Scaling research and practice of scholarships impact for peace: The role of theory

Anas N. Almassri

School of Education, Durham University, Durham, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

The scope of appraising international higher education scholarships' potential impact on peace should be broadened beyond assessing their contribution to technical recovery and development. Extant research often limits appreciation of this contribution to instrumentalist terms of human capital import, underpinning it with a view of 'peace' as a flat phenomenon of technical functions in a neoliberal order. I present here an alternative approach for fuller and more critical examination of scholarships' potential impact on peace in Palestine. Working within critical realism, I collected qualitative data from 32 Palestinian alumni on their master's scholarship experiences, which I then analyzed in a data-driven, descriptive mode followed by abductive analysis. Descriptive and inferential findings developed from this two-stage analysis demonstrate that the participants' perceived academic, career, and identity developments relate to peace in Palestine in deeper, more complex ways than advancing career progress and human-sourcing higher education recovery. Interpreted through an interdisciplinary theoretical framework of everyday peace capability, these perceived developments suggest that scholarships enhanced the participants' ability to reposition themselves in relation not only to conflict but also to a reflexive agenda of individual-national progress, enabled their transgression of oppressive forces disciplining their national and global connections, and expanded their capacity for working with advanced methods of knowing. These findings illustrate the significant role that critical interdisciplinary theorization can play in developing fuller, context-informed understanding of the impact of scholarships and of international academic mobility more broadly. While these findings demonstrate only micro-level effects, i.e., impact on individuals, they have clear implications for scaling research and practice of scholarships impact for peace at the meso- and macro-levels.

1. Introduction

International higher education scholarships are "financial grants that cover the majority of costs associated with higher education study outside of the recipient's home country" (Campbell, 2017, p. 56). They enable highly talented students to pursue their academic education in foreign countries, usually in the Global North, where they can enjoy opportunities for cultivating knowledge, skills, and connections with which they may better contribute to development in their home countries. This claimed promise of scholarships has been formally endorsed by the United Nations (2015), establishing in Target 4.b of its fourth Sustainable Development Goal the aim to "substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries…for enrolment in higher education."

Public and private, local and foreign actors invest in this promise of scholarships (Campbell & Neff, 2020). Governments like those

of Kazakhstan (Jonbekova, 2023), Libya (Shtewi, 2019), and member countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (Pavan, 2020) support their own citizens to study abroad to import capacities and drive national development. Other governments recruit foreign individuals to study in their countries via scholarship programs like the Fulbright in the U.S., Chevening in the U.K., DAAD in Germany, MEXT in Japan, and many more. Also, a wide range of nongovernmental actors invest in scholarships (Campbell, 2021). Universities are an obvious example, whether they offer scholarships dedicated to (certain groups of) international students or consider foreign students for their merit- and/or need-based financial awards; "in fact," as UNESCO (2019) asserts, "programmes funded by other sources, especially universities, may dwarf official government scholarships" (p. 208; also see Posmik, 2022). This assertion may well be true when one looks at the history and relative size of investment in scholarships that is made by large international organizations like the MasterCard Foundation (Marsh et al., 2016) and the Open Society Foundation (Brogden, 2018), smaller ones like the Said Foundation (n.d.) in the Levant and the Hani Qaddumi Fund (n.d.) in Palestine, and even smaller charities dedicating scholarships to certain groups, e.g., the UK-based Durham Palestine Educational Trust (DPET, n.d.) and St Andrews Education for Palestinian Students (STEPS, n.d.).

These diverse actors may follow different lines of reasoning in making their investment in scholarships. In the still burgeoning area of research on scholarships (Mawer, 2018), Campbell and Neff's (2020) systematic review is a key source identifying rationales common among various actors offering international scholarships. Based on 105 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters published from 2010 to 2019, Campbell and Neff (2020) identify six key rationales for international scholarships for students from the Global South: "to develop skills development and human capital, to enhance diplomatic relations, to promote social change, to spur sustainable development, to internationalize universities, and to increase students' access to higher education." Campbell and Neff (2020) go on to remind us that such rationales, while distinguishable, are often mixed and conflated in designing and/or evaluating scholarship programs. Analyzing British and Czech government scholarship programs, Wilson (2015) and Novotný et al. (2021) further illustrate this frequent "drifting" and "ambivalence" of rationales for international scholarships. Following critical reflection on this lack of firm grounding, a growing consensus seems to be forming around the need for a more serious approach to using theory to better connect scholarship programming with intended impact (Campbell & Mawer, 2019; Novotný et al., 2021; Saling, 2023).

This article contributes to this consensus formation. It does so by illustrating the important role of theory in researching the potential contribution of scholarships to peace. This illustration is delivered through the case of scholarships in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). This case offers a country context that requires serious re-examination of the theoretical and methodological assumptions often followed in thinking about societal impact of (funded) international academic mobility. As demonstrated later in the article, the Palestinian case shows that human capital accumulated through education abroad can often be unutilized, un(der)utilizable, and susceptible to mass destruction in the oPt. Also, because of the context of protracted occupation, Palestinian students' global exposure through education abroad to values of democracy, liberalism, and world society integration may be achingly dissonant with long evolving national perceptions of exclusion from fair application of these values. Structures of the radically asymmetric Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as persisting domestic corruption, division, and failed leadership, far lower the opportunity window for alumni to disseminate and institutionalize their scholarships impact—especially if impact is expressed in terms of human capital, liberal and democratic socialization, or other theoretical constructs detached from the country's context. This low opportunity structure must then inform any methodological design to understand scholarships' potential impact on peace in the oPt.

I keep this context omnipresent in delivering the contribution of this article to consensus on the importance of theory in scholarships research. I report a major segment of the literature reviewed, choices made, methods used, findings developed, and implications concluded in my doctoral research project, parent to this article, to address one key research question: How do international graduate scholarships relate to peace in the oPt? The response I *commence* here is focused on the micro-level of scholarships' relevance to peace. In the section below, I review current approaches to researching scholarships, which I demonstrate tend to employ empiricist methods, instrumentalist framings, and an ideological bias towards neoliberalism that altogether narrow our understanding of scholarships impact, not least on peace. I then describe the series of philosophical, methodological, and theoretical choices that I followed in the parent project and that contextualize the findings and overall argument in this article. Next, I present two sets of thematic findings developed from descriptive and abductive analysis of 32 research participants' data, comprising their reported scholarship experiences and outcomes. I finally discuss how these findings illustrate the significance of theory, especially when used in critical interdisciplinary modes, in planning future effort to research and societalize the impact of scholarships in contexts of conflict.

2. Literature review

Although research examining the relationship between higher education and conflict-and-peace is growing (Kester et al., 2022), the former's contribution to the latter remains underappreciated and insufficiently understood (Novelli & Lopes Cardozo, 2008; Milton & Barakat, 2016). This understanding gap widens as the research focus deepens to the area of international student mobility and its relevance to peace. In their systematic mapping and thematic synthesis of literature published between 1960 and 2022 on returning students' impact in their societies, Wang et al. (2024) found only 53 studies addressed this topic with sufficient relevance and rigor—that is 3.5% of their initial pool of 1515. Only two of these 53 studies seemed to consider the peace dimension of returning students' societal impact (Wang et al., 2024, p. 9), one tangentially by highlighting Ghanaian returning students service to keep electoral peace (Campbell et al., 2021) and the other more substantially by analyzing Afghan returning migrants' engagement in effort for change (van Houte, 2014). I therefore dedicate this section to reviewing literature that deals with scholarships in contexts of conflict. The objective of this review is to highlight how scholarships impact is framed in research on such contexts, including the types of peace conceptualized in this research.

2.1. Empiricist accounts, instrumentalist framing

In the post-9/11 context, Saudi Arabia launched the world's largest scholarship program to rebuild its ties with the U.S. and manage opening its economy and society (Pavan, 2020). In this context, Hilal and Denman (2013) consider the case of Saudi and Emirati students, examining their education abroad as a tool of building world peace. The authors' empirical findings highlight specific dispositions fostered through education abroad which they then characterized as pro-peace on account of these dispositions being ones of international awareness and global competence. In this case, peace seemed to be conceptualized, in purely empirical terms, as a set of positive dispositions, peacebuilding as the cultivation of these individual dispositions, and scholarships as an instrument of this peacebuilding. Similarly, Jafar and Sabzalieva (2022) report faculty perceptions of the role of funded academic mobilities in the post-conflict contexts of Iraq and Tajikistan. In their analysis, the authors approached academic mobilities in instrumentalist terms, interpreting their role as means of importing foreign capacity and prestige as well as pipelines for staffing and internationalizing local universities. Peacebuilding in this case seemed to be conceptualized as a sum of technical activities delivered by scholarships, i.e., importing human capital, building institutions, and fostering internationalization. Neither of the two studies engaged with the wider or deeper contextual relevance of such scholarships impact, e.g., how academic mobilities may influence post-conflict inter-sectarian peace in Iraq; and how the pro-peace dispositions cultivated relate to conceptions and imaginaries of post-9/11 peace in the Gulf, an interpretation required in the context of regional developments and shifting global engagement priorities there (Csicsmann & Rózsa, 2020).

In more striking cases, research on scholarships impact in contexts of conflict can go without any (significant) mention of these contexts—even when conceptual lens of peace may not be considered or needed. For example, the conflict in Libya was virtually omitted from the text and analytical framework of Shtewi's (2019) doctoral study of the human capital impact of scholarships to Libyans. So was the legacy of mass violence in Cambodia in Webb's (2009) tracer evaluation of Australian scholarships to Cambodians. In both studies, the empirical account of scholarships' impact involved severe divorce from the context in whose terms this impact could—and probably should—have been more fully explored.

The empiricism and instrumentalism outlined in the four preceding studies is typical of research on scholarships. As Saling (2023) contends, "previous studies on international scholarship programs [are] often painstakingly and meticulously researched and yet largely descriptive" (p. 4). Even when some theory is used, it is most often limited to Human Capital Theory (HCT) (e.g., Perna et al., 2014, 2015; cf. King et al., 2023). HCT may be valuable in understanding *part of* scholarships impact, specifically its economic manifestations, but its ontological presumptions preclude its optimality, if at all suitability, for understanding scholarships impact in political and socioeconomic contexts different from that in which it was developed (see Saling, 2023, for a discussion of HCT's "impotence"). The limiting effect of this absence and this narrow choice of theory may be better understood by considering scholarships research informed by context-driven theory choices.

Kalisman (2015) used Benedict Anderson's (1991) seminal work *Imagined Communities* to interpret the impact of university scholarships by the Mandatory governments of Iraq, Palestine, and Transjordan. By doing so, the author shows scholarships' role in enabling "intellectual pilgrimages" to regional spaces where prospective leaders not only built technical capacities but also, in resistance to Mandatory impositions, weaved a thread of politico-cultural nationalism across territorial boundaries. This reframing of scholarships as fields and means of political (identity) re-construction and -imagination can also be observed in Williams' (2017) study of scholarships for Namibians during the 1960s, which facilitated their political organizing but also contestation of post-colonial visions. In a contemporary case, Fincham's (2020) study went beyond examining scholarships' enablement of Syrian refugees' access to higher education in Jordan, Lebanon, and Türkiye. By using Amartya Sen's (2001) *Capability Approach*, the author identified how this increased access to higher education was shaped by larger social and economic factors that limited scholarships' efficacy in empowering recipients to fulfil their aspirations. These three studies begin to illustrate that context-driven theory choices can broaden the terms in which scholarships impact may be better understood, including in contexts of displacement and post-conflict transition.

I have thus far demonstrated that research on scholarships in contexts of conflict rarely makes effective, if any, use of theory to explore scholarships impact on peace. I now try to extend this demonstration by looking at relevant research from the field of International Relations (IR).

2.2. International Relations scholars' approach

Although not specifically focusing on scholarships, IR scholars have done relevant research that more seriously considers the relationship between international education—including funded education abroad and international exchanges—and peace. Freyburg (2012, p. v) describes their work succinctly: "They theoretically specify a long causal chain linking the micro-phenomenon of the democratic socialization of individual agents [being educated abroad] to the macro-phenomenon of regime-type change [conducive to peaceful world society membership]". In empirical tests of this hypothesis, IR scholars look at political leaders and military officers as their subjects, and they privilege in their analysis concepts like democratization (Gift & Krcmaric, 2017), liberalization (Nieman & Allamong, 2023), and war avoidance (Barceló, 2020). One fair summary of their usual concluding argument is that "leaders educated at Western universities are more likely to democratize than other leaders because Western education socializes leaders to prefer democracy and creates transnational linkages that alter the strategic calculus of democratization" (Gift & Krcmaric 2017, p. 671). A variant of this summary is that "US-hosted exchange programs can play an important role in the diffusion of liberal values and practices across the borders of authoritarian states" (Atkinson, 2010, p. 1). Whenever scholars from or of focus beyond the U.S. write about/around scholarships and peace, they hardly part with the norm of centering their analysis around such concepts (e.g., see Benabdallah, 2016, 2019; Lefifi & Kiala, 2021).

This neoliberal framing of the peace impact of scholarships may be valuable; after all, it is the kind of logic often invoked to explain and sustain governments and other investors' interest in scholarship programs (CSIS, 2016, 2018; USIP, 2015, 2017, 2019). However, as international educationist Lomer (2017) argues, it binds us to an elitist understanding of scholarships' relevance to peace, remains preoccupied with the U.S. and predicated on outdated assumptions developed during the Cold War, and fails to capture contextual nuance and group diversity of scholarship awardees (also see Bevis, 2019). An approach complementary, if not critically alternative, to it is needed to develop fuller understanding and appreciation of the ways scholarships yield their relevance to peace.

3. The critical realist study

I planned my doctoral research project in response to the need highlighted in the previous section, specifically to explore new ways in which scholarships may contribute to peace beyond quantified relevance to neoliberal proxies thereof, e.g., democratization and liberalization. I started actioning this plan by following critical realism (Archer, 1995; Bhaskar, 2016). In this research philosophy, reality is posited to be of three domains: an empirical one encompassing human perceptions and experiences, an actual one of events that underpin perceptions and experiences and whose occurrence may or may not be observable, and a real one of mechanisms giving rise to events and experiences (Fletcher, 2017). I mainstreamed this ontological view in every methodological and theoretical decision in my doctoral research, focused on Palestinian recipients of international master's scholarships.

First, I determined the needed data to be of Palestinian scholarship alumni's perceptions of their scholarship experiences. This data falls in the empirical domain of reality, and descriptive analysis of it is fit to address basic exploratory questions like, what are some of the profile characteristics of Palestinian recipients of international scholarships? What motivations drive Palestinian students to apply for scholarships? How do Palestinian scholarship recipients experience funded graduate education abroad?

Second, I established a conceptual framework of peace in whose theoretical terms I redescribed the empirical data. The goal of this "theoretical redescription" (Fletcher, 2017) was to move the empirical data to a more abstract level at which I could respond to more inferential questions like the one in focus in this article: How do international graduate scholarships relate to peace in the oPt? Within critical realist philosophy, the abstraction and inference required at this stage are posited to fall in the actual domain of reality (Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021). In the following subsections, I further discuss the methodology choices, analysis procedures, and influence of the Palestinian context that I followed in these empirical and actual domains of reality (work in the third domain will be presented in a separate manuscript).

3.1. Sampling and data collection

I used purposeful sampling in recruiting Palestinian alumni who completed, 1–6 years prior to data collection, a master's degree at a university abroad after receiving a scholarship. Thirty-two participants contributed to this research through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Sixteen of them further completed a brief background questionnaire, and 11 shared one or more relevant pre-existing documents, e.g., a copy of their CV/resume and completed scholarship application form. In interviews, the participants were prompted to share their motivations for and academic and broader experiences through their scholarships as well as their and post-completion engagements. Data collection lasted from January through March 2023.

3.2. Participant profiles

In terms of their profiles, the 32 participants were 60% female and 40% male, 81% from Gaza and 19% from the West Bank, and they ranged in age from 22 to 31 when they completed their funded graduate education abroad. Academically, they represented a diversity of trajectories, with their undergraduate training spanning the humanities (50%), STEM (12%), and professional fields (37%). In their graduate study, 56% participants specialized further in their fields of undergraduate study, and 44% shifted their fields of study (see Appendix A). Over two thirds of the participants pursued graduate programs that involved more than one social science discipline, with the single greatest prevalence being of programs in or heavily drawing on International Relations (19%). They pursued

Table 1
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.

these programs in English- (84%), French- (12%), and Arabic- (12%) speaking countries (note the total is greater than 100% because three participants held two different scholarships and studied in two different countries) (further details of the participant profiles can be found in Almassri, 2024a, p.3, 2024b, pp. 6-7).

In terms of return and employment status at the time of interviews, the participants demonstrated a diversity of post-completion trajectories as outlined in Table 1:

3.3. Data analysis

I analyzed data from interviews and pre-existing documents through critical realist thematic analysis. This method is a version of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis that Wiltshire and Ronkainen (2021) adapted to ensure correspondence between the practice of data analysis and the ontological view in critical realism of three domains of reality. In the empirical domain, concerned with perceptions and experiences, I analyzed the interview and documentary data in a data-driven, descriptive mode, building themes through consolidating similarities directly identified in the data. These themes are 'experiential' because they describe the experiences reported by the participants. In the actual domain of reality, which is concerned with events that may or may not be observable, I applied abductive analysis to the research participants' perceived scholarship experiences, that is, interpreting them against the context-driven theoretical framework presented below. The 'inferential' themes developed from this stage moved the analysis from description of reported scholarship experiences to inference of peace-relevant events underpinning these experiences. I clarify this stage of the analysis further in the next subsection.

3.4. Active reflexivity and context-driven theory choice

Throughout the research project leading to this article, I committed to active reflexivity (Almassri, 2023; Soedirgo & Glas, 2020). I made conscious and self-critical use of my positionality as a Palestinian scholarship alumnus born, raised, educated to an under-graduate level, and of work and research experience on (international) education in the oPt. A major step of actioning this reflexivity was bringing to the research the following understanding of scholarships in the oPt and therefore the focus on their micro-level impact on peace there.

3.4.1. Research context

Historically, it is Palestinians' education abroad that enabled them to build and expand their local higher education. However, the story of this contribution of international academic mobility to home-country development has unique historical and contemporary characteristics that are intimately connected to the political context.

In 1948, Palestinians experienced mass displacement and dispossession. Many of them with (nothing but) sufficient academic qualifications could pursue higher education in their countries of forced exile. They soon achieved attendance rates surpassing those in their countries of exile and even in England and France (Hallaj, 1980). In what was now the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), referring to the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, Palestinians barely had any local higher education opportunities. By the 1980s, Palestinians educated abroad could and did return to the oPt and began establishing universities there (Abu-Lughod, 2000). The next 45 years witnessed almost a 1,000% growth of both the number of higher education institutions and the proportion of student enrolment at them (Isaac et al., 2019; PCBS, 2023). While Palestinians' 'international academic mobility' was indispensable to achieving this higher education massification, its broader societal effect has been far more limited in delivering on Palestinian aspirations of independence, emancipation, and development. This ceiling of the societal impact of international and domestic higher education in the oPt can be explained, mostly but not only, on account of implications of the "radical asymmetry" of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (Ramsbotham, 2022).

In comparative terms, Israel has all the military, diplomatic, political, and economic power to enforce its domination over the oPt (Amnesty International, 2022; Chomsky & Pappé, 2015; Khalidi, 2020; Mearsheimer & Walt, 2006). Under Israeli domination, the ability of Palestinians there is minimized to maintain and manage their education (and its contribution to their), society, peoplehood, and economy (Abu Lughod, 2000; Bishara, 2022; Dajani & Husseini, 2014), further unhelped by *intra*national forces of corruption, repression, division, and despair (al-Omari, 2023; Amnesty International, 2015; Dana, 2020). This asymmetry has meant that Israel could, did, and barely faced accountability for policing, isolating, attacking, and now decimating Palestinian higher education (Rabaia & Habash, 2024). Indeed, since their inception, Palestinian academic institutions had to withstand Israel's heavy taxing of book and lab imports, its bans, confiscation, and/or serious censorship of educational materials, its closure of universities, its expulsion of Palestinian intellectuals and academic leaders, and its arrest and incarceration of (former) student leaders (Abu Lughod, 2000). Israel has since escalated its attacks on Palestinian education. It routinely sanctions securitization of and threats of violence to students trying to access their universities in the West Bank (Abed Al-Hadi et al., 2021; Harker, 2009), and it repeatedly destroys the human and material infrastructure of universities in Gaza (Milton et al., 2021). In the cycle of violence that commenced in October 2023, Israel's decimation of education, including all higher education institutions, in Gaza has been so wide-reaching that terms as strong as educide (Gordon & Turner, 2024), epistemicide (Moaswes, 2024), and scholasticide (OHCHR, 2024) have been attempted to describe it. Beyond direct attacks, Israel enforces policies that fragment Palestinians across the oPt through an infamous regime of immobilization and that isolate them from the world through securitizing and often banning in- and out-bound mobility of Palestinian and foreign students and academics (Griffiths et al., 2022).

In my understanding, this context have exigent implications that I followed in my research. Two are key for the purpose of this article. First, although so much of it has been orchestrated through historical exile and now intolerable living conditions, Palestinians'

pursuit of 'international academic mobility' still leaves enormous impact on the process of building and expanding access to local higher education in the *occupied* Palestinian territory. This technical impact of Palestinians' education abroad is to be very much celebrated. However, the political side of it—including its potential relevance to peace—remains subject of more presumption than careful interpretation, e.g., that Palestinians' engagement in (Western-style) leadership cultivation, economic development, and extended contact, including with Israelis, may lead to peace (see NYU, 2013; OGS, n.d.; Thiessen & Darweish, 2018). It made sense then to me to focus my research on the potential impact of scholarships on peace in the oPt.

In doing so, second, I prioritized micro- over meso- and/or macro-level analysis of scholarships' potential impact on peace in the oPt. 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. The context explored above gives me much doubt that this minimum degree of security and stability exists. As do its implications specifically for scholarship recipients. Since at least 2007, Palestinian scholarship recipients have often been denied travel permits by Israel, whom—should it allow them travel and re-entry—it can then arbitrarily kill (Alijla, 2020; Almassri, 2019; BBC, 2023; Limb, 2024; PCHR, 2008). At Palestinian (academic) institutions, scholarship alumni can often have their potentially unique talents un(der)utilized, whether for reasons of politico-technical incapacity and incompetence or for sexism or reverse agism (Almassri, 2024a). This overall understanding of the context of higher education and international scholarships in the oPt, as well as the dearth of research on Palestinians' international academic mobility, made me prioritize analysis at the micro-level. Findings of this analysis 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 in Palestine.

3.4.2. Everyday peace capability

Following the understanding above of the Palestinian context, I decided to follow a theoretical framework that, first, recognizes the enormity of constraints on Palestinians' effective ability to pursue their education and emancipation and, second, does so without failing to appreciate the actions through which these constraints are navigated, resisted, and rejected. I found that by building Everyday Peace Capability, a synthesis of Sen's (2001) Capability Approach and Mac Ginty's (2014, 2021, 2022) thesis on Everyday Peace. This theoretical framework focuses on the peace that is represented in people's everyday life, the range of actions with which they navigate daily life under conflict and the logics represented in those actions as rejecting conflict ethos, e.g., of despair, subjugation, and destruction (Mac Ginty, 2021). Such responses to conflict are theorized as functions of everyday peace, arising from one's capability to deliver them. In this sense, I took everyday peace capability to refer to the effective ability to respond to conflict in a pro-peace mode, where effective ability comprises constraints on and affordances to one's behavior as well as their individual will to act in their intended ways (Robeyns, 2006; Walker, 2008). Responses to conflict, even if pursued unconsciously, are considered ones of everyday peace when they are interpreted to comprise rejection or resistance to logics and practices that perpetuate conflict. Examples of functions of everyday peace include Palestinian youth sustaining engagement in education despite repeated destruction of education facilities (Stewart, 2011), everyday commerce between ethnic and religious communities in conflict-affected regions of Iraq and villages in Myanmar (Bourhrous & O'Driscoll, 2023; Ware et al., 2022), and even quality engagement in learning in countries as stable as the UK (Bevington, 2020; Fry et al., 2023).

Within this theoretical framework and the overarching critical realist paradigm, functions of everyday peace represent events, falling in the actual domain of reality. These events are indicated by empirical experiences of them and are therefore identified through inferential interpretation of experiences. Therefore, I aimed in abductive analysis to infer functions of everyday peace from the research participants' data where I interpreted this data, i.e., their reported scholarship experiences, to comprise a pro-peace response to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. To operationalize this context-driven theory choice, I borrowed from Michel Foucault (2009) the conceptual terms of 'governmentality' and 'counter-conduct'. I understand the first term 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 Palestinian context, I understand 'conflict governmentalities' as a systemicity of material, social, and/or epistemic conditions that have an overall effect of governing conflict perpetuity (Foucault, 1991; Gordon, 1991). I also understand conflict governmentalities to be 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).

Before proceeding further, I should note my subscription to Mac Ginty's (2021) self-critical commentary on Everyday Peace as an approach anchored in the micro-level of sociological analysis. The (hyper)local sphere, individual scope, and "mundane" nature of everyday peace make it *neither insignificant nor sufficient*. Logics and actions at this level are indispensable to the emergence of peace, at least sustainable peace, in meso- and macro-level forms, and their emergence in individual actions can also be a distillation of higher-level forces in society (Mac Ginty, 2021). This points to the need that research of this micro-peace should be followed by reflection and action to try to scale it out and up, i.e., to disseminate and institutionalize the logics and actions of it that are disruptive to conflict (Mac Ginty, 2021, ch. 2). For this particular article, this commentary may cement the fit of Everyday Peace Capability to studying scholarships' impact in the Palestinian context. Knowledge produced through examining the micro-level impact on peace of these individual awards may well inform attempts at identifying and exploring pathways for widening and systemizing scholarships impact on peace in the oPt. This is demonstrated later in the Discussion section.

4. Findings

As outlined in the Data Analysis subsection, experiential findings describe empirical patterns observed as prevalent and/or significant in collected data, i.e., the motivations, academic and broader experiences, and post-completion engagements that the research

participants reported of their scholarships in their interviews and reflected in their pre-existing documents. It is these findings that capture the empirical evidence informing subsequent abductive analysis and inferential interpretation. Presentation and discussion of this empirical evidence should be elaborate for three reasons. Elaboration helps establish trustworthiness in the inferential claims advanced in this research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and it makes the contribution of this research a substantial one to bridging the dual absence of the oPt from research on scholarships and of studies illustrating practice of critical realism. Recognizing the conflict between this need for elaboration and word limits of research publications, I sought to resolve it by publishing experiential findings in a series of peer-reviewed journal articles (Almassri, 2024a,b,c) and sharing here a concise summary of them before presenting the inferential findings. Beside resolving this conflict, this dissemination strategy is a good response to educationist Kris Stutchbury's (2021, p. 114) note that "[p]ublished 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". This dissemination strategy offers a much needed illustration of the practice of critical realism.

Following this dissemination strategy, this section first presents a concise version of experiential themes. These themes demonstrate the research participants perceived making significant gains in their various academic, career, and national-personal identity capacities through their scholarships. The section then presents the overarching inferential theme developed through interpretating the relevance of these perceived gains to peace in the oPt. Throughout the experiential and inferential themes, following Wiltshire and Ronkainen (2021), I use the following quantified expressions, among other language markers, to indicate levels of prevalence of a point among the 32 participants, e.g., nearly all (29–31), most (23–28), many (18–22), several (12–14), some (6–11), and a few (3–5).

4.1. Experiential findings

The following four experiential themes are developed from data-driven, descriptive analysis of the participants' interview transcripts and provided pre-existing documents. These themes track the participants' reported journey of accessing and experiencing funded education abroad, as well as valuing it for its perceived contribution to their academic, career, and identity development (see Appendix B for quotes illustrating these themes).

4.1.1. Motivation powered by ambition and pragmatism[1]

The participants demonstrated various motivations for choosing to study abroad and for choosing their scholarships, study programs, and countries of study. In seeking opportunity and advancement, several participants articulated that they were driven to study abroad to actualize 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 as well as prior academic, career, and/or civic engagements (greatly) influenced their scholarship, study program, and country choices. To all of them, across their countries and institutions, scholarship funding was indispensable.

4.1.2. A journey of academic (re)adaptation and fulfilment[2]

While delivering on these motivations, the participants reported experiencing exciting-and-challenging (re)adaptations while appreciating new approaches to the content and practice of their academic learning. Several participants described initial and/or constant struggle in dealing with the quantity and quality of (research) reading and writing in their study programs. However, they also reported usually feeling appreciative of their academic learning, particularly of its emphasis on research and its often interdisciplinary and global scope. In fact, global learning was a salient point of appreciation among many participants, who highlighted such experiences of it as class discussions of international case studies, group projects completed with diverse peers, and thesis research on projects of an international scope, e.g., researching the cultural memory of genocide in Germany and Turkey, examining policies on gender-based violence in Iran and Turkey, and evaluating water and sanitation services in Jordan. Through their learning, many participants seem to have developed a new approach to their academic learning, where they described exerting "high" or "unprecedented" levels of independent effort. For some participants, this amount of independent study became a key challenge to their academic progress and/or well-being when it coincided with the social isolation caused by COVID-19. Other participants reported feeling frustrated before finding ways to maintain their academic progress. Beside such resilience, many participants cited positive interactions with professors and support from others in their new environments as enabling of their continued progress.

4.1.3. Individual careers in advancement, fulfilment in negotiation[3]

The participants' perception of the contribution of their funded graduate education abroad to their careers took two major forms. First, many participants thought their education abroad boosted their prospective employers' impression of their profiles. This in turn helped the participants advance or shift their careers although it was not always followed by satisfying levels of utilizing their competencies in their new jobs. Second, many participants believed their education abroad enhanced their professional exposure, their career-relevant skills and qualities, and access to development opportunities that overall were relevant to their work today. Over half

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[1] The full version of this experiential theme can be found in Almassri (2024b).
[2] The full version of this experiential theme can be found in Almassri (2024b).
[3] The full version of this experiential theme can be found in Almassri (2024a).

of the participants described their time abroad as an opportunity to expand their career horizons, and many reported in their interviews and/or reflected in their pre-existing documents that they completed a range of practical learning activities during their education abroad, whether these activities were degree requirements or not. Indeed, interview and documentary data of many participants indicate perception of strong and broad relevance of gaining through their education abroad skills and qualities directly relevant to their work activities today, even in the case of several participants whose fields of work differed (substantially) from the field of their graduate study. Expectedly, this perceived relevance is strongest among the seven participants who proceeded to doctoral study. It was also reflected by most of the 15 participants who went to the job market in the oPt.

However, many participants reflected that 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 had not returned to the oPt, visa issues related to work and stay abroad were a significant factor in determining which employment pathways they followed. Per the data for both groups, it seemed job availability and quality often superseded their ideal career plans.

4.1.4. More Palestinian, more reflexive[4]

Beyond perceived academic and career gains, many participants articulated that during their education abroad they enjoyed freedom from the political violence and its permeating everyday effects of insecurity and immobility in the oPt. Their enjoyment of this freedom was most signified through their accounts of encounters with 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.

Reinforcing the effect of these meetings, 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. In their civic engagements, 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. 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.

These engagements, beside extending the participants' awareness of the global context that shapes reality in the oPt, appear to have prompted them to take their national awareness to a reflexive front. During 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-personal identity—as well as to leading, for the first time, an independent personal life and a greater intrapersonal engagement through it.

4.2. Inferential findings

The four preceding experiential themes presented the participants' reported perceptions of their scholarship experiences. They showed that the participants appreciated the opportunity scholarships allowed them to act on their motivation for academic and career advancement. They also show the participants used this opportunity well, despite academic challenges, to make significant gains even when the career-related efficacy of these gains was limited by various factors beyond the participants' control. Importantly, the participants' national life-related experiences sketched scholarships' significance beyond the individualist and careerist tone of these gains. I explore this significance in this subsection, in which I present findings developed from abductive analysis of the participants' perceived scholarship experiences against the theoretical framework of Everyday Peace Capability. The inferential findings presented in this theme and its subthemes help articulate a response to the key research question of this article: How do international graduate scholarships relate to peace in the oPt?

4.2.1. Facilitating disruption of conflict governmentalities

Considering available empirical evidence, 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. Both points suggest the research participants had already been engaged in conflict disruption, an engagement whose expansion scholarships facilitated. The participants' accounts reflect three ways in which scholarships can be said to have done so: enhancing the participants' ability for subject positioning, enabling their transgression of oppressive disciplines of citizenship, and expanding their epistemic capacity-building. These are presented respectively in the following subthemes.

4.2.1.1. 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

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[4] The full version of this experiential theme can be found in Almassri (2024c).

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 programs abroad. Selection to these programs 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 overcoming academic challenges, appreciating their interdisciplinary and global learning, completing their degrees, enhancing their practical competencies and (perceived) professional competitiveness, and achieving a bigger and deeper 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 the international and inwardly to intellectual, professional, and personal aspects of the self. 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 (Shehadeh, 2015; Moussa, 2020). I see this engineering, or governmentality, in several ways in which the conflict conducts Palestinian subjectivities. Experiences of human and material destruction (Nijim, 2023), 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 internalization 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 national commitment to education-as-a-means-of-liberation (Pherali & Turner, 2018).

The participants' perceptions, however, reflected counterdisciplinarian subject repositions, that is, capacity gains and engagements contradicting the disciplinarian nature and effect of this governmentalization of conflict subjectivities reproduction in the oPt. Where Palestinian subjectivities are governmentalized to internalize a (global) flow of power, subjugation, and violence, scholarships offered a pathway for *stronger* rejection of this governmentality. The participants' perceptions reflect an experience 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 agenda of 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.

4.2.1.2. Enabling transgression of citizenship disciplines. Accounts by nearly all the participants demonstrate substantial resocialization of their national and global citizenship consciousness. This resocialization 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 minimized (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 *intra*national mobility. Where this structure effects a consciousness focused on subnational life (see Alijla, 2020, for illustration), 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 are confined. This counter-conduct was enhanced through the participants' engagement of their sense of Palestinian citizenship more deeply and critically, as represented by their recounted 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 governmentalized 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 participants' reported impact of their scholarships suggests that their disruption extended to the governmentalization of Palestinians' global citizenship through restrictions on international mobility, whether inbound or outbound (Griffiths, 2022; Griffiths et al., 2022). The participants' exposure to life in new global 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 *inter*national mobility, the

participants' success abroad and their often-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 representations of the oPt in scholarly, educational, and professional platforms.

4.2.1.3. 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, 1995), i.e., the systemic degradation of knowledge infrastructure—institutions, resources, and opportunities (Jebril, 2023). This engagement in epistemic capacity-building was illustrated throughout the participants' reports of their scholarship experiences; for example, their study program choices reflected noteworthy diversification of their knowledge pursuits, whether by specializing in certain study areas, shifting to new areas/fields of study, and undertaking study programs beyond those focused on "development" and humanitarianism (see Appendix A). During their funded graduate education abroad, they 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 characterizing the participants' engagement in developing their knowledge methods. First, that their degree programs were at the graduate level indicates that their gained thematic knowledge was characterized by specialization. Specialized knowledge gain was demonstrated in the participants' reported learning and research activities, and it can be furthered demonstrated through review of their study programs, including those of them who shifted their fields of study (e.g., DU, n.d.; DIGS, n.d.). This specialized knowledge was further characterized 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 programs and common reflection 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 subjectivity. More of the participants' data evidence this epistemic capacity-building, e.g., a) progress to and through doctoral or further study, including five PhD candidates following a critical approach to researching the oPt in their respective fields, b) transition to post-completion employment involving research or other knowledge work, and c) 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, 2020), and restriction of (academic and professional) mobility (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, 2015; 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 potentially too much to substantially 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 governmentalized epistemic de-development. Their counter-conduct of the process and effect of resource depletion, conflict protraction, and resulting epistemic boxing was demonstrated by engaging with resilience and success 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 utilization of institutional and other sources to support their epistemic development. Throughout, this counter-conduct was significantly facilitated by the participants' increased freedom from the immediacy of structural violence, its preoccupying mental effects, and its function of policing their social, global, and reflexive learning of Palestine.

5. Discussion

The experiential findings demonstrate the participants perceived making significant gains in their academic, career, and multi-dimensional identity development. While these findings are important on their own, limiting to them the basis of the claim that scholarships contribute to peace in the oPt would be a replication of the instrumentalist approach that reduces scholarships' significance for peace to a tool of importing academic capacities, advancing individual careers, and human-sourcing development NGOs and higher education recovery, development and internationalization (HERDI). It would also seem to endorse the empiricist view that human-sourcing HERDI is necessarily a contribution to peace. While this view has some basis in empirical evidence (Kester et al., 2022; Milton, 2017), it misses engagement with the complexity of conceptualizing peace, at least beyond technical accounts of it (Mac Ginty, 2012). Also, the assertion of human-sourcing HERDI as necessarily a contribution to peace ignores the serious interdisciplinary debate, historically and contemporarily, about the potential of education to contribute to peace but also to conflict (Kandel, 1935; Kester et al., 2022; Milton, 2017, pp. 87–119). This conceptual flattening of peace narrows the range of experiences and scope of interpretation that may otherwise be relevant and necessary in appraising scholarships' potential contribution to peace. This narrowing effect can be observed by considering the full range of the experiential findings. The participants reported many engagements on Palestine and gains in their multidimensional identity development. The view of scholarships as a means of human-sourcing HERDI and, on that account, a means of contributing to peace risks presenting these engagement and identity development experiences as not only extraneous to appraisal of scholarships' potential contribution to peace but also insignificant to conceptualizing the peace to which this contribution is claimed (Almassri, 2024c).

One demand following this critique is for deeper interpretation of empirical evidence, interpretation that is both informed by an explicit conceptualization of peace and guided by an analysis protocol to establish how empirically demonstrated gains represent events to which progress towards peace may be ascribed. The inferential findings presented in this article suggest that theory, especially if deployed in a context-driven and interdisciplinary mode, may well facilitate such an interpretation. Developed through abductive analysis, these findings offered a re-reading of the empirical data patterns that ensured conceptual engagement and trustworthiness in addressing the key research question of how do international graduate scholarships relate to peace in the oPt? In the inferential findings, the relevance to peace that was claimed of the research participants' reported scholarship experiences was grounded in an understanding of peace as an everyday process of disrupting conflict governmentalities. The participants' reported scholarship experiences were analyzed within this conception of peace. This analysis offered an understanding of scholarships as involving significantly more freedom and resources for the research participants to advance their subject positions, citizenship consciousness, and epistemic capacities. This impact of scholarships was finally interpreted to be one of expanding conflict disruption insofar the subject positions, citizenship consciousness, and epistemic capacities advanced by the scholarship recipients represented processes and outcomes counter to the disciplining cycles and effects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

These findings of scholarships' micro-level impact on peace in the oPt illuminate the significance of Campbell and Mawer (2019), Novotný et al. (2021), and Saling's (2023) argument for increased and careful theorization in research of scholarships impact. By applying Everyday Peace Capability, this research demonstrated scholarships can have individual effects significant for peace in the oPt. The theoretically-informed articulation of these effects has key implications for scaling research and practice of scholarships impact for peace. I turn now to discussing these implications.

5.1. Implications for research

One key task that lies ahead is to explore whether and how the potential impact on peace demonstrated in this article does and can transcend its micro-level manifestation. The inferential findings reported here—expanded capability of subject repositioning, critical domestic-global awareness, and epistemic development—can serve as categories against which to analyze scholarship alumni's institutional and systemic, i.e., meso- and macro-level, contribution to conflict disruption in the oPt. These categories shift research questions from (a) what positions—in government, academia, NGOs, entrepreneurship, civil society, and social circles—scholarship alumni have gone 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 sustaining the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and (b.2.) what affordances and constraints they have faced in trying to do so. These alternative research questions are informed by the conception of peace as an everyday process of conflict disruption (Mac Ginty, 2021, 2022). Although they can be informed by other theoretical frameworks of peace, any such frameworks must consider the low opportunity structure in the oPt described earlier in the article.

Pursuing these alternative, theoretically-informed questions has clear potential to address some of the complex and persisting gaps in literature on scholarships (Mawer, 2018) and more broadly on international academic mobility (Wang et al., 2024). First, addressing these questions can reveal the extent and forms of widening and systemizing scholarships' impact on peace in the oPt, as well as the institutional and broader contextual contingencies of sustainable diffusion of scholarships impact at the meso- and macro-levels. Crucially, the theory-ladenness of these alternative questions mitigates the risk of relapsing to a technical account of scholarships impact on peace in the course of 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. This can establish some ground to gauge the additive value and qualitative edge that scholarships may extend to peacebuilding (see Martel, 2018; Mawer, 2018). Such a research approach can help address the absence of comparative studies between foreign- and locally-educated peers (Wang et al., 2024). Third, these questions have an inherent transdisciplinary focus, moving from an interrogation of education impact to an investigation of impact dissemination that considers alumni's agency and political, economic, and cultural factors in the home-country. This transdisciplinary focus can offer a valuable opportunity for collaboration and dialogue

between (political) sociologists and anthropologists of education and scholars of migration, development, and peace (see van Houte, 2014), for a fuller understanding of the multidimensional and contextually mediated impact of scholarships and international academic mobility more broadly (Wang et al., 2024).

The findings in this article also have direct implications for the practice of investing in scholarships for peace and of societalizing their peace-relevant impact. I outline these implications below, showcasing the improved practical significance of scholarships research that is informed by theory.

5.2. Implications for practice

The experiential findings showed significant academic, career, and multidimensional identity development gains that the research participants perceived making during their funded graduate education abroad. I argued in a previous article (Almassri, 2024b) that these findings justify a recommendation for continued investment in scholarships for Palestinians, to allow their access for such gains that may be currently difficult to achieve in the aggravating local context of conflict. The inferential findings clarify how this continued investment may be better made, to optimize the conflict-disruption effects 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)utilizability of their scholarship gains. This is especially important in the Palestinian and similar contexts where higher levels of individual agency are needed to transcend structural challenges and perhaps transform them (see Abou-Al-Ross & AlWaheidi, 2021; also see Heleta, 2017; Milton, 2017). This may be achieved by the three actions suggested below, where the focus on reflection can support alumni in cultivating the needed higher levels of agency (see Almassri, 2023):

1. Reallocating part of scholarship program funds 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 structural barriers to practicing, disseminating, and institutionalizing their scholarship impact.
2. Facilitating 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 institutionalize some of their scholarship outcomes.
3. Availing technical and networking support to optimize alumni's efforts to (a) re-create locally as conflict-disruptive experiences as those they would have experienced abroad; and (b) scale up this impact by working with formal and non-formal education providers to integrate into their programming similar experiences conducive to everyday peace.

These actions can produce experiences, observations, and records that are valuable to responding to the research implications identified earlier, creating a cycle of reflective practice (Schön, 1992) that may advance attempts at disseminating and institutionalizing scholarships impact.

6. Conclusion

I have presented in this article an argument for broadening the scope of appraising scholarships' potential impact on peace. To do so, we need to move beyond empiricist and technical accounts, which risk essentializing scholarships' effects of human capital import and human-sourcing HERDI as ones of peacebuilding (see Chankseliani, 2022). We also need to engage an explicit conception of peace, perhaps a critical one where peace is neither reduced to a technocratic endeavor nor conceived in neoliberal terms of Western-style democratization and liberalization. International education researchers should assume initiative in responding to this dual need, making serious and context-driven use of theory to explore scholarships' deeper potential impact on peace, in and beyond contexts of immediate conflict. As presented in the literature review section, this is especially important in light of more scholarships research emerging from/on conflict-affected contexts yet most often lacking interpretive signification of these contexts. The findings and discussion sections illustrate the important role that such theorization can play in helping us build a fuller account of scholarships impact on peace without hollowing out the concept and context of peace. The two sets of implications presented further show how this account can help advance our research agenda on the topic of scholarships and the area of international academic mobility, as well as consider practices to optimize scholarships impact on peace and feed back into the research agenda.

By way of emphasis, it is finally worth noting the need for careful placement of theory within and/or along larger philosophical and methodological approaches to researching scholarships impact. In the case here, a 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 synthesizing it through descriptive analysis. This theory placement choice—orchestrated specifically by the ontological view in critical realism of separate domains of reality—allowed me to tread with care, i.e., active reflexivity, between theory and evidence in interpreting what the empirical data show about scholarships' potential impact on peace in the oPt. This is contrasted with 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 (see Abu-Lughod, 1989; Adely, 2012; Hinnebusch, 2017). The theory placement choice reflected in the substance and structure of this article may inspire more interest in experimenting with philosophical-methodological approaches that neither surrender nor surrender to theory in researching the impact of scholarships and international academic mobility, including on peace.

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Ethical approval

The parent project of this article received ethical approval from the School of Education Ethics Sub-Committee at Durham University. All participants shared in writing their voluntary, informed consent to participating in the research and to the use of their data in publications associated with it.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Anas N. Almassri: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The author declares that he has no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

The data leading to the findings reported in this article are not publicly available due to privacy and ethical restrictions. Inquiries to the corresponding author are welcome.

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Appendix A. : Undergraduate-graduate pathway

Undergraduate program	Pathway	Graduate program
Business Administration	Specialization	Marketing and Strategy
Business Administration	Specialization	International Business
Civil Engineering	Specialization	Water, Sanitation and Health Engineering
Computer Engineering	Specialization	Data Science
Dentistry	Shift	Sustainability, Culture and Development
English and Education	Shift	International Relations
English and Education	Specialization	Special Education
English and Education	Specialization	Intercultural Communication and Education
English and French	Shift	International Media
English literature	Specialization	Cultural and Literary Studies
English literature	Specialization	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	Specialization	Water, Sanitation and Health Engineering
French language	Shift	Tourism and Sustainable Development
Journalism and Media	Shift	Politics and International Relations
Law	Specialization	International Law (Human Rights)
Mathematics	Specialization	Mathematics and Statistics
Medicine	Specialization	Global Health (Conflict and Security)

(*continued*)

Undergraduate program	Pathway	Graduate program
Medicine	Specialization	Cognitive Neurosciences
Medicine	Specialization	Child and Adolescents Mental Health
Medicine	Specialization	Global Health
Medicine	Specialization	Women and Children's Health
Medicine	Specialization	Burns, Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery

Appendix B. Experiential themes with illustrative quotes

Experiential theme: Motivation powered by ambition and pragmatism	Illustrative quotes	
Subtheme: Seeking Possibility and Advancement	When I was thinking about the master's, I just thought how crucial this program 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.	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)
Subtheme: A Pursuit Dually Shaped	I was applying for a master's scholarship, *any* master's 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.	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 Brooks University and MSc Public Health at the University of Southampton. (quoted from scholarship application)

Experiential Theme: A Journey of Academic (*Re*) Adaptation and Fulfilment	Illustrative Quotes		
Subtheme: Meeting the challenge of research reading and writing	Academics wise, 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. Being critical was the hardest thing for me, and I saw it with like my cousins or my friends now doing master's abroad. I tried to help them with things. We always have the same issue of being critical.		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)
Subtheme: Perceiving the research-oriented, interdisciplinary, and global dimensions of graduate education	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 organize my thoughts about my work, and I keep reading others' works on participatory	My study [in Palestine] 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	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,

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	action research to see how to improve the ethics and success of my work. (translated)	manhole location. But we never considered the social aspect of these analyses or the social impact of implementing our results. Unlike my program in the UK, programs at our universities never focus on this aspect. (translated)	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)
Subtheme: Learning resilience	It took me about two months to realize what this new system required in terms of studying on my own. 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 system was different and required us to read and then write our views, not like my undergraduate study where I just needed to check whether my knowledge was correct or incorrect through multiple choice questions. Now I felt any answer would be valid as long as it is argued well and supported by evidence. (translated)	COVID disrupted everything for me. I was making good progress; I had planned, and got support for, my international fieldwork for my thesis 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 thesis research, which I did. It became a systematic review that I completed from my dorm. (translated)	I had to work very hard, like, to understand how to study for exams or actually write my essays. It took me four assignments to finally, like for my brain to, to figure out how I should do, like studying for exams and writing essays.

Experiential Theme: Individual Careers in Advancement, Fulfilment in Negotiation — **Illustrative Quotes**

Subtheme: Enhanced employers' impression	Having such a master's made it really possible for me to even pass the first screening. So, when they got to see that this guy has this master's 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 organizations.	[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.	

| **Subtheme**: Enhanced professional exposure and development | … and, 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) | | |

| **Subtheme**: Negotiating career outcomes | 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 master's who is here to enjoy a good position so we'll try to criticize 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) | 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. | 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) |

Experiential Theme: More Palestinian, More Reflexive — **Illustrative Quotes**

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Subtheme: "It is the simplicity of basic rights"	We had never seen beautiful things in our lives, and when we went abroad, we saw truly amazing things—beautiful nature, beautiful people, peace, and the kind of people's smiles that you never see here because of the miserable life that has destroyed them. It is the simplicity of basic rights, compared to the possibility that you can be bombed while you're home. (translated)	In Gaza, we live in a space of 365 km^2, so there is no possibility for driving long distances. I mean, the longest drive is about 40–50 min. So, the first fun thing I planned was hiring a car and going on a 30-hour long road trip from Seattle, Washington to San Diego, California. I was shocked, literally shocked that there were no checkpoints, no people to stop you, nothing! It is impossible to drive for that long in Gaza or even in Palestine without encountering an Israeli military checkpoint. (translated)	
Subtheme: Meeting fellow Palestinians	it was like overwhelming for me, to be honest. It was like, these are Palestinians who have never been to the West Bank; I've never been in Gaza; and we're getting to know each other. It felt we're aliens to each other, and it wasn't pleasant. It was like an ugly reality check. We're, like, really separated. We're really separated because I really don't know enough about the people in Gaza, didn't have a clear picture of them in my mind.	Palestine now felt so big for me, and I understood my knowledge barely extends beyond Gaza and Gaza's issues. When I met Palestinians from the West Bank, I heard from them about their experiences of military raids and checkpoints, events I had only seen in the news. I had never heard personal testimonies of the impact of these raids and checkpoints. It marked a key difference in my understanding, and at some point, I felt we were under two different occupation regimes. My thoughts have since evolved, and I believe we are subject to the same occupation regime though via different tools deployed to divide and fragment us. (translated)	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. So, this is one of the positive experiences of being here, realizing that we are indeed a diverse people—differing in the religious beliefs we hold, the jokes we tell, and the cooking recipes we follow. I embrace this realization of our diversity knowing we have not had a chance to live it out. (translated)
Subtheme: Deepened sense of reflexive national membership	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 organizations 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)	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)	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

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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)

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