conceptual and operational terms to use in making inferential codes of what functions of everyday peace are represented in the research participants’ data. A later work, focused on higher education and hope in the OPT and drawing on articles in the aforementioned special issue, further confirmed the positive corroboration I found in the special issue. In this work, McGahern (2024, p. 830) wrote the following, which concisely sums up the argument of her article:

the combination of military, infrastructural, industrial and administrative tactics which have been used to isolate and enclose the campus; raid, injure, maim and kill people and animals; destroy property and key physical defences; degrade natural resources vital to its survival; disrupt university life and educational routines; and erode the physical and mental capacities of its students and staff over time, are not only illustrative of siege warfare but of ongoing and continuous attacks on Palestinian futures in the present.

At the time of reading this article, I had already developed and was about to publish the inferential findings. Still, McGahern’s (2024) work was useful to me in building further on this data analysis progress. It offered me clarity about the dispositional effects and structural and individual factors that I looked for during the subsequent stage of retroductive analysis, with

this clarity being instrumental in navigation of the roadblocks and U-turns I described earlier in my account of *Building Dispositional Themes* (2.4.4.4).

To further illustrate, the data from research participants, the intimate familiarity I had developed with scholarships in Palestine, and research like that cited above all contributed to the retroductive inference I mentioned earlier: that scholarships had symbolic power that, among other effects, seemed to elicit increased ambition and greater self-direction as well as confirm the viability of hope for continued academic, career, and broader success and fulfilment (3.4.1). I also made another inference of the research participants' expression of agency through aspiration and antifragility (3.4.4). In making both inferences and ensuring they are ontologically plausible, I was constantly thinking of the numerous public and private accounts I regularly encountered of fellow Palestinian scholarship recipients in whose cases these two inferences can be clearly observed (Horizons-Pal, n.d.; also see Buheji, 2025).

In these examples, the analytic dimension of reflexivity offered a value of dialogic adjudication. Where (i) the research participants' interview and documentary data supported an initial inference, I brought this initial inference in dialogue with (ii) what is established in research on Palestinian and international higher education and (iii) what I thought I knew about the experiences of Palestinian students applying for and undertaking funded education abroad, before (iv) adapting and eventually confirming the inference and writing it as an inferential finding. Before turning next to the relational dimension of reflexivity, I should mention that I particularly enjoyed this adjudication because Anderson's (2006) conceptual guidance offered me a clear way of *doing* judgmental rationalism, which as noted earlier is peripheralised in critical realist research (Isaksen, 2016). The relational dimension of reflexivity below may further illuminate a way of doing judgmental rationalism in critical realist research.

## 2.5.2. Relational

Beside the analytic dimension, I mentioned above that Anderson (2006) outlines a relational dimension of reflexivity. Soedirgo and Glas' (2020) proposal of "active reflexivity" illustrates this dimension of my reflexive practice. Soedirgo and Glas (2020) define active reflexivity as an ongoing tripartite assessment of one's positionality and its reception by others, followed by critical reflection on one's subsequent actions to manage their positionality and its reception by others. They extrapolate that reflexivity in this sense can be meaningfully practised only if approached from a position of epistemic humility. Like critical realists, who



embrace epistemic relativism, Soedirgo and Glas (2020) write that meaningful practice of reflexivity rests on “accept[ing] the complex, contingent, and *human-ness* of the research enterprise and allow[ing] this recognition to shape our research designs, interactions, and interpretations” (p. 529, emphasis in original). Soedirgo and Glas (2020) conclude their proposal by recommending four strategies for practising active reflexivity: regularly recording the tripartite assessment outlined above, systematically reflecting on the data collection process, inviting others into the reflection process, and visibilising reflexivity in the writing process (pp. 529-530). It would be out of scope and focus to try to illustrate in this section how my reflexive practice integrated actions from each of these strategies. Instead, and pursuant to the goal stated of this subchapter, I share some of my key research experiences that help illuminate the relational dimension of practising active reflexivity.

#### 2.5.2.1. Insider Status

First, I brought an insider status immediately observable to the research participants, and one communicated to them in the consent package. I thought of this insider status as a long-maintained, immersive, and authentic one. In the autoethnography connected with this doctoral study, I described this status in the following terms (Almassri, 2023, p. 3):

Beside sharing with [Palestinian scholarship recipients] the experience, settings, and context of the phenomenon [of undertaking funded education abroad], I had connected well with them in social settings (as a flatmate, friend, new encounter, and social media connection), in professional settings (training and advising over 120 scholarship applicants, and often engaging socially with those who were successful and whom I met abroad or kept in touch with), and in research settings (through engaging current and prospective scholarship applicants and recipients as participants in research I completed on other topics).

This insider status offered me great opportunity. I demonstrated earlier that it offered me the intimate familiarity I needed to plan my research approach such that it might be sensitive to and plausible in the context of the OPT. In two preceding sections, I also hinted that this insider status—publicly accessible but also explicitly stated in the consent package sent to participants—might have helped secure positive responses to the invitation to participate in the research (see sections 2.4.1 *Sampling* and 2.4.2. *Data Collection*). During interviews, several research participants readily acknowledged a *shared* interest in the doctoral study. For instance, after noting his view of scholarships value to Palestinians as taken for granted, one participant,

in the UK, volunteered his agreement that this research was important to generate documentation and reflection on this value of scholarships to Palestinians. Another research participant, who studied social work in the US, was more attentive to the open interview approach, which I had deliberately designed and conducted to welcome a broad array of input from the research participants. In indicating his shared interest in the doctoral study, he said,

الاشي الي انا حبيته في الدراسة تبعتك انو انت ما طبعت الاشياء هاي واجيت حكيت فيها، والي احنا كلنا دايما بنحكي فيها بينا وبين بعض انو اه والله بنواجه المشاكل هاي بتصير الشغلات هاي لكن ما في واحد حطها قدام الشخص الابيض في بحث ولما احكي عن الشخص الابيض بحكي عن الي هي الغرب، ما اجا واحد حكاه تعال في هنا بحث بحكي ٣ ٢ ١ هاي الناس بتواجهه، وهادا بتخيل يمكن كان جزء من اسباب احنا معاناتنا انو دكاترتنا ما كانوا يعرفوا انو كنا بنعاني خلال دراستنا لانو محدش حكالهم.

What I liked about your research is that you did not normalise these issues [difficulties of travel and education abroad] but discussed them. We always discuss these issues among each other, e.g., the problems and issues we experience; however, no one has presented them in a research study before White people. By “White people” I refer to the West. Nobody has brought them research to inform them that these [students] face X, Y, Z issues. I think part of our suffering was perhaps that our professors did not know that we were struggling with our studies because nobody told them.

Other participants were more subtle in their indication of this mutual interest in the doctoral study, e.g., volunteering elaborate responses to interview prompts like What do you think motivated you to pursue this scholarship? this programme? How would you describe your experience during your study of X at Y institution? This can also be observed in the case of 11 of them (34%) who, at their continued consent, led the interview to last for over 75 minutes, the maximum duration announced in the consent package.

Beside aiding this active and implied shared interest in the doctoral study, my insider status seemed to facilitate a sense of ease and/or trust among most participants during interviews. One participant’s favourable perception of (the nationality aspect of) my insider status was explicit as illustrated in the exchange quoted below. This exchange followed her elaboration of critical stances she developed during and after her scholarship on issues of national identity and local education:

أنس: أنا ممتن جدا يعني لمستوى الصراحة إللي عم تشاركي فيها كل هاي التفاصيل لأنه أحيانا بتعرفي ببيكون في عنا هذه الحمية للوطن إنه أوك أنا بعرف إن هادا الاشئ بصير بس ما رح أحكي عنه لأنه ما بدي سمعة الوطن تصير سيئة.

المشاركة: لا لأنو عشان انو فلسطينية بين بعض مش مشكلة يمكن لو كنت من جنسية ثانية كان شوية عملت تحفظات عال موضوع.

Anas: I am so grateful for how openly you are sharing all of these details because, as you know, we sometimes have that patriotic fervour where we know something [bad] is happening but we decide not talk about it because we do not want to do reputational damage to the country.

Participant: it's okay because we're Palestinian ourselves. Perhaps if you were of a different nationality, I would've been somewhat reserved [in my discussion] on the topic.

A second participant was recounting how far too much she had to endure at her workplace when she emphasised "it is hard to share these ideas with anyone in Gaza." In response to the prompts later on national life-related outcomes of scholarships (see Appendix C), the same participant said "I don't share this in public, believing in [Israeli-Palestinian] coexistence under the right conditions. You know what I mean." Three other participants concluded their interviews by volunteering an expression of having *enjoyed* the conversation. One of them said the interview was "a great opportunity" for a pause for reflection amidst her "always busy days." Another elaborated as follows:

أنا هاي الاشياء الي حكيتها مستحيل اناقشها مع حد خارج نطاق الدائرة المقربة، او حد معندوش اكسبيرنس بره، لأنو مستحيل يفهم الاشياء الي بحكي عنها، او حتى الناس المقربين مستحيل يفهمو التفاصيل الي بحكي عنها، وهادا اشي محزن انو الناس لأنو فش عندها اكسبيرنس مش قادرة تفهم الي بتحكي عليه. ... استمتعت بالنقاش، طلعت افكار اول مرة اطلعها بنقاش، استمتعت بالنقاش اكثر ما انه اشي بحثي او اشي اكايمي

I would never discuss these things that I said with people outside my close circle or with someone with no experience abroad because it will be impossible for them to understand these things. The details I share may be impossible for even close people to comprehend. And that is sad because people don't have experience abroad, so they cannot comprehend. ... I enjoyed the conversation. It was the first time for me to share some of the ideas I shared. The conversation was enjoyable as it was not so much scholarly or academic.

Only one of the 32 participants seemed explicitly reserved. At the end of their 36-minute long interview, the third shortest in duration, they were saying their scholarship experience did

not really change their political views when they truncated their response by saying: “بغض النظر شو هي/ regardless of what they [my views] are.”

I took full, constant notice of these perceptions of my insider status and the subsequent—or consequent—interview performances. During data collection, I verbalised my appreciation for what I believed was the generosity and, often, openness with which a research participant was sharing their input. Where their openness exceeded my expectations, I acknowledged that with a thank-you and a reiteration of the anonymity and confidentiality guarantees agreed in the consent process. And, where I assessed (i) it was appropriate and (ii) there was little risk of me leading their input, I engaged in reciprocity in two ways. One was sharing a little about my own scholarship experience after their input, e.g., struggling with research writing and meeting Palestinians from the West Bank and beyond for the first time. The other way was actively welcoming their extended commentary on issues I believed were of particular interest to them. I based this belief and subsequent interview action on my understanding of what these issues may mean for a Palestinian. For example, when the research participants touched on scholarship experiences of everyday personal independence, I followed up by inviting them to elaborate on any such experiences if they wished. This invitation followed my belief that (i) everyday personal independence is not often a characteristic or gender-neutral experience for Palestinians in the same age group as the research participants; and (ii) that this scholarship experience may well be within the scope of the investigation of scholarships’ potential impact on everyday peace in the OPT (see 3.2.4.3).

So far in this subsection, I have presented perceptions of my insider status and their potential implication on the research participants’ approach to their contribution to this doctoral study. I also presented my response to these perceptions in the implementation (but also in the design) of interviews. This practice of the relational dimension of reflexivity was not, however, limited to my positionality vis-à-vis that of the research participants. As Soedirgo and Glas (2020, p. 527) assert, active reflexivity involves continuous assessment of “how our positionality is read by others, given their own social location and the contexts in which we interact.” This aspect of the relational dimension of active reflexivity was crucial to my progress through conducting the doctoral study and writing this thesis. I demonstrate that in the subsection below.

#### 2.5.2.2. Researching Scholarships (to Palestinians) as a (Palestinian) Scholarship Alumnus

I began attempts to disseminate my doctoral research as early as April 2023. Three factors enhanced my confidence and competence to do so: continuous and high-quality feedback from my three supervisors at Durham University, service as an editorial assistant for a peer-reviewed journal on education abroad, and prior success in conference participation as well as recent success in (co-)publishing other research of mine. Each of these factors is worthy of discussion in relation to my reflexive practice not just in my doctoral research but also in my broader academic and researcher development. For brevity, however, I focus this subsection on how my research dissemination attempts expanded opportunity for me to learn external perceptions of my positionality as a (Palestinian) scholarship alumnus researching scholarships (to Palestinians). I therefore focus on the segments of feedback from peer reviewers and editors that helped me better understand and reflect this positionality in the narrative, substance, and framing of the thesis.

In April 2023, I had just finished data collection and was beginning thought about my reflexive approach to analysing it. At the time, while looking up research on reflexivity, I read Anderson's (2006) work on analytic autoethnography. I appreciated the insights on reflexivity I found there; moreover, as a scholarship alumnus, I thought they were readily applicable to a proposal of critical realist autoethnography as a methodology not only to researching but potentially also for optimising scholarships impact. I developed this proposal into a manuscript, sought and received constructive feedback from my supervisors thereon, and submitted it for review for publication (Almassri, 2023). Two of three anonymous reviewers then expressly offered their evaluation of my positionality as a good contribution to the proposal. One assessed that my positionality was "essential to the methodological and conceptual approach taken." The other commented, "The author is no doubt an ideal case, a scholarship awardee researching scholarships, but the broad strokes of this approach demonstrate a method of thinking about scholarships outside the standard neoliberal frame." This positive feedback, in addition to that earlier from my supervisors, affirmed to me the legitimacy of my reflexivity as a key resource for doing my doctoral study. I said 'legitimacy' because while I—and my supervisors—recognised the value of my positionality to doing "scientific research" on scholarships, I had doubts whether my positionality would be as appreciated for a "Q1 journal." The first reviewer's comment on the manuscript being "an excellent illustration of the epistemic power of international students" affirmed to me that my lived experience as a Palestinian scholarship recipient could be a valuable resource for doing my doctoral study. In this instance, continued

reflexive practice in my doctoral research was induced by the interaction between its outcomes and positive evaluation thereof by two anonymous reviewers. In a later instance, during abductive analysis, this external evaluation of my positionality aided me in being attentive to what the research participants' data may demonstrate about the epistemic dimension of the relevance-to-peace of scholarships impact.

I proceeded with this positive affirmation to the first of the three aforementioned data analysis stages (2.4.4). When I completed it, I relied on Wiltshire and Ronkainen's (2021) guide on narrating the experiential themes developed. As I did, I applied a similar narrative practice as that I had used in the article mentioned above. My decision on keeping this narrative practice was, to a great extent, an outcome of the interaction between my prior application of it, i.e., in the article, and the two reviewers' consensus on its suitability. One of them said the writing was "deeply moving and beautifully written" and "both delightful and painful to read," before adding, "... having read the 'findings' section and been deeply moved and convinced, I would not sacrifice a single paragraph... to make room for this [expanded literature review]." When I shared the resulting narrative of experiential themes with my supervisors, their substantive, conceptual, and editorial feedback helped me further refine my narrative practice, e.g., clarify conceptual terms, analysis procedures, and links between substantive findings; use more illustration and signposting; and fix issues of writing mechanics. In this instance, the relational dimension of reflexivity challenged me to critique and adapt my substantive analysis as well as performance of my linguistic positionality in articulating the process and outcomes of this substantive analysis (I discuss the linguistic dimension of my reflexive practice in the next section). These interactions with others and, as Soedirgo and Glas (2020) posit, their enhancement of self-critique of positionality led to greater appreciation of the substantive and narrative quality and the overall trustworthiness of my doctoral research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This was evidenced by the acceptance of all three manuscripts in which I reported the experiential themes (Almassri, 2024a, c-d). It was also expressly recognised by some reviewers, one of whom said,

The article, through its beautiful narration of the data, allows a preview of the sensitivities of the experience of creators of a marginalized body of knowledge and the suppression of agents who are in a position to communicate this knowledge to the rest of the world (scholars and researchers from Palestine working on issues of Palestine).

Finally, others' assessment of my positionality greatly benefited my reflexive practice in framing my doctoral study as presented in this thesis. Time and time again, reviewers—as well as colleagues at conferences—prompted me to share and/or be more reflexive in my understanding of the significance of scholarships (i) within the historical context of the OPT and (ii) against the three levels of sociological analysis, that is, scholarships impact at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels. Before and after my abductive analysis and the theorisation involved then and afterwards, prompts from external reviewers helped me plan and apply a stronger degree of reflexivity. As highlighted previously, this stronger degree of reflexivity involved making abductive and retroductive inferences based on the following five actions: (i) consulting relevant research by Palestinian educationists, academics, and researchers based in the OPT and abroad; (ii) searching proactively for literature to calibrate my categories of analysis and corroborate the soundness of initial inferences, including conducting rapid reviews to complement participants' empirical data and my descriptive and theoretical inferences; (iii) explicitly justifying the scope of the doctoral study, i.e., the focus on peace and on the micro-level; (iv) dedicating a subchapter to scholarships for Palestinians; and (v) establishing my authorial visibility throughout the thesis.

As part of this self—critique, I also took note of the linguistic dimension of my reflexive practice, as reflected in different previous sections (2.3.1; 2.4.4.2). I discuss this linguistic dimension in the next final section.

### 2.5.3. Linguistic

My language and translation performance played a key role in this doctoral study. My departing point for this dimension of my reflexive practice was Murphy and Costa's (2022) previously cited chapter on the key role of language in innovative theorisation in education research. In their work, Murphy and Costa (2022, p. 24) wrote, "social theory itself is a form of language, a 'language that is able to illuminate, sometimes amplify, the understanding of the world we aim to explore' (Costa et al. 2018, 2)." The philosophical terms of critical realism offered me a language through which I made explicit for (my) critical reflection and dialogic adjudication the ontological assumptions in accordance with which I then sequenced, structured, and justified my theoretical and methodological choices and procedures. In articulating the outcomes of these procedures, I relied on a dual language, one derived from and connected to both the Palestinian context—or, at least, my understanding thereof—and pertinent research in International Education and International Relations. In so doing, I heeded

Isaksen's (2016) critique of methodological applications of critical realism. He then noted that comprehension is not only a cognitive and linguistic process but also a bodily and lived activity. He further clarifies that comprehension as such functions better to inform interpretation of a phenomenon. It was that dual language that helped me put into actionable (and accountable) analytic form the lived experience and understanding I had about Palestinian context and the reality of scholarships' potential relevance to peace there. The substantive and methodological comprehension I thereby developed was key to me in developing inferences about the phenomenon under focus in this doctoral study.

This simultaneous exercise of linguistic reflexivity and, through it, analytic reflexivity took an explicitly relational dimension through the multilingual aspects of the doctoral research. Given the landscape of scholarships research (1.2) and of critical realism (2.2), nearly all of the research cited in this thesis is in English. This linguistic dependency challenged me to exercise a higher level of dual effort to (i) understand research in my second language and, in consistency with the contextual-disciplinary languaging described above, (ii) to be more critically attentive to whether and how well (I thought) the stances, theories, concepts, and terms used in this "universal" language of research related to the Palestinian context. This active linguistic-relational exercise of reflexivity was continuously prompted by the advice and relevant work of my primary supervisor, Prue Holmes (Holmes et al., 2016; Nemouchi & Holmes, 2022), further showing the intersection of the relational and linguistic dimensions of reflexivity.

In this intersecting form, reflexivity was a key tool of interpretation for me. It was so when I tried to identify and fairly re-present language nuances during my translation of data shared by the participants in colloquial Palestinian Arabic. In translating this data, I was mindful that its linguistic substance and form were potentially shaped by the participants' perception of my positionality as a fellow Palestinian. In action, I ensured my language translation but also data interpretation were informed by this social nature of the data. Consider, for example, the epistemic trust that several participants expressed with phrases like the following, each from a different participant, and which they then performed in their often elaborate and sometimes open input during interviews:

أحكبك الخلفية الي انت بتعرفها...

I'll tell you the background you know...

اكيد انت بتعرف الصحة النفسية كيف بموضوع انو لما تكون قاعد لحالك وبتضلها الافكار تيجي في بالك...



You surely know the mental health implications of being alone with your thoughts [while abroad]...

I took these phrases and their elaborate/open approach to their interview with a fellow Palestinian, myself, to imply some degree of epistemic trust, by which I mean their confidence in both my understanding of what they were sharing and my appreciation of its significance. This interpretation of the social nature of the data extended my exercise of linguistic-relational dimensions of my reflexivity, e.g., giving me guidance and confidence through the inferential and terminological thinking involved in retroductive analysis (2.4.4.4).

### Subchapter Summary

In this subchapter, I have demonstrated the analytic, relational, and linguistic dimensions of my reflexive practice through the doctoral study. I illustrated how Anderson's (2006) approach to analytic reflexivity served me well in developing and articulating findings based on constant, critical dialogue between the participants' data, existing research pertinent to the doctoral study, and my personal knowledge (Polanyi, 2003) of the context and phenomenon under focus. By embracing this dimension of reflexive practice, I did not treat my positionality as a risk to be managed or pretend that I could "suspend or hold in abeyance [my] presuppositions, biases, assumptions, theories, or previous experiences to see and describe the phenomenon" Gearing (2004, p. 1430). To do that would have been blatantly inconsistent with the critical realist stance of epistemic relativism (2.2.2). By this stance, any and all knowledge claims developed about reality are seen as laden with the academic, cultural, personal, and other background elements we bring to every step of the knowledge production process by virtue of our life trajectories. Instead of pretending I did, or ever can, suspend that effect of my positionality, I tried to take intentional and conscious actions to ensure that my influence of the research process was (i) more a product of active dialogue with existing research rather than an undue and unchecked bias and (ii) that reasoning behind and consequences to these actions are visibilised in the reporting of the doctoral study.

I also demonstrated that my reflexive practice had a strongly relational orientation. My understanding and (linguistic) performance of my insider status first contributed to informing the scope and approach I took in this research as well as the language I have tried to use. During data collection, I actively engaged with my positionality and with the participants' perception thereof. This reflexive practice through interviews seemed to play a role in the substance and

extent of the research participants' sharing of their bilingual data. Then, the two processes of data analysis and research dissemination offered rich opportunities to build on prior reflexive actions and to extend a relationally and linguistically self-critical approach in this research. Both processes involved a cycle of seeking, receiving, negotiating, and actioning feedback from PhD supervisors, anonymous peer reviewers, and journal editors, among others. Confirming the pertinent element of active reflexivity proposed by Soedirgo and Glas' (2020), these interactions helped me achieve and reflect a deeper understanding of my own positionality and its reception by scholars, researchers, and peers in the field. They also guided and challenged me to be more explicit in delineating and improving my reflexive practice of narrative, substantive and framing aspects of my doctoral study.

Overall, the analytic, relational, and linguistic dimensions of my reflexive practice were valuable assets that helped me conduct the doctoral study with a mindset of self—critique, making full, research-informed and explicit and therefore accountable use of my positionality as a Palestinian scholarship alumnus researching scholarships impact in the OPT. Assessing an outcome of this self—critique, a peer reviewer said it symbolised epistemic power. I also see it as an “epistemic advantage” in the terms of a key critical realist, Tony Lawson (1999). Coming to scholarships research with my national and academic background was useful to me in seeing beyond the careerist and neo-liberalist framings of scholarships impact. It was also instructive to me in taking the critical approach elaborated throughout this chapter. I summarise this approach below before presenting the findings to which it led.

## **Chapter Summary**

In this five-part chapter, I have presented the research critique, meta-theoretical framework, methodological procedures, and reflexive practices that I used in investigating scholarships impact and its potential relevance to peace in the OPT. In doing so, I pursued three interrelated objectives. In the first subchapter (2.1), I demonstrated the significance of building a context-driven approach to investigating (dis)connection between scholarships impact and peace. By critically reviewing ISM research, I illustrated its theoretical poverty when it comes to exploring scholarships impact beyond its manifestation in capacity developments, career advancement, and technical functions in the workplace. By further reviewing pertinent IR research vis-à-vis the Palestinian context, I illustrated the ideological bias and current ontological implausibility of the two models predominantly used to explain the relevance-to-peace of education and exchange abroad activities. By the first model, diffusing liberal-

democratic values, Palestinian scholarship recipients are presumed to study in liberal-democratic countries, to internalise the politico-economic values experienced there and, upon return to the OPT, to disseminate and systemise these values. They are presumed to (be able to) do so under protracted Israeli occupation and violence, despite fragmented, corrupt, and exclusive national Palestinian institutions, and against the popular view among fellow Palestinians that liberal democracies have actively or passively enabled the conflict to persist. The second model, institutionalisation of world society, presupposes that Palestinian individuals, institutions, or even scholarship providers have a strategy of translating the experiences of individual scholarship recipients into a coherent programme of building Palestine's membership in global political, economic, scholarly and other institutions. The national context described and problematised in the first chapter (1.3; 1.4) casts much doubt on the plausibility of this presupposition, especially in the absence of data, research, and official and scholarly reflection on scholarships for Palestinians.

Having demonstrated this strong need for alternative models to explain the relationship between scholarships and peace, I sought in the two subsequent subchapters (2.2; 2.3) to explain the theoretical viability and greater ontological plausibility of the alternative approach proposed in this doctoral study.

To achieve this second objective, I first described the overarching metatheoretical assumptions of critical realism, and I discussed their applicability to investigating scholarships impact and everyday peace *in the OPT*. I further discussed how the assumptions of ontological realism, epistemological relativism, and judgmental rationalism foregrounded a research approach that integrates appreciation of subjective scholarship experiences with in-depth analysis of the context in which these experiences emerge. This approach is markedly different from ones foregrounded by descriptive phenomenology, which, as commonly practised in scholarships research, prioritises empiricist analysis (of subjective perceptions of scholarships impact) over theoretical interpretation (of subjective perceptions in the broader context in which they arise).

Then, in the third subchapter, I demonstrated how these metatheoretical assumptions served as a coherent metatheoretical basis for synthesising Sen's (2001) Capability Approach with Mac Ginty's (2021) Everyday Peace approach, while keeping fidelity to the research context, scope, and questions of this doctoral study. The resulting Everyday Peace Capability framework offers meta-theoretical guidance of how (else) to conduct the investigation of

scholarships' potential relevance to peace in the OPT. Instead of truncating the investigation at descriptive analysis of perceptions of this potential relevance or prescribing the peace to which scholarships impact may be relevant, *Everyday Peace Capability* offers a more careful approach to conceptualising peace and to establishing the relevance thereto of scholarships impact. It first requires building empirical evidence of the capacities gained through scholarships; exploring any advancement of functions of peace demonstrated in this empirical evidence—where these functions represent contextually positive responses to conflict; and *then* identifying the factors and processes through scholarships that give rise to the demonstrated advanced functions of peace. this demonstrable ontological links between scholarships impact and peace. In this alternative model, pathways of the potential relevance of scholarships impact to peace remain open to contextualisation and refinement, based on local realities and the experiences of research participants.

Proceeding from this research critique and with this meta-theoretical framework, my third and final objective of the chapter was to demonstrate the practical applicability of the alternative approach taken here to investigate scholarships impact and its potential relevance to peace in the OPT. In the fourth subchapter, I distilled the meta-theoretical assumptions, together with the research scope, into a series of methodological assumptions and sampling and data processing procedures fit for the purpose of addressing each of the five RQs. Perhaps the most significant and original exercise in this distillation was the illustrative application of Wiltshire and Ronkainen's (2021) full data analysis protocol. By this application, I illustrated how critical realist metatheory can be actioned into a viable, rigorous, coherent, and powerful method of analysing the data vis-à-vis the five RQs. I elaborated how this method enables the analysis to address (a) the descriptive-exploratory RQ1 and 2 in order to build empirical evidence of the capacities gained through scholarships; (b) the inferential-exploratory RQ3 and 4 in order to identify any advancement of functions of peace demonstrated in this empirical evidence; and (c) the inferential-explanatory RQ5 in order to explain any demonstrated occurrence of increased everyday peace capability. I cemented this account of the practical applicability of the new research approach by recounting active reflexive practice throughout the doctoral study. I highlighted the analytic, relational, and linguistic dimensions of this reflexive practice, which I pointed out was constantly guided by the epistemologically relativist and judgmentally rationalist assumptions of critical realism.

Altogether, these five subchapters may demonstrate the original approach undertaken in this doctoral study to examining scholarships impact and its potential relevance to peace in

the OPT. I present the results of applying this novel approach in the next chapter (Ch. 3). In the subsequent chapter (Ch. 4), I discuss the multi-fold potential contribution that this approach offers to advancing the research, impact, and potential relevance-to-peace of scholarships.

## Chapter 3

# Scholarships Impact and Its Demonstrated Relevance to Micro-Level Peace in the OPT

## Introduction

In this chapter, I present the findings of this doctoral study, which investigates the potential relevance of scholarships impact to peace in the OPT. I developed these findings through applying Wiltshire and Ronkainen's (2021) aforementioned method of critical realist thematic analysis to the interview and documentary data of the 32 research participants. By applying this method, I analysed the data in a sequence of three stages (2.4.4), and I was guided in doing so by both the five research questions (1.4.3) and the meta-theoretical propositions of Everyday Peace Capability in a critical realist iteration (2.2; 2.3). The results of this three-stage data analysis are presented in this chapter as follows.

First, profile findings introduce the research participants in terms of their demographic, academic, and post-completion trajectories (3.1). These findings outline a response to RQ1: *What are some of the profile characteristics of Palestinian recipients of international scholarships?* While not exhaustive or representative of characteristics of Palestinian scholarship recipients, these findings suggest that Palestinian students selected for international scholarships tend to be relatively young and recently graduated and to include men and women coming from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and succeeding in various graduate disciplines and education systems. The profile findings further demonstrate that the research participants, whose academic backgrounds were unsurprisingly concentrated in STEM and language fields, went on to pursue more diverse areas of study, whether specialised or new to them but often with a global outlook.

Second, I present experiential findings, which describe scholarships impact. I developed these findings through data-driven, descriptive analysis of the participants' data (2.4.4.2), so they correspond to the empirical domain, which is concerned with the experienced or directly observable aspects of reality (2.2.1). With these findings, I describe the patterns I observed as prevalent and/or meaning-significant in the participants' reported backgrounds, motivations, scholarship experiences, and post-completion engagements. These experiential findings helped me address RQ2: *How do Palestinian scholarship recipients perceive their motivations for and experiences and outcomes of undertaking funded graduate education*

*abroad*? The experiential findings show that the participants followed positive and negative motives for pursuing their funded graduate education abroad and, subsequently, perceived making significant capacity developments in the academic, professional, national, and personal aspects of their lives (3.2).

Also, the experiential findings formed the basis of empirical evidence that informed an initial response to RQ3: *Does the characterisation of scholarships impact in the OPT warrant some rethinking of the potential efficacy of scholarships vis-à-vis peace?* They showed virtually no support for framing the participants' scholarship experiences through the lens of liberal-democratic or global-institutionalist peace (see 2.1). That is, the participants' reported scholarship experiences and outcomes did not reflect a stage of socialisation into, internalisation of, or attempts at disseminating liberal-democratic values (according to the DL-DV model). Nor did the findings offer evidence of scholarships impact being coordinated to bridge Palestine's membership in the world society (according to the IoWS model). Rather, these findings underscored the role of scholarships in resocialising, complementing, and reflexivising the participants' *national* and international awareness, including a deepened sense of, if not commitment, to active national membership. The findings also underscored the absence of any role by official Palestinian or other institutions to incubate their global talent, let alone globally strategise it for serving the national cause. With this base of empirical evidence on scholarships impact in the OPT, I proceeded to addressing the inferential-exploratory and -explanatory RQs as overviewed next.

In the third subchapter, I present inferential findings, which are inferential interpretations of the relevance-to-peace of the scholarships impact evidenced in experiential findings. I developed these findings by redescribing the empirical data in theoretical terms of Everyday Peace Capability (2.3; 2.4.4.3), so they correspond to the actual domain, which is concerned with the inferred and indirectly observable aspects of reality (2.2.1) With these findings, I show three distinct ways in which scholarships impact is demonstrated to relate to everyday peace in the OPT. It involves advancement in the participants' effective ability to disrupt governmentalities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by re-negotiating their subject positions vis-à-vis the conflict (3.3.1.1), transgressing the disciplining effects of the conflict on their sense and practice of domestic and global citizenship (3.3.1.2), and seizing expanded possibilities for building their epistemic practices and repertoire (3.3.1.3). These inferential findings consolidated the response to RQ3, namely that the characterisation of scholarships impact in the OPT warrants major rethinking of the potential efficacy of scholarships vis-à-vis

peace. By highlighting the three aforementioned folds of scholarships impact being relevant to peace in the OPT, the inferential findings also offered a good response to RQ4: *How do scholarships relate to micro-level peace in the OPT?*

Finally, I present dispositional findings, which are explanatory claims about the factors and processes generating the relevance-to-peace of scholarships impact. I developed these findings through retroductive analysis, i.e., going back through the experiential and inferential findings to the raw data to infer what might have been the case in order for the demonstrated increase in the participants' everyday peace capability to emerge (2.4.4.4). These findings correspond to the real domain, which is concerned with the forces of structure and agency that generate phenomena in the world (2.2.1). In response to RQ5 (*what may explain the relevance of scholarships impact to micro-level peace in the OPT?*), I articulate with these findings ontological links that can be claimed as underpinning the positive connection between scholarships impact and everyday peace capability in the OPT. These links are the extended induction of hope in defiance of conflict-driven despair (3.4.1); freedom from forces governmentalising the participants' psychological, intellectual, social, and gendered behaviour (3.4.2); structured guidance and open possibilities for growing in conflict-disruptive ways (3.4.3); and antifragile, aspirational exercise of individual agency (3.4.4).

Overall, this chapter illuminates the multi-fold contribution that this doctoral study makes to scholarships research. I discuss this contribution in the Chapter 4, drawing directly on the findings presented in this chapter as well as on the meta-theoretical, methodological, and analytical practice that foregrounded them and which were presented in Chapter 2.

### **3.1. Participant Profiles**

In this subchapter, I describe the characteristics of the research participants' profiles as gleaned from their completed background questionnaire ( $n = 16$ ), shared pre-existing documents ( $n = 11$ ), and interview transcripts ( $N = 32$ ). Descriptive reporting of participants' profiles is a common practice in scholarships research (e.g., see Campbell, 2017; Haupt et al., 2021; Sodatsayrova & Waljee, 2017). This practice is particularly important in this doctoral study, which, as demonstrated in the first chapter (1.3), may be the first scholarly documentation of some of the demographic, academic, and career characteristics of Palestinian students selected for international scholarships. Guided by this assessment, I conducted rapid reviews of scholarship programme websites and other pertinent sources to begin locating the research participant profile findings within the context of scholarships to Palestinians (2.4.2).



Beside the valuable empirical insights they lend to this doctoral study and to scholarships research, these complemented profile findings provide information useful to inform future research and scholarship administration practices, as discussed in the next chapter.

### 3.1.1. Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics

In terms of demographics, the participants undertook their funded graduate education abroad between the ages of 22 and 31, with women making up 60% of them and men 40%. No one chose not to share their gender identification. This participation level seems to match Palestinian women's competitive access to scholarships. Based on my rapid review of publicly accessible information, women made well over 80% of all selectees for the Durham Palestine Educational Trust (DPET) scholarship between 2011 to 2024, 60% of all winners of the Oxford Brookes' Gaza Scholarship between 2011 and 2021, and around 50% of Palestinian Chevening awardees between 2018 and 2023.

Of the 16 participants who further completed the background questionnaire, six self-reported coming from an upper middle-class family, two from a lower middle-class family, and five from a working-class family. Also, 14 of the 16 participants self-reported residence in the OPT in an urban setting, and two in a refugee camp. However, nine reported having attended a primary school (grades 1 through 9) run by UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees. Thirteen reported having attended a public high school (grades 10 through 12), compared to three who reported having attended a private high school. While limited and ungeneralisable, these socioeconomic characteristics might indicate some diversity of scholarship recipients, which may be predictable given the diversity of providers and rationales of scholarships to Palestinians (1.3.2).

### 3.1.2. Academic Trajectories

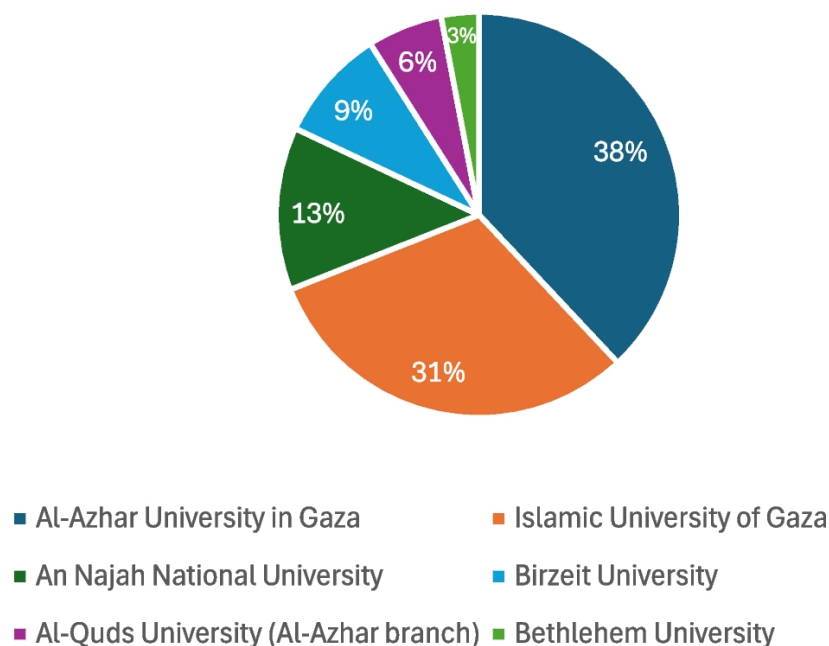
Academically, the 32 participants represented a diversity of trajectories. Their undergraduate programmes spanned languages (47%), mostly English but also French, medicine and related health programs (25%), engineering (9%), business (6%), law (6%), journalism (3%), and mathematics (3%). That is, the participants' undergraduate training spanning the humanities (50%), STEM (12%), and professional fields (37%). The prevalence of academic backgrounds in languages and in health-related fields potentially reflects the predominance of these fields as common choices for highest-achieving Palestinian school

leavers. The participants pursued their undergraduate programmes in these fields at six different Palestinian universities (see Figure 6).

Given prohibited mobility between Gaza and the West Bank, I take the prevalence of graduates from Al-Azhar University in Gaza and the Islamic University of Gaza to reflect the greater representation in the sample of Palestinians from Gaza than those from the West Bank (2.4.1), as well as the status of both as Gaza's two leading academic institutions, i.e., the ones to which outstanding school graduates most likely tend to go (before their destruction during the latest cycle of violence in Gaza). Twenty-eight (88%) of these participants, for whom data was available, waited on average for 2.4 years between completing their undergraduate degree and starting graduate study. This average interval is similar to the one documented in Elhour's (2022) research of Palestinian graduate students in England.

**Figure (6)**

Participants' institutions of undergraduate study



Source: Almassri (2024b, p. 7)

In their graduate study, 18 of the 32 participants (56%) pursued specialisation in their undergraduate fields, and 14 (44%) shifted their fields of study. Examples of specialisation include participants with an undergraduate business degree undertaking a graduate programme in marketing or in international business. Examples of shifting fields of study include participants who shifted from dentistry or pharmacy in their undergraduate study to

anthropology or development in their graduate study and others who shifted from English to social work, to international relations, or to global development. In the Sampling section (2.4.1), I mentioned that three research participants had completed two different MA-level scholarship programmes. Two of them double-shifted their fields of study, that is, they had their undergraduate degree in one field and went on to have two graduate degrees in two different fields. The third used her two MA-level scholarships to diversify her specialisation in her field of undergraduate study. These three participants are excluded from Table (3), which presents all the shift or specialisation pathway that the 29 remaining participants followed. As the table shows, over two thirds of the participants pursued graduate programmes that involved more than one social science discipline. The single greatest prevalence (19%) was of programmes in or heavily drawing on international relations, e.g., International Relations; Human Rights and Conflict; International Law (Human Rights); and Global Health (Conflict and Security).

**Table (3)**

Undergraduate-graduate pathway

<b>Undergraduate Program</b>	<b>Pathway</b>	<b>Graduate Program</b>
Business Administration	Specialisation	Marketing and Strategy
Business Administration	Specialisation	International Business
Civil Engineering	Specialisation	Water, Sanitation and Health Engineering
Computer Engineering	Specialisation	Data Science
Dentistry	Shift	Sustainability, Culture and Development
English and Education	Shift	International Relations
English and Education	Specialisation	Special Education
English and Education	Specialisation	Intercultural Communication and Education
English and French	Shift	International Media
English literature	Specialisation	Cultural and Literary Studies
English literature	Specialisation	Applied Linguistics
English literature	Shift	Journalism
English literature	Shift	International Relations and Affairs
English literature	Shift	Conflict Management & Humanitarian Action
English literature	Shift	Social Work
English literature	Shift	Human Rights and Conflict
English literature	Shift	Global Development
English literature	Shift	Comparative Literature
Environmental Engineering	Specialisation	Water, Sanitation and Health Engineering

French language	Shift	Tourism and Sustainable Development
Journalism and Media	Shift	Politics and International Relations
Law	Specialisation	International Law (Human Rights)
Mathematics	Specialisation	Mathematics and Statistics
Medicine	Specialisation	Global Health (Conflict and Security)
Medicine	Specialisation	Cognitive Neurosciences
Medicine	Specialisation	Child and Adolescents Mental Health
Medicine	Specialisation	Global Health
Medicine	Specialisation	Women and Children's Health
Medicine	Specialisation	Burns, Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery

Source: Almassri (2024d, pp. 13-14).

### 3.1.3. Study Destinations, Time, and Funding

The participants' study destinations spanned Australia (3%), England (66%), France (9%), Jordan (6%), Qatar (6%), Scotland (9%), Switzerland (3%), and the U.S. (6%) (note the total is greater than 100% because three participants held two different scholarships each and completed two MA-level programmes in two different countries). The greater representation of participants who studied in the UK, 87% of whom attended Russell Group universities, may reflect their more positive response to the invitation to participate in this doctoral study. It may also reflect my greater access to them and potentially one or more of the following factors: the prevalence and comparatively greater awareness in the OPT of scholarships to study in the UK, preference for the relatively shorter duration of Masters programmes there, and the reputability of UK higher education (Elhour, 2022; also see UCU, 2017). These education abroad destinations are not surprising given their association with availability of scholarships, a point that the participants made very clear as demonstrated in the next subchapter. It is my assessment that it is difficult, in light of unavailable statistics or systematic data, to evaluate how these destinations compare to the overall destinations "chosen" by Palestinian students.

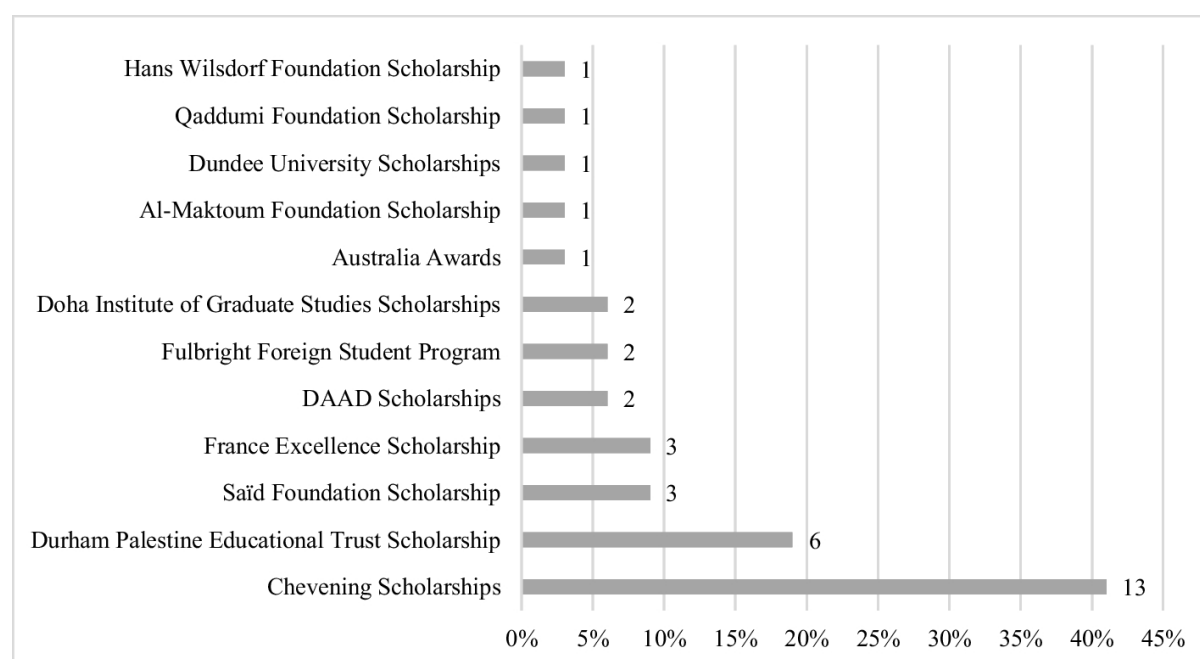
All participants reported having successfully completed their programmes abroad, including the three participants who used two different scholarships to complete two different graduate programs. Twenty (63%) of the 32 participants were studying between early 2020 and late 2021, when varying degrees of COVID safety restrictions were applied in their host countries. Twenty-two percent were studying in the academic year 2020-2021 and had their experiences fully or substantially impacted by COVID measures. Others (28%), who were

studying in the academic year 2019-2020, had some or half of the period of their education abroad affected by COVID measures.

The participants' scholarship programmes spanned different categories of primary funding from foreign governments (65%), private foundations and charities (37%), and universities' institutional aid (9%) (Figure 7). This distribution was not surprising given the predominance of foreign government-sponsored scholarships to Palestinians (1.3.2). The small representation of recipients of institutional scholarships may also reflect the comparatively more difficult access to such recipients. For example, Chevening and Fulbright (and DPET) alumni may know and, in snowball sampling, lead to each other because of their common spaces of interaction, as well as be more easily known given the often public recognition their scholarships offer. In contrast, a recipient of a scholarship from a specific university may not be as easily identifiable, whether to me or to fellow Palestinian scholarship recipients not at or near that specific university.

**Figure (7)**

Scholarships awarded to participants



Source: Almassri (2024b, p. 8)

In addition to the three research participants who completed two scholarship programmes separately, seven other participants reported securing more than one scholarship simultaneously. Six of them accepted one scholarship offer, and the seventh combined their two scholarships into a joint one to undertake a study programme in the UK. This means that

28 participants had 28 scholarship awards, and the remaining four had eight scholarship awards, raising the total number of scholarships awarded to the participants from 32 to 36 as presented in the figure below. It is my assessment that the case of the 11 participants securing more than one scholarship offer, however impressive, should not be surprising. Given the level of competitiveness of scholarship opportunities, many Palestinian (and probably other) scholarship applicants typically apply for more than one opportunity to maximise their chance of success. Indeed, this assessment may help explain why more and more scholarships (to Palestinians) ask applicants to indicate whether they are applying to other scholarships.

### 3.1.4. Post-Completion Trajectories

In terms of return and employment status at the time of interviews, 15 of the 32 participants had or have just returned to the OPT (Table 2). Of the 17 participants remaining abroad, six were completing PhD programmes—one in the US (from Gaza), one in France (from Gaza), and four in the UK (one from Gaza, three from the West Bank). While two of those who were completing their PhD programmes in the UK said they plan to return to the OPT immediately or shortly after completing their doctoral programs, the remaining four said they may or will do so later in the future, depending on conditions in the OPT. The remaining 11 participants were working abroad. Eight of these 11, including one who had just finished their PhD in the UK, were working in their countries of graduate study: Australia, France, Qatar, and the UK. Three were working in other countries: Canada, Tunisia, and Switzerland. The participants working in the OPT were serving in various roles in the fields of human rights, health, and education and youth empowerment—as program coordinators or officers (5), advocacy or communication officers (2), monitoring and evaluation officers (3), in addition to being schoolteacher or lecturer (3). These post-completion trajectories are presented in Table (4) below. These post-completion trajectories are further discussed in the relevant experiential findings (3.2.3).

**Table (4)**

Participants' return and employment status at the time of interviews

Return Status	Number of Participants	Employer/Sector (depending on available data)
Returned to the OPT	15 (47%)	6 at international NGOs or UN bodies
		3 at local NGOs
		3 at schools or higher education institutions
		2 looking for work (recently returned)
		1 at a development consulting firm

Remaining abroad	17 (53%)	6 in full-time doctoral study
		3 in research (scientific, legal, or social)
		2 in charity and philanthropy
		2 in diplomacy
		2 in hospitality and tourism
		1 in language services
		1 in social work

Source: Almassri (2024a, p. 3)

### 3.1.5. The Scholarship Factor

Although not a profile finding, it is worth noting that the 32 research participants seemed to have no major contribution from their scholarship programmes other than funding their education abroad. This finding is a key preface to all the substantive findings presented later in this chapter (and is further discussed in Section 4.3.2). In their interviews, most of the participants barely focused or elaborated on the specific contribution of their scholarships to their engagements during and after their education abroad, i.e., in terms of programming for leadership, intercultural engagement, academic support, or other extracurricular and skill development agenda often presumed of the mission of international scholarships. Some of their scholarship programmes do though claim to embed such programming, e.g., Chevening and Fulbright. Also, the Durham Palestine Educational Trust scholarship stands out in terms of the informal, mostly social, support it avails to its recipients. Yet, in response to the interview prompt specifically on what the scholarship programme itself offered them through their recounted academic and other experiences, the participants' responses were more focused on the financial contribution of their scholarship and, in the specific case of Chevening and Fulbright participants, on the public prestige often perceived of their awards. Discussion further to this preface is presented in the experiential themes (3.2.2.3; 3.2.3.1) and the next chapter (4.3.2).

This prevalent lack of emphasis in interviews on scholarships' broader contributions may result from several potential factors, including the turn to virtual engagements during periods of intensive COVID-19 safety measures (affecting over 40% of participants); the lack of such programming in some of the participants' scholarships; the participants' prioritisation of pursuing their agenda over considering participation in available opportunities; and/or the

participants' perception of little "technical" value of their scholarships to their educational and post-completion experiences. However, in their commentary on scholarships' financial contribution, all participants confirmed it was indispensable (see subtheme 3.2.1.2. *A Pursuit Dually Shaped*). Noteworthy, financial challenges were nearly absent in the participants' accounts of their scholarship experiences, an observation similar to that noted in Akbaşlı and Albanna's (2019) study, which includes Palestinian scholarship recipients studying for a Masters or PhD degree in Turkey. I take this absence to probably highlight, again, the participants' overlooking of financial challenges relative to the contribution they perceived of their scholarships to their educational and post-completion experiences. I also take this absence to carry significant implications for ontologising, not just conceptually defining, scholarships, a point I elaborate in the next chapter. This strong determination and agency are demonstrated in the themes presented in the next three subchapters, which also show the participants went on to make great use of the indispensable financial support of their scholarships.

### Subchapter Summary

In this subchapter, I have presented findings about the participants' demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds, academic trajectories, study destinations and time, sources of scholarship funding, and post-completion trajectories. The contribution of these findings to scholarships research and their significance for thinking about scholarships to Palestinians are elaborated in the next chapter. The documentation they offer of some of the characteristics of Palestinian scholarship recipients directly contributes a response to RQ1 and to the knowledge gap on what groups of Palestinian students benefit from international graduate scholarships. With this response continued in the substantive findings in the following subchapter, these profile findings, together with the mapping of scholarships to Palestinians (1.3), deepened my familiarity with the research participants. This deepened familiarity was useful to me in the three subsequent stages of analysing the participants' substantive data, i.e., their reported scholarship motivations, experiences, and outcomes. For example, in descriptive analysis, where I needed to identify empirical patterns, the existence of such patterns in the participants' contextual data, e.g., choosing global destinations, foregrounded my identification of a relevant pattern in their substantive data, e.g., appreciating the global dimensions of their study and life abroad. In subsequent stages involving inferential data analysis, these profile findings served me well in adjudicating the interpretive validity and ontological plausibility of the inferences I drew. This usefulness can be observed in the next three subchapters, each presenting a class of



findings developed respectively from descriptive (2.4.4.2), abductive (2.4.4.3), and retroductive (2.4.4.3) analysis of the data.

## **3.2. Experiential Findings**

In this subchapter, I present the four experiential themes that emerged from descriptive analysis of the participants' interview and documentary data. Together, these themes track a significant part of the participants' reported journey of seeking, accessing, and experiencing funded education abroad, as well as valuing it for its perceived contribution to their academic, career, and (national) identity development. The starting point of their journey is explained in the first theme, which describes the participants' reported vision of a path to self-development out of and/or beyond what is currently possible in the OPT (3.2.1). In the second experiential theme, the participants' accounts of their good progress towards this path are descriptively summarised, highlighting their appreciation of following new, often challenging, approaches and methods of academic training in their new or specialised areas of study (3.2.2). Extension of this perceived good progress is continued in the third theme, which shifts focus to the participants' perceived career outcomes and their professional achievements as shaped by larger market and national contexts (3.2.3). The last experiential theme captures more of the participants' reported appreciation of their study, life, and broader engagements abroad (3.2.4). The focus in this final theme shifts to identity- and national life-related gains that the participants deemed and demonstrated as significant outcomes of their scholarship experiences.

### **3.2.1. Motivation Powered by Ambition and Pragmatism**

In their interviews and pre-existing documents, the participants demonstrated various motivations for choosing to study abroad and for choosing their scholarships, study programs, and countries of study. Descriptive analysis of their data shows these (sometimes gendered) motivations range from negative ones, e.g., escaping limited or poor opportunities in Palestine, to positive ones, e.g., academic and career advancement and service to Palestine. In pursuing these intentions, the participants reflected a pivotal role of both scholarships and past engagements in shaping their study program and destination choices.

#### **3.2.1.1. Seeking Possibility and Advancement**

Several participants articulated that they were driven to study abroad to actualise more of their perceived potential for academic and career progress and for serving Palestine. A

participant who studied tourism and sustainable development in France and had worked in the OPT's precarious tourism sector said:

I had been working with Masar Ibrahim, a community tourism project that offers domestic and foreign tourists a walking path from the north to the south of the West Bank, in course learning about local communities and their heritage and traditions. My plan [of studying abroad] was to come back and continue working in this sector and build something related to sustainable tourism, especially environmental tourism.  
(translated)

Two other participants said their pursuit of a Masters followed their longer-term plans to become academics in their respective fields, mathematics and literature. Both said their passion for academic work followed their success as undergraduate students, an early time when both took language tests and other preparation steps to apply for scholarships to advance their education abroad.

Women participants offered often gendered expression of similar aims of career and academic advancement. In explaining her graduate programme choice, International Relations, one participant said it had been a decision long in the making:

My passion is politics, not journalism. I studied journalism [in my undergraduate degree], but my eyes were on politics. I did so because it was clear to me that it was difficult for a fresh woman graduate to work in politics or get published writing political columns. (translated)

Another participant reflected more clearly her gendered, critical motivation behind also choosing to study international relations:

When I was thinking about the Masters, I just thought how crucial this programme would be to my community... I just thought we just need this—and also we, especially like females, we don't see females playing a role in Palestinian international relations. In fact, even the males who are doing this, I don't, I personally don't believe they're doing the job really well.

Beside this ambition for advancement, a quarter of the participants said leaving (more often Gaza than) Palestine, whether temporarily or permanently, was *a* or *the* key force of their motivation to pursue graduate education abroad, primarily to build their capacities in their

fields of interest. One participant, a medical doctor with specialised interests for fulfilling which the OPT offers no appropriate training or work opportunities, said:

I was applying for a Masters scholarship, *any* Masters scholarship, because I was just at some point escaping from Gaza. And at some point that was the only motivation that I had personally, that I need to get out of this place, because I cannot actualize my potential in this place. And I knew that I have some potential that needs to be actualized somewhere else. ...

Similarly, another participant had studied English and French in Gaza but felt frustrated at what she described as the lack in her undergraduate training of meaningful experiences and work-related skills. She said her frustration grew when she started developing interest in humanitarian work but found no relevance to this field of her language and literature studies nor academic training in Gaza to prepare her for doing professional humanitarian work. Therefore, she said, she “spent five years just focused on trying to work or volunteer at humanitarian organisations, e.g., the Red Crescent, while also being focused on finding a scholarship to study this field abroad.” Repeatedly using the collective voice, a third participant, from the West Bank, said,

We left because home right now offers no hope, and we’ve remained abroad because we can’t afford to go back and be unemployed, let alone survive violence of the occupation and of settlers. We’re abroad, but we know we’re building the capacities we know we’ll bring back home once conditions there improve. (translated)

### 3.2.1.2. A Pursuit Dually Shaped

In recounting how they went about pursuing these plans, nearly all the participants reflected that availability and conditions of funding as well as prior academic, career, and/or civic engagements (greatly) influenced their scholarship, study programme, and country choices. For example, in explaining her application to the US Fulbright Foreign Student programme, one participant said:

I’m going to be honest with you. I didn’t know what the Fulbright was. All I knew it was a scholarship, and it would pay my tuition if I went abroad. I had no idea it was this competitive, had no idea it was this prestigious. I just wanted to try again because I applied for the first scholarship in my senior year in undergrad, and I actually got this

scholarship to Canada, but I couldn't leave Gaza because of the political situation in Egypt in 2013.

Similarly, many participants said they applied to more than one scholarship, whether in a single year or across 2-4 years, to ensure they had higher chances of success and to start their graduate study at their intended time (see 3.1.3). Following this line of reasoning, the participants followed in making their choices the significant influence of conditions associated with available scholarships. For example, for a third of them, the scholarships they ultimately secured could be held at only specific institution(s), e.g., DPET for Durham University in the UK.

This reported influence of scholarship availability on the participants' choices follows (their recognition of) the indispensability of financial support for their ability to undertake graduate education abroad. One by one, the participants reported in interviews that they would not have been able to afford the travel costs, living expenses, or tuition fees of their graduate education abroad without the scholarship funding. One participant, who studied in the US, succinctly highlighted the indispensability of his Fulbright scholarship in covering such costs: "Of course as someone living in Gaza and getting Gaza-scale salaries, I could not even imagine I would be able to afford studying for this degree here." Another participant, who studied in France, was particularly elaborate (and critical) in his account of how "unthinkable" these costs are for most Palestinians:

Let's be frank and realistic. Who from Palestine can afford self-funding their studies abroad? Only the wealthiest; the most elite; children of Palestinian Authority top executives, of ambassadors, of businessmen. The class to which I belong—and to which most Palestinians do—has to work all their lives to manage their living costs. I mean, we had to borrow our way through undergraduate education at local universities [where the annual cost of attendance may range from 800USD to 5,000USD]. It's just not even thinkable for me to have afforded my education abroad. (translated)

Documentary data further illustrated the indispensability of financial support for undertaking graduate education abroad. In her scholarship application, a participant who studied in the UK responded to the two following prompts on financial need as below:

Application Prompt: How did you finance your first-degree course? (e.g. scholarships, employment, family)

Participant's Response: My family paid for my first and second semester at Birzeit University. Since my second semester at Birzeit university until I graduated, I have always been on the honour list and this means that in the given semester I was able to obtain an average above 85% with no individual course average below 80%. This, in Birzeit university gave me an automatic tuition fee exemption for the following semester.

Application Prompt: Is your family able to finance you to study for a Masters degree abroad? If not, why not?

Participant's Response: No, the universities in UK are very expensive. In addition, the living expenses are also high and my family cannot afford to finance my Masters degree in the UK or in any other country abroad.

To further illustrate in contextual terms, even before the current devastation in Gaza, the OPT's GDP per capita at constant prices stood at 769USD—with Gaza's at 291USD and the West Bank's at 1,129 (PCBS, 2023). In comparison, based on a rapid review of the annual cost of attendance at the institutions attended by the research participants, they could have faced dues totalling upward of 75,000USD to undertake their graduate study in the US, 45,000USD in the UK, 30,000USD in Qatar, 21,000USD in France, and 11,000USD in Jordan.

Although potentially limited by this absolute reliance on available scholarships, the participants seem to have still drawn significantly on their past experiences in trying to shape their country and study choices. Most said they arrived at the application process following records of academic distinction, internship or career success, community volunteering, and/or other significant engagements and reflections beyond academics and work. In making their scholarship applications and deciding on their study programmes, many participants drew directly on these records of past experiences. In their scholarship application, one participant wrote:

Working as a medical coordinator at [name of organization redacted] has given me a front row seat to examine and scrutinize the devastating defects within the health system. I lack the proper knowledge, tools and research methods to come through with my ambitious vision for a better health system. I realize my need for specialized studies into Global Health Science, Epidemiology, trends and updates in Communicable & Non-communicable Diseases, Clinical Trials and Meta-analysis, which are offered by

the programmes I chose, MSc Global Health at the University of Glasgow, MSc Public Health at Oxford Brookes University and MSc Public Health at the University of Southampton.

Another participant explained how her academic achievements, career experiences, and gendered national identity informed her study programme choice. In her scholarship application, she wrote, “I believe that my background is the driving force behind my decision to apply for the LLM in International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights”. In another essay of her scholarship application, she referred to herself in the following order: “Arab Palestinian,” “woman lawyer,” and “proficient in three [world] languages.” Clear links could be observed between this self-conception and her vision for the future of her field, of which she wrote:

Massive human rights violations are committed in addition to grave violations of IHL, in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, or Libya ... In my opinion, there is a huge reliance on international experts in these areas [International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights], while we also need more indigenous human rights lawyers and experts who can not only use IHL framework effectively, but also translate these frameworks not only linguistically, but also culturally and politically.

It is worth noting that this sector is highly dominated by men. ... I want to be able to break any social limitations to reaching my career goals as a humanitarian expert... and eventually, the social pattern that this job is reserved for men will be broken.

Similar patterns of motivation were noted in the interview transcripts of most participants. In the case of two, their undergraduate training was in the medical field and most of their wider engagements were in community service and charity work. Both said they pursued graduate programmes in the social sciences to gain knowledge and skills better aligned with their past and intended civic and professional goals. For a third participant, her pursuit of an International Business specialisation followed her undergraduate training in business, internships with various international businesses, and work in the export industry.

### Theme Summary

This first theme has presented the participants’ reported ambitions and pragmatism in planning and pursuing their funded graduate education abroad. They had various motivations for choosing to study abroad and for choosing their scholarships, study programmes, and countries of study. In seeking opportunity and advancement, several participants articulated

that they were driven to study abroad to actualise more of their potential for academic and career progress and for serving Palestine. Beside this ambition, a quarter of the participants said leaving (more often Gaza than) Palestine, whether temporarily or permanently, was *a* or *the* key force of their motivation to move abroad for advanced academic training. On planning their education abroad, nearly all the participants reflected that availability and conditions of funding and, though to a lesser extent, their prior academic, career, and/or civic engagements influenced their scholarship, study programme, and country choices. To all of them, across their countries and institutions, scholarship funding was indispensable. As the second experiential theme next demonstrates, the participants seem to have seized these motives and funding support well through their academic experiences abroad.

### 3.2.2. A Journey of Academic (Re)Adaptation and Fulfilment

This second theme reports the participants' experiences of exciting-and-challenging (re)adaptations while appreciating new approaches to the content and practice of their academic learning. It shows that the participants struggled with but often appreciated and overcame the demands of graduate-level study in a language environment and academic climate both new to them.

#### 3.2.2.1. A Challenge Met: Research Reading and Writing

Several participants began their accounts by describing initial and/or constant struggle in dealing with the quantity and quality of (research) reading and writing in their study programs. One participant, a graduate of English and Education, said the following of this struggle:

It was, it was torturing for me because I never really in my life made research. I never read a scholarly article in my life. I graduated from Birzeit but without really reading any academic paper in my life. So, it was hard, very hard to read, to write, to be critical, to keep up with what they're talking about. And another thing is that like how to do research, how to write, how to be critical.

For another participant, the challenge was harder because his programme in France was delivered in academic French, which he felt was different from the French language he learned in his undergraduate study in the OPT.

Specific research writing tasks were particularly challenging for several participants, e.g., organising one's research writing, completing (critical) literature reviews, and articulating meaningful interpretations. One participant, who studied in the UK, experienced a mix of stress about writing such assignments and regret at not having been exposed to them in their undergraduate education in the OPT:

I remember while stuck writing one of my summative essays, I felt stressed about it, and I shared a Facebook blog on why our universities never introduced us to written assignments! I mean, all our assessments were of exams and tests, which didn't help us learn how to write or do these kinds of written assessments. (translated)

Another participant, who studied in Qatar, reported the same challenges but commended her institution's approach to supporting students through offering courses on the basics of academic research.

Despite these challenges, the participants reported usually feeling appreciative of the contribution they perceived of writing-intensive learning tasks to developing subject-specific skills like technical report writing and broader intellectual skills like critical and analytical thinking. A third of the participants categorised the academic writing skills they gained during their graduate education abroad as among the most valuable part of their experience. Even for the two participants whose "torturing" and 'new language' experiences were presented above, they evidenced such appreciation by recounting good progress through their current doctoral study respectively in the UK and in France.

### 3.2.2.2. Perceived Learning: Research-oriented, Interdisciplinary, and Global

Many participants spoke mostly highly of their substantive learning, focusing specifically on the research-oriented, interdisciplinary, and global scope of their attainment in their subject areas. For some participants, the methodologies and theories introduced in classes and readings helped them develop more critical and systematic reflections. One participant, who studied in the UK, particularly appreciated their exposure to participatory action research as their prior community service and charity work followed no academic background in social science:

When I studied participatory action research, I was like, I have been doing this all my life, but I never thought it had a term! Even for the ethics of it, I just thought that my charity work was benevolent and thus "ethical" and so didn't require much thinking



about its ethics. Now, I can better organise my thoughts about my work, and I keep reading others' works on participatory action research to see how to improve the ethics and success of my work. (translated)

Another participant's study of international relations in the U.S. exposed them to various schools of thought in the field. They were drawn to the realist school, an interest they further advanced following reactions of shock or condescension from American and European classmates:

I remember we were having this conversation about how everyone subscribes to a certain IR theory, and when it was my turn, I said I was a realist and everyone laughed, "how could you be a realist!" They just thought because I am from the Middle East, I should be subscribing to postcolonialism or one of those liberation theories. They found it almost shocking that a Middle Easterner believes in realism.

The participant said they dwelled on these comments before growing more affirmative in their subscription to realism: "The theory kept making sense to me, and every time I read more about it, like, I just don't believe in the whole thing of human rights, the United Nations, which, you know, wash all the scandals that governments do."

Also, some participants articulated that their interdisciplinary learning was of great value to their subject knowledge development. This was especially the case of participants pursuing specialisation in their fields of undergraduate study. For one participant, a medical doctor by undergraduate training, his Global Health graduate programme focused on conflict and security. He appreciated this interdisciplinarity because it helped him "better see global health from a security perspective and from the standpoint of international politics." Three other participants, engineers by undergraduate training who specialised further in their respective fields, offered similar, highly positive accounts of considering social and/or political issues while building technical solutions. One of these engineers said,

My study [in the OPT] was purely technical. It was all of numbers, statistics, and technical drawings. The social aspect [of engineering] was absent. For example, in environmental engineering, we once worked on an assignment to extend sanitation works to more areas in Gaza. Our work involved technical analyses—determining water levels, ground height, pipeline length, and manhole location. But we never considered the social aspect of these analyses or the social impact of implementing our

results. Unlike my programme in the UK, programmes at our universities never focus on this aspect. (translated)

Beside interdisciplinary learning, global learning was also a salient point of appreciation among the participants. In their interviews and pre-existing documents, many participants highlighted experiences of global learning in classrooms, in major learning projects, and beyond academic settings. For several participants, their readings involved case studies from “far” countries, and their class activities featured discussion of their (international) peers’ diverse perspectives on learning topics. Reflecting on her learning with/from international peers in a course on Data and Society, one participant said,

The content was about how data is used in China. China may sound to us [Palestinians] as an isolated, unheard-of place. In the course, I had the opportunity to read research but also to listen to opinions from many Chinese classmates. It was an interesting class because there were some differences between what claims we read in the assigned research, produced by Western researchers, and what descriptions my Chinese classmates gave of the use of data in their country. The gap between these research claims and my peers’ descriptions made me spend much time thinking before drawing a conclusion from a reading and while doing research. (translated)

This appreciation was also of the global scope of the participants’ completed learning projects. Some of the examples cited during interviews included group presentations and team projects where the participants said their work with global peers involved learning new communication skills and, again, diverse perspectives on their assigned topics. Documentary and interview data further evidence this appreciation. In their dissertations, two participants looked at the global context of Palestinians’ access to international exchanges and to foreign aid. A third participant focused on the cultural memory of genocide in Germany and Turkey. A fourth examined policies on gender-based violence in Iran and Turkey. A fifth referred to Jordan as their case study for research on water and sanitation services. All these participants reflected finding motivation to pursue these global learning projects in the international research resources available at their universities and the relevant regional expertise of their supervisors.

Additionally, the opportunity to meet people of other nationalities—most often for the first time—was also of reported value to participants’ global learning. With her graduate study focused on conflict and humanitarian work, one participant said she appreciated her interactions with Syrian and Yemeni students and communities in Qatar: “I heard from them

firsthand stories of the crises in their countries, but I also learned a lot about the two countries, which we as Arabs assumed we knew but pretty much did not!”

### 3.2.2.3. Learning Resilience and Support

While navigating the aforementioned challenging and enjoyable learning experiences, the participants seem to have developed a new approach to their academic learning and their perspective on academia. Many described exerting “high” or “unprecedented” individual effort in progressing through their studies. A participant trained as a medical doctor said it took him “two months to realise what this new system required in terms of studying on my own.” Following this realisation, he said he spent 12 days of going to the library from 8am to 10pm to get his first writing assignment done. In his interview, he went on to explain that as he progressed through his Masters, he felt he got used to this amount of independent study. “I was assured of my progress when I saw my second-term grades,” he said. “Instead of 63 and 67 [in my first term], I now got 90 and 91, and I actually got distinction in my thesis.” Another participant, who studied in France, offered the illuminative example below of the time and (peer learning) effort he had to put in to overcome the language challenge ahead of written exams:

I used to gather notes from my peers, study them, predict what questions may be asked in the essay exam, draft a few essays based on readings and my own thinking, memorise them, and try to use them in answering the essay questions at the time of the exam.  
(translated)

For some participants, who were studying between 2020 and 2021, this amount of study seems to have become a significant challenge to their academic progress and/or well-being when it coincided with the social isolation caused by COVID-19. During England’s second national lockdown in late 2020, one participant said he struggled to maintain his energy and focus while studying alone in his student accommodation room. Another felt “highly frustrated and disappointed by the very low level of interactions [he] was able to do during the first four or even five months in the UK.” Others seem to have felt frustrated but quickly found ways to maintain their academic progress. A participant who completed her Masters with distinction in the UK in September 2020 offered the following account of her coping with COVID-19 impact:

COVID disrupted everything for me. I was making good progress; I had planned, and got support for, my international fieldwork for my dissertation research. When COVID happened, I couldn’t even leave my dorm but for essential matters, let alone travel

internationally. I had to re-plan my whole dissertation research, which I did. It became a systematic review that I completed from my dorm. (translated)

Beside such resilience, being in supportive academic environments was also cited by many of them as enabling of their quality progress. Two participants said they always found their professors available for and actively interested in further discussion of learning content. For two more participants, who studied in Qatar, they recounted enjoying their interactions with their professors. Both cited finding inspiration in these interactions, including when their professors—with academic and lived experience of regional affairs in the Middle East—challenged them to be more self-critical in their approach to their learning. With a consistent smile and a dynamic tone, one of these participants recounted the following powerful example of such interactions with one of his professors at the Doha Institute of Graduate Studies:

Professor [name redacted] said like, it's one of the main questions in the field to define what the genre is, to label texts to a certain genre. I raised my hand and we kept debating why, why we need to label a text—I could write a short text and call it a poem or a short story. It's up to me, the writer, not the reader.... Why should there be one specific form for the poem or for the short story and so on. Then, he started yelling, 'ah, you Palestinians, because you don't have a father, don't have leadership, don't have one single entity that you can turn to, you want to destroy the system; you don't want institutions.' He wasn't insulting me, of course; he was analysing. And he was right; we hate institutions; we don't trust establishments, every time and everywhere we go, and it's the same in our studies. We don't like institutionalisation.

Others in the participants' environments were also supportive. One participant was generic in his appreciation: "It was my first-ever time to travel, so I assumed academics would be the hardest part of it, but I felt it was much easier than I had expected because people in the university were welcoming and supportive." For four of the six participants on the Durham Palestine Educational Trust (DPET) scholarship, they reported finding additional academic support in their conversations with one of the charity's members, a retired Durham University professor. Echoing accounts by the other DPET scholars, one took initiative during the interview to volunteer the following account:

And also I have to say, I used to discuss every assignment with [him]. ... he would help me like with critical thinking and would encourage me by saying, 'you know more than what is written.' To hear those words is very important because as I told you, it affected

my self-confidence. But when [he] told me those things, that I know the things on the ground out there, it was really helpful.

### Theme Summary

This theme has presented prevalent and significant results of descriptive analysis of the participants' perceived academic experiences of their funded graduate education abroad. Developed from data-driven, descriptive analysis of the participants' interview transcripts and pre-existing documents, the theme demonstrates they experienced exciting-and-challenging (re)adaptations while appreciating new approaches to the content and practice of their academic learning. They described initial and/or constant struggle in dealing with the quantity and quality of (research) reading and writing in their study programmes. However, they also reported usually feeling appreciative of their academic learning, particularly of its emphasis on research and its often interdisciplinary and global scope. Through their learning, many participants seem to have developed a new approach to their academic learning, where they claimed higher degrees of resilience and independence in meeting the demands of their study, even in face of the challenges arising from social isolation and restrictive measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Beside such resilience, many participants cited positive interactions with professors and support from others in their new environments as enabling of their continued progress. Building on this demonstration of academic gains, the next experiential theme describes some of the career gains that the participants perceived of their academic and broader experiences while studying and living abroad.

### 3.2.3. Individual Careers in Advancement, Fulfilment in Negotiation

The participants reported perceiving a strong contribution of their funded graduate education abroad to their career advancement. This perception was shared by nearly all participants, whether they remained in or left academia and whether they returned to the OPT or remained abroad. This experiential theme demonstrates that this perceived contribution took two major forms: enhancing employers' impression of the participants' career readiness and extending the participants' awareness of and access to development opportunities whose professional remit lent itself to their work at the time of data collection. However, the participants' reports of this contribution were permeated by reflections on larger forces that shaped their post-scholarship career achievements in their respective countries and industries. These findings are elaborated in this experiential theme, starting with enhanced employers'

impression and professional exposure and development before turning to the disjuncture between post-completion intentions and achievements.

### 3.2.3.1. Enhanced Employers' Impression

Many participants thought their education abroad boosted their prospective employers' impression of their profiles, which in turn helped them advance or shift their careers. This was especially the case of participants who had won the better-known scholarships, e.g., Fulbright and Chevening. This was a case of dual perceived prestige in the OPT, one of the renowned scholarship and another, more general one associated with foreign—Western, more accurately—education. Interview and documentary data strongly suggest that the positive career effect of this enhanced employer impression materialised well and often for the participants. After her return to the West Bank, one participant said her British graduate degree was like a ticket to facilitate her entry to the field of international business, which is a small and competitive field, in the OPT:

My Masters gave me a huge opportunity to work in an important sector in Palestine, where you get paid really well and have good benefits. It's though a competitive sector. Not everyone can enter it. So, my Masters facilitated the road for me to work in this sector, not only facilitated the road but gave me also the skills and the confidence and, you know, the reputation. Like, being a graduate from the UK and being a graduate from Durham University, you know, it's things they look for in Palestine.

Another participant, an engineer by undergraduate and graduate training, was selected for a monitoring, evaluation, learning, and accountability (MEAL) officer position at a local NGO within two weeks after her return to the OPT. Eighteen months later, she successfully applied for a similar position at an international NGO. She believed the perception of her British education and her Chevening Award bridged the suboptimal match between her academic training in engineering and her MEAL role, which involved work on various projects in the youth empowerment sector. Another participant's case is even more demonstrative. Following an undergraduate degree in English Literature, a few years of various work experiences in the OPT, and an American Masters in social work, this participant secured a social worker position at a Canadian hospital. In explaining this career achievement, they reflected that the (perceived) prestige of their Fulbright Foreign Student scholarship and rigour of their American degree helped them secure the interest of such an unusual employer up to and, even more, through the interview stage of the hiring process.

According to the interview and documentary records of several participants, such positive perception by employers facilitated significant career advancement. One participant, with an undergraduate degree in English, completed her Masters in international relations at a non-Russell Group university in the UK. Shortly after graduation, she was selected for an adjunct lecturer job in a nascent English department at a Palestinian university in the West Bank. Soon, she was invited to take up departmental leadership roles, e.g., proposing curriculum plans, building and delivering new modules, and contributing to review and update of syllabi. In her excited reflection on this career achievement, she attributed it to the department's positive perception of her profile as a Chevening awardee and a UK graduate:

[The department] then asked me if I want to be part of the development actually of this department as they, to be honest, believed in me because I graduated from the UK and also because I'm a Chevening scholar. They believed in scholars because they knew that it's so hard to get such a scholarship. But yeah, so currently it's really good to just feel as a leader in the university—and with only a Masters degree and just because you're a UK graduate. It definitely defines your position in this community.

Another participant, who completed his Masters in the UK in a field unavailable in the OPT, shared the same belief. Reflecting on the competitive hiring process, which ultimately led to his selection, he said,

Having such a Masters made it really possible for me to even pass the first screening. So, when they got to see that this guy has this Masters from the UK on this topic, and it was highly related to the job, I think it was a main reason [for advancing my application]. And, again, this is a high position that I was competing for with really experienced people, even [with] 10 years [of experience], in international nongovernmental organisations. Maybe they have better skills, but this type of Masters made the panel think this guy might be a good candidate, so let's get him to the exam stage.

These accounts demonstrate that the participants' scholarship awards and foreign Masters degrees enhanced employer impressions of their qualifications, which in turn seemed to facilitate the participants' progress to new or advanced areas of work. However, the participants' accounts also show that this enhanced employer impression of their distinguished qualifications was not always followed by satisfying levels of (possible) utilisation of their competencies. The following part of this experiential theme illustrates that the participants

thought highly of the contribution of their funded graduate education abroad to their technical and general professional competencies, before the subsequent part shows their assessment of suboptimal use of their competencies.

### 3.2.3.2. Expanded Professional Exposure and Development

Many participants believed their education abroad enhanced their professional exposure, their career-relevant skills and qualities, and their access to development opportunities that overall were relevant to their work at the time of data collection. To begin with, over half of the participants described their time abroad as an opportunity to expand their career horizons. By these participants' accounts, just their enrolment at their respective institutions allowed them access to key career resources like job fairs, career advising events, and skills development workshops—opportunities, they said, were not as quantitatively or qualitatively available in the OPT. In assigned readings, especially those involving country case studies, the participants said they gained an international knowledge background that now informed their approach to professional practice in their fields. In classes, they said they found in their interactions with global peers new perspectives on critical or innovative practices in their work fields, whether healthcare and global health, business, development, or human rights. One participant said of this global dimension of her learning:

... Second, there was a lot of opportunity to learn how to do in our field [Water, Sanitation and Health Engineering]. My international knowledge on the field was highly enhanced, especially when I listened to international students—from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East—speak about their own prior experiences in the field. This very much helped me understand how things work in our field across the world.  
(translated)

Furthermore, a key mechanism of this perceived career contribution was completing a range of practical learning activities that many participants cited in interviews and/or highlighted in their pre-existing documents. These activities included but were not limited to workshops and project assignments completed in class and on campus. All the participants who studied in Australia, France, Qatar, Switzerland, and the US, along with a few of those who studied in the UK, had to complete an internship or work placement—occasionally two—as part of their graduate degrees.

Their appreciation of the career benefits of such degree components was unanimous. In describing their internship or placement experiences, different participants mentioned working



on tasks that were highly relevant to practice and often of a global scope. Such tasks included “delivering with an international team a comprehensive evaluation of healthcare facilities in different countries”, “covering [for a media organisation] cultural issues beyond those happening only in Palestine”, and “becoming aware of key organisations working in the field and connecting with them.” Equally importantly, some of the participants emphasised the added value of career exposure that such practical learning allowed them since similar opportunities tend to be missing in the OPT. For example, during his graduate education abroad, one participant completed clinical training in child psychiatry with a focus on intellectual disability, a field that despite its significance in Palestine remains critically under-resourced (Dabbagh et al., 2023).

Even when such professional exposure was not required, some participants proactively pursued it. For example, one participant completed two internships as a political risk analyst, a title nowhere to be found when looked up in key job search websites in the OPT like [Jobs.ps](#) or [GazaRrcruiters.com](#). Another participant seized the time during her study and that between her graduation and her visa expiry to intern in her field of data science, another field of study and work barely found in the OPT (Zakaria, 2023).

Additionally, many participants indicated during their interviews their perception of strong and broad relevance of gaining skills and qualities through their education abroad that they said were directly relevant to their work activities. This perceived relevance spanned industry-specific and transferable skills as well as contextual knowledge of the OPT that the participants reported applying in their work.

Expectedly, this relevance is strongest among the seven participants who proceeded to doctoral study. At the time of interviews, one participant had just finished their PhD and secured four offers of academic clinical fellowships. In their elaborate reflection, they enumerated multiple gains during their Masters at a Russell Group university in the UK that enabled them to achieve so highly of their doctoral trajectory: enhancement in their personal resilience, intercultural proficiency, collaborative lab skills, multidisciplinary research teamwork experiences, and sense of purpose and self-direction. Another participant, who has been pursuing their PhD and working as a research assistant at an American university, highlighted two factors that enabled them to achieve this milestone. They said these factors were (i) quality academic training they received during their Masters in Jordan and (ii) constant encouragement and thorough support and guidance from their university professors there. Both of these factors,

the participant added, would not have existed or been of the same contribution to their success had they pursued their STEM Masters in the OPT. The five other participants completing their PhD cited the significance of their academic training during their Masters for their current academic work. All five described following a critical approach to the study of Palestine in their respective fields, in/across social sciences and humanities. They explained this critical perspective flowed from reflections on their earlier academic work and intellectual engagement with Palestine during their Masters. For example, one participant realised that the inclusive education frameworks she had studied during her Masters in the UK could not sufficiently account for the reality of disability issues in the OPT, not least because of the social climate and political context surrounding these issues. Motivated by this realisation, she has been following a grounded theory approach that, she hopes, will make her doctoral research deliver a context-sensitive understanding of disability and inclusive education in the OPT.

Among the 15 participants who went to the job market in the OPT, most shared such perception of strong and broad relevance to their work today of the skills and qualities gained through their education abroad.

One participant who had frequented writing development workshops at her UK university said she relies on her now advanced writing skills in completing her day-to-day tasks at a Palestinian human rights organisation, e.g., “drafting updates, reports, and other submissions to UN bodies, and contributing to the organisation’s international communications.” Two other participants said their education abroad, one in engineering and the other in health, equipped them with the advanced analytical skills on which they now rely in leading technical strategies at work. Serving at an international healthcare NGO in Gaza, one of them described using their “newly-gained”, “up-to-date knowledge of plastic surgery and research synthesis skills” in performing day-to-day tasks of their job. These tasks include “setting eligibility criteria for receiving the organisation’s support [for patients needing plastic surgery]” and “building action plans for mitigating health challenges.” The participant further highlighted their continuous dependence on key intercultural communication skills they had developed abroad in managing communication with their international colleagues. During her study of Global Development, a fourth participant said she became aware and supportive of a decolonial approach to foreign aid to Palestinians, a knowledge position she said was further advanced by her conversations with international peers engaged in development work in their similarly conflict-affected countries. She said that in her work now with a development consulting firm in the West Bank, she has been reflecting on difficulties associated with such

an approach but also evaluating possibilities for a degree of decolonisation, even if “as small as ensuring project planning is more informed by local data.” A fifth participant, who had just returned to Gaza, reported working on a social enterprise to help more Palestinian students access education abroad. He cited two factors that he felt were helpful to him in this endeavour: The substantive knowledge of business he gained during his Masters, and, in course, his reflections on accessing and experiencing UK higher education as a Palestinian student.

Perception of such positive career effects of education abroad was also reported by several participants whose fields of subsequent work differed (significantly) from the field of their education abroad.

One participant said she was now well served in her MEAL role by the writing, research, interpersonal, and global thinking skills which she cultivated while studying and living abroad—and which her employer (like others in the OPT) presume of foreign-educated individuals. Another participant, who studied international relations, now works as an English teacher at a UN refugee school in Gaza. Capitalising on the leadership skills and substantive knowledge she had gained abroad, she now steers the work of the school’s human rights committee by “supervising the students’ parliament,” “promoting human rights, focusing on rights of children and women,” “campaigning against gender-based violence,” and “reflecting on educational policies and practices of human rights and conflict resolution at UN refugee schools in Gaza”.

These perceptions of strong and relevant career contribution are further coherent with the finding of increased engagement in (paid and unpaid) knowledge work. Review of several participants’ interview and documentary data shows that following, and in a few instances, during their education abroad, they started or scaled up their production and publishing of knowledge in scholarly, educational, and professional settings in their respective fields.

Following his Masters, one participant co-authored two articles that were published in key peer-reviewed journals in their field of graduate study, including *The Lancet*. Another participant, by the end of her second PhD year, had published three peer-reviewed articles. With the interdisciplinary learning and networking gains she made during her Masters, a third participant said she was co-authoring two research articles on sustainable public services development in the OPT. In educational settings, a fourth participant’s documentary data reveals she has made several contributions—through conferences, symposia, and magazines—to local and regional debates on effective pedagogy and curriculum development, including in

the wake of transitioning to online education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Documentary data of a fifth participant shows his post-graduation, pre-visa expiry work in the UK involved contributing to evaluation research that was closely related both to his graduate study of global and public health and to his research consulting work subsequently in the OPT.

Other participants were engaged in knowledge work in similar professional settings. One used her advanced legal analysis skills in co-authoring different publications as part of her post-completion job. Another participant, following work mostly in language teaching before studying abroad, has now been leading or contributing to key knowledge-building activities at work, e.g., planning and implementing needs assessments, baseline and endline studies, and project impact evaluations. A third participant said “only now with this competence gained during [her] Masters” she feels confident in agreeing to consult on research and strategy work in her field and has already accepted an offer to do such work for an international agency.

Finally, available documentary data seem to further confirm the participants’ confidence in the career value of undertaking funded graduate education abroad. Seven of the 11 participants who shared their CVs/resumes listed there modules from their graduate programmes that coherently link with their professional specialty. In his CV, for example, one participant highlighted under their graduate degree from the UK taking modules like *Management of Healthcare Organisations* and *Health Policy*. He then listed these work responsibilities, among others: “developing guidelines and policies to ensure standardization of medical management across the organization”, “conducting quality and compliance assurance visits”, and “leading teams” through risk assessments and field operations. Showcasing her relevant academic training and her research focus on the OPT, another participant topped her CV with the education section and, under her graduate degree from the UK, the title of her dissertation. Another dedicated a whole section of her CV to showing the industry-specific technical and research skills she applied through her dissertation research in the UK. Equally importantly, six of those 11 participants highlighted in their CVs and/or job cover letters certain extracurricular engagements that showcase broader experiences they had abroad and that may signify their interpersonal and technical competencies. These engagements include leading and organising a conference, serving in the student representative council, and winning an institutional award for global leadership. They also include further global engagements; for example, two participants who studied in Switzerland and in the US joined specialised training workshops abroad, respectively in Albania and in the Netherlands.

This part of the experiential theme has demonstrated the research participants' positive perception of their funded graduate education abroad to their now advanced or new sectors of work, whether in academia or beyond and whether in the OPT or abroad. Employers' perception of their foreign degrees and prestigious scholarships seemed to facilitate their competitive access to their current work. Subsequently, a broad set of experiences and skills that they had cultivated while studying and living abroad seemed to serve them well in delivering on their roles, which sometimes involve knowledge work. This positive perception notwithstanding, the participants' accounts, in interview and documentary data, show these career achievements were not free from substantial external influence. The last part of this experiential theme below presents patterns observed in the participants' data regarding contextual forces shaping, if not (pre-)determining, these career achievements.

### 3.2.3.3. Negotiating Career Outcomes

Many participants reflected that their post-completion career experiences and achievements followed a process of constantly negotiating their individual circumstances and preferences vis-à-vis realities of work in the OPT and/or their host countries. This was evident in data from participants working in academia and other sectors, whether in the OPT or abroad.

During what was their brief return to Gaza, two participants worked as adjunct lecturers in different STEM departments at two different universities there. Both reported perceiving their working conditions to be impossible, with low workload, delayed pay, intermittent contracting (to avoid labour obligations for permanent employment), little appreciation, and near-absence of investment in teaching, equipment, or the student experience. Both left Gaza within a few months after quitting their part-time roles, one to pursue a PhD in her field of graduate study and the other to pursue another Masters in a completely different field—and one in which she went on to work in her host country. A similar account was shared by a third woman participant, working as an adjunct lecturer in an arts department at a third university in Gaza. In the course of her gendered account, she said she has to tolerate too much in order to keep her source of income:

I lecture at [name of university redacted], and it's not the best thing that I'm doing right now. I feel like this is the worst phase of my life. I work for the sake of just making money. I don't feel the passion. I don't feel like I am making any change... because I am being "spoken to", being controlled. I am being, you know, I don't feel like I'm free enough to do anything at the university right now. It's not my safest space

to kind of get creative with my students... walking into [name of university redacted] feels like you're walking into a big men's club, like I'm of the very few females there and it's really hard for them to take me seriously. It's either sexist or ageist, or both of them...

These three accounts are contrasted with the previously outlined case of a fourth woman participant, who said she was happy about her adjunct lecturer job in an arts department at a fourth Palestinian university in the West Bank. She added she remained excited about her job even though it required her to move to another city and to teach more in her undergraduate field of study, English, than in her graduate field, international relations. In explaining her choice, she said "the opportunity presented itself and [she] was happy to seize it," a decision she has come to further appreciate when the department asked her to assume more leadership responsibilities.

The same predominant effect of contextual forces was also evident in reports of lacking fulfilment in the post-completion career experiences of participants not working in academia, whether in the OPT or abroad. One participant said that although her British degree secured her a positive job application outcome, it has also brought her unfavourable office politics and unreasonable expectations at her work at a local human rights NGO:

At work, there are people with long years of service before me, and they are divided into two groups. The first is of those who look at me as this new girl with a UK Masters who is here to enjoy a good position so we'll try to criticise her work. The second group is of those who consult me on things of which I have no knowledge, their belief being that I am a UK graduate and so I know everything and should understand anything. (translated)

After completing an international relations degree, another participant resumed working as an English schoolteacher, knowing any plans for working in the Palestinian government would not be possible:

When I was at university [abroad], I enjoyed engaging in the classroom and beyond, and my professors were always supportive. The amount of access to knowledge I had was phenomenal. However, I trusted that these engagements and ideas, though fun and significant, would not make any benefits to my career because I knew I would never be employed in the Ministry of Interior or of Foreign Affairs, or be able to apply the

security or neoliberal approaches of international relations in Palestinian politics. Our politics don't work that way but through nepotism and political affiliation. I was just satisfied with the friends and connections I made and the freedom I enjoyed.  
(translated)

A third participant graduated with distinction from a data science programme in the UK. She enhanced her specialisation by interning and later working, until the expiry of her student visa, in the field in the UK. Committed to returning to Gaza, “even if temporarily”, she returned there knowing the local market remains unprepared for this field; therefore, she prioritised applications for remote jobs with companies and research institutes abroad. A fourth participant, a medical doctor, finished his Masters and was preparing to complete his medical licensing exams when a family event back home—along with the social and economic repercussions of COVID—made him reassess his life priorities and finally decide to accept a job offer at a healthcare charity in Gaza. For a fifth participant, who had studied in Qatar and wished to work there, Qatarisation—the policy of prioritising Qatari citizens for employment, meant that her immediate employers of interest, Qatari global charities, were less accessible to her. This context, she said, made her accept a job offer in a different sector, tourism, while retaining interest in her field of graduate study. A sixth participant, following a career mostly in teaching, a Masters in education, and a wish to reunite with family, decided to go back to Gaza and accepted a job offer at a health INGO. A seventh participant accepted a post-graduation job in a field different from that of their graduate study because they needed a source of income to fund their extended stay abroad. Clarifying the significant influence of legal stay and visa issues on career choices, an eighth participant said,

... maybe I already mentioned that at the beginning of the interview, but I never imagined myself working in Tunisia or in another Arab country, but mostly, you know, because of this big question of like, okay, you leave—especially you leave Gaza—and like, now you're studying in this country within the EU. What's next? And there was always this question in the back of my mind, like, in terms of security, you know, in terms of retaining some legal papers and legal status that would give me that sense of security.

The previous cases show many participants' perception of social, economic, and legal forces, in Palestine and abroad, shaping their post-completion achievements. These forces were demonstrably larger in their often negative or limiting influence than the participants' own

intensions of post-completion endeavours. Such influence, while prevalent among many participants' reports, was not experienced to be as negative by all participants. For a few, negative contextual forces of limited opportunities for making an impact seemed to be less detrimental to their sector choices or professional interest and determination. One participant of a track record of professionally progressive work in human rights advocacy in Gaza reflected being conscious of but not demoralised by the paradox of her work at a time of worsening violations of Palestinians' rights. She expressed standing fast to the view that documenting, exposing, and advocating for the end of human rights violations are necessary to inform accountability efforts in the future. Another participant, in a junior position at a private development consulting firm in the West Bank, reflected hope and interest in face of what she described as great challenges of decolonising foreign aid to Palestinians. After expressing recognition of difficult conditions of life and work in the OPT, two of the six participants currently in PhD programmes—one from Gaza and one from the West Bank—said their planned return immediately or shortly after graduation follows their commitment to the “national cause,” to improving those conditions, and to serving specifically fellow Palestinian women and students.

### Theme Summary

This experiential theme has presented the participants' perceptions of the contribution of their funded graduate education abroad to their careers. It illustrated the signalling power (Spence, 1973) which they gained by virtue of their scholarship awards and foreign degrees and which they sometimes actively wielded to boost employers' impression of their job readiness. The theme further reflected patterns in the participants' post-completion career trajectories where their funded education abroad, including (global) practical learning experiences, helped them advance or shift their careers, though often not in autonomous ways, to satisfying levels, or for effects of evidenced societal impact. Nonetheless, the participants' job descriptions suggest some of them served in roles of advanced knowledge and/or leadership work. This advanced work ranged from constructing and operating data collection and analysis frameworks for academic research and development aid projects, to overseeing team members and corporate activities, and to producing knowledge in academic and professional settings. Other participants' descriptions of their post-completion jobs did not reflect such advancement but instead involved significant career shifts, e.g., from language education to tourism and development aid and from human rights advocacy to diplomacy. Finally, the theme demonstrated that for many participants, their post-completion job outcomes were shaped by



social, economic, and legal forces in the OPT and/or abroad. For those who returned to the OPT, they reflected their post-completion career trajectories were shaped by one of the following factors: precarity in the academic sector, office politics, nepotism in the public sector, market unreadiness for specific fields, and family circumstances and attachment. For those who remained abroad, visa issues related to work and legal stay abroad were a significant factor in determining which employment pathways they could choose and follow. Per the data for both groups, it seemed that job availability and quality often superseded their ideal career plans.

Overall, this theme, together with the previous one, showed the academic and career-related aspects of the research participants' scholarship experiences. As the first theme, though, suggested, the Palestinian context was omnipresent before and through these scholarship experiences. The following experiential theme therefore shifts focus to the participants' appreciation of their national life- and identity-related experiences through their funded education abroad.

#### 3.2.4. More Engaged, More Reflexive Palestinian-ness

The research participants' interview data show two major events, beyond academic and career progress, that were key through their scholarship experiences. The first event was of their enjoyment of free movement and the associated freedom now to meet—often for the first time—fellow Palestinians from other areas and backgrounds. The second event was of engagement in often reflexive deliberations about a range of national affairs. The participants' accounts of both events demonstrate their perception of a multidimensional, advanced effect of their scholarship experiences on their sense of national awareness, membership, and identity. This experiential theme starts with a description of the participants' reported perceptions of freedom from the context of immediate political oppression in the OPT. It then presents three major experiences enjoyed amidst this freedom: meeting fellow Palestinians from other areas and backgrounds, recalibrating national awareness in international settings, and deepening their sense of national membership, including the personal and social dimensions of it.

Many participants articulated enjoying freedom from the political violence and its permeating everyday effects—that is, effects in the mental, environmental, human rights, and/or mobility spheres of life—in the OPT. One participant said she had more of her mental energy released now that she enjoyed constant access to electricity and reliable internet connection. “I no longer had to keep thinking about what to do when the electricity goes off or

when the (2G) internet is too slow,” she said, of a challenge defining—sometimes threatening—the life of Palestinians (see Anna et al., 2021; Hajjaj, 2022). Another participant spoke passionately of factors that helped him make “a 180-degree change” from the “survival mood” by which he said he had always gone in Gaza: the drone-free sky, secure neighbourhood, and “chill people, unbothered by sounds of planes in the sky.” Other participants focused particularly on enjoying freedom from restrictions on movement and travel. One participant took fullest note of this freedom while boarding trains and travelling across the UK and Europe. Responding to the interview question of what, beyond academics, they appreciated of their sojourn, the participant said,

... I was most impressed by the freedom of movement. I could in a few minutes plan my trip to another city or country... every time I took the train and found myself in a new city, I reminded myself that this was not normal, that this was unique to someone from Gaza. I just felt like ‘wow, the train was no big deal to any other passengers, no reaction! (translated)

The participants’ enjoyment of such freedom from the salient everyday effects of insecurity and immobility in the OPT was most signified through their accounts of the opportunity to meet fellow Palestinians. For most of them, whether from Gaza or the West Bank, it was their first time to meet Palestinians from the other area—in addition to meeting Palestinian citizens of Israel and diaspora Palestinians. They described this broader national exposure as an opportunity to achieve fuller awareness of a cross-fragmental Palestine and a better understanding of the extent to which Palestinian territory and peoplehood are segregated. One participant had a particularly compelling, perhaps tragicomic comment of this increased national awareness. In the course of their response to the interview question on whether they met other Palestinians during their sojourn, they said,

I suppose the most romantic Palestinians are those in refugee camps in Lebanon. They go to [Lebanon’s southern] borders to catch a whiff of Palestine while perhaps weeping. And these don’t like the Palestinians of Ramallah because streets there are too clean to be in Palestine, but they like us—Palestinians of Gaza—because of the shared misery. Palestinians of Jerusalem were especially interesting; I met some who were most nationalistic and others whose Palestinian-ness I couldn’t determine. The latter didn’t fit into at least my own definition of nationalism, which I do concede may be too narrow. So, there are sometimes enormous differences, which is good and normal. All

nations of the world have this diversity, but because we [Palestinians of Gaza] are locked in, we are denied the opportunity to face these differences. (translated)

These encounters of the research participants with fellow Palestinians and the resulting insights about their peoplehood seemed to enhance and be enhanced by engagements focused on the Palestinian issue. The next section describes these engagements and their reported significance for the participants' sense of national awareness and membership.

#### 3.2.4.1. National Awareness in International Settings

Many participants reported dedicating some of their academic and/or civic engagements during their time abroad to thinking about Palestine and advocating for Palestinian rights. In their academic activities, participants used the OPT as an empirical site of their academic advancement. For example, one participant completed her dissertation on factors influencing Palestinian agricultural products, two others on the global context of Palestinians' access to international exchanges and to foreign aid, and two more on the applicability and implications of certain international legal provisions on specific issues of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In their civic engagements while studying abroad, participants joined speaking events and, occasionally, protests, where they shared their experiences of life in the OPT to raise awareness about the politics, humanitarian implications, and other aspects of life under conflict. They also attended meetings with or contributed to events by student organisations focused on Palestine, e.g., Palestine Society at various UK universities and Students for Justice in Palestine in the US. Participants who were studying abroad during the May 2021 eruption of violence in across the OPT and Israel organised or helped organise on- and off-campus events to contribute their voice and lived experience to discussion in their host countries of that cycle of violence and its broader context. Uniquely, participants on the Durham Palestine Educational Trust scholarship, because of its structure as an educational charity in the UK, were offered several opportunities to engage in such awareness elevation events.

All participants who reported such engagements cited as their motivation the need to amplify Palestinian voices and to challenge widespread lack of knowledge of or compassion with their cause. This motivation was fuelled by a two-step realisation that was strongly prevalent in the data. First, in the course of responding to the interview questions on any realisations about Palestine they drew from their sojourns, many participants reported starting to realise that “نحننا مش مركز الكون”/“we [Palestinians] are not the centre of the universe,” a

realisation repeated in exactly the same words by different participants, from those who studied in Australia and the US to those who studied in Europe. Even in Jordan, one participant said,

... even when [fellow Palestinians] and others watch the news of what happens in Gaza, especially during wars, they still don't know certain things about our life there. This was shocking to me, but it led me to the second realisation: We are not the centre of the universe. Even people in Jordan were amazed at learning we had restaurants, cafes, and universities. Their amazement always was a shock to me. (translated)

Extending this realisation, the participants reported developing a broader range of perceptions of how Palestine is approached in their host countries. These perceptions ranged from ones of active animosity and passive apathy to Palestinians to ones of heightened scrutinisation of discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

First, nearly all participants who studied in Europe and the US cited media distortion as a case of animosity. Their reported perception was that Palestine is subject to so much media distortion that ordinary people in their respective host countries develop negative popular views—which in turn, two participants added, facilitate continued lack of action by the international community to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Second, several participants reported drawing perceptions of apathy to Palestine from classrooms and beyond. When prompted to share an example of such reported apathy, one participant shared the following incident of absence—or omission—of Palestine from the curriculum of a social justice course at an American university: “A professor wanted us to read Edward Said’s *Orientalism* but instead of assigning his book, she assigned us a book written about his book. It drove me nuts because the original book was there and was accessible!” Other perceptions developed by many participants were of the strong scrutinisation of discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including through charges of antisemitism. One participant, who studied and has been working in Australia, said, “support for Zionism and charges of antisemitism are quite common here, especially in Melbourne, given the government’s stance, so it’s not easy for someone to go out publicly in criticism of Israel.” Another participant’s account stands out as insightful of how this peculiar scrutinisation—often coupled with extreme animosity to Palestinians—came to be:

It’s oftentimes like you’re treated like Hitler’s cousin here [in France]. That’s the point of departure—you’re Hitler’s cousin. Now you may be nice, so you’re a distant cousin of Hitler still. It’s an automatic accusation, a sense of guilt vented away at us, a

desperate cry for forgiveness for French complicity in handing Jews to the Nazis.  
(translated)

Continuing his account, the participant emphasised that he had never realised this is how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is approached outside of the OPT:

It's a huge problem, and it's particularly so because nobody had taught us anything about this. Not at home, not at school, not at university, nowhere had we been taught how support for Israel follows that history of the Holocaust and of European antisemitism. I mean, I literally came here without even an understanding of antisemitism, an understanding that is essential to begin and approach any discussion here. I struggled to make sense of it at first, and so I always thought of my grandmother then. She was warned by her Jewish neighbours of imminent Zionist attacks on their village. Was she antisemitic to criticise the people who expelled her from her village? We never thought of it that way, so when I came here, I was made to recalibrate my approach to any discussion of Palestine. (translated)

Most participants seemed to be driven even more by their range of such perceptions to pursue or keep pursuing opportunities to challenge the object of their perception. Two participants said they actioned this drive by continuing to use media and educational spaces, including schools, to raise awareness of Palestinians' plight, in course feeling assured by the often positive engagement from their audience. Responding to the interview question on any realisations about Palestine they drew from their sojourns, a third participant said she actioned this perception in similar spaces but also in formal ones where opportunities were available:

I understood I was not the only suffering and I should be as interested in others' causes as I would like them to be in mine. I translated this into action during a session in the UK Parliament where I joined Bangladeshi colleagues on International Mother Language Day to celebrate their heritage but also to connect their past struggle with our struggle for independence and liberation. (translated)

#### 3.2.4.2 Reflexivising National Awareness

The engagements and evolving perceptions presented in the previous section seem to have helped the participants during their education abroad to develop fuller awareness of the global context that shapes reality in the OPT. Simultaneously, these engagements, along with other experiences accessed through their scholarships, appear to have prompted the participants

to take their national awareness to a reflexive front. In the course of their interviews, most participants constantly demonstrated a sense of reflexive national membership, recounting their experiences abroad and volunteering contrastive reports of how these experiences inform their approach now to various national affairs, from education and politics to national identity, as well as to leading for the first time an independent personal life.

On education, the participants shared reflections in which they contrasted their learning experiences abroad with those of theirs previously in the OPT. Contrastive comments in the participants' accounts covered issues spanning the limitation of resources for effective teaching and research, the lack of emphasis on writing, research, and critical and open learning, and the structural difficulty of creating an atmosphere conducive to intellectual engagement. The following three quotes, respectively from participants who studied in Jordan, Qatar, and France, illustrate such contrastive commentary:

There was very limited availability of resources for research or even teaching [at the local universities where I studied and later taught], compared to what was available in Jordan, and that really should be thought about by our universities. (translated)

The nature of life in Gaza makes it very difficult for people to focus on things beyond securing subsistence. ... It is true that some organisations avail such opportunities [for discussion of key issues], but I feel they lead nowhere because participants are still mentally occupied with trying to survive and secure subsistence. Being here, free from violence and its daily manifestations, allows you the mental space to think more concretely about Gaza and about Palestine. (translated)

I think this is something that we lack, unfortunately, in our domestic education system, which is the critical thinking and the challenge to challenge what the professor is saying, to think outside of the box, to say your opinion without being afraid, and not just to say whatever what you think the professor would like and want to hear. That was also challenging for me because I was like, there were younger people than me in the class who were just so courageous and so like vocal. They would just say, no, this is bullshit. They'd say it to the professor, and then the professor would be like, "oh, yeah, tell me more about it!"

On politics, the participants drew on their academic and/or broader experiences abroad in reflecting on the need for more freedom of expression, enhanced rule of law, improved governance, as well as the dual need for bridging internal division and, instead of building

national institutions, prioritising the rebuilding of effective communities in pursuit of a connected, functional national peoplehood. However, one critique stood out as not only prevalent but also particularly significant: Reproduction of political beliefs. To some participants, they found in their education abroad space to think more (critically) about the context and contingency of this reproduction. This is illustrated in the impassioned but sobering account below, shared by a participant who studied in the UK. This account begins to contextualise and de-essentialise reproduction of political beliefs in the OPT, while also highlighting the potential of education (abroad) to cause cracks in the cycle of their reproduction:

When we were young, we were by far emotion-driven, which resulted from the difficulties we suffered in Gaza because of oppression. The more oppressive life becomes, the more you adopt euphoric ideas—‘yeah, this is all unjust, but it’ll all go away and Palestine will be free and we will return these [Israelis] to where they came from, and Palestine will be free from the river to the sea, and we will go on to live an ideal, rosy life’. This emanates from a mix of emotion-driven, fanatic religious and political ideas propagated by fundamentalists and ideologues. We were deeply affected by these ideas. Look at Fathi Hammad [a Hamas leader] when he says we’ll liberate Palestine and won’t recognize Israel; his rhetoric enflames passions and make illogical things believable. When you couple this with the injustice inflicted on us and the deep weakness we feel, the act of following fantasies, of imagining a radically alternative reality becomes very much possible. When you study and live abroad, you leave all of this. You realize the world is much bigger than the situation there and the occupation no longer affects you individually, at least not to the same degree. You then start reclaiming a more realistic sense of the world—even when this means we become pessimistic, which is natural given the bleak situation in Palestine. You finally realize we Palestinians are not a legendary or superhuman or resilient people. We are simple, poor people who fight and withstand hardship only because that is all we can do, and once we are free, we will go on to live an ordinary life. (translated)

To another participant, who also studied in the UK, he found in his education abroad a window to recalibrate his view not only on political beliefs in the OPT but also on the context he said *is* engineered to keep their reproduction cycle going:

I was highly frustrated because I saw people were really developing at all levels in all countries but giving us this fake feeling—victory, resistance, resilience, whatever it is. It's a box; we've been put in a well-designed box, and all of our ideas emerge from within this box. They appear to us to be new or radical, but once we leave the box, we discover it's fake.

For a third participant, who studied in France, his education abroad presented an opportunity to leave that box but also challenged him to engage in critical self-inspection. In the course of sharing his experience, he said,

What is the source of our political beliefs about the national cause? No source. Your father? My father? AlJazeera? The mosque, if we go there? I discovered here that people read for Ghassan Kanafani, and they feel shocked when you tell them you haven't read for him. I remember a professor was covering Edward Said, so she asked for the Palestinian in the classroom to stand up and share his thoughts—in French—on Said's work. I didn't know how to do so even in Arabic! You realize you're Palestinian only because of your birth there and because of your survival of wars. It dawns on you then to stop and reflect, how have I come to learn my politics and to grow my understanding of national affairs? (translated)

Furthermore, most of the participants from Gaza, regardless of their foreign countries of study, demonstrated wrestling with their sense of national vis-à-vis subnational identity. Three participants said they had always introduced themselves as Gazan, explaining it to professors and friends abroad as a way of emphasising “the kind of isolation and suffering we had gone through” (also see Abdel-Wahab, 2022). All three said though that with encounters with other Palestinians, interactions with other people, and/or further thinking about it, they have come to give up this primacy of subnational pain and instead embrace the view that “we are one people and not two separate nations even if we have different experiences.”

The participants' perceptions of changes in their sense of identity were neither limited to participants from Gaza nor to changes in their national identity. Several participants recounted that during their education abroad, they engaged in rethinking their individual identities along sociopolitical, critical, and/or gendered ways.

One of the participants who studied in Qatar said he grew more critical of thinking of himself in individualist terms, instead embracing a belief that he is part of a larger social collective. By extension, he said, he also grew more firm in his belief that being Palestinian



cannot and should not be divorced from the larger collective of also being Arab. For four participants, their (increased) exposure to fellow Palestinians and global peers prompted them to be more conscious of their perceived positionalities of relative privilege. For example, several participants said they grew more aware of the relative privileges, or lack thereof, that resulted from their social background, economic class, and/or city of residence, and the ensuing level of access to earlier educational and self-development opportunities. Additionally, some woman participants highlighted that their education abroad presented them an opportunity to reflect on their gendered sense of identity. Two participants said they enjoyed more personal, social, and intellectual freedom while living abroad, including through exposure to feminist academic scholarship. In continuing their account, they reflected that certain “situations”, “observations”, and “tests” made them re-evaluate the school of feminist thought by which they now feel inspired in their lives as Palestinian women. In her concluding remark in the interview, one participant, who had attended a private foreign school in the West Bank, said that her engagements on Palestine and with Palestinians have become diverse and extensive—in academic, civic, and social settings—since her graduate study abroad. “I feel I have become much more Palestinian,” she concluded.

#### 3.2.4.3. Experiences in the Personal and Social Spheres

Finally, the participants’ accounts show that their deepened sense of national membership extended to the more personal and social spheres of their lives. For most of them, their education abroad marked the first time they had to rely on themselves in managing their now independent life. Several of them offered often impassioned accounts of their experiences of such independence. In her account, echoing other participants’, one participant enumerated several forms of this independence that she enjoyed while in the UK:

I was the only one in charge of my life. I enjoyed the ability to travel to any city at any time I wanted; to come home at the time I wanted; to sleep outdoors on the hill next to my accommodation; to spend the night at a friend’s house; to take a walk in the woods and climb up trees; and go out in my house dress; all while free from censoring stares or people’s interference. (translated)

Nearly half of the participants reported finding in this more independent life space or time to make several gains, from becoming aware of the caring labour of their families to widening their social circle and cultural exposure, and/or diversifying their interests and engagements.

At losing in-person contact with her family, one participant said she was now more pushed to leave her comfort zone and find friends with whom to “go shopping, have conversations, or plan gatherings.” In course, she said, she “enjoyed learning about their own lives and unique backgrounds.” Similarly, not living with family anymore made another participant “assume responsibility for doing the things [she] needed and had to do to handle [her] daily life”. For a third participant, the time away from his wife and their child as well as the time alone during lockdowns made him reflect on his family life. Since his return to the OPT, he said he has become “more expressive to [his] wife in terms of showing [his] feelings and appreciating her,” as well as becoming more involved in his child’s life while managing the demands of his job. A fourth participant said she now leads a life of extensive engagements in her work at a school and in several other professional and community settings. Reflecting on her motivation behind these engagements, she said,

Remembering it now, I believe there was a point in my life [before my graduate study abroad] where I feel I only had a few things to do with my day: Just go to work, go home, do work, and do it all over again the next day. And, I remember how it felt like at that point. I feel very much as if I was missing out on so much, missing out on doing so many things with my time, missing out on so many people that I could meet or cross lives with. So, when I was in the US, it felt like the day was kind of longer for some reason. And I was able to do so many things and I often reflected, how come I never felt that I had so much time in the day and so much energy to do so many things back when I was in Gaza!

For several participants, this (first-time experience of) independent life presented challenges and opportunities conducive to personal growth. This is illustrated in the following accounts from three participants of different life backgrounds and trajectories:

I didn’t know before how much gas costs in Palestine because I was about to get engaged and had no clue how much my fiancé was paying for gas, for my coffee, or anything. I never knew how [personal] finance works and how you have to take care of your money. And, I grew a lot in this time and saved money even with the little I got and still enjoyed myself. And the whole idea of me moving out; I didn’t want to be involved with anyone, so I lived on my own and this gave me a lot of, like, things and I stopped depending on anyone. Also, I’m a lot less angry now. The UK forced me to

because I lived in my own bubble and learned how to calm down. So, generally I'm much better at, like, controlling my life and feelings now.

Another participant echoed a similar experience of the opportunity to outgrow certain respects of past socialisation:

I got a higher understanding of my fears, my insecurities, my internal beasts. At some point in Gaza, you don't have the time to think about your well-being because in Gaza you're just running to prove yourself. You're just running to secure a job or whatever, and then you get the chance to go to a country where it's really peaceful. You have your time without the interference of any of your family or friends—because generally in Gaza you're owned. You're owned to this society. This society has you; you don't have a chance to think of yourself there. I got the chance to think of myself. I got some time to think of what I really hate, what I really love, what tears me, and then I found that I have several insecurities that I never thought of. I had some fears that I never thought of, and I had a chance to just feel myself.

This dual illustration of appreciating independent life abroad and growing at the personal level was also evident in a third participant's concluding remark through the interview:

I accepted that it [the old version of myself] had to go because it had to go. And there was like, a new a new version of me. I began thinking, like, I can't accept any kind of work now. I want work where I feel that it's in line with my values, where I contribute to my country and to the world. I set standards for myself. Even in terms of the person I would marry, the whole standards changed. Previously, I thought, for example, it's okay if you're in a relationship and you have to sacrifice a lot for that person to be happy. No, not really. You don't have to sacrifice a lot for the other person to be happy. You know there is sacrifice, of course—compromise, but with limitations. I didn't know those limitations; before, I thought there's no limitations. That's how they, you know, raise us, and how they teach us to do—for both actually women and men. When it's a relationship, you sacrifice and you know if you need to die, go die. But no. For those things, I developed new ideas and new standards and I've since had them.

### Theme Summary

This last experiential theme presented findings about the research participants' scholarship experiences beyond their academic study and career gains. These findings show

that the participants perceived making significant gains in their sense of national awareness, membership, and identity. Reported experiences of safety, free movement, encounters with co-nationals, national advocacy, engagements in international settings, independent life, and much contrastive reflection on various national affairs were valued by the participants. When considered together with the three preceding experiential themes, this theme underscores the need for moving away from limiting scholarships impact to careerist terms. The contextualisation it offers of the perceived impact of these participants' scholarship experiences demands the use of terms fit to capture the multidimensionality of this impact, e.g., its subjective, epistemic, and political dimensions. As explained at the metatheoretical, theoretical, and analytical levels earlier in this thesis (2.2.1; 2.3.2; 2.4.4), it is the purpose of abductive analysis to interrogate this potential, multidimensional impact and, given the scope of this doctoral study, to demonstrate whether and how it may be relevant to peace in the OPT (RQs 3 and 4). Outcomes of this abductive analysis are presented in the next subchapter, which moves the findings to a theoretical level (corresponding to the second, actual domain of reality in critical realism).

### 3.3. Inferential Findings

The preceding experiential findings demonstrated a process of capacity-building, i.e., provision of opportunities to the research participants' for developing their knowledge, skills, experiences, and connections and, crucially, for doing so across the academic, professional, reputational, national, social, and personal spheres of their lives. Based on the research critique (2.1) and meta-theoretical assumptions guiding this doctoral study (2.2; 2.3), this capacity-building is taken to represent the impact of international graduate scholarships on Palestinian recipients; subsequently, its potential relevance to micro-level peace in the OPT can now be established. Within the theoretical framework of Everyday Peace Capability, this potential relevance needs to be demonstrated and explained, a two-step task delivered respectively in this and the following subchapters. In this subchapter, I present the inferential findings that demonstrate the functions of everyday peace inferred from the scholarships impact observed in the previous subchapter. By demonstrating these functions, I can confirm the initial response to RQ3 and proceed to addressing RQ4, that is, *whether the characterisation of scholarships impact in the OPT warrant some rethinking of the potential efficacy of scholarships vis-à-vis peace, and if so, how do scholarships relate to micro-level peace in the OPT?*

As explained in the previous chapter (2.4.4.3), these inferential findings emerged from abductive analysis of the participants' interview and documentary data, or a process of theoretical redescription that corresponds to the actual domain of reality (Fletcher, 2016). The overarching inferential theme resulting from abductive analysis suggests that scholarships can contribute to everyday peace in the OPT by facilitating significant disruption of the governmentalities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (the conflict). This disruption concerns the systemic conditions governing the conflict trajectory in ways that perpetuate a Palestinian subjectivity of subjugation, limit Palestinians' national connection and international exposure, and undermine their capacities to build their lives, communities, and state. The research participants' accounts demonstrated three pathways of this disruption. Each of these pathways is demonstrated in the following subthemes: enhanced progress towards a more autonomous subjectivity (3.3.1.1), towards a consciousness transgressive of enforced citizenship disciplines (3.3.1.2), and towards greater possibilities of epistemic capacity-building (3.3.1.3). The overarching inferential theme is presented first below and followed by these three subthemes.

### 3.3.1. Facilitating Disruption of Conflict Governmentalities

Considering the empirical evidence presented in the previous subchapter, I find it strongly plausible to suggest that international graduate scholarships can expand Palestinian recipients' disruption of governmentalities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Palestinian scholarship recipients bring along, by definition, a history of success under and despite conflict, and their application to scholarships—highly selective awards—represents a statement of hope and ambition counter to the ethos of the protracted conflict. Both points suggest the research participants had already been engaged in conflict disruption, an engagement whose significant expansion was facilitated by scholarships. The research participants' accounts of their scholarship experiences reflect three ways in which their scholarships are demonstrated to have expanded that engagement in conflict disruption. They enhanced the participants' ability for subject repositioning, enabled their transgression of oppressive disciplines of citizenship, and expanded their epistemic capacity-building.

#### 3.3.1.1. Enhancing Ability for Subject Repositioning

Many participants' accounts demonstrate that scholarships helped them consolidate a stronger, more positive role in repositioning themselves in relation (rather than in limitation) to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as well as to a reflexive agenda of individual advancement and contribution towards national progress. This repositioning was first evidenced in the

participants' application to (highly) competitive study and scholarship programmes abroad. Selection to these programmes added to the participants' history of success experience, the most influential source of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). Extending this history, and thereby adding to their self-efficacy, was the participants' subsequent success in (i) overcoming academic challenges, (ii) appreciating their interdisciplinary and global learning, completing their degrees (iii), (iv) enhancing their practical competencies and (perceived) professional competitiveness, and (v) achieving a greater degree of national awareness. With this success and deepening self-efficacy, the participants demonstrated co-producing a subjectivity of hope and progress but also of (self-)integration, represented by their increased connection outwardly to the national and international and inwardly to intellectual, professional, and personal aspects of their lives. Their demonstrated co-produced subjectivity was also of civic-mindedness, represented by their reflective, academic, and advocacy engagements with national affairs. In co-producing this subjectivity, scholarships seem to have enhanced the participants' ability to reposition themselves further from subjects of direct and structural violence of the conflict and more to subjects whose "modes of thinking, stances, and practices" (Mac Ginty, 2021) were now more strongly beholden to their individual achievement and ambition, their critical vision for domestic improvements, and their hope for (international engagement in) the conflict cessation.

This enhanced exercise of subject repositioning contrasts the engineered reproduction of conflict subjectivities in the OPT (Moussa, 2020; Shehadeh, 2015). I see this engineering, or governmentality, in several ways in which the conflict conducts Palestinian subjectivities. Experiences of human and material destruction (Nijim, 2020, 2023, 2024), subjugation to mobility and market restrictions (Gisha, n.d.; Tartir et al., 2021), and long-lasting depletion of hope and of an "undefeated despair" (Berger, 2006; Hilal, 2009) produce a subjectivity of more misery than hope, more survival than progress, more withdrawal than engagement, and perhaps self-destructiveness rather than self-integration (Khatib, 2018, 2022; Khayyat & Mousa, 2022; Stewart, 2011). The emergent limitation, if not absence, of material and mental space and resources to counter internalisation of these experiences further intensifies their effect in reproducing conflict subjectivities (Affouneh, 2007; Al-Rahl, 2018; Marie et al., 2016). It also intensifies the detrimental effect of such experiences on an otherwise widely celebrated commitment among Palestinians to education-as-a-means-of-liberation (Pherali & Turner, 2018).

The participants' perceptions, however, reflected counterdisciplinary subject repositions, that is, capacity gains and engagements contradicting the disciplinary nature and effect of this governmentalisation of conflict subjectivities reproduction in the OPT. Where Palestinian subjectivities are governmentalised to internalise a (global) flow of power, subjugation, and violence, scholarships offered a pathway for *stronger* rejection of this governmentality. The participants' data reflect experiences of a global stage where they acted well on their hope and ambition and on their role in reconstructing their agenda in relation to their individual advancement and contribution towards national progress. This counter-conduct of conflict subjectivities reproduction in the OPT led in course to further counter-conduct of governmentalities, namely structuring Palestinians' national and international alienation and disciplining their capacity-building engagements. Counter-conduct of both governmentalities is demonstrated in the next two subthemes.

### 3.3.1.2. Enabling Transgression of Citizenship Disciplines

Accounts by nearly all the participants demonstrate substantial resocialisation of their national and global citizenship consciousness. This resocialisation represented a defiance of the conflict governmentality of national and international alienation, i.e., the material and structural conditions through which Palestinians' level of exposure to and engagement in national and international life is minimised (Elhour, 2022; Griffiths et al., 2022).

Counter-conduct of this governmentality commenced with the participants' connection to co-nationals and strengthened through their exchange of different national life experiences. Both actions represented a transgression of a key structure of Palestinians' national alienation: socioterritorial fragmentation, including through restrictions on *intranational* mobility. Where this structure effects a consciousness focused on subnational life (for illustration, see Alijla, 2020), the participants' recounted experiences contrast this alienation, showing deepened sense of *national* membership, including through increased awareness of national life beyond the region to which they had been and continue to be confined. This counter-conduct was enhanced through the participants' engagement of their sense of Palestinian citizenship more deeply and critically, as represented by their contrastive and critical reflections on Palestinian identity and various affairs of national life. This engagement, and the attitude of reflexive citizenship and national self-critique it represents, points to a stronger act of counter-conducting national alienation, whether governmentalised offensively by Israel (Gordon, 2008) or defensively or inadvertently by Palestinian actors (Alijla & Al-Masri, 2019; Elayah et al., 2024). In its inward direction and its positive implications of liveliness of national life, the critical self-introspection

demonstrated in the participants' accounts of their increased national connection and awareness runs counter to the current of Palestinians' citizenship consciousness that is conducted through direct and structural Israeli violence and (consequently) disciplinarian Palestinian ethos, e.g., limiting national priorities to pursuit of the end of *that* violence (Hussein, n.d.).

The participants' counter-conduct of the governmentality of Palestinian alienation was not limited to disrupting disciplines of national citizenship. Much of the reported scholarships impact suggests that the participants' conflict disruption extended to the governmentalisation of Palestinians' global citizenship, which is enacted through, *inter alia*, restrictions on inbound and outbound international mobility (Griffiths, 2022; Griffiths et al., 2022). The participants' exposure to new experiences in now international contexts and their immersion in often globally-themed study, including through experiential learning abroad, connected them or enhanced their connection to the world and to global epistemic/professional communities relevant to them (Hovey, 2015). This connection represents another level of counter-conducting the conflict governmentality of international alienation. Where the current of Palestinians' consciousness of national identity and (possibilities of) international membership is conducted through restrictions on *international* mobility, the participants' success abroad and their oft-reported enjoyment of meeting, studying, or working with international peers suggest not only freedom from but also active resistance to that "engineered circuitry" (Mac Ginty, 2019). Through and after these global engagements, the participants' academic learning, political advocacy, and knowledge production activities, often on Palestine, demonstrated the potential of the participants to claim their role as individual actors exercising their national consciousness on a world stage, contributing both to foreign views of the situation in the OPT and to representation of Palestinians in scholarly, educational, and professional platforms.

#### 3.3.1.3. Expanding Epistemic Capacity-Building

Along with their enhanced repositioning ability and broadened citizenship consciousness, the research participants' accounts demonstrate their scholarships expanded their engagement in a process of epistemic capacity-building. This engagement demonstrably involved counter-conducting the governmentality of knowledge "de-development" in the OPT (Roy, 2016), i.e., the systemic degradation of knowledge infrastructure—institutions, resources, and opportunities (Hammond, 2011; Jebril, 2021). This engagement in epistemic capacity-building was illustrated throughout the participants' reports of their scholarship experiences; for example, their study programme choices reflected noteworthy diversification of their knowledge pursuits, by specialising in certain study areas, shifting to new areas/fields



of study, and undertaking study programmes beyond those focused on “development” and humanitarianism. During their funded graduate education abroad, the participants engaged in advanced academic learning that usually involved intensive research reading and writing, practical learning, and/or global, interdisciplinary, and critical approaches to study in their fields, beside their reported engagement in contrastive reflection on domestic affairs and personal life.

These reported experiences outline seven dimensions potentially characterising the participants’ engagement in developing their knowing methods. First, that their degree programmes were at the graduate level indicates that their gained thematic knowledge was characterised by specialisation. Specialised knowledge gain was demonstrated in the participants’ reported learning and research activities, and it can be further demonstrated through review of their study programmes, including those of them who shifted their fields of study (e.g., DU, n.d.; DIGS, n.d.). This specialised knowledge was further characterised by five dimensions as evidenced in the participants’ perceptions and indicated in online information on their study programs. These dimensions were of knowing as a scientific, interdisciplinary, global, experiential, and critical activity. Beyond their formal learning, the participants’ contrastive reflections on domestic affairs like politics and education and their reflections on personal life both sketch a seventh dimension of knowing as a reflexive activity. The participants’ completion of their study programmes and their prevalent demonstration of these seven dimensions of their knowledge gain point to an effect deeper than increased and diversified knowledge attainment, rather an expansion of their *epistemic* capacity, that is, experiencing and appreciating more methods of knowing that draw on advanced knowledge qualities like systematicity, complexity, global interconnection, relevance-to-practice, (re)orientation to justice, and reflexivity and subjectivity. More of the participants’ data evidence this epistemic capacity-building, e.g., (i) progress to and through doctoral or further graduate study, including five PhD candidates following a critical approach to researching the OPT in their respective fields; (ii) transition to post-completion employment involving research or other knowledge work, and (iii) post-completion engagement in knowledge production in various settings.

The process of engaging in epistemic capacity-building represents strong counter-conduct of the conflict governmentality of epistemic de-development in the OPT. I see this governmentality represented in routine destruction of human and material resources of education (Hearst, 2024; Milton et al., 2021), orchestrated displacement of educators and

professionals (Elwaheidi, 2018; Jebril, 2018; Karpefors & van Riemsdijk, 2019), and restriction of academic and professional mobilities (Gisha, n.d.; Griffiths et al., 2022). Amidst protracted violence and emergency, this governmentality is also represented in the ensuing structuring of knowledge flows to the OPT to be limited not only in quantity but more crucially in quality, privileging flows of neoliberalism-infused humanitarian knowledge over sourcing (indigenous) knowledge for emancipation and development (Abdallah, 2016; Dana, 2015b; Isaac et al., 2019). In turn, reproduction of this humanitarian purpose of knowledge is structured through limitation of academic, political, and economic avenues for expanding the purpose of knowledge in the OPT. For example, blockade, aid-dependency, and restrictions on trade and international mobility mean the local market is too impoverished and humanitarian-oriented to offer the kind of partner necessary for engaging in experiential learning or research valuable for knowledge creation beyond humanitarian purposes (Sharabati-Shahin & Thiruchelvam, 2013). This deliberate-and-emergent, or deliberate-turned-emergent, disciplining of the activity of knowing—amidst protracted subjection to violence, immobility, and de-development—causes and intensifies reproduction of “conflict” subjectivities (Shibib, 2024). It also depletes and, borrowing a research participant’s precise term, “boxes” the agency of epistemic actors, significantly undermining their effective ability to resist or renegotiate this reproduction: “We’ve been put in a well-designed box, and all of our ideas emerge from, within this box. They appear to us to be new or radical, but once we leave the box, we discover it’s fake.”

The participants’ accounts outline a sharp contrast to this governmentalised epistemic de-development. Their counter-conduct of the process and effect of resource depletion, conflict protraction, and resulting epistemic boxing was demonstrated in their reports of resilient and successful engagement in new methods, sources, frontiers, practices, and applications of knowledge. This disruption of the epistemic de-development governmentality was also demonstrated in the participants’ reported utilisation of institutional and other sources to support their epistemic development.

## Theme Summary

This inferential theme has presented an inferential interpretation of the functions of everyday peace—or positive responses to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—that are represented in the participants’ scholarship experiences. Given the empirical data, and within the theoretical framework of Everyday Peace Capability, these functions were of the participants: (i)

increasing their self-efficacy through extending their academic and broader hope and success; (ii) continuing accumulation thereof despite the disequilibria of their life and education outside of the OPT's oppressive context, most often for the first time; (iii) gaining connectedness and practising civic-mindedness in global spaces; (iv) resocialising their domestic and global citizenship consciousness; (v) applying reflexivity and critical reflection, in academic and/or social settings, on issues of national concern; (vi) extending beyond a humanitarian purpose their knowledge pursuits; and (vii) advancing practice of different methods of knowing. In the Palestinian context, these functions are of everyday peace insofar as they represent actions that, in their rationale and outcome, are antithetical to the disciplining cycles of the conflict, those systemising flows of ethos of despair and helplessness, domestic segregation and alienation, global isolation and oblivion, and de-development of knowledge and other currents of safe, good life. These actions illustrate a strong expression of everyday peace power (Mac Ginty, 2021, ch. 3), a successful exercise of strong will in face of presumably overpowering conflict governmentalities, a disruption to their conducting of Palestinians' subjectivity and consciousness, a resistance to internalising, normalising, and capitulating to their effects of subjugation, alienation, and de-development, and a claim of hope and positive action against the restriction, policing, and denial of Palestinians' future(s) and (education) imaginaries (Amir, 2021; Ismail, 2025; Joronen et al., 2021; McGahern, 2024). On this account, scholarships are demonstrated to have strong potential to expand Palestinian recipients' effective ability to disrupt governmentalities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, thereby making it strongly plausible to suggest that scholarships impact is relevant to peace in the OPT because they can advance recipients' everyday peace capability. The generation of this potential of scholarships to contribute to peace in the OPT is explained in the next, final subchapter, which moves the findings to an ontological level (the third domain of reality in critical realism).

### **3.4. Dispositional Findings**

Thus far in this chapter, I have presented experiential and inferential findings, developed respectively from descriptive and abductive analysis of the 32 research participants' interview and documentary data. The experiential findings showed the significant academic, career, and multidimensional identity developments that the participants perceived drawing from their funded graduate education abroad. Within the meta-theoretical framework of Everyday Peace Capability (2.3), I took these developments to represent scholarships impact in the OPT. Then, the inferential findings re-presented these developments as demonstrating

advancement in the participants' subjective, citizenship, and epistemic functions of everyday peace in the Palestinian context. These inferential findings therefore established the relevance of scholarships impact to everyday peace in the OPT, where scholarships have potential to contribute to everyday peace by adding significantly to the recipients' capability of it. Within the meta-theoretical framework guiding this doctoral study (2.2; 2.3), this capability gain is posited to be generated through a process of capabilitisation: efficacious interactions between (i) the capacity developments and structural changes offered by scholarships and (ii) the human agency exercised by scholarship recipients to seize these offerings. This capabilitisation is posited not to arise from perceived developments, which would collapse the reality of the relevance-to-peace of scholarships impact to perceptions of it, i.e., the kind of epistemic fallacy repeatedly criticised in critical realism (Farasoo, 2024; Wiltshire, 2018). Nor can knowledge of this capabilitisation be established by summarising the capacities gained, which would technicalise the relevance-to-peace of scholarships impact rather than explain it in contextual terms. Findings of this process of capabilitisation and the interactions involved in it are presented in this subchapter.

Developed through retroductive analysis (2.4.4.4), the four following dispositional themes articulate the series of structure-agency dynamics underpinning the emergence of demonstrated gain in the participants' everyday peace capability. Overall, the claim advanced by these themes is that it is plausible to explain the potential contribution of scholarships to everyday peace in the OPT on account of a process in which scholarships (i) motivate, (ii) degovernmentalise, and (iii) guide the participants' expanded disruption of conflict governmentalities, (iv) simultaneously as scholarship recipients themselves—now more free from conflict disciplines—extend their exercise of (pre)dispositions of everyday peace. Each of the four parts of this explanatory claim, “sub-claim”, is presented in a dispositional theme. Altogether, the four themes help illuminate some of the structure-agency dynamics, contextual contingencies, and processual dimensions that underpin the demonstrated contribution of international graduate scholarships to everyday peace in the OPT, in response to RQ5: *What may explain the relevance of scholarships impact to micro-level peace in the OPT?* As a reminder, elaborate presentation of the empirical evidence informing the inferential interpretation in these dispositional themes was already offered in the second subchapter here (3.2). Reference to experiential themes is therefore regularly cited across the following dispositional themes.

### 3.4.1. Motivating Expansion of Conflict Disruption

Considering the available empirical data, it is plausible to make the first sub-claim that scholarships extended inducement of the participants' hope for educational advancement as a mode of everyday peace. The theme first demonstrates the national communalisation of this hope as a conflict-disruptive asset and the socialisation of Palestinians into practising it as a major counter-conduct of conflict governmentalities. After outlining the individual predispositions fostered in this context, including towards a strong interest in education abroad, the theme articulates six counts of scholarships' symbolic power that, in its correspondence with the aforementioned force of hope, extends the latter's efficacy in motivating stronger functions of everyday peace. Overall, the theme demonstrates that this motivation of expanded conflict disruption may well be contributing to the demonstrated emergence of gain in the participants' everyday peace capability.

In the context of protracted conflict and chronic de-development, Palestinians have cultivated a predisposition to educational development as a praxis of liberation, i.e., a psychological remedy, a resource of economic survival and social mobility, a means of resistance and liberation, and a space of freedom, creativity, and imagination (Abu-Lughod, 2000; Alzaroo & Hunt, 2003; Barakat, 2008; Bruhn, 2004; Dickerson, 1974; Taraki, 2000; Zelkovitz, 2015). Continuation and consolidation of this predisposition can be ascribed to multiple, mutually reinforcing forces of life in the OPT, including cultural and religious emphasis on education and community attitudes of high regard to (university) educators. The following structural forces within the Palestinian context may further predispose (particularly high-achieving) Palestinian students, like the participants in this doctoral study, to advance their education and to do so abroad: a historical national tradition of studying in foreign countries (1.3), a view of international support as key to achieving national aspirations and the resulting need for well-educated, internationally-connected leaders (see Abu-Lughod, 2000; Shibib, 2021), an enormous growth of (I)NGOs reliant on foreign donors and the resulting need for well-trained local talents to staff them (see Da'na, 2014; Schulz & Suleiman, 2020), and a sustained belief in graduate education (abroad) as a means of significant socioeconomic mobility (Alfoqahaa, 2015), all amidst limited availability and quality of graduate education locally and of efforts to address this limitation (Isaac et al., 2019). In the course of acting on these predispositions, high-achieving Palestinian students, like the participants in this doctoral study, build and advance their dispositions of (academic) ambition and self-efficacy (3.2.1).

This, in turn, gives more—or retains some (Pherali & Turner, 2018)—continuity to the socialised predispositions towards educational advancement and to the hope that, with it, one will contribute to the collective good of liberation and development.

This national communalisation of hope and socialisation into its practice through educational development represents an amalgamation of forces of everyday peace in the OPT. It creates context-driven predispositions to respond to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in ways that maintain and cultivate humanity through education and positive progress rather than internalise the disciplines of death, despair, and de-development enacted by the conflict governmentalities. Scholarships' symbolic power corresponds well with these forces of everyday peace and, in part because of this correspondence, can be claimed to extend inducement of the socialized hope that upholds them. Before articulating six counts of this symbolic power, it is worth pointing out that the huge gap between levels of income in the OPT and the cost of attendance at graduate programmes abroad predisposes Palestinian students to a strong need for scholarships (3.2.1.2). Acting on this predispositionally strong interest in and need for scholarships was then further induced by the symbolic power of scholarships. This symbolic power took the form of six dispositional effects demonstrable in the participants' accounts of their scholarship experiences (3.2) and further inferred from the review of scholarships for Palestinians (1.3).

Availability of scholarships signalled to the participants *a* sense of direction for how to act on the abovementioned predispositions towards education in the OPT, and the financial support they offer confirmed the viability of following that direction (see Perna & Steele, 2011). Also, scholarships' competitive nature demanded of the participants meeting a higher, usually global standard of fulfilment of the motivation for individual advancement. Most often, scholarships' design and delivery as investment required that the participants be demonstrably committed, at least in expressed thought, to fulfilling their motivation for individual advancement in ways that would serve the larger good in their country—a criterion also commonly required or favourably considered for admission into their graduate study programmes. Additionally, in Palestinian society, a scholarship award may well add to the sense of pride and perceived socioeconomic status not only of the individual Palestinian recipient but also of their family—and indeed of their common and elite national peers (see Palestine Chronicle Staff, 2023; Stephan, 2019). The last dispositional effect ascribable to scholarships in extending interest in following the communal hope for educational advancement in the OPT is the prevalent inclusion of Palestinians among those eligible for scholarship programmes and,

increasingly, the (exclusive) dedication of specific scholarships to them (1.3). This inclusion/dedication, most often by foreign scholarship providers, may affirm to potential applicants the viability, legitimacy, and global significance of both their individual pursuit and the wider ethos of conflict disruption it represents.

The extended inducement of socialised hope that followed this correspondence of scholarships' symbolic power with contextual antecedents to conflict disruption was consistently illustrated in the participants' interview and documentary data. As elaborated in the *Experiential Themes* (4.2.2), this illustration appeared in the participants' accounts of their application, academic, broader and post-completion experiences: undertaking early planning and preparation for scholarship applications; applying and re-applying to multiple scholarships and, in the case of about a third of them, securing more than offer; reflecting on the importance of their education abroad plans for technical and critical issues in the OPT; appreciating the global dimensions of their learning abroad; focusing on Palestine in their academic and/or civic engagements; and signalling to employers the power of their education abroad.

This correspondence between scholarships' symbolic power and contextual antecedents may well be claimed as the starting point at which scholarships were beginning to contribute to the participants' everyday peace capability. Their symbolic power signalled to the participants viable steps for advancing their practice of their nationally socialised, individually possessed hope for educational advancement. In so doing, scholarships can be said to have played a significant role in motivating the course of conflict-disruptive action that the participants followed during their funded education abroad. Subsequently, the structural changes involved in funded graduate education abroad further enabled this course of action. This is illustrated in the next two dispositional themes.

### 3.4.2. Degovernmentalising Conflict Disruption

Subsequent to inducing and bridging the research participants' effective access to graduate education abroad, scholarships enabled their relocation to various contexts that were far more peaceful and stable. This relocation, in its conception as a causal mechanism (Dobroski, 2012; Ragusa, 2022; also see Fine, 2012), led to removal of several key constraints on the extent and quality of the participants' effective ability to engage in conflict disruption. This theme names these constraints and demonstrates their removal as evident in the participants' data. In theoretical terms, this relocation added to the participants' freedom *from*

barriers limiting their ability to practice and advance their everyday peace capability (see Marginson, 2014). Therefore, this theme establishes the second sub-claim that scholarships had a significant dispositional effect of degovernmentalising conflict disruption, i.e., contributing to great, however relative, de-limitation of the research participants' effective ability to counter-conduct the conflict governmentalities.

The participants' data demonstrate that their relocation to their host countries seemed to yield a quadruple dispositional effect of increasing their negative freedom, i.e., their freedom *from* political, institutional, and social factors constraining the extent of their everyday peace capability. First, relocation for graduate education involved removal<sup>1</sup> of the participants from immediate subjection to the barriers, stressors, and frustrations of everyday life under conflict, e.g., restrictions on access to electricity, internet, and domestic and international mobility, repeated events and campaigns of violence by Israeli actors, and persistent corruption and sometimes repression by Palestinian actors (4.2.2.4; 5.3). Second, the participants' relocation involved significant liberation of their graduate education experiences from structural limitations on what study programmes at Palestinian academic institutions could offer them, amidst the state of human and material de-development of higher education and other sectors in Palestine (3.3.1.3). Simultaneously, it involved significant liberation of their informal learning experiences from the 'eventfulness' of life under conflict that—in an Israeli scholar's words—makes it difficult to be 'reflective and lucid' (Katz, 2022, p. iii). Finally, the participants' relocation involved substantial distance from sanctioned codes of social and intrapersonal behaviour, e.g., gendered and familial relations of dependence and social ownership of individual time.

During their interviews, the participants shared common assessment of this quadruple dispositional effect, especially in their (often volunteered) contrastive reflections on their experiences abroad vis-à-vis possibilities in the OPT. Indeed, several participants clearly linked to their relocation the degovernmentalisation of their ability to practice and advance their functions of everyday peace, whether those manifested in their formal or informal experiences of educational advancement while abroad. The following sample quotes from five different participants that illustrate this linking are worth presenting again here (4.2.2.4):

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<sup>1</sup> I intentionally use the word 'removal' to signify, especially from a Capabilities perspective, that departure from the OPT was structurally orchestrated rather than fully voluntary. I also use it to underscore the qualitative difference involved in relocating from a context of protracted violence, domestic segregation, international isolation, and limited educational and self-actualisation opportunities to ones of potentially antithetical offerings.



There was very limited availability of resources for research or even teaching [at the local universities where I studied and later taught], compared to what was available in Jordan, and that really should be thought about by our universities. (translated)

I spent five years just focused on trying to work or volunteer at humanitarian organisations, e.g., the Red Crescent, while also being focused on finding a scholarship to study this field [humanitarian work] abroad. (translated)

The nature of life in Gaza makes it very difficult for people to focus on things beyond securing subsistence. There were limited opportunities for discussion of key issues like improving Gaza's situation or even for principled, thorough, and critical engagement with intellectual matters. It is true that some organisations avail such opportunities, but I feel they lead nowhere because participants are still mentally occupied with trying to survive and secure subsistence. Being here, free from violence and its daily manifestations, allows you the mental space to think more concretely about Gaza and about Palestine. (translated)

I got a higher understanding of my fears, my insecurities, my internal beasts. At some point in Gaza, you don't have the time to think about your well-being because in Gaza you're just running to prove yourself. You're just running to secure a job or whatever, and then you get the chance to go to a country where it's really peaceful. You have your time without the interference of any of your family or friends—because generally in Gaza you're owned. You're owned to this society. This society has you; you don't have a chance to think of yourself there. I got the chance to think of myself. I got some time to think of what I really hate, what I really love, what tears me, and then I found that I have several insecurities that I never thought of. I had some fears that I never thought of, and I had a chance to just feel myself.

I was the only one in charge of my life. I enjoyed the ability to travel to any city at any time I wanted; to come home at the time I wanted; to sleep outdoors on the hill next to my accommodation; to spend the night at a friend's house; to take a walk in the woods and climb up trees; and go out in my house dress; all while free from censoring stares or people's interference. (translated)

These quotes illuminate the inference of lessened unfreedom—to study, to connect, to reflect, and to be—through the participants' funded graduate education abroad. Together with the other reported scholarship experiences, they support the ascription to scholarships of a

dispositional effect of increasing negative freedom, i.e., freeing the recipients' effective ability from governmentalities disciplining the possibilities of their response to the conflict. With this increased negative freedom, as well as the extended prior inducement of their predispositions towards educational advancement as a form of everyday peace, the participants were under much less limitation on their effective ability to counter-conduct governmentalities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Before demonstrating their seizing of this effective opportunity, the next dispositional theme presents some of the institutional and social factors related to funded education abroad that the data demonstrates were more direct and substantial in co-producing the everyday peace capability gain.

### 3.4.3. Guiding Expanded Conflict Disruption

The demonstrated gain in the participants' everyday peace capability did not stop emerging at the point where the participants relocated to their host countries. The participants' data clearly demonstrate this gain continued to arise as scholarships offered them more capacity developments (3.2) and structural changes (3.4.2). As the participants' relocation involved substantial removal of several key constraints on their everyday peace capability, their funded graduate education abroad simultaneously involved fundamental alteration of the institutional and social arrangements and resources available to them to lead their educational advancement (see Marginson, 2014). As evident in the empirical data, this structural alteration took two forms, structuring of learning progress and outscaling of contact, both of which guided the participants through their expanded disruption of conflict governmentalities. In theoretical terms, this dual structural alteration added to the participants' positive freedom, i.e., freedom *to* apply their capacities as they wished. Therefore, this theme demonstrates how this dual structural alteration may have added to the participants' effective ability to advance their epistemic, citizenship, and subjective functions of everyday peace. The theme finally makes the third sub-claim that this guidance of expanded conflict disruption marks an advanced point at which the participants' funded graduate education abroad had a dispositional effect of contributing more directly and substantially to the demonstrated emergence of gain in their everyday peace capability.

Based on the participants' data, their enrolment in *programmes* of graduate study offered them a curricular—i.e., organised, sequenced, purposeful, coherent, *guided*—pathway of formal learning progress. In this curricularity, the participants interacted regularly with knowledge of systematic, global, interdisciplinary, experiential, and/or critical qualities. Their

interactions included consuming and, through assessment and (dissertation) research tasks, producing knowledge of such qualities (3.2.2). Further in this curricularly, as the participants readily expressed, they were challenged to exercise higher levels of learning independence but were also afforded access to research facilities, learning resources, and expertise that aided their epistemic capacity-building. These curriculum, assessment, independence, and support components of the participants' formal learning abroad represented a force for structuring their progress, that is, equipping them in a coherent manner with resources to advance, opportunities to practice, and arrangements to support their epistemic capacity-building, including through upscaling their learning independence. This structuring of formal learning progress—within the larger atmosphere of financial sufficiency and removal from immediate exposure to many oppressive conditions—was further illustrated in the post-completion engagements where the participants' roles involved (significant) knowledge work (3.2.3.2).

The affordances in this structuring of the participants' formal learning progress were reinforced by a parallel structural force conducive to guiding their conflict-disruptive engagements: outscaling of contact<sup>2</sup>. This structural force took the form of more possible, more frequent, and more substantial encounters with a coscientising variety of peers, perceptions, and situations. This outscaling of contact re-configured their informal learning to take a global and strongly reflexive orientation, in direct defiance of governmentalities of the Israeli-Palestine conflict. This “social [re]arrangement” was illustrated across the participants' reports of new connections with compatriots; expanded exposure to the “outer” world of international and professional and/or academic peers; enhanced access to and engagement with global perceptions of Palestine, including through new civic spaces; increased space to be on their own; and reflection, often critically, on domestic and personal affairs—from issues of education, governance, and conflict politics to gendered issues of personal self-reliance, family engagement, and ownership of individual time (3.2.4; 3.2.3.2).

This dual structural alteration can well be claimed as guiding the participants through their increasingly conflict-disruptive engagements of (re)negotiating and developing their sense and practice of subjectivity, of national membership, of international connection and of

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<sup>2</sup> I included this structural force in this theme rather than in the one on degovernmentalization because it fits the defining characteristic of “provision of... social arrangements” better than that of “removal of barriers”. For example, the participants had to attend classes with diverse peers and to undertake study of global themes. So, outscaling of contact was more than simply removal of subjection to the access and mobility restrictions in Palestine. It involved active offer of arrangements and resources to outscale their contact. This ascription of a guiding effect to the participants' new places is in keeping with education (abroad) research that demonstrates places can have pedagogical attributes (Pipitone, 2018; Wattoo & Brown, 2011).

knowledge development, in defiance of conflict governmentalities structuring their subjugation, domestic segregation, international isolation, and knowledge de-development (3.3.1). As such, this dispositional theme illuminates inference of increased positive freedom among the participants—to learn, to reflect, to connect, to know, and to create and share knowledge—through their funded graduate education abroad. The theme supports the ascription to scholarships of a dispositional effect of increasing positive freedom, i.e., actively guiding recipients through their more autonomous responses to the conflict.

The three preceding dispositional themes have demonstrated the three sub-claims of explaining the emergence of gain in the research participants' everyday peace capability on account of their scholarships motivating, degovernmentalising, and guiding their conflict disruption. This tripartite process has thus far been explained in terms of the structural factors involved in it but not yet in terms of the individual factors without which its efficacy may have been suppressed. Simply put, scholarships have been demonstrated in the preceding themes to give more encouragement, allow more space, and enable access to greater resources for the participants to expand their functions of everyday peace. This *offer* of favourable symbolic, structural, institutional, and social arrangements meant some significant liberation of the participants' agency, where they can exercise more of their active will in pursuing their educational advancement and counter-conducting conflict governmentalities. The *offer* of such conducive structural factors is not in itself sufficient to explain the demonstrated emergence of gain in the participants' everyday peace capability. How the participants seized their agency liberation is key to complementing and concluding the explanatory claim about the emergence of gain in their everyday peace capability. This is presented in the next, final dispositional theme.

#### 3.4.4. Claiming Agency Freedom

The three preceding dispositional themes explained the process through which scholarships placed the research participants in a socially motivated, politically less coercive, and technically better supported position to advance their counter-conduct of the governmentalities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this new position, the participants had both less constraints and more resources to act as agents of everyday peace capability; that is, they had more effective freedom to exercise their agency. As this theme demonstrates, the participants claimed this agency freedom by extending their practice of three mutually reinforcing qualities prevalent in their data: aspiration, antifragility, and national commitment.

This account of the participants' agency complements and concludes the claim of potentially strong, positive association between the emergence of everyday peace capability gain and scholarships' motivation, degovernmentalisation, and guidance of conflict disruption.

The participants' accounts of their scholarship experiences demonstrated a consistent exercise of aspiration, from following context-driven predispositions to educational development to bridging these predispositions with the symbolic power of scholarships. Prior to the point of their scholarship application, they had built records of distinction in academic, professional, and/or civic settings. They drew on these records in planning and competing for funded graduate education abroad, in so doing confirming their continued subscription to an ethos of hope, that their educational advancement—through graduate-level study in settings of more negative and positive freedom—will contribute to their individual development and thereby to their contribution to their lives in Palestine. They remained faithful to this ethos of hope during their sojourns, committing time and effort for success in their studies and for pursuing academic, civic, and reflective engagements on the dual object of their hope, an advanced individual profile and a free and developed Palestine.

In the course of mobilising and maintaining their aspiration, the participants also exhibited strong degrees of antifragility, a pattern of not only resilient behaviour but also of growth through navigating and resisting difficulty (Taleb, 2012; also see Yosso, 2005). Although scholarships offered significant removal from immediate constraints and addition of impactful resources, opportunities, and social arrangements, this offer of structural alteration in itself could not be efficacious in advancing their subjective, citizenship, and epistemic functions of everyday peace. Nor could it address their (self-reported) pre-structured disadvantage, i.e., how their academic and language training as well as broader life learning in the OPT could serve them as they embarked on seizing the possibilities unlocked by this overwhelming rearrangement. Along with the aspirational agency described above, the acts of antifragility observed below could well be claimed to be co-constitutive of the dispositional effects described in the preceding themes, of scholarships motivating, degovernmentalising, and guiding expanded conflict disruption.

As they made their scholarship and graduate education abroad plans, the participants prevented a lifetime of de-development governmentalised under conflict from precluding their look forward and progress towards a better reality of their individual lives and, potentially, of their contribution to their home-country. During their academic education abroad, they resisted

(their perception of) insufficiencies in their prior academic and language training in the OPT vis-à-vis the research, writing, and independent learning demands of graduate-level study at their new universities. Instead, they dedicated more time and effort to their study, sought support from various members of their university communities, and ultimately completed their programmes with success—including those of them who studied in full or in part during COVID-19 lockdowns. Crucially, their salient appreciation of opportunities for research-driven, global, and interdisciplinary learning marked a counter-conduct of their prior enforced knowledge de-development and isolation from the world. It was as well a progressive act of building globally-connected knowledge and, with that, some substantial ground for membership in the epistemic and/or professional communities of their fields, as reflected in the post-completion engagements of several of them (3.2.3; see Adler et al., 2024; Ralph, 2023). Beyond academics, the participants' antifragility was also illustrated in their engagements on Palestine. Many of them reported perceiving active animosity and passive apathy to their cause as well as to heightened scrutinisation of discussing the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (3.2.4). While these perceptions may deter continued (public) engagements on their home-country, the participants resisted them whether through advocacy or, in a more self-reconstructive way, through developing reflective and reflexive thought on the global-domestic context in which the conflict has (been let to grow) protracted.

Finally, the participants' commitment to Palestine was a salient pattern of agentic behaviour that is claimed, along with aspiration and antifragility, to have co-constituted the efficacy of scholarships in motivating, degovernmentalising, and guiding expanded conflict disruption. By choosing to focus on their home-country in the following ways, the participants demonstrated *steering* the sustained process that scholarships offered for expanded disruption of the trajectory of domestic segregation, international isolation, and knowledge de-development in the OPT: considering Palestine in their learning and research activities, connecting with fellow Palestinians, reflecting (critically) on domestic affairs, pushing back against biases towards and omissions of Palestine and, in the case of over half of them, returning or expressing intent to return to (serve in) the OPT. For participants who were studying abroad during the May 2021 eruption of violence in Israel/Palestine, they reported leading events along with fellow Palestinians to amplify their voices on the campaign of violence. They did so as some of them had families under attack but prioritised the public national interest over their individual concern. Even in reported aspects of their personal lives as members of the Palestinian society, the participants still demonstrated this duality of national

commitment and antifragility. Their distance, often for the first time, from their social circles and close-knit communities was an oft-reported challenge from which they however reported “rebounding” (Taleb, 2012) into stronger degrees of self-reliance and -connection as well as into stances of more equity on caring responsibilities, among other personal growth gains (3.2.4).

These agentic behaviours of aspiration, antifragility, and national commitment were themselves a form of everyday peace power (Mac Ginty, 2021), forces on which the participants drew in applying the higher agency summoned of them through engaging in stronger, scaffolded, and less threatened or policed disruption of the disciplining cycles and effects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The participants’ reflections of these forces were further manifestations of the sustained, potentially strong and positive association between the emergence of everyday peace capability gain and scholarships’ motivation, degovernmentalisation, and guidance of conflict disruption.

## Subchapter Summary

In this subchapter, I have presented the last class of thematic findings, which I had developed through retroductive analysis of the research participants’ data. These findings, reported in dispositional themes, moved the research from empirical exploration of scholarships impact and theoretical interpretation of its potential relevance to peace to an ontological examination of the forces that may be said to give rise to this relevance, of scholarships impact to everyday peace in the OPT. At this ontological level, the dispositional findings demonstrated the plausibility of explaining the potential contribution of scholarships to everyday peace in the OPT on account of a process in which scholarships (i) motivated, (ii) degovernmentalised, and (iii) guided the participants’ through advanced functions of everyday peace, (iv) simultaneously as the participants themselves—now relatively but significantly more free from conflict disciplines—extended their exercise of (pre)dispositions of everyday peace.

In this process, the participants were predisposed to appreciate their educational advancement as a praxis of everyday peace. They also were predisposed to rely significantly on the financial support of scholarships, to which the competition demanded of them greater fulfilment of their nationally socialised aspirations despite detrimental effects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Scholarships also appealed to the sociocultural values, political

aspirations, and technical needs of the participants, in whose context a foreign degree may be received with celebration in social and professional settings as well as be seen as a means to move, mobilise, and visibilise Palestinians and their plight globally. As the participants persisted and succeeded in their attempts to claim this promise of scholarships, they moved to their host countries to pursue their funded graduate education. In their new institutional and social contexts, they—as individuals, students, and epistemic actors of social and gendered positionalities—were less subjected to constraints on their effective ability to undertake functions of everyday peace, like advancing their academic knowledge, diversifying their knowing methods, and being able to meet national and international peers and to claim more autonomy of their individual lives.

In this instance, the relocation involved in undertaking a scholarship seemed efficacious in significantly de-limiting their effective ability to engage in conflict-disruptive pursuits in the subjective, citizenship, and epistemic arenas. Simultaneously, during their graduate education abroad, the participants were handed a generous offer of resources, opportunities, and programmatic support to advance and practice their global knowledge, learning independence, and epistemic development, all while enjoying access to spaces where they could effectively enhance their intrapersonal, intranational, and international connections, including as relevant to their fields of study and to foreign perceptions of Palestine. In this instance, this offer of favourable institutional and social rearrangements seemed efficacious in guiding the participants through their conflict-disruptive engagements of advancing their development academically, professionally, personally, and globally. The successful emergence of gain in the participants everyday peace capability was contingent on the participants claiming the liberation of their agency arising through this tripartite process. As demonstrated in their data, they claimed this agency liberation through consistent behaviours of aspiration and antifragility as well as exercising national commitment in international settings.

Overall, these dispositional themes demonstrate that the relevance-to-peace of Palestinians' funded graduate education abroad could well be said to emerge from a transcontextually predisposed and enhanced exercise of pro-peace qualities. While individually possessed, the research participants' demonstrated pro-peace qualities are socially, culturally, and politically predisposed by the Palestinian context. Their exercise of these pro-peace qualities was technically enhanced and guided through their advanced study programmes and broader learning experiences at better-equipped institutions located in more peaceful, globally connected countries.



## Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I first presented the demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds of the participants in this doctoral study, as well as their academic trajectories, study destinations and time, sources of scholarship funding, and post-completion trajectories. These profile findings offered a response to RQ1: *What are some of the profile characteristics of Palestinian recipients of international scholarships?* Then, I presented the experiential, inferential, and dispositional findings developed from these participants' interview and documentary data, supplemented occasionally by data gleaned from rapid reviews of their study and scholarship programmes. The process of developing these three classes of thematic findings was guided by RQs 2, 3, 4, and 5, and I implemented it against certain meta-theoretical assumptions, those of Everyday Peace Capability (2.3) in a critical realist stance (2.2). Acting on these assumptions to address the RQs, I followed three stages of applying a critical realist iteration of thematic analysis (Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021). At the empirical level, I applied descriptive analysis to explore the perceived impact of scholarships in the OPT. Experiential themes from this data analysis stage showed the participants perceive following positive and negative motives for pursuing their funded graduate education abroad and, subsequently, making significant capacity developments in the academic, professional, national, and personal aspects of their lives. These experiential findings offered a response to RQ2: *How do Palestinian scholarship recipients perceive their motivations for and experiences and outcomes of undertaking funded graduate education abroad?* The nature of these findings meant they could well serve as a basis of empirical evidence to inform an initial affirmative response to RQ3: *Does the characterisation of scholarships impact in the OPT warrant some rethinking of the potential efficacy of scholarships vis-à-vis peace?*

Based on this initial response to RQ3, I proceeded to the second stage of data analysis. At the theoretical level here, I applied abductive analysis to explore the potential relevance of scholarships impact to peace in the OPT. Inferential findings from this data analysis stage demonstrated that the participants' funded graduate education abroad involved greater effective opportunity for them to defy, in ways illustrating everyday peace, systemic flows of ethos of despair and helplessness, domestic segregation and alienation, global isolation and oblivion, and de-development of knowledge and of other currents of safe, good life. These findings consolidated the response to RQ3, confirming that the potential relevance of scholarships

impact to peace in the OPT may well require moving beyond the liberal, democratic, capitalist, and global-institutionalist models gleaned from existing research (2.1).

By highlighting the subjective, epistemic, and domestic and global citizenship functions of everyday peace advanced through funded graduate education abroad, the inferential findings further offered a response to RQ4: *How do scholarships relate to micro-level peace in the OPT?* The overall claim made in response to this RQ was that international graduate scholarships could well be said to contribute to everyday peace in the OPT by increasing Palestinian recipients' effective ability to conduct themselves in ways that counteract the disciplining effects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This counter-conduct (Senellart et al., 2009) was demonstrated in the participants' repositioning of themselves in relation rather than in limitation to the conflict, their transgression of conflict disciplines oppressive to their domestic-global citizenship, and their expansion of their epistemic development beyond limits sanctioned under the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Building on this inferential interpretation, I finally needed to account for the factors that may be claimed as giving rise to this relevance of scholarships impact to peace in the OPT (RQ5). By using retroduction as a mode of ontological-level analysis, I developed the four dispositional themes presented above. These themes suggested that this relevance could arise because of potentially strong, positive, and continuous association between the emergence of everyday peace capability gain and scholarships' dispositional effects of promoting everyday peace power, that is, motivating, degovernmentalising, and guiding the participants through functions of everyday peace, simultaneously as the participants could and did claim more of their agency in co-constituting the demonstrated gain in their everyday peace capability.

These findings and the process of developing them, which are summarised in Figure (8) on the next page, make a significant, multi-fold contribution to the body of scholarships research and to research in adjacent areas. This contribution and its significance are presented in the next chapter.

**Figure (8)**

The process and outputs of the three data analysis stages



*Note: This figure has been presented at the 26<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the International Association of Critical Realism in 2024 at the University of Warwick and at a summer school organised by NINE DTP at Queen's University Belfast in 2025.*

## **Chapter 4**

# **Scholarships Impact for Peace in the OPT: Concluding Discussion**

### **Introduction**

In this final chapter, I discuss the multi-fold contribution of this doctoral study to scholarships research. I divide the chapter into six sections. First, I discuss the empirical contribution that this study's findings make to the body of empirical research on scholarships (4.1). By focusing on Palestinian students, these findings introduce a national group of scholarship recipients and international students that is entirely unresearched in the relevant literature. They help bridge a longstanding gap in documenting the characteristics, experiences, and trajectories of Palestinian students undertaking graduate education abroad. These findings contribute to the geographic remit of scholarships research, and they offer new evidence to inform knowledge of the extent and limits of the role that international education can play in the Palestinian and similar contexts of conflict, e.g., from driving epistemic relief and academic survival to mediating domestic and global socialisation.

In the second and third sections, I focus on discussing the inferential and dispositional findings (4.2). I reflect on the theoreticality and interdisciplinarity involved in their development. Then, I clarify how such interdisciplinary theorisation addresses the outstanding call for increased and improved (critical) use of theory in scholarships research (Campbell & Mawer, 2019; Novotný et al., 2021; Saling, 2023). By doing so, I extend support for this call, showing that theoreticality and interdisciplinarity are not only tools to aid the research process but also fields of re-seeing the social world where scholarships impact is studied and where researcher knowledge is reflexively located.

I continue this reflective discussion in the third section (4.3). I turn there to the metatheoretical contribution to scholarships research. By recounting the critical realist orientation of this doctoral study and the dispositional findings developed thereby, I demonstrate the plausibility of moving from a teleological conception of scholarships to an ontological one. That is, I discuss the need to understand scholarships not in limitation to what financial access purpose they serve but in terms of what they can *be*. Drawing on this ontological problematisation and its associated epistemological implications, I introduce new

directions in which scholarships research may indeed mark its status as a “subfield” of international education research (Campbell & Neff, 2020).

In the fourth section (4.4), I continue my discussion of the findings by demonstrating the practical and policy utility of scholarships research that is (meta-)theoretically informed. Drawing on each of the three classes of findings of this doctoral study, I defend the dual case for continuing or adapting certain practices of scholarship programming and for researching and evaluating their impact. By doing so, I demonstrate how critical realism-informed scholarships research may unlock a new praxis, that is, a cycle of research-informed and -informing practice that has potential to optimise both scholarships impact and understanding thereof (4.4.1). I also highlight the emancipatory potential of this praxis, i.e., its support towards decreasing dependence on scholarships and making scholarships impact locally reproducible and more contextually responsive (4.4.2).

In the fifth section (4.5), I further continue discussion of the practical and policy utility of meta-theoretically informed scholarships research. Prompted by common criticism of scholarships as well as peer and reviewer comments on the doctoral study, I draw on the findings in addressing four key concerns about the use of scholarships (in the OPT) for academic and broader recovery and development. These concerns are that scholarships (i) facilitate brain drain, (ii) are of less equitable and sustainable impact, (iii) serve as a means of evading correct(ive) political action, and (iv) may well foster epistemological alienation. The overall commentary I offer in response to these concerns is that while they are most often well-intended, they seem to marginalise the agency of Palestinian scholarship recipients and national actors while demonstrating a technically futile and politically unviable obsession with providers’ intentions. Instead, I argue that these concerns can be better addressed through a claim of individual and national-level agency in realising the productive, even if not physical, return of scholarships alumni.

In the sixth section (4.6), I shift the focus to a discussion of the limitations of my doctoral study. I discuss the limitations evident in the research process and procedures, e.g., the incompleteness of the scholarship stakeholders included in the research, irrepresentativeness of the sample of Palestinian scholarship recipients, and therefore the ungeneralisability of the experiential findings. I also discuss key temporal, substantive, and epistemological limitations of the research findings. I routinely follow discussion of each of these limitations with a clarification of how future research may seek to address them.

Overall, this chapter helps clarify the originality, significance, and multi-fold contribution that I claim this doctoral study makes to scholarships research. It also culminates the illumination throughout this thesis of a practical application of critical realism in qualitative social research. It does so by recounting how critical realist assumptions were applied through theory-methodology synergy and data analysis. Before proceeding to the first section, I note that I intentionally transgress the common practice of separating substantive discussion from listings of implications and recommendations. I do so in the same spirit of praxis invoked in the fourth section of the chapter. I demonstrate there that the relationship between scholarships research and scholarships impact generation and management is one of continuation and mutual reinforcement rather than of distinction or distant relevance.

## 4.1. The Empirical Contribution

In this section, I commence discussion of the study's contribution by highlighting how its profile findings (3.1) and experiential themes (3.2) relate to the body of empirical knowledge of scholarships impact. This discussion underscores the originality of the research in bridging the knowledge gap of the characteristics, experiences, and trajectories of Palestinian students undertaking (funded) graduate education abroad, while also locating knowledge on this national group within the broader knowledge of international higher education scholarships and international student mobility. As a reminder, much of the discussion in this section is reproduced from advance publications of the doctoral study (Almassri, 2024a-c).

To begin with, the profile findings suggest that Palestinian students who may be selected for international graduate scholarships tend to be relatively young and recently graduated and can include men and women coming from rather diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Also, these findings begin to show that Palestinian students selected for international scholarships may pursue advanced study in a variety of fields, a variety broader than that available through local (under)graduate education (see Isaac et al., 2019). That is, while the research participants' academic backgrounds were concentrated in STEM and language fields at the undergraduate level, they went on to pursue graduate study in more fields, whether as a way of specialising in or shifting to areas new to them but often with an international outlook. Furthermore, the profile findings demonstrate the heterogeneity of providers of scholarships to Palestinian students, which I had established based on desk research of such providers (see 1.3.2). These findings show the research participants' openness to seizing scholarship opportunities regardless of whether they are offered by foreign

governments, university-affiliated trusts, and individual foundations and academic institutions, and regardless of whether these scholarships are open to international students or exclusive to Palestinians. In acting on this interest, the participants undertook their graduate education abroad mostly in countries of common attraction to international students, especially the UK. Notably, 20 (63%) of the 32 participants still applied to scholarships and/or maintained success through their education abroad despite the restrictions associated with COVID safety measures.

These profile findings directly contribute to addressing the knowledge gap of Palestinian scholarship recipients' profile characteristics (RQ1: *What are some of the profile characteristics of Palestinian recipients of international scholarships?*). They begin to consolidate the documentation of similar demographic and academic characteristics that Elhour (2022) and Akbaşlı and Albanna (2019) report of, respectively, nine and 16 Palestinian scholarships recipients in the UK and in Türkiye. Together with the experiential findings demonstrating the significant perceived scholarship experiences and outcomes (3.2), these profile findings lend support from a new country context to the claim that scholarships can represent an inclusive and strategic investment in the capacity-building of youth, young professionals, and rising academics in/from Global South contexts (Campbell & Basi, 2022; Clift et al., 2013; Dassin et al., 2014).

The experiential findings about the participants' motivation for applying to scholarships (3.2.1) refresh historical evidence of Palestinian students seeking education abroad for a mix of negative and positive reasons. As Shiblak (2005) notes of Palestinian student emigrants during the 1960-70s: "This migratory movement was attributable to the difficulties which Palestinian youths faced in pursuing their higher education locally (universities had limited places, selective entry, general political instability), and the hope offered by foreign universities (prestige, accessibility, scholarships)" (p. 88). The motivations expressed by the 32 participants barely fell out of this scope of a dual search for viable education opportunities and for self-fulfilment. Indeed, this power of the home-country context in driving and shaping interest in funded (graduate) education abroad is not unique to Palestinians. Writing of scholarship applicants, recipients, and alumni in postcolonial Timor-Leste, King et al. (2023) found that scholarships availed an opportunity in this context "to escape the hidden curriculum and travel outside the structural constraints of the local education system" (p. 190). Together with similar insights in Ahmad et al. (2017) and Perna et al.'s (2015b) studies respectively about scholarships to Kurdish and Kazakhstani students, this empirical evidence of Palestinian students' positive and negative motives to seek scholarships illuminates Marginson's (2023a)

conceptual argument and Roy et al.'s (2022) systematic review findings that antecedents to education abroad are key to understanding the experiences that international students go on to have through their sojourn. By highlighting the antecedents associated with the context of conflict in the OPT, these findings further globalise and deepen evidence of national-level factors that drive and shape students' interest in study abroad, e.g., not only the availability of high-quality study programmes abroad (Ahmad et al., 2017) but also the unavailability of conditions to build such programmes locally or to engage in them as effectively.

Furthermore, the experiential findings about the participants' academic experiences showed that they used their scholarships to access advanced programmes of study, which were perceived to centralise research- and writing-mediated independent and global learning and to boast resource-intensive pedagogies far beyond what is currently (possible to be) on offer in local higher education in the OPT (3.2.2). Also, the experiential findings showed that participants enjoyed significantly expanded access to opportunities for experiential and professional (global) learning, again beyond what is currently possible in the OPT. These findings refresh historical evidence of Palestinians' education abroad contributing to their technical capacity development and career advancement (Al-Hout, 1979, Kalisman, 2015). Globally, these experiential findings add a new national group's voice to the growing recognition of scholarships as a means of developing individuals' subject knowledge, learning skills, and overall academic and intellectual capacities for academic and broader professional service (e.g., see Campbell, 2017; Campbell & Baxter, 2019; Campbell et al., 2021; Demir et al., 2000; Haupt et al., 2021; Jonbekova, 2023; Pikos-Sallie, 2018). Also, the experiential findings about the participants' academic development illustrate the potential of scholarships to facilitate the generation of new academic talents to serve the cause of higher education recovery, reconstruction, and development in the OPT. As such, these findings confirm the academic capacity-building potential of scholarships is as significant for higher education development in the OPT as in other countries in Central and Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe, and West Africa (Campbell, 2017; Campbell et al., 2021; Enkhtur, 2020; Morlang & Stolte, 2008; Singh et al., 2021).

Beside these academic development outcomes of scholarships to Palestinians, the experiential findings about the participants' post-completion trajectories (3.2.3) further add to existing evidence of the efficacy of scholarships in enhancing male and female recipients' professional, personal, and global capacities for careers in academia and (education) advocacy (Campbell et al., 2021; Campbell and Lavalley, 2020; ECA, 2017; Demir et al., 2000; Pikos-



Sallie, 2018; Shtewi, 2019). These findings also extend, from a new country context, evidence of scholarships bridging Global South recipients' access to educational experiences yielding advanced technical knowledge, transferable practical experiences, and/or personal effectiveness (Jonbekova, 2023; Perna et al., 2015a; Mawer, 2014b; Raetzell et al., 2013). They also cement cross-country evidence suggesting that the utilisability of scholarship outcomes in the home country is often (strongly) shaped by workplace conditions and norms as well as on broader political, economic and other structures in the returning scholarship alumni's home country (Alzubaidia & O'Tooleb, 2015; Jonbekova et al., 2021; Pham & Saito, 2020; also see Szkudlarek, 2010, for a systematic review of the re-entry process). Unsurprisingly, the participants simultaneously reported facing challenges that seemed to undermine the extent to which they could practise the career-relevant outcomes of their funded graduate education abroad. These challenges included the Palestinian market's lack of roles through which specialist knowledge gained abroad could be practised, the precarity of academic employment, and issues of nepotism, among others. Indeed, the participants' reports of their post-completion trajectories underscore the absence of key conditions conducive to making scholarships impact work at levels beyond that of individuals. They demonstrate there was no role by official Palestinian institutions to attract or incubate their newly developed global talent. Government employment in other contexts can be "particularly powerful in terms of [facilitating the impact of scholarships in] influencing social and economic change" (Campbell, 2017; also see Ye, 2021). None of the participants mentioned any government effort to help realise this potential. Additionally, the participants' accounts of negotiating career outcomes seem to suggest similar, though in less stark terms, lack of organisational initiatives to welcome or invest in the specialised, global talent that the participants who returned home brought with them. This was suggested by the case of participants whose fields of graduate study (and prior work) had to be shifted, whether for lack of opportunities or fulfilment, and by the case of participants who left or did not (try to) return to the OPT. This is deeply regrettable as the smaller size of their potential employers, compared to government agencies, suggests less inability to induce their stay and fulfilment.

Finally, the contribution of this doctoral study to the body of empirical knowledge of scholarships impact is extended by the experiential findings about the participants' national life-related experiences and multidimensional identity development while abroad (3.2.4). These findings showed that the participants perceived experiencing a degree of relief of their political standpoints and worldviews from effects of domestic segregation, national alienation,

and international isolation. These findings illustrated the ways in which the participants appreciated their scholarships for distancing them, however temporarily, from the immediacy of structural violence and from the standing threat of physical violence and its preoccupying mental effects, echoing King et al.'s (2023) aforementioned finding of scholarships facilitating a similar effect in Timor-Leste. Also, scholarships facilitated the participants' cultivation of improved self-connection, cross-territorial connections with fellow nationals, cross-national encounters with international peers, and subsequently to a more reflexive, globally engaged sense of national identity and understanding of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. These findings extend the limited research on scholarships impact beyond academic and career development. For Tajikistani students, Sodatsayrova and Waljee (2017) showed that scholarships can facilitate their exercise of reflexivity and cultural agency through their education abroad. For Arab students from member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Pavan (2020) showed that scholarships can help develop the new glocal identities that are needed in these states' context of political, economic, and social change and development (also see Hilal, 2013; Hilal et al., 2015). The experiential findings here broaden the geographical scope of this emerging evidence on reflexive and glocal identity development among scholarship recipients.

In summary, these experiential findings demonstrate the important experiences and outcomes that Palestinian students may gain through international graduate scholarships (RQ2: *How do Palestinian scholarship recipients perceive their motivations for and experiences and outcomes of undertaking funded graduate education abroad?*). Altogether, these findings cohere with the body of empirical scholarships research. They confirm many of the themes salient in this research about motivations for and experiences and outcomes of scholarships. However, the contextual nuances captured in the findings—e.g., about Palestinian scholarship recipients' motivations, national life-related experiences, and the significance of their capacity gains in the Palestinian context—compel the search for a language with which to move beyond description of reported perceptions of scholarship impact. The two other classes of thematic findings of this doctoral study demonstrate the significance of such a language. I discuss this broader research contribution in the following section.

## 4.2. Theoreticity and Interdisciplinarity of Scholarships Research

In this section, I refer to the study's inferential findings in continuing discussion of its critical contribution to scholarships research. This discussion is centred around RQ3 (*does this characterisation of scholarships impact in the OPT warrant some rethinking of the potential*

*efficacy of scholarships vis-à-vis peace?*) and RQ4 (*how do scholarships relate to micro-level peace in the OPT?*). This discussion draws on and significantly develops the pertinent points made in/across three of the six articles I had published from or in connection with this doctoral study (Almassri, 2024c-d, 2025).

#### 4.2.1. Moving Beyond Empiricism

The experiential findings discussed in the previous section are important on their own. However, they are insufficient to answering RQs 3 and 4 on the potential relevance-to-peace of scholarships impact in the OPT. Limiting to experiential findings the basis of the claim that scholarships relate to peace in the OPT would be a replication of the instrumentalist approach that reduces scholarships' relevance-to-peace to a *tool* of importing academic and professional capacities, advancing careers, and human-sourcing institutions of higher education and development. Also, limiting to experiential findings the basis of the claim that scholarships relate to peace would seem to endorse the empiricist view that such outcomes—capacities gained, careers advanced, and institutions human-sourced—are necessarily a contribution to peace. Indeed, the presumed sufficiency of such empiricism could well be a reason why neo-liberal ontology—and its associated theoretical choices and methodological practices—continue being imported without much (critical) discussion from the fields and areas of research within which scholarships' potential contribution to (proxies of) peace is examined (see 2.1).

In such an empiricist view, as I wrote earlier in this thesis, peace would be reduced to a technical phenomenon in a neo-liberal world order (2.3.1). The assertion of academic and career developments as necessarily a contribution to peace evades, even flattens, the conceptual and theoretical complexity of establishing the object being contributed to and explaining how this contribution unfolds. Such flattening, conceptually of peace and theoretically of the contribution to peace, narrows down the range of individuals' scholarship experiences that may be considered in the interpretation of the relevance-to-peace of scholarships impact.

The effect of this atheoreticity, itself sustained by missing interdisciplinary engagement with Peace and Conflict Studies (2.1), can be observed by considering the full range of the experiential findings. The participants reported many scholarship outcomes related to their national life and multidimensional identity development. The view of scholarships as a means of human-sourcing institutions of development and higher education in the OPT and,

on that account, a means of contributing to peace runs a dual risk: (i) presenting these scholarship outcomes as extraneous to appraisal of scholarships' potential relevance to peace, and (ii) dismissing the significance of these outcomes to conceptualising the peace to which this relevance is claimed. Indeed, the diffusion of liberal-democratic values (DL-DV) and institutionalisation of world society (IoWS) explanatory models of the potential contribution of education/exchange abroad to peace (2.1.3) barely offer any analytic categories against which to interpret the significance-to-peace of the fourth experiential theme on the national life-related experiences and multidimensional identity gains reported by the participants (3.2.4). This theme presented the participants' reflexivised national awareness rather than the kind of socialisation into liberal-democratic and global institutionalist values that is presumed in the DL-DV and IoWS models. These experiential findings, considered within the Palestinian context of protracted conflict, confirm the strong plausibility of rethinking the potential efficacy of scholarships vis-à-vis peace (RQ3).

#### 4.2.2. The Relevance of Scholarships Impact to Peace in the OPT

In turn, the inferential findings presented in the previous chapter (3.3) offer a response to RQ4 by demonstrating the potential relevance of scholarships impact to peace in the OPT. Using interdisciplinary theoretical redescription of the empirical data, I developed these inferential findings to offer a re-reading of the experiential themes that ensured serious engagement with the conception of peace, that is, justifying the theoretical propositions borrowed from Peace and Conflict Studies and doing so *in the context* of the OPT (see 2.3). By doing so, I ensured the relevance-to-peace claimed of the research participants' perceived scholarship experiences was grounded in an understanding of peace as a contextualised phenomenon rather than a universal technical project in a neo-liberal order. In this understanding, peace was conceptualised as an everyday process of disrupting conflict governmentalities (2.3.2). The peace to which scholarships impact was demonstrated to be relevant was an experiential sense of hope and freedom, an acted ability to connect more and better with the world, and a lived exercise in self-fulfilment. This understanding of peace was not imported from the predominant capitalist, liberalist, globalist, or democratic models (2.1.3). Rather, it was rooted in the understanding of both critical scholarly work on peace and the reality of life and possible scope and scale of peacebuilding in the OPT (1.4; 2.5). As clarified throughout the thesis, this understanding was something *i* brought into the research, based on existing research on the OPT, prior training in peace studies, and personal assessment of the

implications of this extant research and prior training for approaching the phenomenon under study (1.4.1; 1.4.2; 2.5).

With this theoreticality, interdisciplinarity, and reflexivity, I analysed the participants' reported scholarship experiences within an explicit, openly accountable conception of peace, scaled to the individual basis of scholarships impact and the low opportunity structure of peacebuilding in the OPT. This analysis established that the research participants' funded graduate education abroad was relevant to everyday peace insofar as the participants' data demonstrated advancement in seven functions across the subjective, citizenship, and epistemic dimensions of everyday peace (3.3.1). I finally interpreted this impact of scholarships to be one of expanding conflict disruption. That is, it comprised significant effects for the research participants to pause, resist, and/or transform the everyday, micro-level trajectory of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This interpretation is markedly different from a technicalist conclusion where scholarships graduate the next, well-equipped generation of Palestinian academics or career professionals to rebuild, staff, and develop local institutions of higher education and development—as though this rebuilding, staffing, and development would occur in a vacuum or is guaranteed not to be counterproductive (see Arda & Banerjee, 2021). Instead, scholarships allowed the participants to advance their subject positions, citizenship consciousness, and epistemic capacities, representing a process counter to the disciplining effects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

For the body of conceptual research on scholarships, these inferential findings illuminate the significance of the argument by Campbell and Mawer (2019), Novotný et al. (2021), and Saling (2023) for increased and careful theorisation in research of scholarships impact. The findings demonstrate the role that theorisation, especially if driven by context and crossing disciplinary boundaries, can play in foregrounding a deeper understanding of how scholarships may be important in certain contexts. By extension, these findings also demonstrate the need to address the limited use and diversity of theory in the broader research on international student mobility (Iskhakova & Bradly, 2022; Luo et al., 2023). Drawn from the understudied context of Palestinian students, they add to the evolving consensus that international students' home-country contexts shape their experiences abroad (Marginson, 2023a) and their post-completion trajectories (Wang et al., 2024), and therefore that these contexts should be centralised in scholarships and ISM research.

By necessity, this need for both theorecticality and contextuality requires that scholarships and ISM research strive for stronger interdisciplinarity. As Kent (2018, p. 38) notes, “scholarship programs sit... somewhere between development, education and public diplomacy. They are studied across faculties or by interdisciplinary researchers.” In their systematic review of scholarships, Campbell and Neff (2020, p. 848) also noted that “The bulk of this [scholarships] research resides within a broad range of education literature, yet much of it also exists in various other fields in the humanities and social sciences.” The contribution of this doctoral study in this regard is that it actions this recognition. The approach and findings taken here may illuminate how interdisciplinarity can be applied, not in measuring fidelity to scholarship programmes’ oft-conflated rationales (1.2.2) but in developing fuller appreciation of the contingency and multidimensionality of scholarships impact and its coherence, or lack thereof, in the contexts in which scholarships are offered.

In this section, I discussed the theorecticality I exercised in developing a response to RQs 3 and 4. I also outlined the contribution this theorisation makes to the conceptual research on scholarships and ISM. By referencing the inferential findings, I also showed how theorecticality helped move the doctoral study from an empirical-level, technical examination of scholarships impact to a theoretical-level, interdisciplinary interpretation of the potential relevance of scholarships impact to peace in the OPT. In the next section, I continue this discussion by focusing on meta-theorecticality (complementarity between critical realist metatheory and the theoretical framework of Everyday Peace Capability), its role in guiding me through addressing RQ5, and the metatheoretical implications of the resulting dispositional findings for scholarships research.

### 4.3. Meta-Theorecticality of Scholarships Research

The fifth research question of this doctoral study was: What may explain the relevance of scholarships impact to peace in the OPT? The inferential-explanatory nature of this RQ (1.4.3) and the retroductive mode of analysis needed for it (2.4.4.4) required the use of meta-theory, in a continued reflexive interdisciplinary fashion. In phenomenology, the philosophy predominant in scholarships research (1.4.1), it would have been fine to conclude the research at the end of inferential—or even descriptive—exploration of the phenomenon under study, i.e., the potential relevance of scholarships impact to peace in the OPT. Had I followed (interpretive) phenomenology, the guidance thereof would have probably led me to conclude the research at the inferential-exploratory stage (see 1.2.1 for examples of empirical

scholarships research being concluded at this stage). By contrast, critical realism required a third stage, of attempting an explanation of the occurrence of the phenomenon under study (Fryer, 2022a). In this section, I discuss what this stage involved, why its process and results are essential in this doctoral study, and key implications for scholarships research.

#### 4.3.1. An Alternative Approach to Explaining Scholarships' Contribution to Peace

In addressing RQ5, I relied on meta-theoretical principles, assumptions, and terms (2.2; 2.3) through my retroductive analysis—the re-search of the empirical data for potential factors and processes that could be said to play a role in generating the relevance of scholarships impact to peace in the OPT (2.4.4.4). The dispositional findings demonstrated that the relevance of scholarships impact to peace in the OPT can be explained on account of the negative, positive, and agency freedoms that are expanded and seized through the process of seeking and undertaking funded graduate education abroad (3.4). This explanatory claim is, again, markedly different from the few available in pertinent scholarships research. Here, the contribution of funded student mobility to peace was not claimed in technical language, i.e., importing prestige and staffing institutions (see Jafar & Sabzalieva, 2022). Nor was it reduced to an empiricist account, where perceptions of the potential links between education abroad and peace are summarised and offered as an assertion of such links (see Hilal & Denman, 2013). Rather, the claim is articulated at an ontological level. It accounts for the forces that generate everyday peace in the OPT, for those that generate the potential impact of funded education abroad, and for the interaction between the two groups of forces that gives rise to the relevance-to-peace of scholarships impact.

In developing this claim, I further saw the harmony of between critical realism and Everyday Peace Capability. This meta-theoretical framework offered me clear guidance through planning and implementing retroductive analysis. While critical realism guided me to search for ontological-level forces, Everyday Peace Capability offered me the scope and language with which to pursue my search of such forces, i.e., the forces that “degovernmentalise” scholarship recipients’ everyday peace capability (3.4.2) but also the agentic behaviours through which the research participants claimed the degovernmentalised space to advance their functions of everyday peace (3.4.4). In this sense, meta-theoreticality here was an avenue to part with decontextualised explanatory claims about scholarships and

peace in the OPT and, instead, a device with which to bring context-sensitivity and active reflexivity to bear on the analysis process and outputs of this doctoral study.

This approach in scholarships research may highlight the need for careful placement of theory within and/or along larger metatheoretical and methodological approaches to researching scholarships impact. In this doctoral study, the philosophical paradigm of critical realism and a corresponding qualitative methodology guided me in placing Everyday Peace Capability such that I started applying it *after* I had finished collecting empirical data and descriptively analysing it. This theory placement choice—orchestrated specifically by the ontological view in critical realism of separate domains of reality (2.2.1)—allowed me to tread with care, i.e., with active reflexivity (2.5), between theory and empirical evidence in interpreting (i) the functions of everyday peace demonstrated in the participants’ data and (ii) the factors that made these functions possible to arise. This staged application of theory is contrasted with theory placement choices that let theory take over research design. Such choices can precipitate arrival at interpretations that, while supported by collected data, have little resonance in the research context—a characteristic long observed of education, peace, and other research on countries in Southwest Asia and North Africa (Abu-Lughod, 1989; Adely, 2012; Hinnebusch, 2017; also see Hajir, 2023). Where and how theory has been applied in this doctoral study may inspire more interest in experimenting with philosophical-methodological approaches that *neither surrender theory nor surrender to theory* in researching the impact of scholarships and international academic mobility, including on peace.

Finally, the dispositional findings illuminate the emerging argument for the optimality of Sen’s (2001) Capability Approach to researching and evaluating the impact of scholarships (Campbell & Mawer, 2019; Novotný et al., 2021; Tamim & Bari, 2025) and of international student mobility more broadly (Lo, 2018). For example, in comparing it to human capital theory and a human rights framework, Campbell and Mawer (2019) concluded that the Capability Approach offered broader scope to understand the transformative potential of scholarship experiences while also emphasising the emergence of this potential as an outcome of dynamic interaction between pertinent structures and individual agency. This was precisely the case in the dispositional findings, whose development was closely guided by the conceptual tenets of the Approach (2.3.1). These findings showed why the research participants’ scholarship experiences could be impactful on their everyday peace capability, and they did so by identifying some of the pertinent structure-agency dynamics whose effect before and/or during the sojourn constituted that impact.



Having extended support for the choice of the Capability Approach to inform scholarships research, I now reflect on why the Capability Approach may be particularly effective to guide critical, context-informed research on scholarships impact if it is anchored in a critical realist and interdisciplinary stance.

As Sen himself acknowledged and others have confirmed, the Approach can be difficult to apply empirically, not least because it refrains from prescribing which structure-agency dynamics are necessary for the realisation of which capabilities (Kremakova, 2013). What I found helpful to addressing this potential limitation of the Approach was anchoring its application in a critical realist paradigm. This metatheoretical framing of the Approach application helped me operationalise its five conceptual tenets—capacity, rationale, function, structure, and agency—into categories around which I could organise the three data analysis stages while maintaining focus on the five RQs. This effect of integrating the Approach into critical realism was not surprising given the existence of prior conceptual discussions of such an effect (Owens et al., 2021; Smith & Seward, 2009). This doctoral study now validates these conceptual discussions in reference to researching scholarships impact. It does so by offering a full illustration of the process and outcome of integrating the Approach into critical realism. To scholarships research, this cemented plausibility of a critical realist iteration of the Capability Approach requires careful reconsideration of whether the predominant use of (descriptive) phenomenology (1.2) is tenable amidst the evolving support for the Capability Approach. It does seem that focusing scholarships research on subjective dimensions may not be ideal to applying the Capabilities Approach as seriously as needed to account for the diversity of factors constituting, moderating, and shaping any capability gains made through scholarships.

The other aspect of this theoretical implication relates to the synthesis of the Capability Approach with Everyday Peace (Mac Ginty, 2021). This synthesis was helpful to me in maintaining the research focus on the potential relevance of scholarships impact to peace. On its own, the Capability Approach may not have been effective in guiding this focus, as may be further gleaned from Barnett's (2008) synthesis of the Approach with Johan Galtung's work on larger-scale peace. However, the resulting theoretical synthesis was not perfect, and it constantly required operationalisation through conceptual terms drawn from Foucauldian, psychology, and critical theory (2.4.4.3; 2.4.4.4). These terms were useful to redescribe the empirical data theoretically, that is, to theorise what the data tell us about the relevance of scholarships impact to peace in the OPT. Again, I saw this need for borrowing pertinent terms

as an unsurprising requirement of applying the Everyday Peace Capability theoretical framework in this doctoral study. Inheriting a non-prescriptive nature from its two constitutive approaches, Everyday Peace Capability does not prescribe what counts as progress towards everyday peace capability development; they only offer broad assumptions about the emergence of gains in this capability (2.2.3), which can be identified through interpreting their observed/observable manifestations. This point is not to suggest that all scholarships research may require a framework offering such focus, i.e., on peace. It is only to suggest that interdisciplinarity—including in theory development and application—may be key to effective application of the Capability Approach in scholarships research.

#### 4.3.2. Ontologising Scholarships

A further implication of the dispositional findings—and, more broadly, the critical realist approach—relates to the definition of scholarships. In Chapter 1, I stated that I would be using Campbell's (2017, p. 56) definition of scholarships, "financial grants that cover the majority of costs associated with higher education study outside of the recipient's home country." This was a good definition to guide me in conducting the literature survey and review, selecting participants, and reporting their profile characteristics. However, the dispositional findings reported in the previous chapter (3.4) demonstrate that such a teleological, global definition of scholarships may be too limited in capturing their significance in the Palestinian context—and perhaps in other contexts. By this definition, the function of scholarships is financial: they only offer funding with which recipients can undertake education abroad. Judging by what the participants did and did not say about the role of their scholarship programmes, this teleological definition was also reflected in their data about their scholarship awards (3.1.5). This definitional limitation should not be surprising given the largely empiricist mode of researching scholarships, a mode in which there seems to be no major concern with thinking about scholarships beyond their *instrumentality* in bridging (financial) access to education abroad (1.2).

The dispositional findings (3.4), together with the review of scholarships to Palestinians (1.3), invite critical reflection on the limits of such a teleological conception of scholarships. These findings demonstrated that scholarships to Palestinians, beyond their financial function, had technical, discursive, reflective, and politico-affective dimensions. Scholarships, to the research participants, were not only funding awards won through competitive processes based on individual merit. They were a nudge to express and extend nationally communalised

practices of commitment to and resilience and hope through education; moreover, they were a bridge to do so in qualitatively significant and globally resonant ways (3.4.1). In other words, scholarships were a stage where the participants, having been well-accomplished individuals, developed their technical knowledge of foreign academic offerings and broader outcomes of education abroad. Through this stage, the participants practised their reflective knowledge of how these offerings and outcomes relate to their individual accomplishments, futures, and broader societal roles, and they weaved this technical and reflective knowledge into certain institutional discourse favourable to the scholarship provider. Where these providers were foreign governments, the scholarships were simultaneously a form of macro-level support, active or passive, for engaging with Palestinians and for including them among the foreign nations considered for aid and/or for dialogue (through public diplomacy). Where scholarship providers were foreign universities or nongovernmental bodies, their scholarships, whether exclusive to Palestinians or not, were a means of meso-level support to Palestinians' pursuit of education and development, of solidarity with their political cause, and/or of technical and affective acknowledgement of their academic aptitude and (pre)dispositions of commitment to and resilience and hope through education.

To limit the definition of scholarships to financial terms may obscure these dimensions of what a scholarship to Palestinians *is*, as well as what various functions it may serve in such a context. This assertion follows relevant research showing that financial aid to domestic students bridges their access to higher education *but also* promotes their proactive preparation for academic success (Perna & Steele, 2011). While I do not think this point of discussion—or indeed this doctoral study—is sufficient to propose an alternative definition of scholarships, I believe it warrants dwelling on the degree of distinction between scholarship recipients and other international students and, subsequently, the ways used to research each group.

According to an Institute of International Education report (cited in Dassin et al., 2018a), 5% of international students from developing countries received scholarships to study abroad in 2014/2015, excluding scholarships awarded by host academic institutions. In another, conservative estimate, 1% of such international students received scholarships from foreign or domestic governments (Bhandari, 2017). Even though these are very small percentages, I agree with Campbell and Neff's (2020) assertion that scholarships research is emerging as a subfield of education research. My agreement is not so much based on these percentages or the burgeoning state of research on scholarships (Mawer, 2018). Rather, it is based, largely, on the ontological point made above, of scholarships *being* not only a funding tool of enabling access

to education abroad but also a highly competitive mechanism of rewarding prior achievement, of inducing and assessing reflective and discursive capacities, and of expressing political interests—and, in the Palestinian case, of sometimes celebrating individual continuities of national ethos. This nature of scholarships means those selected to benefit from them may have or display qualities unique, in form and/or degree, from those of other international students, whether they did or did not seek scholarships. This uniqueness is cemented by the assumptions lavished on scholarships alumni's post-completion contribution to their home countries. These assumptions are reflected in temporal and thematic foci of scholarships research that were presented in the first chapter (1.2). This potential uniqueness of scholarships from international student mobility—in terms of the ontology of scholarships vis-à-vis general student mobility and in terms of the characteristics of and assumptions about the respective research populations—may be significant to consider as scholarships research charts its distinction as a more context-attentive, interdisciplinary, and critical subfield of education research.

In this section, I discussed the meta-theoreticity I exercised in developing a response to RQ5, and I outlined the distinct claim it foregrounded about the potential relevance of scholarships impact to peace in the OPT. By referencing the dispositional findings, I also demonstrated how meta-theoreticity helped advance the doctoral study to an ontological-level interpretation of the efficacy of scholarships as opportunities for capabilitisation for peace in the OPT. Rather than involving academic training and skill enhancement, scholarships offered the research participants an ecosystem through which they could make academic, career, and personal gains, exercise higher levels of agency and, in so doing, counter-conduct currents of conflict in ways otherwise much less possible in the current Palestinian context. Drawing on this discussion, I finally sketched the challenge this interpretation poses for the current definition of scholarships. In the next section, I turn to discussion of what the experiential, inferential, and dispositional findings mean for the practice of offering scholarships to Palestinians and, more broadly, for the potentially emancipatory praxis of scholarships as opportunities for capabilitisation.

#### 4.4. On Critical Relevance-to-Practice of Scholarships Research

I start this section by outlining the practical recommendations based on the experiential findings of this doctoral study. I then reflect on the limits of these recommendations as a way of extending a practical case for moving beyond empiricism (see 4.2.1). I centre this reflection around the inferential and dispositional findings and the more critical directions in which they

may prompt scholarships research and practice. I finally conclude that these critical directions can expand the analytic (self-)reflectiveness and sociological knowledge generated through scholarships research, which in turn can serve individuals in stronger claims of their agency and therefore their roles in co-constituting scholarships impact.

The empirical-level findings of this doctoral study described the research participants' perceived capacity gains through their funded graduate education abroad (3.2). Together with the dispositional findings (3.4), these experiential findings demonstrated why these gains could be made through academic sojourns abroad but may not be as achievable in local graduate study programmes. As such, the practical utility of these experiential findings lies in their support for three main recommendations, all focused on the immediate and visible impact of scholarships.

First, the experiential findings offer evidence to believe that scholarships programming should be continued for Palestinian students, as to others from conflict-affected areas, insofar as it constitutes a pathway to building technical and broader capacities otherwise difficult to gain in the current Palestinian context. Second, the empirical finding that 40% of the research participants studied in full or in part during COVID-19 lockdowns and still made the capacity gains reported may encourage support for scholarships to fund Palestinians' remote study at universities abroad. This practice of scholarships can simultaneously limit risks of brain drain and class- and gender-stratified access to in-person education abroad. Third, these experiential findings highlighted some of the immediate challenges that many of the participants faced when they tried practising their newly-gained capacities in the OPT. These reported challenges of utilising capacities are not unique to scholarship alumni given the overwhelming effects of the Israeli occupation and dysfunctional Palestinian institutions on issues of employment, public service, and strategic civic engagement (1.4). These contextual challenges may prevent scholarship alumni from engaging in actions that visibilise use and scalability of scholarships impact. This lack of visibility should not be treated as evidence of scholarships being insignificant or failing to produce scalable impact in the OPT. Instead, the experiential findings show a pattern among the participants of reporting that their perceived capacity gains will be useful to them when conditions in the OPT allow for their safe and productive return. These findings, together with a history of Palestinian students and migrants making the same return plans (1.3.1), may demonstrate that scholarships to Palestinians should be approached as an investment in their longer-term future rather than expected to have immediately visible (meso- and macro-level) impact.

As may be clear from these three recommendations, there is good practical utility in the experiential findings. Yet, these empirical-level findings, generated through descriptive analysis, seem of limited practical utility in terms of guiding engagement with the latency and context-dependability of scholarships impact that they otherwise underscore. That is, according to the three recommendations made above, scholarships, including for remote study, should continue to be offered to Palestinians, even when their impact is not immediately manifested. This recommended practice is necessary, but its necessity in the Palestinian context of conflict (serious contextuality) and its potential to lead to change beyond the level of individuals as well as to decrease, rather than keep, dependency on scholarships (emancipatory potential) are both out of the scope of these recommendations—which, again, are developed from descriptive analysis of scholarship impact. In this doctoral study, it seemed to me that the findings generated through theoretical- and ontological-level analysis could be of practical utility that is more contextualised and of emancipatory dimensions. In the remainder of this section, I discuss the more critical relevance-to-practice of the theory-informed, ontologically-engaged findings, in course outlining concrete recommendations for both practice and research.

The inferential findings demonstrated the greater significance *in the Palestinian context* of the capacity gains that the participants perceived making through their funded graduate education abroad. These findings revealed some of the ways in which scholarships facilitated a stronger degree of the research participants' capability of disrupting the effect of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on subjective, citizenship, and epistemic spheres of their lives (3.3). Generated through theoretical-level analysis, these findings expand the interpretation of scholarships impact in the OPT beyond its technical dimension and to emphasise the relevance of this impact for contextualised functions of everyday peace. This interpretation-in-context lends a deeper and more critical orientation to the practical utility of this doctoral study. I discuss this implication below.

The inferential findings of expanded capability of subject repositioning, critical domestic-global awareness, and epistemic development can serve as categories against which to explore the impact-in-context of scholarships, including their impact on peace in the OPT. By that, I mean that these inferential-exploratory categories may inspire a shift of research questions from:

(a) what positions—in government, academia, NGOs, entrepreneurship, civil society, and social circles—scholarship alumni go on to occupy, and what their service in these positions entails; to

(b.1) whether and how they have re-created through their service in these positions experiences as disruptive to the dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and

(b.2) what affordances and constraints they have faced in trying to do so.

These alternative research questions deepen the contextuality of scholarships research, from an assessment of technical outputs and career outcomes to an investigation of the transcontextual significance and contingent efficacy of scholarships as opportunities for capability-building (for peace or otherwise). Importantly, these alternative research questions are informed by the conception of peace as an everyday process of conflict disruption (Mac Ginty, 2021, 2022). For research in other contexts, they can be informed by other theoretical frameworks—so long as the latter are developed in close connection to the research context(s) considered.

Pursuing these alternative, theoretically-informed questions has three implications that may be helpful to address some of the complex and persisting substantive and methodological gaps in literature on scholarships (Mawer, 2017, 2018) and, more broadly, on international student mobility (Hernández-Torrano et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024). First, addressing these questions can reveal the extent and forms of widening and systemising scholarships impact on peace in the OPT. By focusing on the efficacy of scholarships impact, rather than on the outcomes and outputs only, and by highlighting the structural-agentic contingencies of that efficacy, scholarships research can better explore the institutional and systemic conditions necessary for scaling scholarships impact from its micro-level to the meso- and macro-levels in given contexts. Identifying such conditions may additionally clarify possible pathways for sustainable dissemination of scholarships impact. Crucially, the theory-ladenness of these alternative questions can also mitigate the risk of relapsing to a technical account of scholarships impact on peace while moving from one level of analysis to the other.

Second, these alternative questions can be pursued of the pre- and post-scholarship service of foreign-educated individuals as well as of the service of foreign- and locally-educated peers. Such research might compare the pre- and post-scholarship engagements and success of Palestinian individuals in re-creating experiences disruptive to the dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—through their career, educational and broader societal roles. It can also compare such engagements of successful, vis-à-vis unsuccessful, scholarship applicants.

Such a research programme can establish some evidence to gauge the additive value that scholarships may extend to peacebuilding, development, social change, or any other phenomena in reference to which scholarships impact is usually indicated (see 1.2). In so doing, the alternative research questions above can move scholarships and ISM research to address the lack of comparative approaches to understanding how (funded) education abroad adds to individuals' capability of serving their home countries (Martel, 2018; Mawer, 2018; Wang et al., 2024). As discussed later in this section, such comparative research can be particularly valuable to inform the design of local education programming such that it may replicate some of the additive value of (funded) education abroad.

Third, these alternative research questions have an inherent transdisciplinary focus. They foreground a move from interrogating the outputs of an education opportunity to an investigation of impact that considers alumni's agency and the political, economic, and cultural factors in the home-country that co-shape this impact. This transdisciplinary focus can offer a valuable opportunity for collaboration and dialogue between sociologists and anthropologists of education and scholars of migration, development, and peace (see van Houte, 2014). This interdisciplinarity is already consolidating in ISM research (Hernández-Torrano et al., 2024). Research questions as the ones above can extend this interdisciplinarity to scholarships research and therefore advance it, together with ISM research, towards a fuller understanding of the multidimensionality and context-dependability of the impact of (funded) education abroad (Wang et al., 2024).

So far, I have discussed the research implications of the inferential findings, demonstrating potential directions in which they may prompt some advancement of scholarships research. I now continue this discussion of research implications by referencing the dispositional findings (3.4). These ontological-level findings demonstrated that the relevance-to-peace of scholarships impact may arise from positive interaction between individual agentic behaviours of the research participants (e.g., aspiration and antifragility) and the predispositions towards education in the OPT (e.g., nationally communalised hope), the structural constraints removed through relocation to new contexts (e.g., subjection to forms of violence), and the institutional resources and structural affordances available in academic and broader spaces abroad (e.g., learning spaces, resources, and equipment). The scholarly value of these individual behaviours and structural and institutional factors is not limited to generating plausible explanatory knowledge of the relevance-to-peace of scholarships impact. Building on the inferential categories offered by theoretical-level findings discussed above,



these ontological-level findings offer inferential categories of the kind that may aid researchers in assessment, (dis)confirmation, and elaboration of the contribution that these structures and agentic behaviours make to scholarship recipients' capability of everyday peace. In other words, the structural and individual factors articulated in the dispositional findings may serve as initial categories with which the planning of future explanatory research can be informed (see 2.4.4.4). For example, researchers may reflect on using, critiquing, and refining the following as (simple or composite) independent variables to track and explain any observed change in scholarship recipients' capability of everyday peace: induction of hope, removal from immediate subjection to political violence, and the exercise of antifragility.

Beside their potential to lay some foundation from which future (attributional) research may begin, these dispositional findings are particularly important in the Palestinian context. By naming local and abroad factors and articulating the potential interaction among these factors, the dispositional findings may facilitate more conscious, intentional, and serious reclaim of the frequently voiced thought of *مهور التعليم مقاومة/احنا بنقاوم بالتعليم*, education *is* resistance/we resist through (pursuing) education. This articulation has the potential to revive and mobilise not so much this popular thought as indeed the deep forces and ethos of everyday peace invoked with it (see Mazawi, 2011). Beyond its particular significance in the OPT, this work of articulation—of developing new concepts and terms pertaining to education and peace—is crucial to expanding the vocabulary with which the topic of scholarships is often approached. This contribution of the doctoral study echoes Al-Rousan et al.'s (2018), whose unique study showed that scholarships to Syrian refugees in Jordan improved not only their academic accomplishment but also their psychosocial outcomes and their functions within their respective social circles. The dominant linguistic-ontological constructs of human capital theory, those emphasising career progress and return on investment (1.2; 2.1), offer little scope to capture such broader impact of scholarships, especially in settings of conflict and displacement (also see Fincham, 2020). The dispositional findings offer some possible alternatives to conceptualise and discourse scholarships impact in ways that are less presumptuous, more contextually informed, and potentially more critical in identifying forms of capability suppression and optimisation.

In this section, I have discussed some of the key implications of this doctoral study for research, evaluation, and discourse of scholarships. In the two following subsections, I focus on how these research implications are interconnected with the practice of scholarships, by

which I simply refer to activities of administering scholarships and evaluating-for-optimising their impact.

#### 4.4.1. Towards a Praxis of Scholarships Impact

I stated earlier in this section that the experiential findings justify a recommendation for continued investment in scholarships for Palestinians. This continued investment would allow Palestinian students to achieve everyday peace capability gains that may be currently difficult to make in the aggravating local context of conflict. The inferential findings clarify how this practice, of continued investment, may be better made to optimise the conflict-disruptive functions demonstrated in these findings. To do so, it is insufficient to increase investment in the number of scholarship opportunities and thus merely enlarge the “skill base” for peace. Part of the increased investment should be redirected, first, to help scholarship alumni overcome, or work around, institutional and systemic un(der)utilisability of their scholarship impact. This is especially important in the Palestinian and similar contexts where higher levels of individual agency are needed in and beyond the higher education sector to transcend structural challenges and perhaps transform them (see Abou-Al-Ross & AlWaheidi, 2021; also see Alzubaidi, 2016; Heleta, 2017; Milton, 2017; Milton & Barakat, 2016). This calibrated investment may be achieved by the three following actions:

- Sessions—before, during, and after the sojourn—could be facilitated so that scholarship recipients are encouraged to reflect on their education abroad intentions, experiences, and outcomes, on the meaning of these in the local context of conflict, and on ways they can exercise and develop their critical agency while trying to disseminate and institutionalise some of their scholarship outcomes.
- Part of scholarship programme funds could be reallocated from the activity of sending students abroad to the activity of supporting scholarship alumni's initiatives to reflect on their experiences and explore avenues for coordinated action to address local barriers to their application of their scholarship outcomes in individual and societal functions.
- Technical and networking support could be offered to scholarship alumni with the objective of optimising their efforts to:
  - re-create locally as conflict-disruptive experiences as those they would have experienced abroad, including through building, to the extent possible, some of the factors and processes generating those experiences; and

- scale up these efforts by working with formal and non-formal education providers to integrate into their programming similar experiences conducive to everyday peace.

Through these three actions, alumni can exercise greater reflexivity on their scholarship impact. That is, they can become more critically (meta-)reflective about: (1) their scholarship outcomes, (2) the factors and processes leading to these outcomes, (3) their experiences of applying these outcomes in post-completion individual and societal functions, (4) their successes and challenges in re-creating locally some of the factors and processes leading to these outcomes, and, at the metacognitive level, (5) the assumptions, practice, and results of this reflectiveness. The critical and meta-theoretical frameworks (2.1; 2.2; 2.3) and the findings (Ch. 3) offered in this thesis can serve as *a* useful background to guide the start of exercising such (meta-)reflexivity among Palestinian scholarship alumni.

Neither this (meta-)reflexivity nor its potential contribution to scholarships research should be approached as an end in itself, whether in the OPT or beyond. Indeed, it can drive a cycle of reflective practice (Schön, 1992) where scholarships research and practice inform each other and therefore potentially optimise scholarships impact (on peace). Where scholarships impact is conceptualised, in critical realist terms, as capability gains, it is constituted through active and dynamic interaction between social and material structures and individual agency (Almassri, 2023). In this conceptual model, of constitutive essence to scholarships impact is a person's exercise of reflexivity, comprising their deliberations about themselves, their social life engagements, and the contextual forces influencing those engagements (Archer, 2003, ch. 4). To the extent that research/evaluation of scholarships impact can engage scholarship recipients and alumni in exercising reflexivity as outlined above, this research/evaluation may be transformed from a one-time investigation/assessment to a dual process of impact generation and optimisation (Almassri, 2023). That is, when recipients and alumni exercise, record, and later critique their reflectiveness on their scholarships impact, they may cultivate more awareness and claim more of their agency in co-constituting capability gains (Almassri, 2023). This is in keeping with Dresen et al.'s (2019) research that graduate students' pre- and during-sojourn focused reflection and peer engagement can enhance their capability of resilience. Scholarship recipients and alumni may also cultivate more conscious intentionality in their education abroad and post-completion experiences, which has been repeatedly highlighted in multidisciplinary, global, empirical and conceptual research as a significant condition or

moderator of (funded) student mobility impact (Atkinson, 2010; Deardorff, 2015; Gauttam et al., 2023; Lin, 2024; Novotný et al., 2021).

Moreover, when scholarship administrators—those responsible for evaluating and/or managing impact—review such records of critical reflexivity, they can, to the extent available resources permit, advise and support scholarship recipients and alumni's co-constitution of their capability gains (Almassri, 2023). This use of (meta-)reflexivity to enhance individuals' co-constitution of impact is already demonstrated in research on education and on other topics (Cramer et al., 2023; Golob & Makarovič, 2022; Ryan, 2015; Willis, 2019). The findings of this doctoral study, as well as the critical realist autoethnography connected to it (Almassri, 2023) make me convinced that such use of (meta-)reflexivity can be replicated in praxis of scholarships impact.

This cycle of reflective practice will be good praxis because, beside generating enhanced impact, this exercise of (meta-)reflexivity may lead to multi-time points of data collection and impact tracking. This enhanced research approach may go a long way in addressing the methodological concern about scholarships (and ISM) impact evaluations and research often involving data collection at a single time point (Martel, 2018; also see Campbell & Mawer, 2019; Wang et al., 2024). Instead, the observations and records of such reflexivity will offer data that may better capture scholarship recipients and alumni's evolving perceptions of their scholarship impact and their changing positionalities as they seek to realise this impact and perhaps to disseminate back in their home countries. This multi-time, -site, -setting data may offer a stronger base of evidence for tracing and explaining the potential impact of scholarships, whether on peace or otherwise, in and perhaps beyond the OPT. Research using such data may well address repeated calls for data collection approaches and methods that are better suited to illuminating the contingent and dynamic nature of the political impact of education (and exchanges) abroad (Atkinson, 2010; Bean, 2021; Freyburg, 2012).

This praxis of scholarships impact may warrant further redirection of the data collection methods and techniques used in scholarships research and evaluation. The emphasis on the research and evaluation participants' (meta-)reflexivity is contrasted with the current orientation of data collection methods in scholarships research, which seems to centre participants' descriptive recounting rather than their analytic reflection and self-critique (see 1.2; 2.1). The cycle of reflective practice presented here may be useful to move beyond the predominance of phenomenology in scholarships research, especially the descriptive rather

than interpretative or even hermeneutic phenomenology (see Stolz, 2022, for distinction between the three types of phenomenology).

The pursuit and use of (meta-)reflexivity in scholarships research can also offer a valid, rich, and perhaps inclusive resource of situated, contextualised insights to understand the agency exercised by returning international students, whether on scholarships or not. This improved understanding will mark much needed progress in scholarships and ISM research (Baxter, 2019; Marginson, 2014). To the extent this praxis may ultimately facilitate alumni's greater ability to replicate, disseminate, and institutionalise their scholarships impact, it may assuage concerns about the potential of scholarships to facilitate efficient and effective contribution to the Agenda for Sustainable Development (Boeren, 2018). In and beyond the field of (international) higher education, such praxis may be useful to adapt and replicate in:

- (i) Researching *with* international students (Mittelmeier et al., 2024; see the [\*Research with International Students\*](#) network), including by applying critical realism (Lou, 2023),
- (ii) Working with students, including those on international scholarships, as partners (Baxter, 2019); and
- (iii) Repositioning social science research participants as active, reflexive agents in the knowledge production process (Riach, 2009).

Finally, as an alumnus and researcher of scholarships, I should note what I think is a crucial role for scholarship alumni-researchers throughout this praxis. Coming to my PhD, I could have borrowed from existing scholarships research its predominant reliance on (descriptive) phenomenology and human capital theory. That would have saved me months of searching for an alternative meta-theoretical approach, experimenting with its application, and attempting to convince reviewers and fellow conference delegates of their greater plausibility at least in the Palestinian context. My choice against that was an instruction of my positionality, i.e., the nuance I gained from personal, social, professional, and research experiences with scholarships to Palestinians (1.1). This was an instruction I embraced actively, however time- and effort-demanding it turned out to be. If I might extrapolate from this individual experience, as well as from a peer reviewer's earlier-cited comment on the "ideal" positionality of "a scholarship awardee researching scholarships", I believe our group, of scholarship alumni-researchers, could claim more of our epistemic agency (and responsibility?) in advancing the criticality, relevance-to-practice and, as highlighted next, the emancipatory potential of

scholarships research. Settling for borrowed approaches without reflecting on their (non)fit for the contexts from which we come may not be the best we can do.

#### 4.4.2. The Emancipatory Dimension

By way of concluding this section, it is key to note the emancipatory dimension of this contribution of the doctoral study to research and practice of scholarships. The knowledge generated through this doctoral study offers a new approach to thinking about scholarships impact and its potential relevance to peace in the OPT. This approach is rooted in a reflexive understanding of the Palestinian context and is critical of research approaches underpinned by capitalist, neo-liberalist, or global institutionalist assumptions that are not only dissonant in that context but also associated with the perpetuity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (2.1). The elaboration of this approach throughout the thesis may illuminate Choo's (2022) assertion, in reference to research in International Education, that the ontological assumptions of critical realism can mitigate against the risk of committing conceptual violence by mischaracterising or de-nuancing the contexts of the phenomena being researched (also see Alderson, 2019; Paulson & Tikly, 2023). By emphasising the contextuality of scholarships impact in the OPT, this research approach also coheres with Hajir's (2023) broader critique of the decontextualisation of research on education-for-peace and the ensuing deflation of complexity of contemporary conflicts (also see Kester et al., 2022). Hajir (2025) further illuminates this critique by making the transferable argument that higher education recovery in Syria cannot be approached as a technical mission of economic necessity but as a societal one with explicit political and reparative commitments informed by the country's history. Illuminating this critique, the approach of this doctoral study allowed for the praxis discussed in the previous section to emerge from the Palestinian context itself, e.g., highlighting antecedents *in/from* the Palestinian context that were key for the emergence of the scholarships impact and relevance-to-peace demonstrated. In this context-driven praxis, local assets—whether societal, like nationally communalised hope, (3.4.1) or individual, like aspirational and antifragility capitals (3.4.4)—are recognised for their significance for education and peace. The demonstration of these significant assets strengthens the interdisciplinary argument for treating local knowledge as a potentially valuable resource to preserve and build on—rather than to alienate, inferiorise, or ignore—in research and the practice of education, peace, and the intersection of both (see Cruz, 2021; Hajir, 2023; Kassis et al., 2022; Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013; Nasser, & Abouchedid, 2007).

The findings developed through this approach extend empirical support to the case for continued investment in scholarships. They also sketch some of the ways through which Palestinians may gradually lessen dependency on this mostly external investment. The dispositional findings of this study highlighted some of the factors plausibly claimed as generating scholarships impact *in the OPT*, e.g., the appeal to hope through educational opportunity and quality, the induction of interest in global connections, and the availing of space to strengthen practice of agency. These findings can inform—at least initially and subject to ongoing assessment through the cycle of reflective practice outlined above—attempts at building local education activities embedding those factors and thereby potentially localising some of the capability gains generated through funded education abroad. For example, such an attempt may involve the development of a local education programme that, to the extent and duration possible, removes its participants from local areas of more immediate subjection to political, structural, and gender violence; increases their effective engagement with advanced knowledge of a glocal scope and their active use of diverse methods of knowing; and celebrates, including through socially meaningful ways, their aspiration and achievement.

As the example above may clarify, re-creating scholarships impact should not be limited to disseminating the capacities gained abroad, like concepts and skills. Re-creating scholarships impact should more be about the dual process of aligning functions (application of these capacity gains) with contextual priorities and of generating locally the mechanisms leading to this contextualised functioning. In other words, the endeavour to re-create scholarships impact should seek to re-create the capabilitisation process involved in scholarships (2.3). This marks a shift from sharing capacities built abroad to both practising them in contextually aligned ways and re-creating the mechanisms conducive to this contextualised functioning. This shift has an essential emancipatory potential; it redirects engagement from governing effects to governing the generative mechanisms of human life, which is the essence of politics (Chandler, 2015). That is, instead of scholarships impact serving a *reactive* function to the conflict effects, e.g., helping address the national segregation caused by the conflict (3.3.1.2), its re-creation in the OPT can have an active function of conflict disruption, e.g., promoting connections across the segmented Palestinian geography and peoplehood. This shift repositions scholarship alumni as micropolitical actors engaged not only in coping with conflict impact on education and life but more importantly in trying to reauthor what this impact itself can be and how far it may reach—aided in so doing by the cycle of reflective practice proposed in the previous subsection.

Having presented the substantive contribution and the research and practical implications of this doctoral study, I turn in the next section to addressing some of the concerns often voiced about scholarships for Palestinians.

## 4.5. Concerns About Scholarships for Palestinians

In the previous section, I elaborated on the potential contribution of this doctoral study to critical relevance-to-practice of scholarships research. No account of such contribution, especially of research on Global South contexts, may be complete without engaging with some of the serious concerns about scholarships. In this final section, I engage with four key concerns often raised about the efficacy of scholarships as a mode of intervention in/engagement with the OPT, whether technically for education recovery and development or politically for broader purposes. In making the following comments, I draw on my prior work and constant interaction with Palestinian scholarship alumni (see 1.1), the literature surveyed and reviewed (1.2; 2.1) and the findings developed (Ch. 3) in this doctoral study. I also draw on relevant discussions, sometimes debates, I had with international and Palestinian conference colleagues on the timely topic of Palestinian higher education recovery, reconstruction, and development. This commentary, however brief for reasons of scope and space, may invite more care in attempts at balancing evidence-based appreciation and criticism of the role of international scholarships in the OPT. Overall, it invites a shift from the obsession with scholarship providers' intentions and offerings to a claim of national-level agency in promoting the return—meaningful return, that is—of scholarship alumni. In order, the four concerns discussed are of scholarships (i) facilitating brain drain, (ii) being of less equitable and sustainable impact, (iii) serving as a means of evading correct(ive) political action, and (iv) fostering epistemological alienation.

First, scholarships are most often criticised for their potential risk of facilitating brain drain, especially in Global South contexts like the OPT's where conditions are conducive to that effect (Dassin et al., 2018b). Campbell (2018b) documents three types of arrangements to mitigate this risk. These arrangements are binding agreements with clear penalties in case of non-return, social contracts fostered through consistent messaging and incentivisation for return, and vague guidelines on post-scholarship return pathways. The efficacy of these arrangements in mitigating brain drain remains subject to much doubt (Campbell, 2018b; Lehr, 2008). The case of the 32 participants in this doctoral study cements this doubt, where such arrangements seemed to be of limited efficacy in determining the location of the participants at the time of interviews and, more importantly, whether they (could) utilise, or localise the use



of, their scholarships impact. Even when scholarships like Chevening and Fulbright came with visa conditions minimising immediate possibilities of legal stay in the country of study, such a measure did not lead some of the respective participants to go back to the OPT, to stay there, or to have a meaningful stay there (3.1.4; 3.2.3.3). Even when the extreme measure of pledging real estate as a collateral in the case of non-return, scholarship alumni may still leave their home-country after completing their required period of return (Abeuova & Muratbekova-Touron, 2019).

This doubt about the efficacy of programme-level arrangements to mitigate brain drain is further sustained by lacking research, in and beyond the OPT, on whether, how well, and how durably these arrangements work to achieve sustainable, scalable localisation of scholarships impact. In the Palestinian case, there is some evidence to suggest that push factors, e.g., the current security situation and political climate, are too extreme for such arrangements to deliver their intended purpose of widening scholarships impact (see Abusamra, 2024). Even before the cycle of violence of October 2023, Jebril (2020) reflected on the tension she, like other foreign-trained academics in Gaza, faced: “staying [in Gaza] and falling into a silent depression or leaving home and retaining my agency as a human being” (also see Jebril, 2021). However, there is also some evidence to suggest that pull factors, e.g., organisational practices conducive to stay (Abou-Al-Ross & AlWaheidi, 2021), need improvement to incentivise and sustainabilise the stay of foreign-trained Palestinians and the return, when conditions allow, of those in further training abroad. Indeed, this need for greater effort to incentivise, sustainabilise, *and* make meaningful contextual use of the return of foreign-educated individuals is as pressing in the OPT as in several other global contexts (see Hanley et al., 2025).

Therefore, I contend that, at this stage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the most plausible way to mitigate brain drain seems to be maximising pull factors and incubation opportunities. The heterogeneity of scholarship providers and their rationales (1.3) evidences the great difficulty of trying to convince them of institutionalising return conditions as part of their scholarship offers—which, again, may ultimately be inefficacious. By maximising pull factors and incubation opportunities, I refer to meso-level initiatives, i.e., at universities and other organisations, that are designed to recruit Palestinian scholarship alumni (including remotely), engage them in the cycle of reflective practice outlined in the previous section, and make intentional and strategic use of their potentially unique skills for institutional and systemic resistance to and transformation of conflict dynamics. Meso-level initiatives of this

intended effect seem to be favoured in similar contexts of protracted instability and macro-level governance deficits (Tessema et al., 2012).

Second, scholarships are criticised, as is education abroad more broadly, for their tendency to favour those already privileged to develop the competitive profiles required for earning them (Dassin et al., 2014; Tannock, 2013). They are also criticised for their individual scope, limiting the delivery of development aid to investment in individuals rather than in institutions or systems. This criticism is more serious in the Palestinian and other contexts where scholarships are used *instead* and/or in the absence of intervention at the institutional or systemic levels for (education) development (Barakat et al., 2025; also see Fincham, 2020). This criticism is accentuated by the contention that institutional and systemic-level interventions may achieve more sustainable outcomes for far more individuals (Barakat et al., 2025; UNESCO, 2014). I think of this dual point as the most compelling criticism of scholarships. Yet, it may be fair of several but not all or even many of the scholarships offered to Palestinians. This criticism most often lumps all scholarship programmes together as though their providers were the same or seek goals aligned with liberation, development, sustainability, or inclusivity priorities in the OPT. This view may be seriously detached from consideration of the heterogeneous scholarship stakeholders active in the OPT (1.3; 1.4.1; 1.4.2). Scholarships offered for institutional reasons of talent recruitment, those aligned with governments' public diplomacy programming, and other scholarship programmes may not have as their goal—or as one of their goals—the contribution to systemic, sustainable development (of education) in foreign countries. Other scholarship programmes launched, in whole or in part, for such a goal can and should explore opportunities for redistributing their resources so as to ensure their impact may be more inclusive and wider-reaching. The case of Glasgow, KCL, Sheffield, Ulster, and other UK universities offering scholarships in the aftermath of 7 October 2023 offers a good opportunity to start advocacy towards this goal. Universities and other organisations offering such scholarships can redirect part of their support to individuals and to institutions that may serve the education of more Palestinians—including those less privileged and thus unable to compete for scholarships—and to systems that may capabilitise Palestinian students for everyday peace, i.e., prepare them for utilising their capacity gains effectively against contextual barriers and coherently with national priorities (4.4.2).

Third, where criticism is more pointed to scholarships claimed by their providers to be an expression of solidarity and/or form of development or humanitarian aid, this criticism takes a more explicitly political dimension. As Alshaikh (2024) reflects, scholarships as a mode of

expressing solidarity with Palestinian students can be insufficient and evasive (also see Neve Gordon, 2024). Government agencies, academic institutions, foundations, and other scholarship providers can hand out a scholarship, two, or a few to Palestinians but simultaneously enjoy financial, research, or other interests with institutions sustaining the violence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this case, scholarships can be seen as a band-aid at best, handed out to give the impression of solidarity and support but not taking serious actions to challenge—sometimes to stop involvement in—the very mechanisms behind the *need* for scholarships. Clearly, there will be Palestinian individuals who will still apply to such scholarships, which I believe is a legitimate exercise of personal agency. To demand boycott of such scholarships or to criticise those individuals misses the point, which is to demand serious, not cosmetic or evasive, political action from the scholarship providers themselves. Here, I find two actions more worthy of the effort. The first, to reiterate, is a national-level mechanism to attract scholarship alumni to disseminate their education abroad impact for the wide benefit of local institutions and systems. The second alternative action is to engage in critical advocacy, by which I refer to committed programmes of *both* researching the potential complicity of those scholarship providers and engaging with them *and with* their stakeholders, including taxpayers and major donors, on how they can rethink their scholarship offerings within a holistic approach to solidarity/aid that is more efficacious in bringing about peace and development.

Before presenting the fourth concern about scholarships, a brief digression is helpful to demonstrating the potentially great extent of this final concern. In their critical commentary on Arab higher education, Nasser and Abouchdid (2007) identified a pattern where universities, by virtue of following foreign practices, inadvertently alienate students (and scholars) from their indigenous knowledges and lives. They went as far as to call this epistemological alienation a form of academic apartheid. In their illustration of such epistemological alienation in the OPT, Kassis et al. (2022) called it a neo-coloniality, where Palestinian institutions import promotion and tenure regulations that are divorced in form and effect from the national context and are instead a show of “localizing and reproducing hegemonic center–periphery relations in academia” (p. 105). If these alarm bells are rung about *local* higher education, it may follow that scholarships are criticised for their greater potential to engender a greater degree of epistemological alienation (see Chiappa & Finardi, 2021, and Lehr, 2008, for discussion of this risk in the case of international scholarships to Brazilian, Chilean, and Cuban students). Where scholarships enable financial access to education abroad, they enable participation in academic

training that may be detached in language, substance, (meta-)theory, method, and political commitment from the context of the home-country. This risk may be relatively greater for Palestinians as Palestine remains under-covered in and across study programmes abroad. Perhaps the clearest evidence of this risk was Fayyadism, the disastrous neoliberalisation agenda pursued by the American-trained economist turned Palestinian prime minister, Salam Fayyad (Dana, 2020; Tartir, 2015). The case of the late Saeb Erekat may also be telling, where his American and British education in political science and peace studies may have served him in leading Palestinian negotiations with Israel but to no positive effect of these negotiations nor to a favourable view among Palestinians (see Roy, 1999).

Considering this risk, scholarships are criticised for their likely facilitation of the epistemological alienation of their recipients from their own ways of knowing, living, and political being. The findings of this doctoral study do not precisely examine whether and how this risk materialised in the case of the 32 research participants, though they reflected in their data a strong commitment to thinking and advocating Palestine during their sojourns (3.2.4). In the absence of data on this risk and on how Palestinian scholarship recipients address it, I find it sufficient to reiterate the need for one of the actions recommended in the previous section:

to facilitate sessions—before, during, and after the sojourn—where scholarship recipients are encouraged to reflect on their scholarship intentions, experiences, and outcomes, on the meaning of these in the local context of conflict, and on ways they can exercise and develop their critical agency while trying to disseminate and institutionalise some of their scholarship outcomes.

These sessions may not prevent the risk of epistemological alienation, but they can signal, in the form of concrete social interaction, to scholarship recipients that their home-country demands of them not just “importing” world-class knowledge and skills but their critical and creative customisation thereof to the national context to which this import is made. Together with the cycle of reflective practice outlined previously, the (self-)reflectiveness fostered through these sessions may also empower scholarship alumni to be not only critical consumers of foreign knowledge but also competent contributors, on behalf of Palestinian epistemology and political aspirations, to the academic and broader spaces they join during their funded education abroad.

I finally must reiterate that in the absence of research on scholarships in the OPT, my treatment of these four serious concerns had to be brief. My goal is to demonstrate the need for informed reflection before rushing to criticism that may be negligent of the diversity and complexity of the scholarships scene in the OPT. Above all, it is my hope that this commentary on the risks associated with scholarships—of brain drain, equity and sustainability, political evasiveness, and epistemological alienation—may consolidate the soundness of the proposal for a national-level mechanism that applies proactive Palestinian agency in the following actions:

- attracting scholarship alumni to serve locally, even if remotely, with their scholarship experiences and outcomes,
- coordinating the alumni's service, including to disseminate their scholarships impact and widen local access thereto,
- aligning these alumni's service with local knowledge and contextual priorities, including through actioning the cycle of reflective practice, to maintain the relevance-to-peace of the scholarships impact being disseminated; and
- strategising for the institutionalisation, sustainability, and scalability of this impact dissemination effort.

While such a mechanism would be new, its mission may well prove coherent with the evolving history of national activism and political leadership among Palestinian students (Abu Samra, 2020, 2021), including in the UK (Long, 2006) and across Europe (Shiblak, 2005). Its mission may also facilitate progress towards the proposal by Sharabati-Shahin and Thiruchelvam (2013) for stronger engagement of the Palestinian diaspora in strengthening the function of local higher education institutions. Above all, I see my invocation of national-level agency here as a reiteration of that made by Ibrahim Abu Lughod 52 years ago. In concluding his thoughts on the concerns about Palestinians' education in exile, he wrote,

Palestinians will have to ponder the very important implications of several factors if there is to be a successful continuation of their struggle for the liberation of Palestine. The first is the ultimate meaning of educating Palestinians for secure jobs, which at present seems to be the major characteristic of education in the Arab states, rather than for liberation; or to put it differently, the relevance of educating a community in exile according to a curriculum and by methods appropriate for a stable and on-going society. The second is the implication of educating the Palestinians without attention to their

Palestinian consciousness and identity. Third, one must study the implication for future revolutionary strategies of a more highly educated population. Within less than a decade, the normal balance that obtains in all societies among its various sectors - working class, peasantry, tertiary services, business, etc., - will be totally and irreversibly [*sic*] altered. Palestinians will constitute a highly urban community predominantly engaged in middle class occupations, and this will strongly affect the type of struggle they can wage. These are some of the implications responsible Palestinian... leadership will have to examine closely. (Abu-Lughod, 1973, p. 111).

This conclusion by Abu-Lughod is only more urgent today. Part of the response to the educide in Gaza, i.e., the systematic destruction of education there (see 1.3), should not be limited to training and hiring new academics, e.g., by awarding scholarships and recruiting scholarship alumni to academic posts. The response should go deeper beyond that, involving active efforts to train and support Palestinian academics in applying serious contextuality in their academic training and subsequently their academic service. Academic actors, scholarship providers and stakeholders, and others in pertinent positions need to consider collaborating on creating the national-level mechanism and actions outlined above. This effort may ensure that rebuilding higher education in Gaza is not only a technical exercise in physical reconstruction and resumption of credentialisation but, more strongly, a national exercise in epistemic rebirth and revitalisation of national identity and citizenship.

I have in this section complemented the potential contribution that this doctoral study makes to the critical relevance-to-practice of scholarships research, including the urgency of strategising scholarships' role in higher education recovery in Gaza. I now turn to the final section of this chapter where I discuss the limitations of this doctoral study and point out potential directions for future research on scholarships in the OPT.

## 4.6. Limitations

This doctoral study is limited in five main respects, in terms of its research process, procedures, and findings. I outline these limitations in the same spirit of epistemological relativism discussed in the second chapter (2.2.2).

First, this doctoral study has been conducted based on academic and grey literature that is predominantly in English and, to a disproportionately limited extent, in Arabic (1.2.1). Availability of and access to more studies in Arabic and academic or grey literature in other

languages may have advanced the extent to which the research design, findings, and implications could be informed by diverse perspectives. As demonstrated in the first chapter, academic and grey literature on scholarships is published mostly in English and by researchers and evaluation professionals trained and based in and/or focusing on Northern North contexts (see Pham et al., 2021). This meant that the survey (1.2) and review (2.1) of this literature could be limited in reflecting a scholarships research agenda—i.e., research perspectives and approaches as well as priorities of and views on scholarships—which may better cohere with the Palestinian context. I tried mitigating this limitation through a commitment to a critical, context-driven approach (2.1) and through a research and narrative practice grounded in both epistemological relativism (2.2.2) and active reflexivity (2.5). Future research on scholarships by researchers of more diverse linguistic, geopolitical, and epistemological positionalities may mitigate this limitation.

Second, views from scholarship providers, employers, and other stakeholders from (Palestinian) government agencies and civil society were not included in the research. As I mentioned in the Data Collection section (2.4.2), I sought to mitigate this limitation by planning a round of expert validation—meetings with Palestinian, Arab, and international scholars, researchers, and practitioners to review and discuss the perceived scholarships impact and its potential relevance to peace in the OPT. I also sought a mitigation by collaborating with a scholarship provider. However, both planned mitigations were of limited efficacy because of the logistic and personal difficulties arising in the aftermath of the violence that broke out on 7 October 2023 (see Appendix E). Instead, I drew extensively on education research on the OPT, often by Palestinian authors, and I completed a substantial review of scholarship providers' arrangements and rationales of offering scholarships to Palestinians (1.3; Appendix A). Still, I acknowledge that a fuller survey of those views may be key to stronger understanding of whether and how scholarships may, or may not, be relevant to peace in the OPT.

Third, while the research participants were relatively diverse in terms of their backgrounds, scholarship programmes, academic trajectories, countries of study, and fields of work, neither the sample size nor the sampling protocol was not intended to ensure the findings can be representative of the population of Palestinian scholarship recipients (1.3.2.1). Any generalisation of the findings is therefore cautioned. I see this study as only a first contribution to building an empirical background and a critical approach against which the design and aims of future research on scholarships to Palestinians (and perhaps to others in similar contexts) may be informed. Relatedly, fourth, the study drew on the participants' self-reported

perceptions of their scholarship experiences and outcomes, leaving room for social desirability and other potential biases to influence the data—especially given the participants’ perception of me as an in-group member. I sought to mitigate this limitation by deliberately using the semi-structured format of interviews to elicit extended discussion and/or illustrative examples of specific points (see Appendix C). Also, pre-existing documents, where provided, and rapid reviews of study and scholarship programmes, where appropriate, served to confirm but also to supplement the substantive data collected through interviews.

Having discussed the four main limitations of the research process and procedures, I now turn to discussing the temporal, substantive, and epistemological limitations of the findings.

Temporally, the findings of this doctoral study offer some account of the 32 participants’ pre- and post-scholarship trajectories. This account is not systematically longitudinal or complete of such trajectories of all participants. The knowledge offered in this account does not tell us much about, for example, key factors in the participants’ pre- and post-scholarship trajectories, e.g., whether and how their families and friendships (key social institutions of Palestinian life) contributed to their scholarship application motives and success; and whether and how they have continued or changed the post-scholarship engagements captured at the time-point of interviews. By my original plan to mitigate this limitation, I invited all participants to complete the background questionnaire and to share pre-existing documents, chiefly a copy of their CV/resume. Only 16 and 11 did respectively. Therefore, future research could address this limitation and the generalisability limitation mentioned above by using appropriate quantitative and/or longitudinal approaches while also mainstreaming collection of participants’ biographical, demographic, and socioeconomic data.

Substantively, the experiential findings leave at least one key gap in understanding Palestinian students’ scholarship experiences. Given the meta-theoretical and interdisciplinary resources *I* deployed for the doctoral study and subsequently the 32 participants’ responses to the interview prompts and the data gleaned from the documents of 11 of them, the findings privileged the motivation, academic, professional, and national life-related aspects of the participants’ experiences. Only briefly did these findings highlight the linguistic, intercultural, psychological, political, or religious dimensions of the (post-)sojourn experiences, as well as dynamics of gender and racialisation that may be involved in Palestinian students’ experiences abroad. Future research could aim to explore these dimensions and dynamics, perhaps focusing



on their potential implications on scholarships impact and its potential relevance to peace in the OPT.

Furthermore, the inferential findings offered only three categories of functions of everyday peace that were demonstrated in the participants' data. These functions were of a subjective, citizenship, or epistemic nature. Future research may aim to explore a broader array of functions of everyday peace that may be represented in scholarship experiences, of Palestinian and other students. It can do so specifically through techniques of data collection and methods of inferential-exploratory analysis that are suited for that aim. It would also be interesting to explore in future research—but not limit its focus to—technical functions of everyday peace, where scholarship alumni do peacebuilding work, e.g., lead direct interventions and/or capacity-building projects in the four peacebuilding areas of (i) security, conflict transformation, and/or peacekeeping; (ii) political measures or human rights; (iii) socio-economic and political development; and (iv) relief (Goodhand, 2006; also see Almassri, 2024c).

Another substantive limitation relates to the dispositional findings, with which I articulated explanatory claims about some of the structural forces, institutional resources, and individual factors that could be contributing to the demonstrated increase in the participants' everyday peace capability. As I elaborated in my account of the process of developing these findings (2.4.4.4), they are not claims about which factors or what interactions among these factors caused the capability gain; neither the planned methods nor the delivered narrative practice were intended to establish such causality. Rather, the dispositional findings only offer claims about which factors and what associations may be pertinent for causal research to examine. These claimed factors and associations, while ontologically plausible and empirically supported, may be incomplete, imprecise, and/or ultimately of minimal generalisability among Palestinian scholarship recipients. Future research may aim to examine the completeness, accuracy, and the extent of efficacy of these factors and associations in generating gain in Palestinian scholarship recipients' everyday peace capability. It can do so by using data collection and analysis methods intended for such causal analysis.

Finally, the inferential and dispositional findings were developed solely by me. This is an epistemological limitation because the development of these findings was bound(ed) by (i) the positionality described in Chapter 1 and mobilised across the doctoral study; (ii) the specific interdisciplinary research perspective presented in Chapter 2; (iii) the extent and limit of my

contextual, theoretical, and methodological knowledge as presented in the first two chapters; and (iv) the quality of my ability to exercise this positionality, perspective, and knowledge in both making inferences from the 32 participants' data and articulating the findings generated thereby. By my original plan to mitigate this limitation, I significantly depended on research, often by Palestinian educationists and researchers, to ensure my influence, however limiting, of the research process was a product of active dialogue with existing research, rather than an undue and unchecked bias (2.5). I also planned to have a round of respondent validation to check and correct for any procedural inconsistencies, interpretive gaps, theoretical blind spots, and/or ontological implausibilities (see 2.4.2). Due to the cycle of violence in 2023, I could not apply this mitigation, which would have involved a more participatory process where the participant-respondents would contribute a greater wealth of research and personal perspectives to (dis)confirm but also enrich the theoretical- and ontological-level findings.

Future research can include respondent validation as a key activity to ensure that scholarships research, in its theoretical advancement, benefits from the local knowledge(s) and diverse academic perspectives of scholarship recipients and alumni. Also, following the example of Wiltshire and Ronkainen (2021), future research may comprise pairs or teams of researchers whose collaboration and researcher triangulation may add to the rigour and diversity of scholarships research. Where these pairs or teams are of researchers from different disciplinary perspectives, this collaboration and triangulation may further strengthen the interdisciplinary remit of scholarships research. This strengthened interdisciplinarity will be timely as scholarships research continues to emerge as a subfield straddling research across the fields and areas of international relations, public diplomacy, development, sociology, intercultural studies, and area studies.

In this section, I have discussed the main limitations of the research process, procedures, and findings, and I pointed out how future research on scholarships in (and beyond) the OPT may overcome them. I should finally conclude by noting that I approached the writing of this thesis to serve as a piece of transferable research. The thick descriptions I have provided of the Palestinian context, the researcher positionality and reflexivity, the study's participants, and the research assumptions, procedures, methods, and implications may inform others' assessment of whether and how (elements of) the study, e.g., the context-driven approach, meta-theoretical framework, and/or data analysis protocol, may be replicable in other settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

## Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed several ways in which this doctoral study may contribute to advancing the research and practice of international scholarships. In the first section, I demonstrated the doctoral study's introduction of new evidence from an unstudied country context of scholarships impact, bridging a longstanding population gap on the backgrounds, motivations, experiences, and post-completion trajectories of a sample of international Palestinian students. This evidence, from a context of protracted conflict, extends support for international scholarships as a means of potential capabilitisation, offering Palestinian recipients effective opportunities to make academic, career, and personal gains, to exercise higher levels of agency, and to counter-conduct currents of conflict in ways otherwise much less possible in the current Palestinian context.

In the second and third sections, I discussed the role and implications of meta-theory, including their use within the interdisciplinary agenda of this doctoral study. I demonstrated that, within critical realism, the interdisciplinary meta-theorisation resulting from the synthesis of Mac Ginty's (2021) theorisation of Everyday Peace and Sen's (2001) Capability Approach allowed this study to be driven more by the Palestinian context and less by prior research assumptions, whether prescribed by theory or gleaned from empirical evidence produced in dissimilar contexts. A key implication of this interdisciplinary meta-theorisation was identifying the potential limits of current conceptions of scholarships, limiting them to instrumentalist terms of bridging financial access. This implication, together with others elaborated in the chapter, illuminates the significance of heeding Campbell and Mawer (2019), Novotný et al. (2021), and Saling's (2023) argument for increased and careful theorisation in research of scholarships impact.

In the fourth section, I illustrated the potential breakthroughs that this interdisciplinary meta-theorisation can facilitate in improving and synergising research *and* practice. The key to this synergy is a cycle of reflective practice where scholarship alumni engage their (meta-)reflexivity in planning, evaluating, and refining their use of their scholarships impact and, in course, optimising this impact. The resulting praxis may drive stronger progress in understanding, widening, and institutionalising scholarships impact, its coherence with pressing contextual priorities, and the potential thereof to contribute to Palestinian emancipation.

In the fifth section, I offered what may perhaps be the first documented scholarly response to criticisms of scholarships as a mode of intervention in the OPT, drawing on the effort and reflexivity behind this doctoral study and its findings. The gist of this commentary is that this criticism—and appreciation—of scholarships needs to be rebalanced in light of a dynamic, critical consideration of four primary angles: the complex map of diverse scholarship stakeholders in the OPT, the political nature of preferring scholarships to other modes of systemic-level intervention, the absence of data to inform our thinking on scholarships and scholarship recipient trajectories, and the need for some national-level body to help facilitate the praxis of scholarships impact (for peace). Criticism or appreciation of scholarships that fails to engage with these four angles may still be intellectually valuable, though its practical utility, at least in the immediate and short terms, may be subject to question.

In the last section, I outlined five main limitations of this doctoral study, which is of findings that are ungeneralisable and limited in their temporal scope, thematic span, and epistemological foundation. Also, the doctoral study is not as epistemologically informed as would have been the case had I found or been able to read research in languages other than English, and it offers only limited representation, based on secondary sources, of views from scholarship providers and other stakeholders in the OPT. Drawing on these limitations, I highlighted some language-, theme-, population-, and method-related directions that future research on scholarships (to Palestinians) may follow.

## Chapter 5

### Thesis Summary

In this thesis, I presented the background, context, process, findings, contribution, and implications of my doctoral study, where I investigated the potential impact of international graduate scholarships on peace in the OPT. As I described in Chapter 1, I was motivated to undertake this study by my background as a Palestinian scholarship alumni, my prior work with Palestinian scholarship applicants, and my academic interests in international student mobility and peacebuilding. This positionality helped me appreciate the significance of the emerging subfield of scholarships research as well as the need to introduce the Palestinian case to this subfield. This positionality also made me sceptical about the fit of the conceptual and theoretical tools offered in existing research for studying scholarships impact in a context like the OPT. Guided by this positionality and scepticism, I designed my doctoral study to address five research questions: *What are some of the profile characteristics of Palestinian recipients of international scholarships (RQ1)? How do Palestinian scholarship recipients perceive their motivations for and experiences and outcomes of undertaking funded graduate education abroad (RQ2)? Does this characterisation of scholarships impact in the OPT warrant some rethinking of the potential efficacy of scholarships vis-à-vis peace (RQ3)? How do scholarships relate to peace in the OPT (RQ4)? What may explain the relevance of scholarships impact to micro-level peace in the OPT (RQ5)?*

To address these RQs, I first surveyed the academic and grey literature dealing with scholarships impact (1.2), and I critically reviewed the interdisciplinary research dealing more specifically with the potential relevance of this impact to peace (2.1.1; 2.1.2). The conclusion I drew from this literature survey and review is that the Palestinian context requires a different approach to investigating whether and how scholarships impact may relate to peace. I concluded that this approach can replicate neither the ideological bias towards neo-liberalist conceptions of peace nor the epistemic fallacy of flattening the relevance-to-peace of scholarships impact into perceptions thereof (2.1.3). Instead, the alternative approach needed to take seriously the conditions of the Palestinian context that may strongly shape what scholarships impact can be, how it arises, and what nature and level of peace to which it may be relevant. To build this approach, I drew overarching guidance from critical realism (2.2). I clarified the ontological and epistemological stance in reference to which I designed the

theoretical, methodological, and analytical tools of the doctoral study. Together with the theoretical framework of Everyday Peace Capability, critical realism helped me posit that scholarships may offer capacity developments and structural changes that, to the extent they are agentially seized by scholarship recipients, can enhance their constructive responses to conflict (2.3). I further posited that the relevance-to-peace of scholarships impact can be established on account of empirical evidence demonstrating that scholarships make such an offer, that recipients embrace it, and that enhanced functions of everyday peace consequently materialise.

Guided by this meta-theoretical framework, I devised a methodological plan to sample the research participants purposefully (2.4.1) and to use interviews, document review, and rapid reviews to collect data on their profiles, scholarship and study programmes, and their perceived motivations for and experiences through funded graduate education abroad (2.4.2). My methodological plan also provided for context-driven ethical practice in data collection (2.4.3). Beside following the applicable guidelines from BERA (2018, 2024) regarding anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality, I followed a narrative practice in this thesis aimed at minimising the participants' identifiability given the close-knit communities *we* tend to come from and often go on to form and/or join. Also, I integrated into my methodological plan Wiltshire and Ronkainen's (2010) proposal of critical realist thematic analysis (2.4.4.1). With this multi-stage data analysis protocol, I ensured I actioned the meta-theoretical assumptions of critical realism and Everyday Peace Capability into rigorous interpretive practice. After analysing the participants' contextual data in response to RQ1, I produced data-driven descriptive summarisations of their substantive data in response to RQs 2 and 3 (2.4.4.2). I then applied techniques of abductive and retroductive analysis respectively to develop theoretical interpretations in response to RQ4 (2.4.4.3) and explanatory claims in response to RQ5 (2.4.4.4). Although the 7 October 2023 events disrupted my methodological plan, I tried compensating the missed opportunities for respondent validation and research participation by applying quality checks for empirical adequacy, interpretive validity, and ontological plausibility in the data analysis procedures. I also maintained reflexive practice, including through reviewing the work of Palestinian educationists and researchers, in and beyond the abductive and retroductive stages of analysis (2.5).

In Chapter 3, I presented the findings developed through this meta-theoretically guided methodological plan. In the first subchapter (3.1), I presented profile findings about the 32 research participants' demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds, academic trajectories,

study destinations and time, sources of scholarship funding, and post-completion trajectories (3.1). These profile findings helped address the first research question: What are some of the profile characteristics of Palestinian recipients of international scholarships? Together with the mapping of scholarships to Palestinians (1.3), these profile findings consolidate the impression that Palestinian scholarship recipients tend to be diverse in terms of age, gender, and socioeconomic backgrounds; to have interests in academic fields beyond what is (possible to be) at offer at local (undergraduate) university programmes; to be open and/or pragmatic in choosing their graduate education abroad destinations; and to maintain their academic success when transitioning to new academic and language environments.

In the second subchapter, I presented four experiential themes, emerging from data-driven, descriptive analysis focused on identifying empirical patterns in the research participants' data. I developed these thematic findings in response to RQ2: *How do Palestinian scholarship recipients perceive their motivations for and experiences and outcomes of undertaking funded graduate education abroad?* These experiential themes showed the participants had positive and negative motivations to pursue funded graduate education abroad (3.2.1) and that they perceived drawing significant gains from scholarships, in their academic (3.2.2), career (3.2.3), and multidimensional identity development (3.2.4). These findings also formed the basis for an affirmative answer to RQ3: Does the characterisation of scholarships impact in the OPT warrant some rethinking of the potential efficacy of scholarships vis-à-vis peace? The experiential themes, especially that showing the participants' reflexive conceptual, global, and personal engagements with their national identity and awareness, demanded moving beyond the predominant explanatory models of the relevance of education abroad to peace, e.g., the diffusion of liberal-democratic values and the institutionalisation of world society (see 2.1). The participants' data presented no evidence to suggest that their funded graduate education abroad included significant experiences of socialisation into or internalisation of liberal-democratic and global institutionalist values.

From this response to RQ3, I finalised the development of Everyday Peace Capability as the theoretical framework within which to interpret the data in response to RQ4: *How do scholarships relate to peace in the OPT?* From abductive analysis, I presented in the third subchapter (3.3) one overarching inferential theme that suggested scholarships could contribute to peace in the OPT by increasing Palestinian recipients' effective ability to counteract the disciplining effects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (3.3.1). This counter-conduct (Senellart et al., 2009) was demonstrated in three subthemes: on the participants' repositioning of

themselves in relation to rather than in limitation to the conflict (3.3.1.1), on their transgression of disciplines oppressive to their domestic-global citizenship (3.3.1.2), and on their expansion of their epistemic capacity-building (3.3.1.3). Overall, these inferential findings demonstrated the participants' advancement of seven functions across the subjective, citizenship, and epistemic dimensions of everyday peace: (i) increasing their self-efficacy through extending their academic and broader hope and success; (ii) continuing accumulation thereof despite the disequilibria of their life and education outside of the OPT's oppressive context, most often for the first time; (iii) gaining connectedness and practising civic-mindedness in global spaces; (iv) resocialising their domestic and global citizenship consciousness; (v) applying reflexivity and critical reflection, in academic and/or social settings, on issues of national concern; (vi) extending beyond a humanitarian purpose their knowledge pursuits; and (vii) advancing practice of different methods of knowing.

In the fourth subchapter (3.4), I built further on this inferential interpretation by articulating some of the empirically supported ontological links between scholarships and peace in the OPT. I offered this articulation in four dispositional themes, which I developed through retroductive analysis of the participants' empirical data in response to RQ5: *What may explain the relevance of scholarships impact to micro-level peace in the OPT?* These dispositional themes suggested that scholarships extended the participants' viable hope for progress in defiance of conflict-driven despair (3.4.1), removed many key constraints on the extent and quality of their engagement in conflict-disruptive endeavours (3.4.2), and offered arrangements to guide them in this (re)constructive engagement (3.4.3), simultaneously as the participants themselves—now more free from conflict disciplines—extended their exercise of positive (pre)dispositions of aspiration, antifragility, national commitment, and international connection (3.4.4).

Overall, these experiential, inferential, and dispositional findings support the argument that the potential relevance-to-peace of Palestinians' funded graduate education abroad emerges from a transcontextually predisposed and enhanced exercise of pro-peace qualities. While individually possessed, the research participants' demonstrated pro-peace qualities are socially, culturally, and politically predisposed by the Palestinian context. Their exercise of these pro-peace qualities was technically enhanced and guided through their advanced study programmes and broader learning and life experiences at better-equipped institutions and in more peaceful, globally connected settings. In this exercise, Palestinian scholarship recipients can gain valuable, locally unavailable technical capacities, e.g., specialised knowledge and



skills in their fields as well as intra- and inter-national experiences transferable to their careers and lives as Palestinians. I maintain that this exercise itself, rather than its technical outcomes, is peacebuilding, for it involves essential continuation of hope and human progress and just as much rejection of the protracted Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its ethos of despair and destruction. Because this exercise is peacebuilding, I further contend, it forms the ontological basis of scholarships' potential to contribute to peace in the OPT. Scholarships do not necessarily make this exercise any more possible than can local education, but they offer an effective opportunity to extend it, free from the oppressive disciplines of the conflict, as well as to undertake it with more vigour and access to conducive social and material conditions, and to cultivate in course a stronger individual will to conduct oneself as one may. This characterisation of scholarships' qualitative contribution to micro-level peace in the OPT deepens appreciation of their potential to graduate not only competent professionals, social justice advocates and influential leaders but also individuals less inhibited by chronic exposure to violence and more self-efficacious in navigating pathways to better lives.

Finally, this research may be even more relevant in the context of educide that has emerged since 7 October 2023. The research offers evidence of scholarships impact and its relevance to peace in the OPT, as well as of the scene of who offers and supports scholarships to Palestinians and for what purpose(s). This evidence confirms that scholarships can play a significant role in mitigating the effects of the ongoing educide and facilitating higher education reconstruction and recovery. The evidence is useful on two deeper counts. It demonstrates that scholarships impact should not be viewed or utilised in only technical terms, e.g., staffing universities upon rebuilding. Instead, the relevance-to-peace of scholarships impact that is demonstrated in this research underscores the need for fuller utilisation of scholarships, chiefly by supporting recipients in aligning their capability gains abroad and their post-completion functions with pressing priorities of a post-7 October Gaza and Palestine. Also, the documentary evidence in this research, i.e., of scholarship providers and stakeholders, demands nuance in the ongoing debate about whether scholarships should be included in or excluded from education aid to Palestinians. This documentary evidence clarifies that common criticism of scholarships as a mode of education aid fails to consider the heterogeneity of scholarship providers and of their rationales. Instead, the evidence cements the plausibility of shifting from obsession with scholarship providers' intentions and offerings to a claim of national-level agency in promoting and sustainabilising the meaningful return of scholarship alumni to Gaza and to Palestine.

## Implications and Recommendations

I fully accept that the argument summarised above may well sound like common sense to some, even many, Palestinians with education abroad experiences. However, I can only now claim that its basis in some empirical evidence and its articulation in scholarly terms may outline key directions to advance the body of scholarships research and practice in and beyond the OPT. I discussed these implications in Chapter 4. In the spirit of praxis I disclaimed there, I did not separate the recommendations and implications for scholarships research and practice, both of which I demonstrated throughout the chapter to be mutually reinforcing to the potential of scholarships as opportunities for capabilitisation, whether for peace or otherwise, in and beyond the OPT. Only by way of ‘neat’ summarisation do I now outline these implications and recommendations.

### **Education Leaders in the Occupied Palestinian Territory**

1. Could create systems to connect and support scholarship alumni, and advocate for the coordination, dissemination, institutionalisation, strategisation, and localisation of the impact that they may bring to their roles as Palestinian citizens.
2. Should expand the role of scholarship alumni in reconstructing Gaza’s higher education beyond staffing rebuilt institutions, including by eliciting and proactively supporting their (remote or in-person) contributions to the critical national functions of higher education.

### **Providers of Scholarships to Palestinians**

3. Should continue offering international graduate scholarships to Palestinian students, including for remote study.
4. Should not withhold this offer when scholarship alumni are structurally denied the opportunity of demonstrating their education abroad impact in the form of immediately observable institutional or societal contributions.
5. Could, ideally in collaboration with Palestinian stakeholders, organise sessions—before, during, and after the sojourn—where scholarship recipients are encouraged to reflect on their scholarship intentions, experiences, and outcomes, on the meaning of these in their local Palestinian contexts, and on ways they can exercise and develop their critical agency while trying to disseminate and institutionalise some of their scholarship outcomes.
6. Should reallocate part of scholarship programme funding from the activity of sending students abroad to the activity of supporting scholarship alumni’s initiatives and networks

(and local and international engagements) to reflect on their experiences and explore avenues for coordinated action to address barriers to applying their scholarship outcomes in individual, institutional, and societal functions aligned with the national priorities of disrupting and ultimately resolving the conflict.

### **Scholarship Researchers and Evaluation Practitioners**

7. Need to employ serious attention to the contexts in/across which they are conducting their research or evaluation of scholarships impact.
8. Could collaborate in revisiting the ontology of an international higher education scholarship, to move beyond an instrumentalist definition thereof as a tool of financial access.
9. May find it useful, if not sometimes ideal, to apply the Capabilities Approach or other carefully selected theoretical frameworks—plausibly within a clear metatheoretical and interdisciplinary perspective—in interpreting the significance, effectiveness, and scalability of scholarships impact.
10. May need to use alternative methodologies to ensure better epistemological alignment between the population, purpose, and impact of scholarships research. Methodologies where data collection involves scholarship recipients and alumni's (meta-)reflexivity might be powerful tools to achieve this alignment.

### **Researchers New to Applying Critical Realism**

11. May find Wiltshire and Ronkainen's (2021) proposal of critical realist thematic analysis and its elaborate application in this thesis useful to their operationalisation of the metatheory into coherent and rigorous analytic practice.

### **Final Remark**

It is 9 September 2025, 703 days since 7 October 2023. These 703 days of daily stress and survivor guilt make it difficult for me to conclude this thesis in the same way as I started it, telling a story that summarises my relationship to the research. I only had to remember that story from the past and jot it down in the beginning (1.1). To comment as personally by way of conclusion demands of me present, coherent deliberation. I can only *perform* such deliberation, which I am disinclined to do as my family, several research participants, all students and academics, many scholarship recipients and alumni, and 2.1 million human beings

in Gaza continue being subjected to a scale of violence that has profoundly scarred us—for as short, or as long, as we shall be made to live.

What I am though able to draft as a final clear remark is that this research has conscientised me more fully of the history, significance, and impact of scholarships to Palestinians; of the great privilege and responsibility of being a Palestinian scholarship recipient; of the field that scholarships avail for Palestinians to practise more of their epistemic, imaginative, and political agency—not just academic agency; and of the power of critical realism to produce research that is serious in both its contextuality and its potential to inspire creative, emancipatory practice. (Dare) I thus hope that this research may help inform national and international efforts of reparative justice and transformative peacebuilding assistance through scholarships and broader education aid to Palestinians... .

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## **Appendix A**

### **Methodological Note on the Documentation of Scholarships for Palestinians**

Given the very limited prior research on scholarships to Palestinians, it is important to note the methods I used in building the contemporary account of scholarship stakeholders and rationales that I presented in Subchapter 1.3. (Scholarships for Palestinians). Below, I share this methodological note, followed by an indicative sample of rationales for providing and supporting scholarships for Palestinians.

Campbell (2021, p. 5) notes that the mix and myriad of scholarship models and rationales and the lack of information accessibility or transparency make researching scholarships a challenging undertaking. This is certainly the case in researching scholarships for Palestinians. In their baseline study of higher education and research in OPT, Isaac et al. (2019, 46) noted that in their “attempt to assess donor funding for HE and research in Palestine, a letter was sent on 14 July 2018 to 51 consulates and representatives offices. Except for one apology, there were no responses.” In light of these observations, I developed the overview of scholarship stakeholders and their rationales based on a review of relevant materials such as scholarship programme documents, application announcements, as well as press releases, annual reports, and other materials published by the organisations providing or supporting scholarships for Palestinians. Crucially, this review covered relevant materials posted on the Palestinian Ministry of Higher Education’s website, e.g., scholarship opportunity announcements and scholarship nominee lists. The overview is further based on a review of publicly available compilations of scholarships for Palestinians (e.g., Connect Palestine, n.d.; Dutch Scholars for Palestine, n.d.; Palanac, 2024; Palestine Community Foundation, n.d.; UCU, 2017). In finding and reviewing these sources, I was served well by the positionality and reflexive practice described respectively in Subchapters 1.1. and 2.5. The former allowed me to know where to look for such sources and the latter to be rigorous in my review of them. Overall, this was a modest approach to building some foundation of a contemporary account of scholarship stakeholders and rationales.

Two significant limitations of this approach are worth clarification. First, the stakeholders reviewed were identified based on their public accessibility online and my familiarity with them, and the single criterion for including them in the overview was the openness of their scholarship or support programmes to Palestinians. Therefore, the list of

scholarship stakeholders highlighted in Subchapter 1.3. offers an indicative rather than a representative sample of the providers and supporters of scholarships to Palestinians. Second, because I significantly relied on my familiarity with scholarship programmes as a source of identifying stakeholders and as this familiarity was greater with UK-based stakeholders, these stakeholders were privileged in the presentation of the overview. While both limitations need to be addressed in future research on the topic, their implication may be overlooked here given the specific purpose of the Subchapter (1.3) in illustrating the great heterogeneity of actors providing and supporting scholarships for Palestinians as well as the diversity and often overlap of their rationales for doing so. Further *indication* of their diverse and oft-overlapping rationales for offering or supporting scholarships to Palestinians is presented in the table below.

Table (5)

Indicative sample of rationales for providing and supporting scholarships for Palestinians

Scholarship	Rationale
<b>(University-Affiliated) Trusts</b>	
Durham Palestine Educational Trust (n.d.)	“Our main aim is to contribute to the social, economic and political development of Palestine through scholarships for Palestinians to study at Durham University.”
Rhodes Trust (n.d.)	<p>“The Rhodes Scholarship is a merit-based scholarship, with the purpose of developing public-spirited leaders, and to promote international understanding and peace through an international community of Scholars”</p> <p>“One of the founding aims of the Scholarship was to identify young leaders from around the world who, through the pursuit of education together at Oxford, would forge bonds of mutual understanding and fellowship for the betterment of mankind.”</p>
St Andrews Education for Palestinian	“To advance education by providing maintenance and travel expenses to suitably qualified Palestinian postgraduate students in need, admitted onto a one year Master's programme at the University of St. Andrews who otherwise would be unable to attend due to financial



Students Trust (STEPS)	hardship, and who are committed to returning and using their skills for the benefit of their communities.” (Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator, n.d.)
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### **(Family) Foundations**

Amjad and Suha Bseisu Foundation (n.d.)	“Our mission is to break down financial barriers to higher education. We support bright students across the world to pursue higher education. ... We focus primarily on supporting young people, women and refugees who want to study STEM degrees at postgraduate level. We provide scholarships at internationally renowned universities across the UK, US, Middle East and Malaysia.”
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Daughters for Life Foundation (n.d.)	“The Daughters for Life Foundation is committed to building a future in the Middle East, defined by women’s empowerment across the region. We fundamentally believe in the transformative power of education and that it is the key to transcending hardship, allowing every woman to achieve her dreams by tapping into her unique potential. Women have always been agents of change and community building, and with the chance to study, they are able to become industry leaders, innovators and invaluable professionals who help brighten the horizons of their communities.”
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Lutfia Rabbani Foundation (n.d.)	“The goal of this scholarship, besides fostering interaction between Arab and European students, is to provide the means for students seeking to broaden their own horizons.”
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Saïd Foundation (n.d.-a)	“The Saïd Foundation has offered educational scholarships and training opportunities since 1984. The programme aims to empower people through educational opportunities and to encourage the development of the Middle East. It is targeted towards outstanding individuals with leadership potential who will be drivers of positive change within our target countries of Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine.”
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### **Foreign Universities**

Cambridge University (n.d.).	“The objective of the fund is to enable Palestinian postgraduate students to undertake postgraduate Masters courses at the University of Cambridge and to become postgraduate students of Churchill College.”
Centre for Islamic Studies (University of Oxford, n.d.)	“These scholarships have been established by the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies to allow graduates to pursue study of benefit to the Muslim world.”
University of Exeter (n.d.)	No specific rationale outlined, but the scholarship is named in memory of iconic Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh
Oxford Brookes University (n.d.)	“Oxford Brookes’ Gaza Scholarship was started... to indicate to Palestinians in Gaza that they hadn’t been forgotten. Life in Gaza is often precarious. The local economy is stifled by the blockade, and for many ambitious young Gazans there are few local opportunities to progress. Higher education beyond Bachelor’s level is not available so scholarships such as this one, offering a chance to study for a Master’s, are a practical way of supporting talented Gazans to make their mark on the world.”
Queen’s University Belfast (2021 (2021, p. 26)	“The specific purpose of the award is to support a postgraduate student from Palestine who otherwise would not be able to study at Queen’s due to financial limitations.”
University of Sheffield (2024)	No specific rationale outlined, but the scholarship is framed as part of the University’s “sanctuary work”
SOAS (n.d.)	No specific rationale outlined.
Ulster University (n.d.)	“The Salam Scholarships have been established in 2023 to support Palestinian women to study at Ulster University. They aim to provide opportunities for Palestinian women with ability and potential, but limited opportunity, to access Ulster University studies.”

#### Other Foreign Entities

HESPAL (British Council, 2023)	“contributing to the advancement of the Palestinian Higher Education sector through supporting the creation of the next generation of senior academics. We aspire that the HESPAL scholars upon their completion of studies and return to Palestine will contribute towards endorsing international academic quality standards at Palestinian universities and work to develop renewed and sustainable links between Palestinian and UK universities”
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Merit Scholarship Program for High Technology, Islamic Development Bank (2024)	“The objective of the MSP is to develop technically qualified human resources in IsDB MCs by providing scholarships to promising and outstanding scholars and researchers to undertake advanced studies and research in the fields of applied science and technology needed for the development of the member countries.”
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OSC-GCUB Scholarships	“promoting international academic mobility and South-South cooperation as a means to break down barriers, build bridges between different cultures and communities through education, and give individuals the tools to become agents of change” – Organisation of Southern Cooperation (2024)
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	“contribute to the development of high academic level students from the five continents, as well as promoting university internationalization and strengthening international cooperation between Brazilian universities and institutions of other countries” – International Cooperation Group of Brazilian Universities (2024)
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Scholarship Supporters	
Hope Fund, AMIDEAST (n.d.)	“The Hope Fund is dedicated to fulfilling the dreams of deserving Palestinian youth—many from refugee backgrounds—for a higher education that will realize their academic and leadership potential.”
Center for Arab American	“in honor of Dr. Refaat Alareer, with a promise to Gaza’s students: we will do everything in our power to secure your right to pursue an education.”

Philanthropy (2024)	
MD Guidance (n.d.)	“to prepare medical students with the required knowledge and skills for their medical career both through and after their study... to make medical students aware of post graduation requirements, needed steps, challenges and be able to have them all prepared on time.”
Taawon (2016)	“optimize opportunities for high achieving, innovative and distinguished Palestinian students to enroll in internationally recognized universities”

## Appendix B

### Background Questionnaire Form

#### Participant Background Sheet

Dear Research Participant,

Thank you so much for your time and interest to participate in this research, tentatively titled *Capabilities for Peace? A Critical Realist Study of International Scholarships Impact in Palestine*. By now, you should have kindly received and reviewed the Consent Package.

This form is to build your participation portfolio through identifying the demographic, socioeconomic, academic, and career background information about you that helps tailor to your individual context both the research participation experience and the data analysis process.

Please remember that you are not required to complete this form. If you wish to complete it, please note that all the ethical research standards set out in the Consent Package apply to the data you share here, e.g., privacy, confidentiality, anonymity, as well as your rights not to answer questions and to withdraw any given answers.

If you have any questions or concerns, technical or otherwise, about this form, please contact the researcher, Anas N. Almassri (anas.n.almassri@durham.ac.uk).

Once again, thank you so much for your time and interest, and I look forward to working together through your vital contribution to this research. Shukran Jazeelan!

Name \*

Your answer

Email address \*

Your answer



#### Whatsapp Number

**Optional:** Please note that by providing this, you consent to being contacted via Whatsapp for the purposes of this research.

Your answer

#### Gender

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other:

#### Age

Your answer

#### Address in Palestine

This is the address of where you currently live (if you're in Palestine) or where you had normally resided before travelling from Palestine

Your answer

#### Category of Location of Residence in Palestine

Urban: in major cities or towns

Suburban: around or close to, but not in, the major cities or towns

Rural: in villages within Palestinian governorates

- ☐ Urban
- ☐ Suburban
- ☐ Rural
- ☐ Refugee camp
- ☐ Other:

#### Did you at any point attend an UNRWA school?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Other:

#### High School (grades 10 through 12)

Please share the name and location of your high school, e.g.: Abdulkarim Al-Aklouk High School, Dair Al-Balah

If you attended more than one high school, please feel free to share the name and location of each along with the year(s) of attendance.

Your answer

#### Type of High School

- ☐ Public
- ☐ Private
- ☐ Other:

**During high school and/or undergraduate education:**

Please tick all that best describe your engagements beyond formal study

- ☐ I participated in two or more programs that involve foreign language learning or intercultural exposure
- ☐ I participated in one program that involves foreign language learning or intercultural exposure
- ☐ I participated in two or more programs on civic skills such as leadership, advocacy, and/or community service, among others.
- ☐ I participated in one program on civic skills such as leadership, advocacy, and/or community service, among others.
- ☐ I participated in many other programs or activities that involve developing various skills (e.g., debate, IT, music, entrepreneurship, etc)
- ☐ I participated in few other programs or activities that involve developing various skills (e.g., debate, IT, music, entrepreneurship, etc)
- ☐ I never or hardly ever participated in any programs such as those mentioned above
- ☐ All or most of the programs I ticked above were out of school and/or out of university (i.e., not offered by the school/university)
- ☐ Only some of the programs I ticked above were out of school and/or out of university (i.e., not offered by the school/university)
- ☐ I was selected for all or most of the programs I ticked above based on merit (individual potential, academic achievement, and/or creative talent)
- ☐ I was selected for one or more of the programs I ticked above based on financial need
- ☐ Other:



During your high school or undergraduate education, did you receive any form of need-based financial assistance, e.g., grants, scholarships, or loans awarded to you based on financial need (not academic, athletic, or creative merit)

**Optional:** Please remember that you are at full liberty not to answer any questions, including this and the following questions.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ N/A
- ☐ Other:

Overall, I tend to think of myself as coming from

There are no standard definition of the following categories of class in Palestine. You are encouraged to think of the various educational, cultural, social, financial, and/or geographic factors that may play a role in this ranking.

- ☐ An upper class family
- ☐ An upper middle-class family
- ☐ A lower middle-class family
- ☐ A working-class family
- ☐ Other:

Please feel free to use this space to share any other information about your background that you believe is important to consider

Your answer

Name of the Master's Scholarship Program \*

Your answer

Name of University (at which the scholarship was taken up) \*

Your answer

Did you successfully complete the master's program for which you had the above \* scholarship?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Not
- ☐ Other:

Year of Completion \*

- ☐ 2016
- ☐ 2017
- ☐ 2018
- ☐ 2019
- ☐ 2020
- ☐ 2021
- ☐ I completed my master's program in or before August 2022
- ☐ I completed my master's program in or after September 2022
- ☐ I completed my master's program in or before December 2015

Extent of Previous Travel (please tick all that apply)

**Before** you travelled for your master's scholarship, had you:

- ☐ travelled for four or more weeks
- ☐ travelled for three or fewer weeks
- ☐ travelled to one country
- ☐ travelled to two or more countries
- ☐ travelled within the Middle East and North Africa
- ☐ travelled outside the Middle East and North Africa
- ☐ travelled for academic or training or cultural exchange purposes
- ☐ travelled for other purposes, e.g. tourism or healthcare
- ☐ Other:

#### Current Status

- ☐ I am now living abroad for work
- ☐ I am now living abroad for further training or study
- ☐ I am now abroad for other reasons
- ☐ I am now working in Palestine
- ☐ I am temporarily in Palestine
- ☐ Other:

Please feel free to use this space to share any information about your exposure to or engagements with other cultures **before** your travel for your master's scholarship

For the purposes of this research, there is no standard definition of exposure to or engagement with other cultures, so you are encouraged to approach this however you think is relevant.

Your answer

Would you like to share one or more PEDs?

- ☐ Yes, I will upload them through this form
- ☐ Yes, I will email them directly to [anas.n.almassri@durham.ac.uk](mailto:anas.n.almassri@durham.ac.uk)
- ☐ Yes, but I will share them later
- ☐ No

### CV/Resume

This is optional but highly encouraged

Upload 1 supported file. Max 10 MB.

 [Add file](#)

### Scholarship Application Form

This is the form you completed when you applied for the scholarship that you ultimately took up to study abroad. If you don't have a copy of it, please feel free to upload any sections of it you still retain, e.g., essays.

Upload up to 5 supported files. Max 10 MB per file.

 [Add file](#)

### Cover Letter(s)

These may be for jobs to which applied, whether successfully or unsuccessfully, after (and/or before) your scholarship experience.

Upload up to 5 supported files. Max 10 MB per file.

 [Add file](#)

### Personal Statement(s)

These may be for any academic or training programs to which applied, whether successfully or unsuccessfully, before (and/or after) your scholarship experience.

Upload up to 5 supported files. Max 10 MB per file.

 [Add file](#)

#### Other PED(s)

Please feel free to use this space to share any profiles of jobs you now occupy or any relevant diaries, blogs, or academic/work assignments of your own production.

Upload up to 5 supported files. Max 10 MB per file.

 [Add file](#)

Please use this space to share any further thoughts, comments, concerns, or reflections that you wish be included in your participation portfolio.

Your answer

## Appendix C

### General Interview Protocol

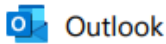
<b>1. Introduction</b> (research purpose, planned interview structure, and reminder of research participant rights and reiterated consent for recording)		
<b>2. Background and current engagements</b>	2.1. Would you tell me a little bit about yourself before you studied abroad?	Follow up as necessary,
	2.2. What activities are you currently doing (in and beyond your job)?	e.g., jobs held, academic institutions attended, causes/communities
	2.3. Would you like to share anything further about your background or current activities?	joined, motivations perceived
<b>3. Scholarship experience and outcomes</b>	3.1. What scholarship(s) were you awarded? For what study programme(s)? At which institution(s)?	Follow-up: Applied for other scholarships/study programmes/institutions/countries? Why?
	3.2. What do you think motivated you to pursue this scholarship? this programme?	Follow up as necessary
	3.3. How would you describe your experience during your study of X at Y institution?	Follow-up: academics, extracurriculars, COVID-19 impact; prompts to elaborate/share examples
	3.4. Beyond academics, were there any activities you pursued while in X country?	Follow up as with probing questions/example elicitation
	3.5. Did you meet fellow Palestinians while abroad? What was that experience like for you? Do you think these encounters/experiences influenced your realisations about Palestine?	

	3.6. What about the scholarship programme itself? Would you tell me a little more about what it offered you through these academic and other experiences?	
	3.7. Would you like to share anything further about your experiences abroad?	
<b>4. Current engagements</b>	4.1. Let's think back about some of X (job) activities, which you mentioned at the beginning of the interview. Do you think the experiences abroad you highlighted may be relevant to these activities?	Follow up with probing questions/example elicitation
<b>5. Closing</b> (recap of the interview, prompt to share anything further, and reminder of research purpose and participant rights)		



# Appendix D

## Ethical Approval



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**Ethical Approval: EDU-2022-11-19T06\_55\_46-xzlt35**

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**From** Ethics <no-reply@sharepointonline.com>

**Date** Fri 06/01/2023 9:18 AM

**To** ALMASSRI, ANAS N. <anas.n.almassri@durham.ac.uk>

**Cc** ED-ETHICS <ed.ethics@durham.ac.uk>; HOLMES, PRUE M. <p.m.holmes@durham.ac.uk>

Please do not reply to this email.

Dear Anas n. almassri,

The following project has received ethical approval:

Project Title: *Capabilities for Peace? A Critical Realist Study of Palestinian Scholarship Recipients;*

Start Date: *01 February 2023;*

End Date: *31 August 2023;*

Reference: *EDU-2022-11-19T06\_55\_46-xzlt35*

Date of ethical approval: *06 January 2023.*

Please be aware that if you make any significant changes to the design, duration or delivery of your project, you should contact your department ethics representative for advice, as further consideration and approval may then be required.

If you have any queries regarding this approval or need anything further, please contact  
ed.ethics@durham.ac.uk

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If you have any queries relating to the ethical review process, please contact your supervisor (where applicable) or departmental ethics representative in the first instance. If you have any queries relating to the online system, please contact [research.policy@durham.ac.uk](mailto:research.policy@durham.ac.uk).

## **Appendix E**

### **Note on Research Plan Disruption**

The cycle of violence that commenced in Gaza on 7 October 2023 significantly impacted many planned activities of the doctoral study. I focus this note on the impact of this cycle of violence on two aspects: collaborating with non-academic partners, and rewarding the participants for their contribution.

First, the doctoral study was supposed to engage two collaborative partners in and beyond the data collection and analysis stages, including in the originally planned expert validation activity. One of them was an education NGO based in the OPT and administering local higher education scholarships there. Staff members of this NGO became unavailable when the violence broke out and resulted in the destruction of their homes and their displacement—for multiple times, like nearly all people in Gaza. I thus ceased all but personal communication with them. I later learned the education NGO pivoted from running education programmes to delivering food and clothing packages in Gaza, among other activities demanded by the severe violence.

The other collaborative partner was a charity administering Masters-level scholarships for Palestinian students to study at a specific university in England. The UK charity remained available for the collaboration, but I could not stretch my thinned personal capacity to manage the typical PhD demands with those of the collaboration. Still, I continued regular, though informal, conversations about my data analysis and broader research progress with two trustees of the charity—and with over 10 students and alumni of its scholarship programme. To me, these conversations were helpful to me in reflecting on my analysis of the already collected data of the participants' scholarship experiences. To the charity (and similar ones in and beyond the UK), the findings and practical implications of this doctoral study will be key to inform their future efforts to improve alignment between their scholarships administration and the reality and purpose of scholarships impact in the OPT.

Second, the participants were informed that they would receive £50 as a token of appreciation at the end of data collection for their time and contribution. Giving this reward to the participants became difficult when the violence erupted, caused the displacement of many participants or of their families, and resulted in the killing of one of them and of close relatives to several others. I then ceased all but personal communication with the participants, and I felt

it would be insensitive to reach out to them to arrange for receiving the modest reward in the current circumstances. Even if I did, arrangements for sending the reward would have been logistically difficult. My original plan was to include this reward as part of my in-person research fieldwork budget and to give it away in an appropriate manner when I am in the OPT. I could not pursue this fieldwork, apply for funding and travel insurance for it, or send the reward from the UK, e.g., in the form of a One4All or Amazon voucher, which do not operate in the OPT. I intend to share this assessment—together with the study's findings—with the participants when the violence ends.

## Appendix F

### Participant Consent Form

**Project Title** Capabilities for Peace? A Critical Realist Study of International Scholarships Impact in Palestine

**Researcher** Mr. Anas N. Almassri  
**Department** School of Education, Durham University  
**Contact Details** [anas.n.almassri@durham.ac.uk](mailto:anas.n.almassri@durham.ac.uk)  
 [phone/WhatsApp number redacted]

**Supervisor** Professor Prue Holmes  
**Contact Details** [p.m.holmes@durham.ac.uk](mailto:p.m.holmes@durham.ac.uk)

This four-part form is to confirm that you understand what the project purposes are, what your participation in it involves, and that you are happy to take part. Please tick each box to indicate your agreement. If you do not agree to certain permissions, please leave the box blank.

#### Part 1/4: General Participation Consent

I confirm that I have read and understand the Information Sheet dated [21/12/2022] and the Privacy Notice for the above project.	
I have had sufficient time to consider the information and ask any questions I might have, and I am satisfied with the answers I have been given.	
I understand who will have access to any personal data provided, how the data will be stored, and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.	
I agree to take part in the above project.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.	
I understand that pseudonymized (i.e., not identifiable) versions of my data may be shared with the collaborative partner of this research project, as per legitimate research purposes (see Privacy Notice).	

#### Part 2/4: Consent to Participation Method(s)

Please initial the box below to confirm your consent to sharing your background information, which will be collected via a brief online form

I agree to completing a background information form	
I agree to providing pre-existing documents (see Information Sheet)	
I consent to the use of my provided pre-existing documents for the purposes of this research project	
As long as any personal or identifying data is removed, I consent to the use of content from my provided pre-existing documents in publications, reports, and other research outputs.	
I agree to joining interviews to share my data for this research.	

#### Part 3/4: Consent to Audio Recording

If, in Part 2/4, you agreed to joining interviews, please initial the corresponding boxes to indicate your consent:

I understand how audio-recordings will be used in the research process	
I consent to being audio-recorded during the interviews for this research	

#### Part 4/4: Further Consent Preferences

As long as any personal or identifying data is removed, I consent to the use of my words from my provided pre-existing documents as quotations in publications, reports, and other research outputs.	
As long as any personal or identifying data is removed, I consent to the use of my words from my interview transcripts as quotations in publications, reports, and other research outputs.	

If you would like a specific name to be used as your pseudonym in this research, please share it in the box below:

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--

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS: \_\_\_\_\_

Please email your completed consent form to [anas.n.almassri@durham.ac.uk](mailto:anas.n.almassri@durham.ac.uk)

## Appendix G

### Information sheet for participants

21/12/2022

## Participant Information Sheet

<b>Project Title</b>	Capabilities for Peace? A Critical Realist Study of International Scholarships Impact in Palestine
<b>Researcher</b>	Mr. Anas N. Almassri
<b>Department</b>	School of Education, Durham University
<b>Contact Details</b>	<a href="mailto:anas.n.almassri@durham.ac.uk">anas.n.almassri@durham.ac.uk</a> [phone/WhatsApp number redacted]
<b>Supervisor</b>	Prof. Prue Holmes
<b>Supervisor</b>	<a href="mailto:p.m.holmes@durham.ac.uk">p.m.holmes@durham.ac.uk</a>
<b>Contact Details</b>	

### Invitation to Participate

You are kindly invited to participate in this study, which I am conducting as part of my PhD in Education at Durham University. The study has received ethical approval from the ethics committee at the School of Education of Durham University.

I planned this study following a modest tenure of professional service and/or academic study focused on education abroad, specifically for Palestinians. I have built this tenure through graduate study at Georgetown and Durham universities as well as through serving in roles relevant to education abroad at AMIDEAST, UNDP, and Natuf Association for Environment and Community Development. Yet, this modest tenure has afforded me still limited room to engage substantially with what I contend may otherwise be a broad range of experiences and outcomes that Palestinians appreciate, or do not, of their funded education abroad.

As a Palestinian myself, born and raised in Deir Al-Balah, I find this topic of great importance at a time when the number of fellow Palestinians able to or already studying abroad is increasing. I find the topic of even greater importance to illustrate the ways—perhaps unique ways—in which scholarships' impact unfolds in a context like that of Palestine's. Such illustration may lead to knowledge that justifies continued investment in scholarships and new ways of managing and optimizing their impact.

Before you decide whether to agree to participate in this study, I very much hope you will please take time to read this information sheet to understand the purpose of the research and what your rights and participation options will be. Please read the following information carefully, and please get in touch if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

## **What Is the Purpose of The Study?**

The aim of this study is to develop an understanding of whether and how the impact of international higher education scholarships relates to peace in Palestine. More specifically, the study aims to develop answers to four questions:

1. What changes in capabilities do Palestinian scholars experience during their funded education abroad?
2. What engagements do these scholars go on to pursue following their education abroad?
3. Whether and how those capability changes and engagements are linked?
4. How do any resulting links relate to peace in Palestine?

Palestinian academic, professional, civic, and digital spaces are usually served—and sometimes, if not often, led—by alumni and alumnae of international higher education scholarships. However, this phenomenon has not received much academic attention. Developing answers to the aforementioned questions will help address this knowledge gap. It will contribute to the understanding of how the impact of scholarships unfolds in Palestine. It will help us, Palestinians, and the relevant (global) communities of research and of practice to find better ways to optimize and strategize international scholarships for peace in and beyond Palestine.

Provisionally, data collection for this study starts in February 2023 and continues until August 2023. The research will be concluded in early 2025.

This study is made possible through a studentship awarded to the researcher through the Northern Ireland and North England Doctoral Training Partnership (NINE DTP), funded by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

## **Why Have I Been Invited to Take Part?**

You have been invited to participate in this study because you meet all of the following criteria:

- being Palestinian, born and raised in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, or the Gaza Strip,
- being in the age group between 23 and 35 years at the time of participation,
- having received a full scholarship to undertake an in-person, full-time master's-level program of study outside of Palestine,
- Having successfully completed your program of study and graduated in the last 1-6 years at the time of participation; and
- Having been, since or after your graduation from your master's program, engaged in activities you believe are important, e.g., in the academic, professional, civic, social, digital, and/or any other spheres.



## Do I Have to Take Part?

Your participation is voluntary, and you do not have to agree to take part. If you do agree to take part, you can withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. Your rights in relation to withdrawing any data that is identifiable to you are explained in the accompanying Privacy Notice.

## What Will Happen to Me If I Take Part?

If you agree to take part in the study, you will be able to share background information about yourself and to report on your experience of having studied abroad on a scholarship and on your engagements after completing your studies abroad.

When you send your completed consent form, you will have full liberty of choice to engage in any of three stages of participation. That is, your participation in one stage does not obligate you to participate in a later one, nor are you at any point required to continue participating through a specific stage. The three stages are described below:

First, you will be kindly invited to fill out a Participant Background Sheet. This Sheet gives you the opportunity to share your demographic, socioeconomic, and academic background information. This information is important for considering any factors from your broader life experience that might influence the trajectory of the impact your scholarship has had on you. The next two stages are described below.

### Sharing Pre-existing Documents:

These may be any of the following: past and/or current drafts of your CV/resume; past and/or current drafts of cover letters you wrote for specific jobs; personal statements you drafted for academic or professional opportunities; the application forms you submitted for your scholarship program; assignments that you completed while studying abroad; and/or blogs that you have recently shared on your website or social media accounts. For the purposes of this research, such documents are referred to as “pre-existing documents”. Such documents will be used for a broader look at your engagement trajectories before, during, and/or after your scholarship experience.

You probably have some of these already written, drafted, or completed. You are at full liberty not to share for this research any such documents or to share one or more. If you choose to share any, you are kindly encouraged to do so at the time of or soon after signing your consent form; however, you are more than welcome to share such pre-existing documents any time during the course of your participation in the research.

If you wish to share such documents, you will be able to upload them directly as part of your Participant Background Sheet. You are also welcome to email them to the researcher ([anas.n.almassri@durham.ac.uk](mailto:anas.n.almassri@durham.ac.uk)).

### Joining Interviews:

These are conversations, for no longer than 75 minutes each, with the researcher to share your experience. The tentative plan is to offer a total of three interviews, but this is subject

to change and only two may be offered instead. These are scheduled for February, April, and July 2023. In the first interview, you will have an opportunity to contribute your account of outcomes you gained during your funded education abroad. In the second interview, you will have an opportunity to contribute your account of your engagements after completing your education abroad. In the final interview, you will have an opportunity to reflect more on whether your education abroad outcomes and your post-completion engagements may be linked.

Your participation in this research will be entirely virtual, i.e., through MS Teams, Zoom, or email correspondence.

Throughout your participation, you are kindly reminded that you will always have the rights to: not respond to any prompts, not answer any questions, not provide pre-existing documents, as well as the rights to omit any of your given responses or answers, and to withdraw your participation in entirety.

As a small token of appreciation for your time and contribution, you will receive £50 at the end of your participation. Arrangements for claiming this token will be offered to you during your participation in the research.

### **Are There Any Potential Risks or Benefits Involved?**

Depending on your education abroad and post-completion experiences, one potential discomfort may be experienced as a result of your participation in this research: Education abroad may come with negative feelings of loneliness or despair as well as, potentially, with distressing experiences of racialization and marginalization. In the course of your participation, you may find yourself recounting those feelings, experiences, and their impact on you. In case any such feelings or experiences have been too difficult and/or you wish not to revisit them, please carefully consider whether you still wish to participate in this research.

In terms of participation benefits to yourself, the research offers an opportunity for structured reflection on your education abroad and post-completion experiences and on how these perhaps link to each other and relate to peace in Palestine. You may (re-)discover in this structured reflection a new individual ethos, theory of change, or agenda of (dis)engagement that helps you better share or manage the impact of your education abroad. Also, depending on your contribution and future progress of the research, and contingent on meeting all and any applicable ethical rules, you may be invited to take up a co-authorship opportunity with the researcher where you collaborate on some suitable form of a publication of your contribution to this research. This can help you scale up your intellectual engagement with your education abroad experience and add to your record of knowledge dissemination.

At a broader level, your participation enables this research to potentially deliver on its aim of generating knowledge that may guide thinking, best practice, and/or policy-making in the field of education abroad and scholarships in, but potentially not limited to, Palestine.

### **Will My Data Be Kept Confidential?**

Any and all information obtained during the study will be kept confidential, unless information indicates the potential for serious and immediate harm to yourself or others (see Privacy Notice for details). Throughout the research, including dissemination through any publications, your data will remain pseudonymous. That is, unless you choose otherwise, any data identifying you or that makes you in any way identifiable will be entirely removed. Full details are included in the accompanying Privacy Notice.

### **What Will Happen to The Results of The Project?**

The findings built from your participation will be used to develop an understanding of how the impact of international higher scholarships relates to peace in Palestine. Next, these findings will be published in a doctoral thesis in early 2025 and, potentially, in scholarly publications, reports, presentations, webpages and/or other research outputs between late 2023 and early 2026. The findings may be shared with scholarship-awarding bodies in and beyond Palestine to inform their policies and practices. In all cases, the findings will remain fully pseudonymous, and no information identifying you or making you identifiable will be shared.

The data in pseudonymous form will be archived and stored for 10 years after the end of the project. The researcher may revisit and use your pseudonymous data in the future to address new research questions.

This research is planned to be a collaborative project with the Durham Palestine Educational Trust. Only pseudonymized data, i.e. no personal or identifiable data, will be shared with the Trust. The data will not be shared with anyone else.

Durham University is committed to sharing the results of its world-class research for public benefit. As part of this commitment, the University has established an online repository for all Durham University Higher Degree theses which provides access to the full text of freely available theses. The study in which you are invited to participate will be written up as a thesis. On successful submission of the thesis, it will be deposited open-access both in print and online in the University archives, to facilitate its use in future research.

### **Who Do I Contact If I Have Any Questions or Concerns About This Study?**

If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please speak to the researcher (Mr. Anas N. Almassri, [anas.n.almassri@durham.ac.uk](mailto:anas.n.almassri@durham.ac.uk)) or their supervisor (Prof. Prue Holmes, [p.m.holmes@durham.ac.uk](mailto:p.m.holmes@durham.ac.uk)). If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact [research.policy@durham.ac.uk](mailto:research.policy@durham.ac.uk).

***Shukran Jazeelan/شكراً جزيلاً/thank you very much for reading this information and indeed for considering taking part in this study!***