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The Life Histories of Palestinian Scholars: Research and Writing Practices Under Peripheral Conditions

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Abstract / المستخلص

The destruction of educational institutions and the targeting of faculty in the Occupied Palestinian Territories have been labeled “scholasticide”, a systematic attempt to erase Palestinian education and heritage, which has amplified during the wholesale destruction of Gaza since October 2023. Drawing on research conducted in the spring/summer of 2022, the chapter seeks to preserve the memory of pre-war academic practices in Gaza while also shedding light on ongoing scholarly work in the West Bank, despite historically longstanding harsh conditions. The findings presented here are from a series of interviews conducted in 2022 with Palestinian scientists and scholars from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The interviews aimed to understand how these scholars’ scientific practices and their efforts to engage with mainstream science are influenced by the material and non-material conditions they face. Pivoting on Bourdieu’s concept of the scientific field, the chapter examines how Palestinian scholars navigate obstacles such as mobility restrictions, gatekeeping by international journals, and high open-access publishing costs. The stories recounted by scholars show that non-discursive barriers tend to take precedence over discursive obstacles in the Palestinian scientific field. Further, the findings reveal how social capital, particularly mentorship, is crucial in helping scholars engage in global scientific communities. The chapter concludes with recommendations for how international academic communities can better support Palestinian scholars and other academics working from conflict-affected zones in their knowledge-production efforts.

شهد العلماء في غزة بيئاتهم الأكاديمية مدمرة بسبب القصف الإسرائيلي منذ أكتوبر/تشرين الأول ٢٠٢٣. وقد وُصف تدمير المؤسسات التعليمية واستهداف أعضاء هيئة التدريس بأنه "مبىد مدرسي"، وهي محاولة ممنهجة لمحو التعليم والتراث الفلسطيني. وتوسع الورقة من خلال هذا البحث إلى الحفاظ على ذاكرة الممارسات الأكاديمية قبل الحرب في غزة، مع تسليط الضوء أيضًا على العمل الأكاديمي المستمر في الضفة الغربية، على الرغم من الظروف القاسية. النتائج المعروضة هنا مأخوذة من سلسلة مقابلات أجريت في عام ٢٠٢٢ مع علماء فلسطينيين من الضفة الغربية وقطاع غزة. هدفت الدراسة إلى فهم كيفية تأثر الممارسات العلمية لهؤلاء العلماء وجهودهم في التعامل مع العلوم السائدة بالظروف المادية وغير المادية التي يواجهونها. اعتمدت الدراسة على مفهوم بورديو للمجال العلمي، ودرست كيفية تعامل الباحثين الفلسطينيين مع العقبات مثل القيود على التنقل، وحراسة المجالات الدولية، وارتفاع تكاليف النشر المفتوح. تظهر القصص التي يرويها الأكاديميون الفلسطينيون أن الحواجز غير الخطائية تميل إلى أن تكون لها الأسبقية على العقبات الخطابية في المجال العلمي الفلسطيني. علاوة على ذلك، تكشف النتائج مدى أهمية رأس المال الاجتماعي، وخاصة الإرشاد، في مساعدة العلماء على الانخراط في المجتمعات العلمية العالمية. وتختتم الورقة بتوصيات حول كيفية قيام المجتمعات الأكاديمية الدولية بدعم الباحثين الفلسطينيين بشكل أفضل في جهودهم لإنتاج المعرفة، حتى وسط الدمار المستمر

Back in 2022, as part of my postgraduate research project on Palestinian scholars' writing and knowledge production practices, I conducted a number of interviews with Palestinian scientists and scholars from both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The scholars based in Gaza were affiliated with the Islamic University and Al-Aqsa University, institutions which, along with all other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Gaza, have been destroyed during the war that has been unfolding since the autumn of 2023. Several international human rights organizations have documented the scale of destruction to Gaza's infrastructure. Thus, according to the Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor (2024), besides the complete devastation of Gaza's educational infrastructure, three university leaders and more than 95 faculty members have been killed, along with hundreds of educators and thousands of students.

This decimation of educational institutions across Gaza and the targeting of faculty and academics have been characterized as "scholasticide"—a term first coined by Palestinian Professor Karma Nabulsi—and which refers to the "systematic destruction of Palestinian education by Israel" (Dader et al., 2024; Tréguer, 2024; ReliefWeb, 2024). The term can be extended to other

forms of destruction of academic and symbolic infrastructures in zones of war and conflict, devastations that, in the case of Palestine, have reached as far as libraries, heritage sites, and museums. In a recent interview with the vice president of the once-standing Israa University, Dr Ahmed Alhussaina described the looting by Israeli forces of 3000 artifacts that were housed by the University. These included artifacts dating back to the pre-Islamic era, the Roman Empire, and all periods of Palestinian history (Deconstructed, 2024). What is thus at stake is the erasure of Palestinian cultural heritage, historical memory, knowledge, and scientific practices, and not least, the eradication of hope for future rebuilding and development.

In light of these devastating developments and in response to calls by Palestinian academics for solidarity and active resistance against the erasure of Palestinian knowledge (Gaza Academics and Administrators, 2024; Galilee Foundation, 2024), one of the aims of disseminating the results from my 2022 study is to preserve the memory of pre-war academic practices and knowledge production in Gaza. By documenting the experiences and practices of Gazan scholars and scientists before the war, this paper contributes to the historical record and offers a testament to their steadfastness and dedication. Additionally, because the study also included participants from universities in the West Bank, this paper raises awareness of the ongoing academic work there, which continues amidst severe restrictions and hostile conditions.

My interest in researching and writing about Palestinian scholars' scientific practices has been informed by my background as an Arab postgraduate student in academic writing as well as by my deep-seated interest in understanding the conditions for equity, or lack thereof, in academic writing and knowledge production, particularly in areas of conflict and crisis. This positionality is essential because it influences my perspective as a researcher who is an outsider to Palestinian academic life, and yet, as a result of growing up in an environment shaped by Pan-Arabism, I am deeply connected to the Palestinian cause. However, the goal of this project was not to concentrate on the adverse experiences created by the Israeli occupation, but rather to give voice to Palestinian academics as they share their academic trajectories, investments in research and in writing for research and publication purposes. For instance, in order to avoid imposing pre-scripted narratives on their conditions for knowledge and writing production, in my project design, I deliberately created interview questions in such a way as to avoid leading or suggestive language and refrained from asking any questions related to the Israeli military occupation. Instead, I let such issues emerge from my dialogues with participants, as was the case of the mobility restrictions imposed on them and the impact of those material and physical restrictions on their research investments.

From the original dissertation to the conference presentation at the fifth edition of PRISEAL at the University of La Laguna in August 2023 and then the writing of this chapter, my project has focused on making sense of the fragmented picture of Palestinian researchers' labor conditions and their processes of doing science. Central to understanding these processes is the question of how writing and publishing in English affect Palestinian scholars' ability to assimilate into mainstream science, given that the majority of scientific journals today are published in English (Salager-Meyer, 2008, p. 26; Ramírez-Castañeda, 2020). And because the issue of language and publishing intersects with and is influenced by broader material and non-material conditions, this study also sought to answer the following questions: What factors influence the ways in which Palestinian scholars structure their academic careers, especially in terms of the challenges or barriers that they face? How do different forms of capital determine the Palestinian scientific arena and help Palestinian scholars engage in global research production and dissemination?

To answer these questions, this chapter draws on Bourdieu's conceptualization of the scientific field as "the locus of a competitive struggle, in which the specific issue at stake is the monopoly of scientific authority" (Bourdieu, 1975, p. 19). Scientific authority is further defined by Bourdieu as "a particular kind of capital, which can be accumulated, transmitted, and even reconverted into other kinds of capital under certain conditions" (p. 25). To gain scientific authority, one must have access to material and symbolic resources, namely different forms of capital. It is important to note that throughout this paper, the terms "scientific practices" and "scientific field" refer not only to the natural sciences but rather to a variety of disciplines from both the soft and hard sciences.

The stories presented here demonstrate that for Palestinian scholars and scientists, non-discursive barriers (Canagarajah, 1996), such as mobility restrictions, gatekeeping by international journals, and the high costs of open access publishing, take precedence over discursive challenges. These structural obstacles must be navigated long before researchers can even begin to negotiate the discursive barriers of scholarly communication, which emerged as a lesser concern. Another key finding shows that among the forms of capital considered—cultural, linguistic, and social—it was social capital, particularly through mentorship, that had the most influence in helping scholars participate in mainstream academic communities.

In what follows, a brief overview of Palestinian higher education and its research landscape prior to the war will be provided to offer context for the results within the geopolitical climate. The methodology used to conduct the study will then be explained. Next, key findings will be presented and

discussed, highlighting the barriers identified by interviewees as most disruptive of their research, as well as the forms of capital that enable Palestinian scholars to overcome these obstacles and engage in research and dissemination. Finally, the chapter concludes by offering recommendations to academic communities on ways to enhance their support of not only Palestinian academics, but also other scholars working from conflict-affected zones.

Brief Background of Palestine's Higher Education Landscape

From its inception in the 1970s, Palestinian academia has always existed and operated under hostile conditions. For example, studies published between 1970 and 1989 that aimed to assess the higher education landscape collectively confirmed the violations committed by the Israeli authorities against these institutions (e.g., Roberts et al., 1984; Gerner, 1989). One of the most serious impediments to the functioning of Palestinian universities was their frequent closures, whether through direct orders by the Israeli authorities or ad-hoc closures caused by roadblocks and checkpoints. These severe measures undoubtedly paralyzed every aspect of academic activity that depends on continuity for it to be able to accomplish its educational mission effectively.

Due to the restrictive measures, one particularly devastating outcome for Palestinian researchers during that time was their inability to build the social capital needed to participate in global scientific communities (Gerner, 1989). The restrictions on travel for Palestinians were not the only contributing factor to their isolation from mainstream scientific circles. Denial of entry and work permits of foreign faculty exacerbated Palestinian researchers' struggle with networking. Foreign teachers have always played an important part in the development of HEIs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). In fact, bringing international scholars to conduct seminars, lectures and research was cited in the literature as a key strategy employed by Palestinian scholars to ameliorate the effects of academic isolation (Roberts et al., 1984). In an interview, Munir Fasheh, a prominent Palestinian learning theorist who taught mathematics and physics at Birzeit University, mentions networking and bringing international scholars to benefit students and teachers with their expertise as a means for survival under harsh conditions (Gerner, 1989, p.8).

These restrictions on Palestinians' mobility and violations of the Israeli forces on academic freedom remained the same even after the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords that allowed for Palestinian self-rule in the OPT through the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) (RecoNow, 2016). Palestine was granted only limited control of major cities in the West Bank and Gaza

while still allowing Israel, to this day, to annex much of the West Bank and control Gaza's borders, airspace and territorial waters. Israel also controls the OPT's resources, as one academic points out when interviewed about the state of health research in Palestine: "They [Israel] collect our tax money for themselves, and they even control importing and exporting the goods" (AlKhaldi et al., 2018, p. 5). Therefore, at the time of carrying out this research and conducting the interviews in 2022, the situation was the same for Gazan scholars, and presently, it remains the same, if not worse, for those working from the West Bank in terms of continued restrictions on their mobility and violations of academic freedom by Israeli forces (See Abbott, 2018; Abd El-Galil, 2022).

In addition to the conditions brought about by the occupation, Palestinian scholars face barriers common in other scientific communities located in low- and middle-income countries. For instance, there is little to no investment in research and development (R&D), and there is limited infrastructure, such as poorly equipped laboratories and libraries. Previous studies confirmed that there is no allocated budget for research from the Palestinian National Authority (Abbott, 2018; Qumsiyeh & Isaac, 2012). This explains why there is very little research output emanating from the OPT from fields like molecular biology, genetics, and immunology, since conducting research in these fields requires substantive funding (Sweileh et al, 2013, p. 4). Poor financial resources have even more devastating effects on the Natural Sciences. According to Najajreh, the former dean of the Faculty of Pharmacy at Al-Quds University in the West Bank, only 7,000 students out of 200,000 were studying natural sciences and mathematics, and he further warns that "nobody will be studying natural sciences, and mathematics will soon disappear in Palestine" (Abd El-Galil, 2022). Not only are there no funds to conduct research in those fields, but also there are no job opportunities for Natural Science graduates in the OPT.

Despite all the barriers discussed here, research continues to be conducted by persistent Palestinian academics. Although their participation is legitimately peripheral (Flowerdew, 2000, p. 131), attempts are being made by tireless scholars to produce knowledge, as evidenced by the results of bibliometric studies conducted on research coming out of the OPT in the last two decades (Sweileh et al., 2013, 2014). These studies also highlight a shift in how scientific research is assessed in Palestinian HEIs. There are now increasing requirements for Palestinian scholars to publish in high-impact English language journals in order for their institutions to receive global recognition in international university rankings. The discursive and non-discursive barriers embedded in those requirements undoubtedly vary according

to individuals' educational backgrounds, disciplines, and differing material conditions. Hence, qualitative research is needed to gain a better understanding of those barriers and how they affect individuals differently and shape Palestinian academics' research and writing practices, and consequently their career trajectories. The following section outlines the qualitative methodology employed to investigate these issues in depth.

Methodology: From a Life History Framework to Making Sense of Gathered Stories

In this study, a topical life history method was used to examine nine Palestinian scholars' career trajectories. A life history inquiry is about "understanding the relationship, the complex interaction, between life and context, self and place" (Cole, 2001, p. 11). Not only does this approach allow us to examine how Palestinian researchers structure their careers but it also facilitates our understanding of how these scholars perceive and make sense of the constraints created by the institutional structure (Rodriguez Medina, 2014, p. 7) and the geopolitical and social context in which they are embedded (Cole, 2001, p. 10).

Another important dimension that a life history approach brings to the study is the temporal aspect it emphasizes while eliciting the stories from interviewees. In a study done on a much larger scale that relied on a life history approach to study the careers of Argentinian political scientists, Rodriguez Medina (2014) elaborates on the temporal aspect of the methodology, advocating that when scientists narrate their lives, they "(i) make sense of their past, (ii) from the perspective of their present, and (iii) in the light of an anticipated specific future" (p. 49). Hence, focusing on temporality is crucial in illuminating how different affordances and choices of Palestinian scholars were influenced by past and existing material and non-material conditions as well as their aspirations towards the future.

Participant Recruitment

Participants were identified through their institutions' websites and were recruited via email. Eighty participants in total were contacted and invited to be interviewed. Some declined the invitation, others did not respond at all. Eventually, a total of nine scholars agreed to be interviewed: four were from the West Bank, and five were from the Gaza Strip. The nine participants represented different disciplines and were at different stages in their academic careers. The following table summarizes their backgrounds.

Table 6.1. Participants' Backgrounds

Name	Location	Field	Year of PhD Completion	PhD Country	Number of Publications
Malek	Gaza	Physics	2008	Egypt	30/ all in English
Ahmed	Gaza	Education	2013	Egypt	9/ 8 in Arabic and 1 in English
Moez	Gaza	Information Technology	2015	France	27/ all in English
Yasir	Gaza	Chemistry	2003	Spain	21/ all in English
Jamal	Gaza	Chemistry	2004	UK	16/ all in English
Kareem	The West Bank	Journalism	1993	US	3/ 2 in Arabic and 1 in English
Amal	The West Bank	Nutritional Sciences	2020	UK	5 research papers and 5 conference papers all in English
Rania	The West Bank	Microbiology	2010	France	8 research papers in English/ 2 conference papers in French
Salwa	The West Bank	Health Economics	2019	France	4 papers/ all in English

The interviewees were given a choice to be either interviewed in English or Arabic. Seven of the participants preferred to be interviewed in Arabic, whereas the other two opted for English. The interviews lasted, on average, about forty-five minutes. In addition to the interviews, all participants were contacted again (with permission) via email with follow-up questions that arose from the data analysis process.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the institution under which it was conducted. Participants were given a Participant Information Sheet in both English and Arabic outlining the research purpose and their involvement. They signed consent forms authorizing interview recording on Microsoft Teams. To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms were used to protect their identities.

Data Analysis

Initially, all digitally recorded interviews were translated into English and transcribed simultaneously. Braun's and Clark's (2006) six-phase

thematic analysis process was used to analyze the data. One of the advantages of using this analytical framework is that it is recursive, allowing the researcher to move back and forth through the steps, every time refining the quality of their interpretation of the data. Using computer-aided text analysis software, Atlas.ti, the interviews were coded, identifying as many patterns as possible. Then, a thematic map, as shown in Figure 6.1, was used to visually represent the different codes and help sort them into themes. Bourdieu’s conceptualization of the scientific field as a “space defined by the play of opposing forces in a struggle for scientific stakes” (1975, p. 21) helped shape this map.

The thematic map shows how the Palestinian scientific field is characterized by changing expectations and decreased motivation, where researchers try to break through barriers and are empowered by different forms of capital, though unequally distributed depending on where scholars are located within the OPT, with those working from Gaza having less access to the different forms of capital than scholars in the West Bank. These dynamics shape scholars’ ability to accumulate scientific authority, which is mainly represented by the capacity to publish research in highly ranked international journals. Among the major challenges identified were labor conditions, such as heavy teaching loads caused by limited financial and human resources, and in the case of Gaza, the decline of natural sciences.

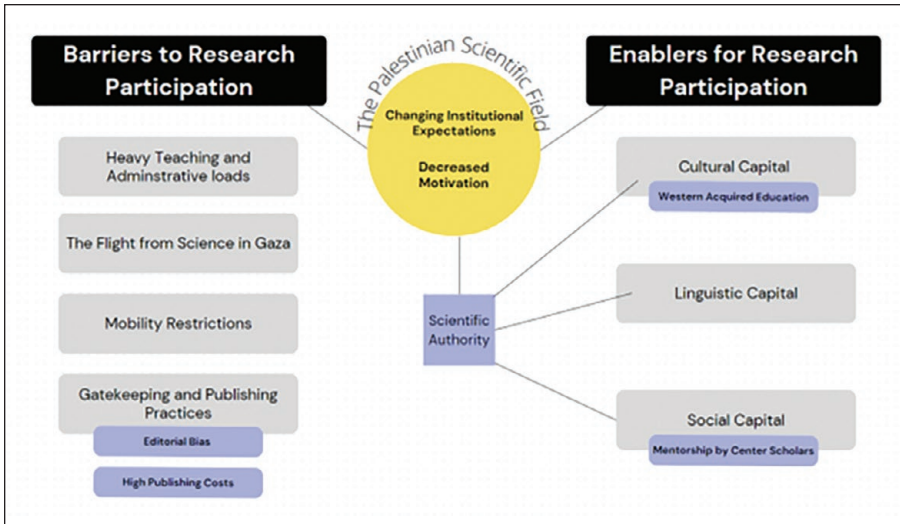


Figure 6.1. Thematic map illustrating seven main themes grouped under two categories: enablers and barriers to research.

However, the discussion in this chapter is limited to themes that are directly pertinent to the subject of this volume. In particular, the chapter examines what participants perceived as the most disruptive obstacles to their research and publishing efforts, namely the mobility restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupation and the challenges associated with the gatekeeping practices of international journals and the high costs of publishing. The chapter also sheds light on the scholars' efforts to overcome these barriers through the different forms of capital available to them, and which enable them to engage in research and dissemination.

Barriers to Conducting and Disseminating Research

What follows is a discussion of the barriers which participants perceived as having the most detrimental effects on their research and publishing endeavors. Both themes—mobility restrictions and international journals' exclusionary gatekeeping practices—highlight how working from different locations within the OPT determines Palestinian scholars' capacity to access the forms of capital needed for their career development.

Mobility Restrictions

Despite the growing interconnectivity through developments in communication channels and technologies, the physical mobility of scientists is still regarded as crucial for advancing their careers by increasing their research productivity through collaborations and expanding their professional networks (Czaika & Orazbayev, 2018; Jacob & Meek, 2013). The restrictions on Palestinians' freedom of movement by the Israeli occupation was a common theme in the stories of all five Gazan scholars who, before October 7, remained isolated from local scientific communities as a result of the restrictions on within-country mobility. All Gazan participants shared that many times they wanted to attend conferences in the West Bank but were never allowed. Dr Jamal's elaboration on this bleak situation summarizes well what the others had to say about their inability to enter the West Bank:

To be allowed in the West Bank, we need to get permission from the occupation authority. And most of the time, they reject it. Sometimes, they give you permission and then arrest you. The number of Gazans who go there is very, very limited. For me, I have never been politically involved in anything, but nonetheless, I will not gamble and go to the West Bank through an Israeli checkpoint. I cannot trust them.

Not only did the participants feel they were cut off from local scientific communities, but this feeling of isolation extended to international scientific communities as well. When asked to talk about professional networking, all the Gazan interviewees spoke about missed opportunities to attend international conferences. For example, Dr Yasir recounted the time he and his colleagues were invited by Erasmus to participate in a 5-day conference in Spain:

I refused to go to avoid the travel hardship. When we try to leave Gaza, we suffer from lots of issues. Especially trying to come back through Egypt. There are lots of checkpoints. My friends who recently traveled said that they had been searched more than ten times.

Although the participants residing in the West Bank did not seem to share the same struggles as their Gazan counterparts when it came to traveling abroad, one participant's story revealed how restrictions within the West Bank hinder researchers from carrying out research locally. Dr Amal explained how the hundreds of checkpoints placed between every town and village in the West Bank by the occupation make it burdensome to conduct field research. From their stories, it was clear that the research potential of individual Palestinian scientists is constrained by the confines of the occupation. As a result of this isolation and fragmentation, they have missed, and continue to miss, opportunities to connect with both local and international collaborators and obtain access to resources.

Gatekeeping and Publishing Practices

The career histories shared by participants reflected the increased pressure on Palestinian scholars to publish in international English-medium journals, much like their counterparts in other parts of the world. Professor Malek recalled his earlier attempts and associated difficulties as an early career scholar trying to publish in internationally recognized journals:

When we contacted a well-known journal in Germany, *Physica A*, as I recall... In the beginning, their initial response was how can such a prestigious journal publish a paper by a researcher from the Gaza Strip. They confirmed the adequacy of the quality of the research, yet their concern was that Gaza is unknown in the field and is politically unstable.

Professor Amal's recent struggles with international publishing as an early-career Palestinian scholar shed light on the difficulties academic returnees

from Western institutions experience with publishing upon their return to their home countries (Horton, 2000; Tardy, 2004). She recalled the ease in the publishing process when she was a Ph.D. student affiliated with a British university and how that experience stood in total contrast to her experience now that she is affiliated with a Palestinian university:

When you are the first author coming from a Palestinian university, it is a no-no for journals. Here, we collaborate with a university in Italy. I have been rejected more than 10 times just for being affiliated with a Palestinian university, and once I requested an Italian collaborator to have their name on the paper as an author, my paper was immediately published.

Some participants, like Dr Jamal, never interacted directly with journal publishers; instead, they relied on his Western collaborators to handle submissions. Others did not feel particularly disadvantaged when submitting to international journals. However, the experiences shared by Dr Malek, Dr Amal, and other scholars suggest that traces of editorial bias against research from low- and middle-income countries persist, a trend noted in earlier studies (e.g., Gibbs, 1995; Horton, 2000).

While the stories collected show experiential diversity vis-à-vis the manuscript submission process, all eight participants who were actively publishing spoke about the high publishing fees of open access international journals as forming another hurdle they have to jump. It is important to clarify here that when one of the participants was asked about why publish open access if the author charges were so high, she explained that most of the journals in her field had moved towards the open access model, and she added: “Those journals that are not open access, which are now very few, have a very high impact factor, and are, therefore, very difficult to publish in” (Dr Rania). Further discussions with participants revealed that the issue of high author charges is a relatively new one. Dr Amal explained that:

The journal’s fees for publication are crazy, and Palestine is no longer considered a low-income country, meaning that the discount we used to receive from journals is no longer available. Palestine is now categorized as a middle-income country for journals. However, if you check the reports of WHO, you will find that Palestine is categorized as a third-world country of low income.

Not surprisingly, this situation was worse for Gazan researchers as all five stories from Gaza confirmed that these scholars never got paid their full

salaries. Dr Jamal frustratedly explained: “We haven’t received full salaries since 2015; the maximum we get is 50% of our total salaries.” This finding reflects the broader funding constraints documented by Qumsiyeh and Isaac (2012) who highlight the PNA’s limited support and reliance on external funding bodies. Unfortunately, depending on outside sources for funding is as unreliable as it is contingent upon shifting geopolitical relations. In fact, Canagarajah (1996) asserts that various forms of educational interventions, such as the funding of educational projects, serve to maintain Western control of the Global South and sustain the latter’s politico-economic and intellectual dependence on the center.

This succinct analysis shows that participants perceived these barriers as having the most detrimental effects on their research and publishing endeavors. With the shift of Palestinian Higher Education towards adopting Western performance measuring criteria (Sweileh et al., 2014), researchers are evaluated against Western standards while having to work under barriers that have existed and have not been broken for nearly half a century.

Enablers for Research Participation

Despite the above-mentioned challenges, the participants interviewed still persisted in carrying out research. However, the extent of each researcher’s productivity was determined by the different types and levels of capital they were able to acquire throughout their career paths, namely cultural, linguistic, and social capital. In this section, I discuss the forms of capital that are most valued in the Palestinian scientific arena and examine their relative strengths in helping scholars overcome and resist structural obstacles to global research participation.

Cultural Capital

A theme that is easily discernible from the stories shared is the prominent place a Western academic degree occupies in the Palestinian scientific field. Six of the participants who received their postgraduate degrees from well-known universities in the West reflected the ease with which they got appointed to their institutions and how it allowed them to attain higher administrative positions. For example, the prominence of Western academic degrees can be seen in Dr Salwa’s story, who received her PhD from France in 2019: “Upon my return, I was appointed as an assistant professor. . . Even if ten had applied for the assistant professorship position, I would still get it.” This statement demonstrates how cultural capital in the form of scholastic qualifications is

considered the “initial capital” (Bourdieu, 1975, p. 25), which determines the advantages early-career scholars acquire as they enter a scientific field.

The influence of Western-acquired scholastic capital can further be observed in how it disrupts gender disparities in academic rank and leadership opportunities. Studies on the MENA region have shown that women’s competence and leadership potential are often undervalued. However, having degrees from the US or UK alters this sad reality (Karam & Afiouni, 2014; Allam et al., 2021). Two of the women researchers who were part of this study received their master’s and doctoral degrees from British and French institutions, respectively, and, as a result, were both able to attain the position of department head at the beginning of their academic careers. This evidence shows how, even for women researchers, a researcher’s scientific capacity in the Palestinian scientific field is judged by the position they occupy in the “instituted hierarchies” (Bourdieu, 1975, p. 20); in this case, it is the hierarchy of postgraduate degrees.

Yet, being trained and educated in center institutions does not guarantee periphery scholars’ ability to maintain and forge professional connections in the center after they have returned to their home institutions. In fact, some scholars have criticized the isolation periphery scholars experience from their alma mater upon receiving their degrees and returning to their countries (e.g., Swales, 1990, p. 106; Canagarajah, 2002, p. 277). The stories shared by the seven participants who received their education in the center reveal mixed experiences about their capacities to maintain and build international scientific networks. Three of the participants (Dr Kareem, Dr Amal, and Dr Yasir) who were trained in metropolitan centers state that upon their return to Palestine, their connections with their Ph.D. supervisors and research colleagues faded gradually. Dr Amal, revealed that ties remained so long as there were papers being extracted from her doctoral thesis for the purpose of publication. Similarly, Dr Yasir, talked about the obstacles that prevented him from forging international collaborations:

I wasn’t able to forge international connections because our research depends on the availability of materials and the presence of all collaborators in one place. For instance, I work on the binding of proteins with drugs, and this matter requires certain temperatures. So, if I want to collaborate internationally, the first obstacle I face is trying to transfer the protein from Gaza to another location.

Dr Yasir’s story demonstrates that even with an acquired Western degree, the influence of this form of cultural capital quickly begins to diminish as a result of the restrictions on the movement of all things and people.

Linguistic Capital

As mentioned earlier, publishing in international English academic journals has become a requirement for academics' career advancement. Today, scientists' success in academic publishing depends to a great extent on their proficiency in English (Flowerdew, 2019; Ramírez-Castañeda, 2020). However, there is a scholarly debate on whether proficiency of the English language is what is essential for succeeding in academic publishing (Flowerdew, 2019) or if it is the knowledge and experience of discourse conventions in a certain discipline that matter (Hyland, 2016). To determine the extent to which language forms a barrier to publishing for the participants, I followed Salager-Meyer's advice (2008) and made a distinction between those who studied abroad and underwent training on academic writing and publishing conventions and those who received their education and research training in local and regional institutions (p. 125). As for the former group, when asked about obstacles they faced in writing for publication, none of them saw language or writing as an issue for them given the language training they had received and their acculturation into the discourses of their disciplines. It is important to point out that linguistic capital here does not refer to English only, but from Dr Rania's story, it was clear that knowledge of the French language was also an asset to her career development.

While linguistic capital has emerged as a key enabler for research productivity, especially for those educated in Western institutions, it can also serve as a limiting factor when lacking. This can be observed in the stories of the two participants who received their education from local and regional institutions. Dr Malek admitted that at the start of his academic career, his English and knowledge of publishing conventions in his discipline were very poor. As for Dr Ahmed, it seemed like he experienced the most difficulties with English academic writing and the conventions pertinent to his discipline. This struggle is expected because he was the only one amongst the interviewees who was from the humanities where it is more common for scholars to use their L1 when writing their research (Alharbi, 2020). Dr Ahmed described his level of English as very limited. His story corroborates the findings of a recent relevant study where academics from the social sciences and the humanities in Saudi Arabia assessed their own mastery of academic English writing as very low (Alharbi, 2020).

Academics with limited English turn to help from different "literacy brokers" in order to publish their research articles in English-medium outlets (Lillis & Curry, 2006). The phenomenon of literacy brokering can be observed in how Dr Ahmed tried to overcome the language barrier by sending his research to a professional translator. However, relying on a "language

professional” was not enough to get his paper published as evidenced by the number of times it went back and forth between the author and the journal until it was finally accepted. The reason for this is that “language professionals” orient to direct translation, unlike “academic professionals” who focus on knowledge content and discipline-specific discourse (Lillis & Curry, 2006).

Social Capital

The most powerful research enabler that emerged from the stories shared by participants is a researcher’s social capital in the form of mentorship. In fact, being associated with an established scientist can bring about many benefits, especially for early-career scientists (Bourdieu, 1975). Some of the stories recounted demonstrate how “personal linkages”, a term used by Canagarajah to describe informal personal relationships between center and periphery scholars, can help the latter build scientific authority by enabling them to overcome the material constraints and the isolation they face (Canagarajah, 2002, p. 292). For example, from the very beginning of the conversation with Dr Malek, he acknowledged the role personal connections played in shaping his academic career. He recounted that through a local professor, he was introduced to an established German scholar who mentored Dr Malek and collaborated with him. Dr Malek described how this collaboration allowed him to overcome the negative consequences of power cuts. Before the ongoing war, Gaza suffered from a chronic electricity deficit, which prevented him from continuously running his statistical analyses. The center scholar would conduct the long simulations and send Dr Malek the data to analyze.

Dr Jamal’s story also emphasizes the role social capital and mentorship played in allowing him to break the barriers he encountered as a Gazan scientist. He described: “My supervisor helped provide me with access to electronic resources, so I could get whatever I wanted. Journals, scientific data... resources that we don’t have here in Gaza.” Not only that, but Dr Jamal was allowed to conduct experiments in his supervisor’s lab in the UK that otherwise would have been impossible to carry out in Gaza: “I am only able to publish papers because I go to the UK. I can’t conduct a complete Chemistry study in the Gaza Strip.” Other stories revealed how mentorship helped eliminate the lack of knowledge about the publishing process and language barriers. For example, Professor Salwa recalled the time her PhD supervisor spent teaching her the conventions of academic writing:

My Ph.D. supervisor was the one who taught me the most about writing... The first paper I wrote for my PhD was weak,

linguistically speaking, we spent two weeks working together on it. He showed me how to edit it using the track changes function on Word. He would also explain why he made certain changes. For instance, he would say this sentence is too long, and it must be shortened... Let's just say that the first paper I wrote, he rewrote from A to Z. My second paper was much better. We went through the same process, but there were fewer corrections. My third paper was perfect, and I remember him saying that it was as if he had written it himself.

Perhaps the story that shows best how mentorship, representing a form of social capital, can be so influential as to offset the lack of other forms of capital, even if the connection is maintained from a long distance, is Professor Malek's story. As a Gazan scientist who received his education from local and regional institutions, he did not possess the linguistic capital required to successfully write a research paper. When he was asked about how he overcame the English language barrier, he declared: "I need to give credit where credit is due. The German professor taught me the basics of research paper writing: how to write a good title, a proper introduction, how to acknowledge sources, taught me referencing conventions." Although Dr Malek expressed how he wished to have gotten a chance to physically attend one of the conferences where his papers were presented, he was nonetheless grateful to have been able to collaborate with the German scientist, a collaboration which resulted in 30 published papers.

Taken together, these stories show that cultural capital in the form of Western education holds weight when it comes to attaining higher academic positions in Palestinian HEIs, particularly for women researchers. Although, one's Western degree did not have an immediate influence on researchers' ability to maintain connections with center scholars, in some cases, it equipped them with the linguistic capital needed to forge new connections. As for social capital, it can be concluded that it had the most significant impact since it allowed an early-career researcher with the least resources in terms of research infrastructure, linguistic competence, and knowledge of publishing conventions to overcome debilitating isolation and to participate in mainstream scientific communities.

Conclusion

Although the findings generated from this study are based on the career stories of nine researchers only, the rich narratives reveal the significant barriers

faced by Palestinian academics and particularly what Gazan researchers had to go through prior to the war and under besiegement. Among the key insights that emerged during the interviews and the data analysis stage, and one I had not anticipated, was that when it came to asking the participants specific questions about their perceived difficulties with writing and the English language, it seemed that this aspect of research was the least of their concerns. They wanted to spend more time discussing non-discursive barriers. This was even the case with those participants who described themselves as having limited proficiency in English. This observation is not made to suggest that Palestinian scholars do not face issues with language and writing for English-medium journals, nor is it to underestimate the added burden of multilingual scholars having to write up their research results in English (Curry & Lillis, 2019). My intent here is to emphasize the fact that Palestinian researchers face so many material, non-discursive obstacles that they must overcome to be able to carry out the research in the first place before reaching the stage where they have to negotiate the discursive barriers.

Another notable finding from the study emphasizes that among the various forms of capital—cultural, linguistic, and social—social capital emerged as particularly impactful. Mentorship plays a key role in compensating for the lack of other forms of capital and facilitating the participation of scholars in mainstream academic communities, even when personal linkages are maintained from a long distance. Thus, there are many ways in which academic institutions can support and connect with Palestinian academics and researchers. Already, efforts like The Palestine Crisis Scholarship Scheme to support displaced Gazan students and academics are being put in place (Oxford University, 2024). When planning these programs, it is crucial to build into them continued support for Palestinian researchers who choose to return to their home institutions.

Moreover, since strict gatekeeping practices and high publishing costs emerged as major obstacles to publishing, there are a number of recommendations for international journal publishers and editors: (i) open access journals should waive their publication fees for Palestinian scholars and other academics working from underdeveloped nations, especially when the studies they want to publish are not funded by grants. Such initiatives align with broader calls for open access policies and institutional archive programs that eliminate cost barriers for authors (Salager-Meyer, 2008). (ii) Scientific journal gatekeepers are advised to adopt more equity-driven journal-based criteria to evaluate studies by authors affiliated with universities from the Global South. (iii) International journals should implement author-helpful policies to accommodate periphery scholars who do not possess the required

linguistic capital or knowledge of discourse conventions but have qualified and worthy research.

While the fate of many Gazans, including the participants in this study, remains uncertain amid the destruction of their homes and institutions, some universities in the West Bank have demonstrated remarkable steadfastness by continuing their research and supporting the learning of Gazan students through online courses. Hence, during these tumultuous times, it is crucial to recognize and support the ongoing academic efforts in the West Bank while continuing to document the experiences of these scholars to counteract the erasure of intellectual and cultural heritage resulting from the war. The conditions described in this paper apply to other scientific communities operating in conflict zones and facing existential threats. From Palestine to Ukraine, Lebanon, Yemen, Syria, Sudan and beyond, the hardships and barriers imposed on academics at risk call for a shared need for international support systems to protect the right to knowledge and academic discourse in conflict-affected regions.

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