The lived experiences of English language teachers in conflict-affected settings: a study of the Palestinian context

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on
the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy
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Abbreviations

CLT Communicative language teaching
DAAD German Academic Exchange Service
EAL English as an additional language
ECFR European Council on Foreign Relations
EiE Education in emergencies
EFL English as a foreign language
EIL English as an international language
ELF English as a lingua franca
ELT English language teaching
ESL English as a second language
GCPEA Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack
GCSE General Certificate of Secondary Education
ICRC International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP Internally displaced person
IELTS International English Language Testing System
IIE Institute of International Education
INEE Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies
INGO International non-governmental organisation
LTC Language teacher cognition
LTI Language teacher identity
LWC Language of wider communication
NGO Non-governmental organisation
NNS Non-native speaker
NS Native speaker
OCHA United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OHCHR United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner
oPt occupied Palestinian territory
PA Palestinian National Authority
P2P people to people
PRIO Peace Research Institute Oslo
SAT Scholastic Aptitude Test
SLA Second language acquisition
ST Standard English
TOEFL Test of English as a Foreign Language
UCDP Uppsala Conflict Data Program
UN United Nations
UNESCO United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund
UNRPR United Nations Relief for Palestinian Refugees agency
UNRWA United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees
UNSC United Nations Security Council
UNSCR United Nations Security Council Resolution
USAID United States Agency for International Development
USDS United States Department of State
USIA United States Information Agency

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Abstract

Lacie Raymond

The lived experiences of English language teachers in conflict-affected settings: a study of the Palestinian context

English language instruction is a priority for low, middle and high income countries. English unlocks educational and occupational possibilities, and is the global lingua franca par excellence. In conflict and post-conflict settings, its utility goes beyond social and economic mobility; English can arguably act as a neutral, politically disengaged alternative to languages associated with a destabilising threat. Given the international demand, English teachers regularly embark on short and long term experiences to teach, train and develop curricula in situations of recent or ongoing conflict. As very little is known about the impact of the sociopolitical environment on these educators, this study investigates the lived experiences of English language teachers in conflict-affected settings.

Using hermeneutic phenomenology (or lived experience research) as a theoretical and applied methodology, this research focuses on the experiences of educators who taught English abroad to adult learners in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), specifically East Jerusalem and the West Bank. The teachers were mobilised through international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and government-affiliated educational diplomacy initiatives. Phenomenological (or open-unstructured) interviews were conducted and the resulting data was analysed iteratively, then organised into thematic categories for coherence.

The research explores the role of the English language in the Palestinian context and the act of teaching English under occupation, in addition to foreign language education against the backdrop of ethno-national conflict. While the language teachers' identities and political views emerged as central to their experiences, a number of other findings were identified, such as deficits in sociocultural training, discomfort with positionality in unilateral exchanges, and the impact of being a witness to the conflict in the oPt. These observations result in suggestions for more ethical and productive interventions. The recommendations include fostering equitable exchanges, providing adequate sociopolitical, cultural, educational and psychosocial training, and generating support systems and offering guidance.

Keywords: *teacher lived experience*; *English as a lingua franca*; *educational diplomacy*; *English in Palestine*; *foreign language education*; *conflict-affected settings*

Chapter 1 | Introduction and the Palestinian Context

1.1 Introduction to study

Education aid and exchanges[1], particularly those that involve language education, have long been an important tool for public diplomacy (Nye, 2004). While the participants of these exchanges may not see themselves as furthering any particular foreign policy agenda (Gagnon et al., 2014; van Ommering, 2020), the impact of these initiatives is both far-reaching and elusive; the extent to which they affect host communities, visiting scholars and diplomatic missions is difficult to measure (Bettie, 2015). Moreover, assumptions about the value of education, specifically that it is a universal good (Burde et al., 2017; Gallagher et al., 2019; van Ommering, 2020), can further obscure their influence. This work hones in on one specific type of aid and exchange: language education as public (or educational) diplomacy in conflict-affected settings.

Since the 1990s, education-based interventions have increasingly been used to address concerns about conflict (Burde et al., 2017) and post-conflict societies (the latter being a term to describe smaller states with internal conflicts) (Gagnon et al., 2014; Hozić, 2014), particularly in the aftermath of 11th September 2001, when conflict-affected and fragile states were increasingly seen as a threat to the international community (Burde et al., 2017; Nye, 2004; Snow, 2008). In these contexts, education is considered to be a stabilising force (Burde et al., 2017; Milton, 2018b), which when facilitated through international partnerships, can shape public opinion and promote human security. Coinciding with an increase in education aid and exchange, the demand for English language skills has also risen globally (Crystal, 2012). This has made English language education, a field that is associated with intercultural communication due to its worldwide expansion (Erling, 2017), a prime venue for educational diplomacy. Thus, English language instructors are frequently mobilised to teach, develop curricula and train teachers in conflict and post-conflict settings provided that the immediate threat of violence has (presumably) passed.

[1] While the experiences investigated in this study are often classified as exchanges or volunteer projects, they are also meant to be capacity-building initiatives that improve English language education abroad. For example, the teacher's presence and expertise (i.e., as a native speaker, teacher trainer, curriculum designer, etc.) is often conceptualised as a resource to distribute by the sponsoring programme. Moreover, there may be political implications for choosing or pursuing certain local partnerships for projects which may not be disclosed to the participants. Therefore, as they function as both people to people (P2P) exchanges and aid, the two terms are used in conjunction throughout this work, and at times, with little differentiation

A key factor that differentiates public diplomacy initiatives from other types of interventions is their reliance on people to people (P2P) contact through non-governmental individuals and organisations (Nye, 2004), in which the involved parties may not be given specialised training or foreign policy briefings (Bettie, 2015). A hands-off approach is meant to provide for a more fruitful and sincere exchange that appears less driven by governmental interest (Bettie, 2015; Snow, 2008). This practice, combined with the aforementioned assumption about education being largely positive, has resulted in an abundance of English language educators who participate in public diplomacy programmes as exchange scholars, but that often (but not always) have very limited knowledge about the host community, the context of conflict and the implications (for both themselves and their students/colleagues) of working in conflict-affected settings (Burde et al., 2017; Kester, 2021; Millican et al., 2021; Milton, 2018a; Phipps, 2014).

In short, this research has one primary objective: to better understand the experiences of English language teachers who take part in education aid and exchange programmes in conflict and post-conflict zones. The specific focus is the Palestinian context. Palestine, or the geographical area known as the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) which includes East Jerusalem and the West Bank[2], is a frequent recipient of education capacity-building projects. Moreover, the oPt's Anglophone colonial past under the British Mandate, its use of English as a lingua franca (ELF) between ethno-linguistic groups in conflict (i.e., Hebrew and Arabic language users) (Amara, 2003), and its cultural and linguistic isolation from the wider international community due to restrictions on mobility (i.e., enforced monoculturalism) (Imperiale et al., 2017), make it a complex yet relevant and appropriate setting for research on English language education as public diplomacy.

Through the study participants' narratives, this project sheds light on some of the long-standing assumptions regarding educational diplomacy, and their implications for visiting educators and host communities. Furthermore, it offers a greater understanding of the experiences of English language teachers in conflict-affected zones, which may become an increasingly common scenario as English continues to be the world's foremost lingua franca (Crystal, 2012) and the number of armed conflicts rises (Rustad, 2024). This research aims to better equip programme administrators and teachers to not only organise and engage in meaningful exchanges, but to prevent them from doing harm. While not explicitly part of a peacebuilding or peacekeeping agenda, quality education and

[2] Gaza, while part of the oPt, is excluded from this research

more equitable exchanges are likely to be peace promoting[3]. In addition, this work endeavours to further ethical practices by highlighting the need for adequate training and support for language teachers who participate in the aforementioned programmes.

It is worth noting that one of the strengths of this research (and as is often the case, its weakness) is its interdisciplinarity. Much like situations of conflict themselves, this study resists reductive approaches to categorisation. Theoretically, it necessarily spans across the fields of applied linguistics, education and conflict, political science, international development and conflict studies. In its application, this dissertation unifies narratives from a wide-range of participants. While all of the research subjects were foreign English language instructors primarily teaching adult learners in the oPt, their profiles were diverse, demographically and otherwise. For example, many respondents were sponsored by government-affiliated public diplomacy initiatives, but others were mobilised through programmes operated by international non-governmental organisations (INGOs); most were assigned projects at third-level institutions in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, but some worked with adult education in non-formal capacities; the majority of the teachers spent an extended period of time in the oPt (i.e., for several months, but generally not beyond two academic years), but a select few embarked on programmes that were structured around briefer sojourns (of 10 days or less). To prioritise anonymity, these details are not always denoted in the participant profile (*Table 2*), yet this approach is not a deficit in the findings: the themes that emerged from the research are significant because, although they may be elaborated on in different ways, they reverberate across a variety of teacher interviews regardless of the diversity of their profiles. Finally, while the focus of this research is the Palestinian context, which (like all conflicts) is unique and engages a very specific body of research, many of the observations made may speak to other conflict-affected environments as well.

1.2 Coming to the research

In phenomenology, the researcher tends to arrive at their research questions because of their professional and educational profiles, not despite them (Dibley, 2022). It is their own lived experience that enables them to identify topics that merit further investigation. Moreover, in the interpretation of data, having a shared lived experience with the research participants is seen as an asset, not a liability (Neubauer et al., 2019). That being said,

[3] Khan (2000) notes that "the positive face [of education] goes beyond the provision of education for peace programmes, reflecting the cumulative benefits of the provision of good quality education" (p. v) (*Section 2.3.2*)

similar to the respondents, I also have experience teaching English at universities in the oPt with a programme that promotes educational diplomacy. While carrying out my teaching fellowship, many questions surfaced about the purpose and impact of the project I was assigned (and my role in it). This was further complicated by the surrounding sociopolitical environment in Palestine. In addition to the context of occupation, the primary national culture in which I was socialised has historically been involved in the conflict as a key supporter of Israel, which may have influenced how I was perceived by the host community.

The proposal for this research was drafted against a backdrop of checkpoints and the everyday challenges and victories of living and teaching as an outsider amongst conflict and occupation. Following the years spent developing this research, I continue to have many questions and uncertainties about how to best undertake such experiences. Nonetheless, I believe that this work captures the key issues at hand, especially because of the way that I came to this research – through lived experience.

1.3 Research questions

The theoretical and applied methodology for this research is hermeneutic phenomenology (also known as lived experience research). As previewed in *Section 1.1*, this work is driven by one objective: to better understand a particular lived experience. Thus, the project is guided by the following research question:

> What are the lived experiences of English language teachers who work abroad in conflict-affected settings, specifically in the occupied Palestinian territory?

As discussed at length in *Chapter 4*, research in the phenomenological tradition does not seek to evaluate, measure or classify, nor does it validate data or generate theory, although it can be used to inform the development of theory and/or recommendations (Cooper, 2014; McConnell-Henry et al., 2011). Instead, it tries to capture the experiences of the research participants and accordingly gain a better understanding of the meaning that they give to the particular experience in question (Dibley et al., 2020). Therefore, as the researcher does not assume that something is present (i.e., the respondents direct the researcher towards what is significant) (Peoples, 2020), there are no secondary research questions. That being said, when hypothesising about areas of interest that would likely emerge when projecting this research in its initial phases, some of the following topics came to mind:

(-) What are the potential benefits and challenges for English language teachers before, during and after their experience?

(-) Do the English language teachers develop any coping mechanisms or find any solutions to overcome the aforementioned challenges?

(-) How does the experience in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) affect the teachers' understanding of their roles as educators, and the role of education in conflict or post-conflict settings more broadly?

(-) In what ways does their experience impact the teachers' views about teaching English as a subject, in Palestine or otherwise?

While many of the research participants touched on all or some of the above topics in their interviews, the study's findings are organised thematically based on the teachers' response to the primary research question. In other words, while these questions are not directly addressed, the content in *Chapter 5*, *Chapter 6* and *Chapter 7* (i.e., the study's findings) does touch on them to varying extents.

1.4 Outline of dissertation

Chapter 1, the introductory chapter of this thesis, presents the rationale for undertaking the research. It establishes the relationship between language education (specifically English as a foreign language (EFL)) and internationally-led education aid and exchange interventions in conflict and post-conflict settings. As discussed in *Chapter 2*, these are often public diplomacy tools that are effective due to their use of soft power to influence foreign policy. This chapter closes with an overview of the conflict in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) and highlights some events between 2010 and 2020 that may have impacted the visiting English language teachers' experiences. The discussion on conflict is not intended to be a thorough examination of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, rather, it is meant to contextualise the specific context of conflict that is described in this study.

The literature review for the dissertation is divided into two parts to best address the interdisciplinary nature of this study. The first part, *Chapter 2*, explores education in situations of conflict, particularly educational diplomacy between the Global North and the Global South and/or (post-)conflict states. It explains how conflict is conceptualised for the purposes of this work, gives an overview of the aforementioned interventions in conflict and post-conflict societies and draws on the field of Education in Emergencies (EiE) for a

theoretical basis. A key concept, the “two faces of education” (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000) is reviewed here, as are other facets related to teaching in conflict-affected settings. Considering that this work focuses on the lived experiences of English language teachers who have experience with adult education in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, it looks at imbalances in aid between primary, secondary and tertiary education. The chapter closes with an in-depth look at the actors involved in education aid and exchange (i.e., such as secular missionaries, witnesses, privileged informants, etc.), including the power imbalances between such actors, and the way that they use their position to influence societies.

The second part, *Chapter 3*, investigates the connection between language, identity and conflict, with a particular focus on English language education in the oPt and beyond. It starts by tracing the emergence of national identity and its association with language as facilitated through formal education. The chapter then looks at how identity is mobilised in ethno-national conflicts, in addition to historical precedents in foreign language education in such conflicts. To better understand how languages function in the geographical area that forms the setting for this study, particular attention is dedicated to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in terms of the interaction between Hebrew, Arabic and English. Before a thorough analysis of English language education in situations of conflict and the oPt specifically, language teacher identity, language teacher cognition and the sociocultural turn in language teaching are discussed to better understand how the research participants make sense of their experience in such a contentious environment.

Chapter 4 is dedicated exclusively to the research methodology used for this project, hermeneutic phenomenology, otherwise known as lived experience research. Divided into two parts, the first gives an overview of the theoretical framework for this study’s methodology, looking at hermeneutic phenomenology as philosophy. It discusses what is (and what isn’t) considered phenomenology and looks at how it has evolved from its origins in the work of Husserl to Heidegger and Gadamer. The key guiding principles of hermeneutic phenomenology that have informed this study are identified (i.e., the fusion of horizons, the hermeneutic circle and the temporality of truth). The second part then explains how the researcher used the philosophical precepts as an applied methodology and gives greater detail about the researcher’s positionality. While lived experience research does not adhere to set methodological procedures, this chapter describes how the research was undertaken, remained ethical and maintained its academic integrity. Furthermore, extensive information regarding the participant profiles, interviewing techniques, data collection and data analysis can be found.

As discussed in *Chapter 4*, while this study isolates themes, they are conceptualised as containers to organise thought. In other words, while a traditional thematic analysis was not carried out, the findings are organised into three thematic chapters. The first is *Chapter 5*, which is centred around the notion of disempowerment. Often, in education aid and exchange from the Global North to the Global South, participants from the Global South are portrayed as disempowered. However, this chapter aims to illustrate how some participants from the Global North also express feeling disempowered by these interventions, particularly when they are designed in a way that reinforces neocolonial approaches to education. It identifies deficits in organisation, training and support that prevent the visiting teachers from feeling confident in their projects, especially as they struggle to access important knowledge regarding the cultural and sociopolitical context in the oPt. Moreover, it highlights the unilateral (rather than reciprocal) nature of educational exchange for public diplomacy, in addition to the innate power imbalances and/or asymmetrical relationships between the visiting teachers and their host communities.

The second thematic chapter, *Chapter 6*, delves into a number of issues regarding the act of bearing witness to situations of conflict. Bearing witness has a long-standing tradition in the oPt and is a lens through which a variety of issues relevant to the participants' experiences can be approached (i.e., the barriers that are intended to prevent witnessing and how the teachers' accounts of the oPt are received by others upon the completion of their projects). It distinguishes between first-hand witnessing and secondary witnessing, problematising the differentiation between being a witness and being a participant (despite one's outsider status) in a conflict. Some key factors that impact the teachers' understanding of their experiences in the oPt, specifically related to identity and positionality, are investigated. Drawing on phenomenology as philosophy, the chapter also illustrates the disconnect between experience as lived and experience as conceptualised or imagined. In doing so, it touches on the work of Palestinian scholar Said and Orientalism, exploring how the Palestinian narrative coalesces with the expectations of the visiting teachers. It closes by suggesting that the act of bearing witness can be a coping mechanism in conflict-affected situations.

The last thematic findings chapter, *Chapter 7*, is dedicated to English language education in the Palestinian context, or English language education under occupation, as understood from the point of view of the study participants. The language's function as both a global lingua franca and a lingua franca between competing ethno-national/ethno-linguistic communities (i.e., Israelis and Palestinians, Hebrew and Arabic) comes to the

fore, although its association with colonialism is acknowledged. Moreover, a closer look is given to the motivation for learning English in the oPt, particularly in its relation to pragmatism (i.e., employment, education, mobility, etc.), self-expression, self-preservation and similar to *Chapter 6*, the need to tell one's story (or self-representation). Throughout the chapter, the impact of conflict on English language teaching and learning in the oPt is investigated, including the consequences of enforced immobility or enforced monoculturalism and interrupted education. A discussion on the challenges of locating resources, selecting content that is fit for purpose and navigating cultural practices ensues. The chapter closes following the participants' reflections on their teaching projects in the oPt; they often characterise them as being hugely significant to their personal and professional lives.

Finally, *Chapter 8* forms the conclusion of this work. It gives an overview of the study's key findings and makes recommendations for fostering equitable educational exchanges. It also suggests that programme sponsors offer adequate training, support and guidance throughout all stages of the teacher experience. The limitations of the study are then acknowledged and areas for future research are identified. Furthermore, additional ways in which the project contributes to knowledge are outlined, specifically its application of hermeneutic phenomenology to situations of conflict, its problematisation of academic and lay discourses of conflict, and its focus on teacher-practitioners (rather than recipients) of education aid and exchange.

1.5 Setting the context: occupation and conflict in Palestine

1.5.1 Identifying the terms

As described in *Chapter 2*, the language that is used to classify conflicts can communicate a political position or strategy (Brockhill & Cordell, 2019; Cuppuleri, 2022). Choosing terminology in the Israeli-Palestinian context is not straightforward and many organisations use a variety of terms interchangeably. My use of Palestine and the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) reflects common usages by international organisations (i.e., European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), World Health Organisation (WHO), etc.). In particular, the oPt is intended to refer to the physical (rather than political) area, including East Jerusalem and the West Bank (Gaza is excluded from this research) that has been occupied by Israel

since the Six-Day War of 1967; geographically, this is the conflict-setting under investigation in this work.

While the following section attempts to contextualise the sociopolitical environment described within this dissertation, my aim is to shift the focus to the visiting teachers' experiences of it. Rather than a(n) (dis)interest in the political situation in Palestine, it is a way to recognise my academic limitations: the political situation in the oPt goes beyond both the scope of this dissertation and my expertise. In addition, the situation in the region is rapidly evolving, particularly since the beginning of the ongoing crisis, from 7th October 2023. Therefore, the terms commonly used at the time of writing may change in the near future. That being said, all materials used to recruit participants for this project (*Appendix A*, *Appendix B* & *Appendix C*), including my personal correspondence and the research question, exclusively use the term "Palestine" or "the Palestinian context". While all selected terminology communicates a position and will have an impact on the data, I believe that the terms chosen to advertise this project best enabled the participants to comfortably engage with the research question in any way that they felt appropriate.

1.5.2 Historical events

For this study, English teachers with professional experience in two areas of the oPt, specifically East Jerusalem and the West Bank, were interviewed. As previously mentioned (*Section 1.5.1*) and further discussed in *Chapter 4*, Gaza was intentionally excluded from the sample. All of the participants carried out their teaching projects between 2010 and 2020. In order to contextualise the setting of this study, a brief timeline will be given that includes historical events that are either referenced in the literature review or were alluded to by the study participants. In addition, some political situations that may have had an impact on the narratives, particularly in regards to the time frame referenced above, are included. Again, although presented in chronological order, this timeline is not intended to be a cohesive account but rather a collection of incidents that enable the reader to better understand the references within this dissertation.

1.5.2.1 Ottoman Empire, World War I and the Balfour Declaration

As referred to in *Chapter 3*, Palestine was under Ottoman rule in the centuries preceding World War I (WWI). In anticipation of the fall of the Ottoman Empire, colonial negotiations between Britain and France led to the division of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region into spheres of influence, which was outlined in the *Sykes-Picot Agreement* of 1916

(UN, 2024). Thus, as previously agreed, Britain took administrative control of the area known as Palestine (from the west of the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea) from the Ottomans during WWI.

Prior to taking official control of the region, which was formalised by the League of Nations in 1922 with the British Mandate (referenced extensively in *Chapter 3*), Britain's foreign secretary drafted the *Balfour Declaration*[4] of 1917. The *Balfour Declaration* is one of the most consequential documents in Palestinian history and is discussed in *Chapter 6* by a respondent. The document endorsed Zionism[5] and stated that Palestine was to become the "national home for the Jewish people", although at the time of signing the "Arab majority" was roughly "94 percent" of the population, while the Jewish population was estimated to be around "6 percent" (Khalidi, 2020, p. 23). Moreover, the majority of the Jewish minority was non-Zionist and "culturally similar" to the Christian and Muslim population; they were seen (and self-identified) as part of the indigenous population[6] (Khalidi, 2020, p. 20). Once the terms of the *Balfour Declaration* were adopted during the British Mandate, the door opened for Jewish immigration to Palestine from abroad.

1.5.2.2 Partition, the Nakba and establishing the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees

In the years following, wide-scale emigration from Eastern Europe to Palestine took place, especially during the 1930s as the Jewish community increasingly faced Nazi persecution (UN, 2024). Rebellions, riots and a series of other violent incidents ensued: on the part of Arabs challenging Jewish immigration and British rule, and on the part of Jewish residents

[4] The Balfour Declaration (1917) is well-known for the following statement: "His Majesty's government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country" (Khalidi, 2020, p. 23)

[5] According to Riches and Palmowski (2021) in the Oxford Dictionary of Contemporary World History, Zionism is "a term used to describe the modern movement founded by Herzl which aimed at establishing a Jewish homeland in Palestine as the only possible way in which Jews could escape from centuries of discrimination and persecution. The term is derived from Mount Zion in Jerusalem, which has been used as a symbol for the Jewish homeland in Palestine since the time of the Babylonian captivity, in the sixth century bc. Herzl's idea itself was nothing new, but he gave it an organizational articulation through the World Zionist Organization (WZO), founded in 1897. It sponsored Jewish emigration to Palestine as a prelude to establishing a Jewish state, and lobbied foreign governments to support its aims"

[6] "In this first decade of the twentieth century, a large proportion of the Jews living in Palestine … were mostly ultra-Orthodox [or Haredim] and non-Zionist, mizrahi (eastern) or Sephardic (descendants of Jews expelled from Spain), urbanites of Middle Eastern or Mediterranean origin who often spoke Arabic or Turkish, even if only as a second or third language. In spite of marked religious distinctions between them and their neighbors, they were not foreigners, nor were they Europeans or settlers: they … saw themselves, and were seen as Jews who were part of the indigenous Muslim-majority society" (Khalidi, 2020, p. 20).

in Palestine, again contesting British rule, particularly following the release of the *White Paper* (1939) which sought to limit Jewish immigration and counteract some policies established in the *Balfour Declaration* (UN, 2024). As Khalidi (2020) argues, the experience of colonialism in Palestine was becoming increasingly unique – from the perspective of Palestinians, they were not only confronted with a foreign colonial power (the British), but also with Jewish settlers mobilised through an internationally-funded Zionist movement, which while initially supported by Britain, were a separate entity (Khalidi, 2020).

As noted in *Chapter 3*, the British Mandate officially came to an end in 1948. Having labelled the conflict in Palestine as "irreconcilable"[7] nearly a decade earlier, the British turned over the "question of Palestine" to the United Nations (UN) in 1947 (UN, 2024). The UN proposed the Partition Plan (1947) or United Nations Resolution 181, which divided Palestine into two states, a Jewish and an Arab state, with Jerusalem (the desired capital for both states) remaining under UN trusteeship (UN, 2024). However, the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 led to the Nakba[8], translated from Arabic to English as the catastrophe. The Nakba is the widespread displacement and dispossession of Palestinians who, after many generations, are prohibited from returning to their place of origin (i.e., the refusal of the Right of Return) (UN, 1978). Although classified as refugees (along with their descendants), they are excluded from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) mandate (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2015). Instead, in 1948 the United Nations Relief for Palestinian Refugees agency (UNRPR) was established in conjunction with a special fund to provide support to over 500,000 Palestinians (UN, 2024). The UNRPR was later replaced by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which continues to support Palestinians today, 5.9 million of

[7] The UN (2024) cites the *UK Peel Commission Report* of 1937 as the source

[8] Khalidi (2020) emphasises the ideological importance of this event: "For all Palestinians … the Nakba formed an enduring touchstone of identity … It marked an abrupt collective disruption, a trauma that every Palestinian shares in one way or another, personally or through their parents or grandparents. At the same time as the Nakba provided a new focus for their collective identity, it broke up families and communities, dividing and dispersing Palestinians among multiple countries and distinct sovereignties" (p. 49)

whom qualify for aid[9] (UNRWA, 2024). As discussed in *Chapter 3*, UNRWA[10] is responsible for educating a significant portion of the population in the oPt and provides English language education.

As previously mentioned in this chapter, the Six-Day War of 1967 marks the time that Israel began occupying the oPt, including the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and started expanding Jewish settlements within the oPt, similar to those referenced by a participant in *Chapter 6*. Moving some years forward, the First Intifada (1987-1993), translated into English as the uprising or revolt against the Israeli occupation, was described by one study participant as the political turning point that made it increasingly difficult for internationals and international educators to visit the oPt[11]. Perhaps as a reaction to these restrictions on mobility, the Second Intifada (2000-2005) saw an increase in the organisation of activist or solidarity tourism, which is discussed in *Chapter 2*. Nonetheless, as the Second Intifada came to a close, the oPt saw much destruction, violence and isolation (i.e., as a participant refers to in *Chapter 4*, the "security fence, the apartheid wall, the barrier, whatever you choose to call it"[12], began construction in 2002). Furthermore, it marked the death of Yasser Arafat (1929-2004), the long-time leader of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the Palestinian National Authority (PA).

1.5.2.3 Muslim travel ban, Jerusalem as capital and defunding United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees

Moving to the late 2010s, three events occurred that had an impact on the participants' experiences. The first, while not directly related to the conflict in Palestine, was reported by a teacher as being ideologically distressing for her students, and by extension, herself:

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[9] According to UNRWA (2024): "Palestine refugees are defined as 'persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict.' UNRWA services are available to all those living in its area of operations who meet this definition, who are registered with the Agency and who need assistance. The descendants of Palestine refugee males, including adopted children, are also eligible for registration. When the Agency began operations in 1950, it was responding to the needs of about 750,000 Palestine refugees. Today, some 5.9 million Palestine refugees are eligible for UNRWA services" (https://www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees, accessed 3 September 2024)

[10] Scholars such as Irfan (2023) argue that "Palestinians do not look to UNRWA as an apolitical, humanitarian agency. Instead … many view the organization as having the ulterior motive of attempting to promote a political solution that ran contrary to their interests, in collaboration with its Western donors" (Norman, 2024, p. 490)

[11] Simon (10) says, before "the First Intifada, it was much easier for international scholars to teach, to be present and to teach. Which means folks had lots more direct interactions with native speakers of English"

[12] Simon, 10

US Executive Order 13769, known colloquially as the Muslim travel ban which was in place for three months in 2017. The second was the decision to move the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in 2018, an action that went against decades of precedents in foreign policy and symbolically denied Palestinian claims to the nexus of a homeland[13]. The third was the decision to remove US funding from UNRWA in 2018, which resulted in job losses in the education sector (it was reinstated in 2021). All three took place during the Trump administration (2017-2021) and therefore would have been particularly (but not exclusively) relevant to the teaching projects of American English language instructors[14].

1.5.2.4 Education, conflict and the occupied Palestinian territory

The teachers' accounts of witnessing or experiencing violence or intimidation in *Chapter 5*, *Chapter 6* and *Chapter 7* do not require evidence, as again, this work is meant to explore the visiting teachers' experience, not to validate their observations (see temporality of truth, *Chapter 4*). Nonetheless, to better understand the research, it is important to contextualise the educational environment where teaching and learning take place within the oPt. The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack's (GCPEA) most recent annual report published in 2024 gives a concise overview of the situation in the West Bank. For example, from 2022 to 2023, campuses reported the use of tear gas and the firing of weapons (using both live ammunition and/or rubber bullets) near or at schools, including institutions of higher education and those facilitated by UNRWA (GCPEA, 2024). Various educational institutions incurred structural damage, while some campuses were subject to raids, resulting in the arrests or detention of students, administrative staff and/or faculty (Scholars at Risk, 2023; WAFA, 2024). In addition, prolonged detentions at checkpoints have been reported, as have the seizure of textbooks (GCPEA, 2024) and the vandalisation of student-led organisations on campus (Scholars at Risk, 2023). In terms of working conditions, local teachers regularly have substantial portions of their salaries withheld (Sawafta, 2024) and schools can face prolonged

[13] "President Donald Trump recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital, saying, 'We took Jerusalem off the table, so we don't have to talk about it anymore' … The center of the Palestinians' history, identity, culture, and worship was thus summarily disposed of without even the pretense of consulting their wishes" (Khalidi, 2020, p. 116)

[14] While not explicitly mentioned by the participants, it is useful to highlight the contrast between the US, UK and Irish relationship to the oPt. For example, "Ireland was the first European Union Member State to declare that a solution to the conflict in the Middle East had to be based on a fully sovereign Palestinian State" (Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland, 2024). Moreover, "for many years, Ireland was the only EU country not to have an Israeli embassy", and when "the Government finally announced its agreement to the opening of an embassy … in December 1993 … on the same day [it] invited the Palestine Liberation Organisation to open an office" as well (Brennock, 1996)

closures and/or are forced to switch to remote learning (UNRWA, 2024). That being said (and as discussed in *Chapter 3, Chapter 7* and *Chapter 8*) education is highly valued in Palestine. Thus, despite these challenges, literacy rates in the oPt are among the highest in the world (Irfan, 2023) and school attendance is generally stable (UNICEF, 2022).

1.6 Conclusion

This introductory chapter communicates the rationale for the study, its primary research question and how the researcher came to undertake this specific project. It also provides a synopsis of the key points and findings contained in each chapter. While fragmented, the brief historical background of the conflict in Palestine outlines notable events, documents and organisations referenced in this work. The next chapters take an interdisciplinary approach to explore the literature that is most relevant to the study.

Chapter 2 | Education in conflict-affected settings: Education aid, educational exchanges and soft power

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature on education aid and educational exchanges as a form of public diplomacy in conflict-affected settings. Considering that education in these contexts often involves interventions that are developed and implemented by actors from abroad who are based in the West and Global North, it also explores the potential impact of such interventions, both on the local community and on the actors/practitioners themselves. It begins by exploring how situations of conflict and occupation are conceptualised, situating conflict and post-conflict societies along a continuum. It then assesses the role of education, specifically higher education, during and in the aftermath of conflict. Next, some key issues regarding the donor-recipient relationship between the Global North and South are highlighted. The final subsections reframe the discussion within the context of soft power and foreign policy.

2.2 Describing conflict-affected settings

2.2.1 Terms that resist definition: conflict, post-conflict and everything in-between

As a point of departure, a basic working definition of conflict for this research is “the pursuit of incompatible goals by various social actors” (Kester, 2020, p. 4). Theoretically speaking, conflict is not “in itself negative or destructive, and indeed is often essential to transformation and change” (Millican et al., 2021, p. 573). However, while a distinct concept, what is often associated with conflict is violence. Violence refers to the “social actors’ attempt to achieve their ends through combative and harmful means”, and is often a key feature of inter-state and intra-state disputes (Kester, 2020, p. 4). Thus, terms such as conflict and post-conflict are frequently used in reference to recent and ongoing wars in both formal and informal discussions, particularly since the end of the Cold War (Hozić, 2014). At times, the terms conflict and post-conflict appear in conjunction or are even interchangeable when exploring topics that could broadly be applied to both a population or area that is currently experiencing a conflict, as well as to one that is still very much affected by a conflict that has, in one way or another, ended (or is perceived to have reached some sort of temporary conclusion).

When looking at the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, specifically prior to the crisis which began

on 7th October 2023, the sociopolitical situation was described in a variety of ways, such as but not limited to, 1) a protracted conflict[15] (Abuelaish & Yousufzai, 2023; ICRC, 2019), 2) an intractable conflict[16] (Rosler et al., 2023; McDowell & Braniff, 2014), 3) a frozen conflict[17] (Berk, 2017; Klosek et al., 2021), 4) a statehood conflict[18] (Kyris, 2022), 5) an identity conflict[19] (Goerzig, 2010), 6) an ethno-national conflict[20] (Yehuda, 2023), 7) an occupation[21] or protracted occupation (Brockhill & Cordell, 2019) and as 8) a post-conflict setting (Rabaia et al., 2019; Samuels et al., 2017), the latter of which will be the focus of the following paragraphs[22]. Looking to the field of peacebuilding, another way of understanding conflict would be to use Galtung's (1969) concept of negative and positive peace: while negative peace is "understood as the absence of direct, personal violence", positive peace is the "absence of structural or cultural violence"[23], or the obtainment of

[15] The term protracted conflict is attributed to the international relations scholar Azar, "who characterized protracted social conflicts in terms of their intractability and longevity" (ICRC, 2019, p. 966). They can be "episodic, cyclical, 'frozen', long-lived insurgencies, long-standing situations of occupation, or wars between States where violence simmers at a relatively lower level than one might traditionally associate with armed conflict. Conflicts may appear to be resolved but later 'relapse'" (ICRC, 2019, p. 967).

[16] Intractable conflicts "are violent, revolve around goals viewed as existential, perceived as having a zero sum nature and being irresolvable, occupy a central position in involved societies, require immense material and psychological investment, and last for at least 25 years" (Rosler et al., 2023, p. 364). To clarify, rather than "a negative sum (or lose-lose) situation and a positive sum (or win-win) situation, a zero-sum situation describes a win-lose constellation in which a gain on one side implies a loss for the other side, such as for example cutting a cake" (Goerzig, 2010, p. 7)

[17] A frozen conflict can be defined as a "protracted, post-war conflict process, characterised by the absence of stable peace" (Smetana & Ludvik, 2018, p. 2). The word "frozen" was intended to "highlight the fact that although the full-scale fighting had already stopped in the particular case, the conflict was not fully resolved, and the situation could easily slip back into violence" (Smetana & Ludvik, 2018, p. 1)

[18] Statehood conflicts "are those emanating from incompatible claims to and substantial efforts at statehood over the same territory … A variety of other regional or global actors, like states or international organizations, are also involved to a greater or lesser degree … often defined by intractability, typical solutions of such conflicts include forceful or peaceful (re)integration to the state from which secession is attempted or, more rarely, independent statehood" (Kyris, 2022, p. 1452)

[19] An identity conflict refers to a "protracted zero-sum" struggle during which "groups feel that their identity (the sense of oneself) is threatened" (Goerzig, 2010, p. 7) (see *Section 3.2.3*)

[20] In ethno-national conflicts there is an "incongruity between … ethno-national boundaries and territorial-statist borders and … self-determination demands over the same territory" (Yehuda, 2023, p. 44); In the case of Israel-Palestine, "a more accurate representation is of a conflict between Zionist Jews and native Palestinian Arabs (Muslims and Christians), generally over the question of who politically controls the territory of the land of Israel/Palestine" (pp. 55-56)

[21] Occupation can be thought of as "the government of the inhabitants of one state by the armed forces, and other agents, of another state or coalition of states. It involves the claim to exercise authority … The boundary between occupation and empire or occupation and intervention can also appear to be a fluid one" (Stirk, 2009, p. 2)

[22] Additional labels for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be found in the work of Berk (2017), who refers to the Palestinian Authority as a post-Soviet frozen conflict or a post-Soviet secessionist state, and Konyukhovskiy & Grigoriadis (2020), who refer to the conflict as a proxy war

[23] Structural violence "is an indirect form of violence built into a violent political, economic and social structure … manifesting itself in the deprivation of basic human needs such as survival, well-being, identity and

"social justice" (Sharp, 2020, p. 124). While incidents of "physical force … such as killing and injuring" tend to be more visible, structural or cultural violence is "underrepresented in theoretical and political discussions" (Brockhill & Cordell, 2019, p. 983). This sheds light on how ongoing conflicts can appear to be inactive or active, as well as low-intensity or high-intensity in terms of physical and/or psychological violence. Within the Israeli-Palestinian context, a conflict that was identified by Galtung (1972) as asymmetrical[24], there is disagreement on how the notions of conflict and peace are understood. For example, Leshem and Halperin's (2020) research shows how Israelis (the high-power group) tend to associate positive peace with harmonious relationships or the absence of physical violence (similar to negative peace), while Palestinians (the low-power group) tend to associate positive peace with the absence of structural violence. This can lead to further conflict as the involved parties aim to achieve peace, but of different types (Leshem & Halperin, 2020). In fact, in their work, Leshem and Halperin (2020) connect an individual's association to peace with the desire for a single or two state-solution[25]. Meanwhile, in recent years organisations such as the World Bank have referred to the West Bank and Gaza as a fragile[26] non-state (or territory), but didn't label it as a site of active conflict until 2023 (this was done prior to 7th October) (World Bank, 2023; 2024). Contradictorily, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack's (GCPEA) reports, which have been released every two years since 2018, consistently rank Palestine as one of the top five sites worldwide where students and teachers directly experience harm[27] (2018, 2020, 2022, 2024). In short, there is huge variety and a large conceptual overlap in how conflicts and violence are classified, particularly in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This is symptomatic of a number of factors: 1) each situation of conflict is unique (Davies, 2004a); 2) there is little agreement on the defining features that distinguish one conflict from another (Cuppuleri, 2022), including a lack of legal terminology to describe

freedom" (Brockhill & Cordell, 2019, p. 983). Cultural violence "refers to certain aspects of culture, exemplified by religion, ideology, language, art, empirical science and formal science, that can be employed to justify, legitimise and normalise direct and structural violence" (Brockhill & Cordell, 2019, p. 983)

[24] In an asymmetric conflict, there is an "imbalance between the military capacity of the warring parties (e.g. in terms of weapon technology, equipment, intelligence information and number of troops)" (ICRC, 2023). This results in high-power and low-power groups (Leshem & Halperin, 2020)

[25] "We further hypothesize that, across societies, the stronger the association of peace with positive peace or structural peace compared to negative peace, the stronger the wish to share (1SS) rather than divide (2SS) the land" (Leshem & Halperin, 2020, p. 18380)

[26] According to the *FCS Historical Note* (2020), fragile situations are those with at least one of the following characteristics: weak institution and policy environments, the presence of a UN Department of Peace Operation (DPO) and/or a large influx of refugees leaving the area (World Bank, p. 2). In addition, the area cannot be considered a medium or high intensity conflict (measured by number of mortalities) (World Bank, 2020, p.2)

[27] Some organisations (the GCPEA prior to 2024 included), group their statistics for the West Bank and Gaza together under the larger umbrella of Palestine

conflict in international humanitarian law (ICRC, 2016); 3) conflict as a general phenomenon is undertheorised as research usually focuses on individual or specific conflicts (Klosek et al., 2021); and 4) the terms to describe conflict are often misleading (Cuppuleri, 2022) and, as Brinkerhoff (2006) claims, the "terminology applied to failed states, conflict and post-conflict … is often imprecise" (p. 4). Therefore, instead of relying on a singular, potentially reductive definition of what constitutes a conflict and/or post-conflict situation (both regarding Israel-Palestine and more broadly), it is essential to further interrogate how terms such as conflict and post-conflict function in academic, humanitarian and lay discourse[28] (Leshem & Halperin, 2020).

At first glance, the notions of conflict and post-conflict can seem to be in binary opposition: if conflict is equated with war (Hozić, 2014), then post-conflict is synonymous with peace, or at the very least, a time when "the threat of immediate violence has passed" (Quaynor, 2011, p. 35). However, the term post-conflict can also function in the opposite way: it can occupy "the space between war and peace, partaking of elements of both" (Wilson, 2014, p. 40). Moreover, it can emphasise the "messy transition rather than clear demarcation [which] characterizes post-conflict processes" (Katzenstein, 2014, p. xiii). In fact, most scholars argue that conflict should not be thought of as an isolated event or "clusters of events at a point in time", but as processes (Azar et al., 1978, p. 50) and/or systems involving a number of interconnected factors that lead to an armed response (Whitaker, 2020, cited in Millican et al., 2021). Furthermore, in Chetail's (2009) introduction to *Post-Conflict Peacebuilding: A Lexicon*, the author demonstrates how post-conflict is used in four different ways, identifying societies that are: 1) emerging from conflict, 2) in the aftermath of conflict, 3) at risk of relapsing into conflict, and 4) stuck in a grey area of "neither war nor peace" (Gagnon et al., 2014, p. 2). Similar to Brinkerhoff (2006) and Klosek et al. (2021), Gagnon et al. (2014) notice that "there are many studies on post-conflict societies, [yet] there is little questioning of the term or concept itself" (p. 2). This ambiguity in usage enables the "crafted" labels of conflict and post-conflict to be used in "highly politicized ways, where certain problems are thrown into focus and others downplayed" (McLeod, 2011, p. 595). Therefore, McLeod (2011), whose research assesses the impact of perceptions of conflict and post-conflict on a United Nations Security Council Resolution (i.e., UNSCR 1325 in Serbia), recommends that "attention should be paid to understanding how actors think about, relate to, and perceive, conflict, and post-conflict" as concepts (p. 597). Accordingly, some scholars who have critically evaluated the terms argue that "no society is 'post-conflict', since conflict is ubiquitous"

[28] Lay theories "describe the naive knowledge structures that people form and use in everyday life to understand concepts, events, and objects pertinent to their social reality … Although lay theories lack the rigor of scientific theories, people rely on them to understand, interpret, and predict their social world" (Leshem & Halperin, 2020, p. 18378)

(Ryan, 2013, p. 28). For example, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to find a state that hasn't experienced a recent violent and/or structural conflict either domestically or internationally (Gagnon et al., 2014), and the repercussions of conflict extend for generations (Davies, 2004a). Considering these observations, many questions regarding the spatial (i.e., where a conflict took place) and temporal (i.e., when a conflict took place) components of classifying conflicts may be raised (McLeod, 2011), such as: Why are some states strongly associated with a past conflict, while others are not? When does a situation become post-conflict rather than conflict, and for whom (Davies, 2004b)? And, when does a setting cease to be post-conflict altogether?

2.2.2 An invitation for intervention: the origins of post-conflict

The term post-conflict was first used in an official report entitled *An Agenda for Peace* (1992) authored by former United Nations Secretary-General (1992-1996) Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who was "one of the principal architects of post-conflict -- both as a concept and as a practice of international affairs" (Hozić, 2014, p. 21). The document intended to improve the UN's capacity for "preventive diplomacy, for peacemaking and for peacekeeping" in the post-Cold War era, which followed "decades of chilled conflict and deadly proxy wars" (Hozić, 2014, p. 22). Boutros-Ghali (1992) used post-conflict to coin the term "post-conflict *peacebuilding*", defining it as "action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict" (p. 11). The emergence and proliferation of the term (post-conflict) coincided not only with the aforementioned document, but also with the heavily criticised international emergency responses in Somalia (1992-1995), Rwanda (1994), and the former Yugoslavia, especially Bosnia (1992-1995) (Hozić, 2014; Givoni, 2016). Its usage reflected the discourse at the time: in the early 1990s, there was an increasing "realisation that intra-state wars were becoming just as much of a threat to the international system as traditional inter-state warfare" (Hozić, 2014, p. 24), and consequently, instabilities in smaller states were seen as being a significant threat to the larger world powers of the West and Global North (Wilson, 2014). In fact, although post-conflict could be applied in a much broader manner based on its definition (*Section 2.2.1*), it is usually associated with "small states suffering from internal wars" due to the historical moment in which the term gained traction (Katzenstein, 2014, pg. xii). Moreover, the term's original appearance in conjunction with peacebuilding, meaning the act of "sustaining peace once it has been established" as Boutros-Ghali understood it (Millican et al., 2021, p. 574), impacted how members of the international community understood their role in addressing civil conflicts (Hoddy & Gready, 2022) and brought about new

perspectives on sovereignty and intervention[29] (Hozić, 2014). For example, the aforementioned concern about the influence of smaller, unstable states on the wider global community reinforced the perceived need for humanitarian and development aid, particularly by actors in the Global North[30]. Thus, at the end of the 1990s, peacekeeping initiatives and similar "interventions in the name of stability, human rights or democracy no longer seemed to require the consent or the invitation of the targeted sovereign state" (Hozić, 2014, p. 27). Still today, as Sharp (2020) observes, "the involvement of powerful foreign governments and international institutions is often all but inevitable" in contexts deemed post-conflict (p. 127).

While intervention has become part and parcel of post-conflict societies, the perception of a society as being post-conflict may potentially enable or justify such interventions[31]. For example, in the case of education aid, there are a variety of international nongovernmental organisations (INGOs) and/or initiatives which support civilians in situations of active conflict or natural disaster (i.e., Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) and UNICEF's education kits or School-in-a-Box), while others concentrate on offering services throughout various stages of pre and post conflict (i.e., International Rescue Committee, United Nations, World Bank) (Burde et al., 2017; Quaynor, 2011). The choice to concentrate on administering education aid in post-conflict societies may be linked to the belief that "the stage of a conflict … affects the stability and quality of education", and that consequently, "the task of reconstruction can be more seriously undertaken once the threat of immediate violence has past" [sic] (Quaynor, 2011, p. 35). It may also be connected to the perceived "stability and capacity" of the state or ministry who is receiving aid, as well as the agency or donor's concern about making costly, long-term commitments (especially if involvement begins at the earlier phases of a conflict) (Davies, 2004b). Therefore, the labels of conflict and post-conflict may determine which types of organisations invest in a given society and how "actors -- including international institutions, NGOs and government bodies -- present policy

[29] Chandler (2012) argues that there are different models available in conflict and post-conflict societies, of which interventionism is only one. In the 1990s, interventionism referred to "the role of external saviours" that protected "non-Western victims" through humanitarian intervention (p. 213). However, there are also frameworks such as liberal internationalism and human security (Chandler, 2012, p. 213-214), which go beyond the scope of this work

[30] The Global South also engages in aid distribution, but Southern actors are often overlooked. They arguably differ from the North in their underlying principles of "mutual benefit, solidarity, reciprocity and non-interference in the national sovereignty of other states" (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2015, p. 18)

[31] The application of post-conflict approaches in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been criticised. For example, following renewed violence in Gaza, Lazzarini (2021), Commissioner-General (2020-present) of UNRWA, "urged the international community to break the Sisyphean approach of post-conflict response … through genuine efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict" (United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, 2021)

responses [and] apply for funding" (McLeod, 2011, p. 597). While the tension between humanitarian and development aid has been greatly reduced (i.e., international humanitarian law (IHL) does not distinguish between rapid life-saving relief, recovery and development (ICRC, 2016), and education is now understood to be an invaluable priority during all phases of conflict (Burde et al., 2017) (also see *Section 2.3.1*), this potentially impacts the types of programmes that are implemented. Regardless, as previously discussed (*Section 2.2.1*), the conflict and/or post-conflict designation is much more than merely descriptive: it is "highly political, inviting the intervention of external actors including states, emerging international and non-governmental organizations, and earnest scholars", all of which are influenced by cultural factors and political agendas (Katzenstein, 2014, p. xii).

2.2.3 Rethinking the concepts of conflict and post-conflict

An examination of the academic and colloquial uses of the terms conflict and post-conflict, in addition to their historical origins, suggests that, as concepts, they are not (and potentially cannot) be consistently nor coherently applied (Brinkeroff, 2006; Gagnon et al., 2014) (*Section 2.2.1*). Despite the challenges of accurately labelling a sociopolitical situation, the significance of putting a name to it, such as conflict (i.e., frozen, protracted, intractable, active, inactive, occupation and/or other) or post-conflict, is nonetheless striking: rather than giving an accurate description of a socio-political situation, it may indicate a foreign policy strategy[32] (Cuppuleri, 2022) or dictate the ways in which external actors can intervene in a particular environment (McLeod, 2011) (*Section 2.2.1*). In other words, the terms used to describe conflict (and peace) potentially serve the communities that act upon conflict-affected societies more than the conflict-affected societies themselves (Raymond, 2023a). This may also be reflected in the observation that "many countries experiencing ongoing tensions, violence or occupation avoid using the terms 'conflict' or 'peace'" altogether (Millican et al., 2021, p. 571). Similarly, in her book *Education and Conflict: Complexity and Chaos*, Davies (2004b) suggests that lay understandings about the origins of a conflict (i.e., how a conflict is thought to have developed and evolved throughout time) also impact the international community's response:

> Perceptions of history of a conflict become crucial for looking at points of

[32] For example, in the Israeli-Palestinian context, Brockhill and Cordell (2019) suggest that by not using the term occupation (opting instead for terms such as disputed or administered territory), Israel's presence in the oPt may seem justified or rationalised. These scholars argue that two-thirds of Israelis do not consider the West Bank as occupied, which may constitute "a long-term strategy aimed at maintaining the occupation" itself (p. 981)

> intervention and 'coping' … conflicts (such as in the Balkans, or Northern Ireland) are portrayed by the media and other commentators as based on age-old, primordial ties – wars are thus seen as inescapable and will never end; they will just vary in intensity … Focusing on 'age-old' rivalries also underestimates the part played by twentieth- and twenty-first-century world powers such as the USA, Britain and Germany. (p. 10)

Therefore, in order to best acknowledge the centrality of perception when researching education aid and exchange in conflict-affected settings, while also recognising the contestability of the terms used to describe such environments (McLeod, 2011), this work avoids differentiating between conflict, occupied and post-conflict societies in its theoretical framework and in reference to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Instead, this research follows Brinkerhoff's (2006) recommendation to conceptualise conflict-affected settings (both conflict and post-conflict) and their various manifestations as entities falling along a spectrum or continuum that ranges from secure to insecure (Doyle & Sambanis, 1999). As Stirk (2009) mentions in his book *Politics of Military Occupation*, by placing conflict and specifically occupation on a continuum, the fluidity of conflict is acknowledged as sociopolitical situations are not "fixed" (p. 53)[33]. In a sense, the primary research tools for exploring conflict, such as the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) maintained by the Department of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University and the Centre for the Study of Civil War at the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), follow a comparable approach. Their *Countries in Conflict View*, which documents violent incidents by geographic location on a micro level (i.e., towns and villages as opposed to countries and large regions), doesn't distinguish between conflict or post-conflict settings (UCDP, 2021). Instead, the tool, which is used by entities such as the World Bank and the United Nations (Quaynor, 2011), documents the frequency of violent incidents over periods of time; it is up to the individual or organisation to apply their own classifications (i.e., what constitutes conflict or post-conflict according to their parameters) to the data.

2.3 Education in conflict-affected settings

2.3.1 The value of education in conflict-affected settings

The importance of education in conflict-affected settings, and of the sites in which formal learning takes place (i.e., physical structures that house programmes, schools and

[33] Some scholars argue that it is essential to understand the different phases or cycles of a conflict so that interventions can be matched to each stage (Ryan, 2018). Ryan (2018) states that "although there may be differences in terminology and approach … an understanding of conflict stages is important in order to devise effective intervention strategies (p. 31) (see *Section 2.3.2* for further discussion)

universities, some of which offer protection and/or access to services) (Burde et al., 2017), has become increasingly apparent. While there has been a longstanding legal framework in place that protects education as a fundamental human right (i.e., Article 26, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948; Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989; Fourth Geneva Convention, 1949, etc.) (Seitz, 2004), access to education during times of sociopolitical turmoil has not always been treated with a sense of urgency. For example, since modern international development aid[34] became more prevalent in the 1950s, "in the midst of crises or conflict, support often shift[ed] toward humanitarian aid[35], which has rarely focused on education" (Burde et al., 2017, p. 620). However, the notion of humanitarian aid or action "evolved and expanded in the mid to late 1990s … to include a concern not just with individuals' basic needs but also with fulfilling their rights to a certain standard of life" (Burde et al., 2017, pp. 621-622). Assuming that education would undoubtedly improve the lives of aid recipients in conflict-affected settings (Gallagher et al., 2018), aid organisations began referring to foreign interventions in the field as education in emergencies (EiE) initiatives (Burde et al., 2017). For years, those involved in EiE "viewed education as largely neutral, if not wholly positive" (Burde et al., 2017, p. 625), demonstrating how, as van Ommering (2020) states, "the hope and trust invested in the transformative potential of formal education can hardly be overstated: it is not only considered the bedrock of economic progress, but also a catalyst of sustainable development, good governance, human rights, gender equity, and peace" (p. 1). In other words, in the eyes of donors, practitioners and even the local communities themselves (many of whom requested education aid), education became more than a human right – it became a humanitarian necessity (Burde et al., 2017) which should be implemented throughout all stages of conflict (Buckland, 2005).

The dominant powers in the Global North concurred with this notion, seeing great potential in education aid as a means to stabilise fragile communities and consequently support human security, particularly following 11th September 2001 (Burde et al., 2017). In the article *Education in Emergencies: A Review of Theory and Research* (2017), the authors' portrayal of the post-9/11 discourse surrounding education and conflict strongly

[34] Development aid "includes monetary assistance in the form of direct grants, programs or training to support a developing country's political, social or economic development. Developed countries often give development aid, but developing countries can do so as well" (Anera, 2019)

[35] Similar to development aid, humanitarian aid does not have a universal definition, however, a working definition used by the European Commission (2024b) is aid which intervenes in "areas such as: food and nutrition, shelter, healthcare, water and sanitation, and education in emergencies". As inferred from Burde et al. (2017), in the past, education in emergencies (EiE) was not included in this list (p. 620). For example, some scholars argued that "even when it is part of a humanitarian response, education is a development activity and must be undertaken with a developmental perspective" (Buckland, 2005, p. xii). Although there is now more flexibility, including EiE in the category of humanitarian action rather than development aid is still resisted (Burde et al., 2017)

resembles that which was used for post-conflict peacebuilding throughout the previous decade (*Section 2.2.2*):

> States considered to be “failed,” “failing,” or “fragile” became targets for Western intervention. These countries were no longer perceived to be a danger only to themselves; many Western governments suddenly perceived them as posing an imminent threat to the world at large and to the Western world in particular … As a result, education responses are often intertwined with political goals, both in terms of identifying states that meet the definition of fragile and in the content of the intervention. (Burde et al., p. 621)

As Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2015) observes, although humanitarian assistance as promoted by the Global North is often conceptualised as impartial, neutral and ideally separate from politics, many believe that it is impossible for aid to be apolitical (p. 17). In the Palestinian context, Alzaroo and Hunt (2003) extend this idea to education, insisting that the “ideology underpinning education and the organization, delivery and content of education is not neutral, and indeed can never be neutral because it always has political intention either for the domination of people or for their liberation” (p. 166). Regardless, the aforementioned paradigm shift (from education as a human right to education as a humanitarian need) can also be seen in the work of non-state actors (i.e., agencies, intergovernmental organisations and domestic or international NGOs). For example, education is a central feature of the *Millenium Development Goals* (2000) and the *Sustainable Development Goals* (2015) set out by the United Nations, and more recently the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) established resolution 2601 (2021), which acknowledges the “invaluable role education plays for individuals and society, including as life-saving safe spaces”. In fact, UNSCR 2601 (2021) states that “providing, protecting and facilitating the continuation of education in armed conflict, should remain a key priority for the international community” (UN, 2021). By looking at trends in education aid and international opinion as conveyed through the UN, the global community’s concern about the impact of education on conflict (and the inverse – of conflict’s impact on education) is palpable.

2.3.2 Education and conflict as a framework: the “two faces of education”

Much of the general framework applied to education in conflict-affected settings has its origins in a body of research conducted in and leading up to the early 2000s (Buckland, 2005; Bush & Saltarelli, 2000; Davies, 2004b; Seitz, 2004; Sinclair, 2002, etc.). The field grew through publications and reports which looked predominantly at primary and secondary education in a variety of contexts, such as ethnic conflict, mass crimes (i.e.,

genocides) and complex natural disasters. While recognising the uniqueness of each conflict (Buckland, 2005; Davies, 2004a; Sinclair, 2002) and consequently the challenges of making broad generalisations about conflict (*Section 2.2.1 & 2.2.2*), education was (and often continues to be) assessed through categories that correspond to stages of conflict. For example, in *Education and Conflict: Complexity and Chaos*, Davies (2004b) uses the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) categories of 1) emergency, 2) recovery, 3) rehabilitation and 4) reconstruction for her theoretical framework (p. 44). More recently, in "The stages of conflict and the practical science of peace", Ryan (2018) uses time markers such as 1) pre-violence, 2) escalation, 3) de-escalation and 4) post-agreement/peacebuilding (pp. 32-37). Together, these labels shed light on the so-called conflict cycle which, when applied with flexibility, may enable practitioners to design effective interventions that are well sequenced (i.e., certain moments may be more favourable for conflict intervention, while others may be more delicate or dangerous) (Ryan, 2018). In terms of thematic areas, Sinclair (2002), who refers to education in situations of conflict as "emergency education"[36] (instead of EiE) (*Section 2.3.1*), breaks scholarly work on the topic into four main categories: 1) education for refugees, 2) education for internally displaced persons (IDPs), 3) education under conditions of armed conflicts, insecurity and instability, and 4) education for reconstruction after armed conflicts (p. 26). As this study resists a dichotomous framework of conflict and post-conflict settings, while also engaging with populations who experience formal schooling within their geographic area of origin[37], the focus of the research will be oriented towards the latter two groups. This best reflects the specific Palestinian context (i.e., teachers serving students located in the West Bank/East Jerusalem in mostly tertiary, non-UNRWA institutions), and addresses what has historically been a research gap: as Buckland (2005) states, while there is "considerable literature and accumulated experience on provision of education to refugees and internally displaced persons, much less is available in the way of lessons from experience on ... the reconstruction of national education systems" (p. 20).

As previously demonstrated (*Sections 2.2 & 2.3.1*), there can be a large amount of variation in how the types and/or stages of conflict and education aid (i.e., development, humanitarian, etc.) are conceptualised. However, since its inception, the field of education and conflict has generally agreed, and continues to agree, on two main points: (1)

[36] "An educational emergency is a crisis situation created by conflicts or disasters which have destabilized, disorganized or destroyed the education system, and which require an integrated process of crisis and post-crisis support" (Sinclair, 2002, p. 22)

[37] Area of origin is not referring to one's area of historic origin, as seen in a diasporic community that was displaced generations ago, but the community in which one was primarily socialised

education is not neutral, nor apolitical, and thus, it can have both a positive and/or negative influence on situations of conflict, and (2) the relationship between education and conflict is multidirectional (Buckland, 2005): just as education impacts situations of conflict, conflict impacts education (i.e., access, resources, content, pedagogy, etc.). A number of scholars share this observation, perhaps most notably Bush and Saltarelli (2000) whose foundational UNICEF publication explores "the linkages between … education, ethnicity and conflict", and coined one of the most commonly used expressions in the field: the "two faces of education" (p. ix). The authors question the "neutral or technical process of information dissemination" that is usually associated with formal education, and argue that education has both a negative and positive effect (or face):

> The negative face shows itself in the uneven distribution of education to create or preserve privilege, the use of education as a weapon of cultural repression, and the production or doctoring of textbooks to promote intolerance. The positive face goes beyond the provision of education for peace programmes, reflecting the cumulative benefits of the provision of good quality education. These can include the conflict-dampening impact of educational opportunity, the promotion of linguistic tolerance, the nurturing of ethnic tolerance, and the 'disarming' of history. (Khan, 2000, p. v)

Similarly, in the dissertation *Education for Peace or War*, van Ommering (2020) demonstrates how the field of education and conflict studies has traditionally "cautioned against merely viewing formal education as a benign catalyst of progress and peace" (p. 1), while in *Universities and Conflict: The role of Higher Education in Peacebuilding and Resistance*, Millican (2018) states that "there is general agreement within the broader literature … that education can be a significant factor in the build up to conflict, in exacerbating or ameliorating conflict, and in post-conflict reconciliation and rebuilding" (p. 2). In fact, the connection between education and conflict is so strong that significant modifications in the education system, such as restricting access and/or implementing (arguably discriminatory) language requirements (*Section 3.3.1*), are usually a precursor to outbreaks of violence (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000). Therefore, as Bellino et al. (2017) argue in their research on transitional justice and education, the potential negative effects (or faces) of education are precisely what make formal instruction such a valuable tool: "education is powerfully linked to root causes of conflict, and thus becomes a powerful vehicle and venue for addressing these root causes" (p. 318). In other words, as education is part of the problem, it is invariably part of the solution.

2.3.3 Teaching in conflict-affected settings: challenges and recommendations

Regardless of the role that education has in preventing or inciting violence (*Section 2.3.2*), institutions and ministries of education in conflict-affected countries or territories are likely to be left in a decimated state following periods of high-intensity or protracted conflict. They are "weakened, damaged, and underresourced at precisely the time when communities, governments, and international agencies require them to play a role in rebuilding and transforming … the societies they serve" (Buckland, 2005, pp. 1-2). However, when supporting communities through education aid initiatives, the objective is not to replicate and/or rebuild the pre-existing system that was in place (and which may have contributed to the conflict itself) (Davies, 2004b). Instead, "crisis provides an opportunity to examine the shortcomings of old systems and attempt to search for new solutions" (Davies, 2004b, p. 165). Therefore, over the years, scholars in the field have highlighted a number of challenges and suggestions for teaching in these delicate contexts (for a discussion on foreign language teaching and conflict, see *Section 3.4*; for a discussion on English language and conflict, see *Section 3.5*).

Given the origins of formal education and the significant role it had in nation-building through the cultivation of collective identities (i.e., by promoting the "nation-state claim to represent culturally and ethnically distinct peoples") (Gallagher et al., 2018, p. 4) (*Section 3.3.2*), incompatibility myths that portray cultures as stagnant and fundamentally at odds with one another (i.e., such as Arabs and Jews, or Catholics and Protestants) can easily proliferate (Davies, 2004b). These can be based on shared national, religious, linguistic, phenotypic (i.e., skin colour) and/or a combination of other characteristics (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000). However, it is not the "essentialist identities" themselves which provoke conflict: it is "the hostilities of the present … factual and fictional ... projected onto the past" (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000, p. 23) (*Section 3.2.3*). Davies (2004b) highlights how, although misleading, the ethnic or religious origins of conflict can be overemphasised, while significant economic contributors to unrest are overlooked. Alternatively, Milton (2018a) argues that many discussions have "moved beyond simplistic mono-causal explanations of conflict as driven solely by ethnic rivalry", but agrees that it remains an important dimension to interrogate (p. 47). For example, although often misframed, "the Arab/Israeli conflict is about religious and national identity and 'place', [but] it is also about the control of water", while the sectarian violence in Northern Ireland "is not just about Catholic versus Protestant in terms of religious belief, but about power and control, employment and housing" (Davies, 2004, p. 42). Considering that the aforementioned characteristics (such as nationality and ethnicity) are not innate but are socially construed in specific places and times, they are malleable (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000). This makes

formal education a venue to address, and potentially correct, biases (Burde et al., 2017) in the "understandings, attitudes, and ultimately the behaviour of individuals" (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000, pg. x). Accordingly, Davies (2004b) argues that there are "two tasks for education in *not* contributing to the essentialist identities which can be mobilised for conflict; the acknowledgement of ambiguity, complexity and hybridity within an individual self, and similarly, the avoidance of stereotyped portrayals of the 'the other'" (p. 82). She finds that historically, these objectives have frequently not been met.

Another issue cited in education and conflict contexts is teacher training and pedagogy, especially when education is conceived as the transmission of knowledge (*Section 3.4*). Although "teachers are the most critical resource in education reconstruction" (Buckland, 2005, p. 20), finding, training and retaining qualified educators can be a huge challenge (Buckland, 2005; Burde et al., 2017). There are often a number of education aid initiatives to help fill this gap, especially in terms of training and development, but the coordinating authorities may have limited capacity to effectively facilitate them (Buckland, 2005). Not only is there a deficit in skills, but teachers, who are likely using outdated or inadequate curricula and materials, may also lack support and supervision within their institutions. Moreover, they may have extremely insecure employment conditions, which includes an absence of collegiality in the workplace (van Ommering, 2020) and an inconsistent salary (Buckland, 2005). They may also be subject to political pressures (van Ommering, 2020) and may struggle with personal trauma (Burde et al., 2017), such as but not limited to the difficult task of coming to terms with their past and present roles[38] in society (and consequently the conflict) (Kasumagić-Kafedžić, 2018). This creates an environment in which it is difficult for teachers, and the education systems in which they work, to thrive. As van Ommering (2020) states:

> Reform and transformation agendas are bound to fail as long as teachers are not equipped, motivated, appreciated, and supported in confronting the stress, pressure, and insecurity that reverberates through their personal and professional lives. Moreover, presenting and resourcing teaching work as merely an apolitical, technical activity rather than an everyday engagement with socio-political realities of strife leaves teachers empty-handed. (p. 3)

In terms of the students' experience, the aforementioned difficulties can increase the use of corrupt and "violent or aggressive teaching techniques that model bad behavior" in the classroom (Burde et al., 2017, p. 632). The most common examples of this would be

[38] Violence can be experienced from the perspective of the witness, victim, perpetrator, and/or a combination of the three; moreover, a single individual may hold more than one perspective simultaneously (Davies, 2017, p. 340)

related to disciplinary action, including the use of physical violence to correct behaviour, punctuality or academic performance, the detention of both an individual or an entire class (i.e., similar to collective punishment), assigning student monitor roles to police peers, and encouraging students to cheat or use other forms of academic dishonesty (Burde et al., 2017; Davies, 2004b). This can be exacerbated by teaching styles that champion singular viewpoints through "rote learning, uncritical thinking, and the authority of a narrowly defined, 'true' narrative" (Cole & Barsalou, 2006, p. 10). Furthermore, as teachers and textbooks can be seen as authority figures in societies, students may be hesitant to question what and how they learn (Burde et al., 2017), which leads to the uncritical consumption and absorption of official and hidden curricula[39] (Kasumagić-Kafedžić, 2018). Together, these factors arguably increase the risk of students engaging in violent conflict[40]: aggressive behaviours are fostered and seen as a means to resolving disputes (Bush & Salterelli, 2000), while blind obedience and positivist knowledge are valued over critical thinking, which ultimately makes it easier to instil (and later mobilise) hyper-politicised identities (Burde et al., 2017; Bush & Salterelli, 2000).

In order to address these concerns, much of the literature recommends applying a conflict-sensitive approach to education in volatile sociopolitical environments (INEE, 2013; Kester, 2021; Omeje, 2015). This refers to "the design and delivery of education programs and policies in a way that considers the conflict context and aims to minimize the negative impact (contribution to conflict) and maximize positive impact (contribution to peace)" (INEE, 2013). One way that conflict-sensitive education can achieve this is by encouraging students "to understand, deconstruct, and transform deep-rooted structures of prejudice, suspicion, and hostilities in a society" (Omeje, 2015, p. 35). Another way is to discourage the use of violence to resolve problems, in addition to promoting the local heritage and language for the purposes of cultural preservation (Kester, 2021; Omeje, 2015) (e.g., historically, education has been considered a tool for maintaining Palestinian identity) (Alzaroo & Hunt, 2003) (*Section 3.3.3*). Other scholars, specifically Davies (2017), have extended their argument from conflict-sensitive to justice-sensitive

[39] While not formalised or explicit, the hidden curriculum refers to the "values and assumptions that are often embedded in school lessons" (Burde et al., 2017, p. 632)

[40] Causal links between education and conflict need to be assessed with caution as there is much debate in the field. For example, in his discussion of higher education (*Section 2.3.4*), Milton (2018a) demonstrates how there is evidence that highly educated pupils "have more to lose", so they are more hesitant to join in violent conflict (p. 45). However, there are other cases where high or low education levels are not correlated with increased membership in groups considered to be extremist, such as "Hezbollah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad", etc.. Alternatively, higher education levels are associated with "Israeli Jewish terrorists" (Milton, 2018a, p. 45) in the 1980s, and the Taliban in Pakistan, but the latter is only true for males (as "better educated women" were less likely to support the organisation) (Burde et al., 2017, p. 627). Nonetheless, "much of the data reviewed … suggest that the benefits of increasing access to education outweigh the potential risks" (Burde et al., 2017, p. 627)

education, a “political mechanism” that can be implemented once violence has ceased and incorporates the added aims of transitional justice, mainly: “addressing the scale and location of human rights abuses; the component of truth-seeking and the constant two-way gaze” (i.e., *Janus faced*, or simultaneously “past and forward looking”, to build a path to a better future) (p. 334).

Some of the most commonly discussed approaches to education in conflict contexts are based on the concept of critical pedagogy. With its roots in Freirean (1970) thought and further developed by Giroux (2004), critical pedagogy is “an educational philosophy which encourages and empowers educators to take a critical look at the role of education in a broader social context and to comprehend teaching as a dynamic process of constructing knowledge with learners” (Kasumagić-Kafedžić, 2018, p. 152). By questioning the purpose and significance of knowledge and schools in society, it de-neutralises education and acknowledges that it is inherently political (Seal & Smith, 2021). Moreover, it encourages teachers and students to not only consume knowledge (as would be the case in transactional approaches to higher education), but to transform it in order to actively address the collective struggles of their time (Giroux, 2011). In conflict-affected societies, it can be “a mode of witnessing, a public engagement in which students learn to be attentive and responsible to the memories and narratives of others … which foster[s] a mix of compassion, ethics and hope” (Giroux, 2004, p. 45) In short, the influence and applicability of critical pedagogy can be seen across much of the literature on education and conflict, and some recommendations or practices for teaching in conflict-affected settings have emerged, such as: acknowledging, rather than ignoring, ongoing or past conflict (Davies, 2017; Kester; 2021; Phipps, 2014) and relating to and/or engaging with the lived experiences of students (i.e., contextual pedagogy and/or student-centred classes, which can have a democratising effect) (Kester, 2021; Millican et al., 2021; Milton, 2018b); using a variety of available tools to address conflict (e.g., interactive and/or web-based materials, witness accounts, etc.), which removes pressure from teachers who are reluctant to explore conflict-related content with students (Davies, 2017); cultivating strategies for discussing sensitive topics in academic environments, ideally ones that develop multiperspectivity in learners (Bruen et al., 2016; Kester, 2021); utilising curricula that are “culturally, socially and linguistically relevant”, and in the case of foreign teachers, becoming familiar “with the contexts in which they teach and the contexts from which the students arrive” (Kester, 2021, pp. 10-11); modelling conflict resolution skills when managing dissent in the classroom; and fostering a participatory climate that promotes student agency, where active listening, intentional seating choices, dialogue, debate and questioning can generate and contribute to open discussion (Burde et al., 2017; Davies, 2017; Kester, 2021). Looking at all of these points together, there is a

dominant recurring theme: the importance of addressing the sociopolitical environment through formal education and "to connect pedagogy with the problems of public life" (Giroux, 2011, p. 6). Concisely articulated, van Ommering (2020) claims that "a depoliticised school environment in which politics, conflict, history, and justice remain unaddressed risks contributing to sustained injustice and violence" (p. 5). However, while sound in theory, scholars such as Davies (2017) wonder if the challenge of engaging conflict and applying critical pedagogy is underestimated in practice, particularly when it falls to teachers who may be managing personal and/or professional challenges in relation to the conflict at hand. Furthermore, the question remains as to what happens when foreign researchers and/or teachers in academic exchanges and education aid programmes are involved; while they may have a different relationship to conflict-related trauma (and daily stressors[41]) than local educators, they may knowingly or unknowingly find it difficult to understand sensitive issues within the host society (see *Section 2.5.1 & 2.5.2*) (Burde et al., 2017; Kester, 2021; Millican et al., 2021; Milton, 2018a).

2.4 Higher education in conflict-affected settings

2.4.1 A sectoral imbalance

Historically, the research on education and conflict and the legal frameworks that guarantee access to education on a global scale have a common oversight: they tend to ignore formal, non-compulsory instruction beyond the primary years, giving limited attention to secondary schooling, and briefly acknowledging (if not excluding) tertiary institutions from their discourse (Millican, 2018a; Milton, 2018a)[42]. Contradictorily, higher education was not always overlooked: in the past (post-World War II), universities were seen as an important development and nation-building tool in post-colonial societies (Milton, 2018b). Yet, by the 1970s, international support and funding steadily declined as donors were disappointed with their investments in the sector (i.e., due to deteriorating campuses, questionable academic standards, high unemployment rates, student unrest and staff deficits, etc.) (Milton, 2018b, p. 23). In terms of policy, as Seitz (2004) quotes in the report *Education and Conflict*, "basic education is, in contrast to general secondary education, vocational training, adult education and university education, essentially

[41] Cumulatively, while often overlooked, daily stressors can be more impactful than residual trauma for individuals living in conflict-affected settings (Burde et al., 2017)

[42] There is some variation in research on trends of neglect in primary, secondary and tertiary education. For example, some scholars argue that secondary education, in addition to technical and vocational schools, are actually most neglected as international funding tends to target the primary and university levels (Buckland, 2005).

'much more' institutionalised in human rights terms … pre- and post-primary education tend to be neglected" (p. 33). In fact, international agencies do not usually have mandates to intervene in tertiary education, and those who do (e.g., UNESCO, World Bank) have dedicated relatively few resources to this cause (Milton, 2018b)[43]. For example, the *Education for All* movement (1990), which works in conjunction with the *Millennium Development Goals* (2000) and the *Sustainable Development Goals* (2015), aimed at achieving "free and compulsory primary education for all" (*Goal 2*), but settled on the advancement of "life skills" (*Goal 3*) as the objective for young people and adults (UNESCO, 2015). This focus on primary education is comprehensible, particularly as it "is the basis of the entire system and therefore warrants high priority", but it is also the result of the logistical challenges that come with offering education aid at the higher levels (Buckland, 2005, p. 32). Secondary and tertiary education are quite costly to maintain: they require infrastructure, technical skills and academic expertise that go beyond basic community resources (Buckland, 2005). For this reason, they are known as "low resilience" sectors (Milton & Barakat, 2016, p. 404), and are commonly viewed as a "luxury" in the face of what are perceived to be "more pressing challenges" in conflict-affected societies, even though its absence has serious consequences for development and stability (Milton, 2018b, p. 8). Therefore, while the importance of primary education should not be undermined, a "sector-wide approach", which includes secondary and tertiary education, needs to be promoted in order to counterbalance what has become a "sectoral imbalance" (Buckland, 2005, p. 25, p. 63). This study attempts to work within this area by focusing on the experiences of teachers in conflict and post-conflict university contexts.

2.4.2 The potential of higher education in conflict-affected settings

Although higher education in conflict-affected settings is "neglected in terms of both policy and research" (Milton & Barakat, 2016, p. 403), it has received more attention over the past decade (Millican et al., 2021). This has led to the implementation of programmes that support university-level instruction in conflict and post-conflict societies, in addition to research that focuses on tertiary education in specific conflicts (Milton, 2018b) and, while less common, comparatively or across conflict-affected settings (such as: Feuer et al., 2013; Millican et al., 2021; Milton, 2018b; Kester, 2021). Nonetheless, there is still a substantial gap. As Milton (2018b) states in *Higher Education and Post-Conflict Recovery*, "too little is known about what works and why [and] in what context" (p. 8). Starting with the purpose of higher education, universities are typically described as having a tripartite

[43] Although some publications argue that this has been changing (Feuer et al., 2013)

mission: 1) to educate students, traditionally youth, 2) to create knowledge and 3) to serve society (Millican, 2018b, p. 13). It can be argued that the three activities (i.e., “teaching, research, service”) (Milton, 2018a, p. 49) work together: by educating individuals and creating knowledge, society can be improved (Millican, 2018b). However, situations of conflict call into question the assumption that education is a good thing *per se* (*Section 2.3.1*). In fact, being an emerging subset of the education and conflict field, higher education shares some of the same challenges and opportunities as primary and secondary education (Millican, 2018a) (i.e., the two faces of education; *Section 2.3.2*). However, due to its societal function and the demographic of its attendees and employees, higher education may be uniquely positioned to influence conflict and post-conflict contexts in different ways.

Similar to its tripartite mission, the potential benefits of higher education in conflict-affected communities are comprehensive and far-reaching. For instance, when looking at all levels of the education system as one interconnected whole (i.e., a sector-wide approach), investments in tertiary education are valuable as they have a powerful trickle down effect. Through teaching and training, third level institutions can provide society with advanced skills in various fields (including primary and secondary education), which is significant considering that during and in the aftermath of conflict, competent professionals are lacking due to deaths, injuries, physical (and academic) displacement and brain drain[44] (Milton & Barakat, 2016). This deficit is exacerbated by the emergence of unqualified educators (Buckland, 2005) and “unaccredited … often low quality institutions outside of state regulatory oversight” which proliferate in conflict-affected settings (Milton & Barakat, 2016, p. 404). Higher education can also equip the future leaders of a society with the skills needed to transition out of conflict, which includes sustaining critical infrastructure (i.e., through disciplines such as architecture, engineering, urban planning, etc.) and (re)establishing the rule of law (Milton and Barakat, 2016, p. 405, p. 412). More than any other educational institution, universities are capable of filling the “skills gap at a time when human capital is in high demand” (Milton and Barakat, 2016, p. 408). Furthermore, with proper investment, research can be conducted at local, third level institutions, which results in a more sustainable, “often-cheaper source of expertise than expensive international consultants” (Milton and Barakat, 2016, p. 410). This reduces a society’s dependence on external aid and enables it to manage conflict and devise post-conflict solutions that are sensitive to the needs of the population.

[44] The European Commission (2024a) defines brain drain as “the loss suffered by a country as a result of the emigration of a (highly) qualified person”

Since participation in higher education is on the rise globally[45], university campuses increasingly resemble "a microcosm of society" (Feuer et al., 2013, p. 9). Tertiary institutions, when not segregated by ethno-sectarian and/or political groups, tend to draw students and faculty from a wide geographical area, which makes for a heterogeneous academic community (Milton & Barakat, 2016). Therefore, attending university can mark the moment when "young people make the transition from insular primary and secondary education to higher education where many students have their first possibility to 'meet the other' whether based on ethnicity, race, religion, gender, nationality, or political position" (Milton & Barakat, 2016, p. 414). Drawing on Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis, this provides students with an opportunity to break down barriers along cultural lines – barriers which may lie at the very heart of a past, protracted or ongoing conflict (Milton & Barakat, 2016) (see *Section 3.2.3*). In addition, as "campuses offer unique arenas ... in which young people … learn skills vital to citizenship including democratic governance, independent organisation, debating and dialogue", those who engage in campus life may be less likely to resort to violence for conflict resolution as they have gained a variety of interpersonal and cognitive tools (Milton & Barakat, 2016, p. 412), and possibly even a sense of social responsibility and a desire for community engagement (Millican, 2014). Furthermore, universities can be a venue for discussing critical issues with students: guided reflection on topics such as "inequality, difference, conflict and cohesion" can be embedded "in courses on civic education, citizenship, ethics and democracy, as well as … peacebuilding", and the topics of "ethics and professional practice" can be incorporated in almost any "professional and vocational course" (Millican et al., 2021, p. 572). The latter can help expand the role of the aforementioned topics beyond the social sciences and humanities, so that students in other disciplines (i.e., natural and applied sciences, economics, etc.) may benefit (Omeje, 2015). Teacher training departments at universities can also facilitate interventions with pre-service teachers that promote reflection on the community's relationship to conflict; this enables educators to gain greater awareness of how personal experiences impact teaching practice, while shedding light on how incoming cohorts of students may be affected by situations of conflict (Millican et al., 2021). Following widespread displacement and/or sustained violence, these types of professional development opportunities are invaluable, especially as new and veteran instructors manage their new reality: a (post-)conflict classroom characterised by "students with uneven educational levels … overcrowding … [and] mental health issues from war-related trauma" (Milton & Barakat, 2016, p. 404). In summary, universities can

[45] According to UNESCO (2024), "some 254 million students are enrolled in universities around the world – a number that has more than doubled in the last 20 years and is set to expand. Yet despite the boom in demand, the overall enrolment ratio is 42% with large differences between countries and regions. More than 6.4 million students are pursuing their further education abroad. And among the world's more than 82 million refugees, only 7% of eligible youth are enrolled in higher education, whereas comparative figures for primary and secondary education are 68% and 34%"

be “sites of guidance” for students that not only impart technical competencies but also address complex issues at a time when young attendees (usually between the ages of 18 to 25) are developing a sense of their own values and beliefs (Akkad & Henderson, 2021).

2.4.3 High risk-reward: the challenges of higher education in conflict-affected settings

With the proper support in place, higher education can contribute to the long-term stability of conflict-affected environments and even prevent societies from sliding back into active violence, which is extremely likely in the first five to ten years post-armed conflict (Milton & Barakat, 2016; Omeje, 2015). However, volatile sociopolitical environments bring a variety of challenges (i.e., lack of personnel, training, support, income, funding, infrastructure, resources, etc.) (*Section 2.3.3*) which may prohibit institutions and educators from fulfilling this potential (Akkad & Henderson, 2021; Milton & Barakat, 2016). Moreover, returning to the two faces of education (*Section 2.3.2*), there are also risks involved with promoting higher education in conflict and post-conflict societies – risks that are perhaps more concerning than those found in primary or secondary school environments. For instance, tertiary education’s close proximity to politics (especially in the Middle East) makes university settings vulnerable during situations of conflict (Milton, 2021). As universities are arenas where attendees participate in student life and practise their governance skills (*Section 2.4.2*), students (and faculty) tend to be politically active on campus. Their political expressions can have powerful social implications that spread beyond the institution (Milton, 2021). For this reason, there have been multiple instances where student unions or councils on campuses have been restricted or banned (e.g., Afghanistan, Gaza, Sierra Leone, etc.) (Milton, 2021). Milton and Barakat (2016) expand on this::

> Campuses are home to politically active students and academics who often play a leading role in initiating protest and political movements including forms of civil disobedience that constitute civil unrest ... In this context of breakdown in security and control, university campuses became ideological battlegrounds and fertile spaces for radicalisation and recruitment by violent groups. (p. 406)

The high level of engagement with the sociopolitical environment may also be attributed to the student demographic at tertiary institutions, which coincides with the conscription age for military service; this makes students vulnerable to recruitment for (or being forcefully obliged to join) the armed forces, and/or more susceptible to propaganda from the aforementioned violent groups (Milton, 2021). That being said, universities can also

counteract these risks in the later stages of conflict, by reabsorbing both faculty and students who were once combatants or "at the front lines of revolutions" back into formal education or the workplace (Feuer et al., 2013, p. 4). Regardless, student activists and faculty may find themselves in danger at various phases of the conflict cycle, especially if there are sudden changes in campus and/or government leadership due to regime changes and/or escalating ethnic violence (Milton, 2021). Additionally, students and jobless graduates may be particularly invested in a conflict because of dissatisfaction stemming from "youth bulge"[46] (Milton, 2021). While debatable, there is general consensus that once "educational opportunities are much greater than livelihood opportunities, then raised expectations among newly educated youth will over time lead to … grievances and increase conflict risk" (Milton & Barakat, 2016, p. 407), which was a major factor that led to the Arab Spring (Milton, 2021)[47].

Another risk factor for universities in conflict-settings is their tendency to aggravate pre-existing inequalities in society. The uneven distribution of educational resources is often a feature of disputes between competing ethno-sectarian groups (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000). In fact, the inequitable provision of university resources can be a significant predictor and driver of conflict (e.g., prior to the civil war in Sri Lanka, there were quotas in place that restricted Tamil students from enrolling in third level institutions, while prior to the conflict in Rwanda, the Tutsi minority was overrepresented, becoming the majority in institutions of higher education) (Bellino et al; 2017; Buckland, 2005; Milton & Barakat, 2016). Moreover, in conflict-affected settings "competition over access to higher education can be fierce because it is … highly valued in many countries for providing social mobility, enhanced social status, and employment opportunities" (Milton and Barakat, 2016, p. 413). When mismanaged, academic resources reinforce the position of the elite and/or wealthy in a society, which prevents social mobility and discriminates against lesser privileged groups through exclusionary practices (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000; Millican, 2018b). Similar to primary and secondary schooling, another issue related to conflict-affected tertiary education is pedagogy (i.e., such as rote-learning, teacher-led classes, etc.) (Milton, 2018b) (*Section 2.3.3*). This includes "overly-theoretical instruction" that is misaligned with the local economy and consequently leaves young adults mismatched for

[46] Youth bulge "is often due to a stage of development where a country achieves success in reducing infant mortality but mothers still have a high fertility rate. The result is that a large share of the population is comprised of children and young adults … [that] cannot find employment and earn satisfactory income … a large mass of frustrated youth is likely to become a potential source of social and political instability" (Liu, 2012)

[47] However, some research states that the link between higher education levels and increased involvement in conflict is weak as formal education ultimately helps to address issues related to high unemployment (Milton & Barakat, 2016). As noted in *Section 2.3.3*, causal links to education and conflict need to be assessed with caution

a stark job market, lacking the “relevant skills, knowledge and capabilities” to participate meaningfully in society (Milton, 2021, p. 2). In addition, just as higher education can be influential in helping a community to critically assess and cope with the legacy of conflict (*Section 2.4.2*), it can also promote stereotypes and other negative representations of the out-group(s) (Milton, 2018a). This can have deep repercussions, particularly if training and development courses for primary and secondary school teachers promote (and model the transmission of) questionable or polarising narratives of the past (Milton, 2018a). Finally, it goes without saying that conflict induced corruption, restricted academic freedom and a variety of “security obstacles” all undermine research at third level institutions (Milton & Barakat, 2016, p. 409).

2.5 Education aid, exchange, soft power and public diplomacy

2.5.1 The Global North-Global South divide

Following the discussion on education in the context of humanitarian and development aid (*Sections 2.2.2 & 2.3.1*), it is important to further investigate the complexities of the donor-recipient relationship that often forms between the Global North and Global South. Although there are different forms of humanitarianism (i.e., humanitarianism as understood by Europe, Africa, etc.) which go beyond the scope of this project (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2015), one approach is defined by Blondel (1989) on behalf of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) as:

> … any aid in the form of food, clothing or medicines as opposed to arms, munitions or other supplies capable of causing damage or death … [it is] not only what is to be distributed, but also how and why it is to be distributed. To be humanitarian, assistance must be given impartially and without interfering with the conduct of hostilities. (p. 511)

While this definition has since expanded to include education (*Section 2.3.1*), it communicates some of the principle hallmarks of aid, which include “humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence” (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2015, p. 17). In fact, it is the appearance of neutrality and the creation of a “strict dichotomy between morality and politics” which enable organisations to maintain their presence on the ground in situations of conflict (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2015, p. 17). However, the notion that aid can be either neutral or impartial has been called into question (*Section 2.3.1*), and aid-based exchanges between the Global North and Global South have often been criticised as neocolonial projects that reproduce global inequalities (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2015). Perhaps the most frequent argument is that the Global North tends to project its biases onto the Global South (Seitz, 2004), and in doing so “impos[es] external models on local realities,

thus reproducing (either intentionally or unintentionally) inequitable and paternalistic power relations" (Kester, 2021, p. 4). This leads to initiatives that are facilitated by donors and outside actors (e.g., Western universities, INGOs, think tanks, etc.) that exclude conflict-affected societies and institutions from their own conflict management and/or post-conflict reconstruction processes (Milton, 2018b; Milton & Barakat, 2016). Accordingly, there may be an overwhelming presence of foreign researchers in conflict-affected settings (Milton, 2018b) who not only privilege knowledge from the Global North and disregard the Global South as a source of knowledge (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2015; Kester, 2021), but who also lack "an in-depth understanding of the local context" (Milton, 2018a, p. 50) (also *Section 2.5.2 & 2.5.3*). Moreover, this dynamic can obscure the Global North's involvement in the very conflicts that affect the Global South (*Section 2.2.3*), while furthering the illusion that knowledge from the Global North is, in contrast to the Global South, "objective, apolitical, and universal" (Kester, 2021, p. 5).

In the field of education, this is exemplified in the application of peacebuilding and intercultural education programmes, where the "approaches developed in Europe and in the USA" are applied to the Global South without "situation-adequate differentiation" (Seitz, 2004, p. 10). For example, Millican et al. (2021) describe how "sensitive issues can easily be misrepresented or misunderstood by outsiders" (*Section 2.3.3*), yet Western approaches to peacebuilding "still dominate university curricula, despite the fact that imported liberal notions of education can be in direct conflict with local attitudes or subjects" (p. 575). When looking at the Palestinian context, Phipps (2014) draws on Goerzig's (2010) research in Gaza with Hamas to demonstrate how the principles of intercultural dialogue (as understood in the Global North) can be uncritically applied to the Global South. This results in a form of intercultural communication that is "de-politicised" and "avoids any attempt to engage with political issues which are root causes of conflicts" (p. 111, p. 120) – an approach that she argues "is at best, limited and at worst, dangerous" in conflict-affected societies (Phipps, 2014, p. 108). Phipps also observes how "by focusing attention away from … inequality and onto perceptions of cultural difference", messages of peace and dialogue "become equated with loss and surrender – the opposite of the stated aims of intercultural dialogue"[48] (Phipps, 2014, p. 112, p. 116). Furthermore, Milton (2018a) describes instances where donors from abroad offer funding to Palestinian institutions but make the award "contingent upon participation in academic cooperation programs with Israeli universities" (p. 54). This is interpreted by many Palestinian

[48] Phipps (2014) draws on many definitions of intercultural dialogue, one of which is UNESCO's (2013) understanding of the concept: "Equitable exchange and dialogue among civilizations, cultures and peoples, based on mutual understanding and respect and the equal dignity of all cultures" (UNESCO in Phipps, 2014, p. 109). She finds that intercultural dialogue is "coterminous with 'exchange' … [and] now acts in place of concepts such as 'multiculturalism' and 'interculturalism'" (Phipps, 2014, p. 110)

academics “as a form of normalisation that legitimises occupation”, rather than an opportunity for collaboration (as understood by the Global North) (Milton, 2018a, p. 54). Therefore, considering that actors from the Global North “privilege certain models of education, and certain student(s’) bodies, to the detriment of Others” (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2015, p. 1), their interventions in the Global South may have questionable outcomes. Finally, while the focus of this subsection has been to gain a more nuanced understanding of the inequitable relationship between the Global North and Global South in the context of aid distribution, it must also be acknowledged that humanitarian aid can be “cynically instrumentalized to further political aims”, either by the humanitarian practitioners themselves and/or the aid recipients (Givoni, 2016, p. 1).

2.5.2 Secular missionaries[49] and witnesses

The roles of outside actors in conflict-affected societies have been deconstructed in a variety of ways. By taking a closer look at two different conceptualisations, secular missionaries (Gagnon et al., 2014) and humanitarian witnesses (Givoni, 2016), some insights and potential issues come to the fore. In *Post-Conflict Studies: An interdisciplinary approach* (2014), Gagnon et al. split conflict response and recovery into four processes: 1) medicalisation (i.e., transforming the experience of conflict into conditions such as trauma, and what Metro (2014) refers to as diagnosing the pathologies of a society), 2) criminalisation (i.e., dealing with the notion of justice; for example, what is considered military, and what is considered criminal?), 3) memorialisation (i.e., assigning meaning to the experience of violence) and 4) missionisation (i.e., “ideological entrepreneurship”, or shaping how “a society understands itself and the world”) (pp. 7-9). The first three areas involve internal actors (perhaps with additional assistance from the international community), but missionisation refers largely to outsider intervention. While external actors can be missionaries in the traditional sense, meaning that they have a religious affiliation, they are most commonly secular in nature (Gagnon et al., 2014). Gagnon et al. (2014) argue that although “portraying and perhaps even seeing themselves as mere technicians with pragmatic, technical ideas … they are attempting to import ways of seeing and understanding that would serve to fundamentally alter power relations within society” (pp. 7-8). In the context of education, secular missionaries may take the form of international instructors who “believe that they are doing what is best” by promoting Western forms of schooling, which they see “as universal best practices rather than culturally specific products”

[49] The term “secular missionaries” was coined by Gagnon et al., in *The Routledge Handbook of Post-Conflict Studies: An interdisciplinary approach* (2014), and refers to those “seeking to change post-conflict populations’ economic, political, social and even cultural ways of thinking and understanding” (Gagnon et al., 2014, p. 7)

(Metro, 2014, p. 164). Accordingly, when these educators are inserted in conflict-affected societies, they (metaphorically) tend to maintain their roles as teachers, while local instructors slide back into the role of learners or "privileged informant[s]"[50] (Metro, 2014, p. 174). Privileged informants may appear to break the boundary between insiders and outsiders, but their role is nonetheless representative of societal stratification, or of the disparities created by the presence of internationals within the host society (Metro, 2014). This dynamic can make relationships between international teachers and local teachers uncomfortable, specifically in terms of power differentials (Metro, 2014). Therefore, echoing the previously discussed lack of awareness (*Section 2.5.1*), Gagnon et al. (2014) reiterate that "while outsiders may have specific intentions, they rarely fully understand the contexts, historical and contemporary, into which they are intervening", therefore, their interventions "often have unanticipated consequences for ongoing contestations and processes" (p. 4). In summary, regardless of how outsiders (un)consciously position themselves in ongoing or recent situations of conflict (i.e., as allies, activists, humanitarians and/or apolitical professionals, etc.), their presence in and of itself has significant and unpredictable outcomes.

Another role that outside actors often assume in conflict-affected settings is that of the humanitarian witness. The informal and formal act of witnessing has a long-standing tradition that spans a variety of fields, professions and cultural contexts[51]. Historically, witnessing can be traced back to the Christian doctrine, "which casts the witness – or in his Greek name, the martyr – as a lived testimony of a transcendent truth" (Givoni, 2016, p. 12). In more contemporary interpretations, we see the act of witnessing in certain occupations (e.g., journalism, photography and/or activism that subscribes "to a heroic notion of witnessing, portraying it as a risky attempt to document and make known a wrong that is otherwise bound to be concealed, denied or forgotten") (Givoni, 2016, p. 6). We also see it in everyday activities (e.g., using social media to document episodes of violence through videos, blogs, text messages, etc., which has "eroded the monopoly of human rights groups, humanitarian organizations, and media corporations over global witnessing") (Givoni, 2016, p. 211). Following World War II, the act of witnessing became more contentious ("a daunting and deeply controversial task") as it was used to build

[50] This term refers to individuals who have a high status in the host society (as perceived by internationals) as they provide access to the local community (Metro, 2014). They are fluent or familiar with the language and customs of the outside actors, so they can easily gain their trust (Metro, 2014)

[51] Witnessing has even been conceptualised as central to phenomenology (or lived experience research, see *Chapter 4*), the chosen methodology for this project: "Bearing witness has a family resemblance with several well-known modes of research … The orientation resembles phenomenology in its attention to fundamental signs and indices of what is sometimes summarized as 'being-in-the-world,' in this case the teacher's" (Kyriakidou, 2020, p. 8)

testimonies[52] of Holocaust survivors, in addition to other communities affected by genocide, disaster, war or political unrest (e.g., the Latin American genre of *testimonio*, truth and reconciliation committees, slave narratives, etc.) (Givoni, 2016, p. 2). Furthermore, numerous humanitarian organisations began to place value on "humanitarian witnessing", particularly in the 1990s when those working in the sector expressed ethical reservations regarding the aforementioned shortcomings of their work in Somalia, Rwanda and Bosnia (Givoni, 2016, p. 2, pp. 172-173) (*Section 2.2.2*). While the politics of witnessing extend far beyond the limits of this project, individuals from abroad in situations of conflict may "strive to give a voice to … political violence and crises around the world and become themselves witnesses of atrocities" (Kyriakidou, 2020, p. 105). Alternatively, they may be "secondary witnesses", or those who "confront the catastrophe and its victims in retrospect and from a supposedly safe distance" (Givoni, 2016, p. 143).

In the Palestinian context, witnessing is also present in both an institutionalised and commercialised form. For example, the OHCHR assigns a Special Rapporteur to witness and report human rights abuses in the oPt (i.e., they are monitors who cannot intervene) (OHCHR, 2024). In addition, there is "third party solidarity" and/or "activist tourism", where witnesses express their support for Palestine through their physical (and financial) presence; they participate in organised tours (e.g., at refugee camps, at religious sites, through volunteer agricultural activities such as the planting and harvesting of olive trees, etc.), as nonviolence activist-observers through INGOs or simply as independent visitors[53] (Darweish & Rigby, 2022, p. 1168). This occurrence became more common following the Second Intifada (2000-2005) (*Section 1.5.2.2*), and many argue that the involvement of internationals has had an overall positive impact, such as: 1) being a protective mechanism for Palestinian protesters, 2) creating links and networks between Palestinians and activists worldwide, and 3) having returnee-advocates share their witness accounts from the oPt in their home countries (i.e., being "invited to witness, [and] invited to go home" (Kelly, 2023, p. 1)) (Darweish & Rigby, 2022).

However, while acknowledging that an international presence in Palestine has helped to "challenge Israeli state sanctioned narratives and popularize Palestinian accounts of Israeli occupation" (Kelly, 2023, p. 4), scholars such as Kelly (2023) in her book *Invited*

[52] Testimony and witnessing are arguably distinct concepts that are heavily intertwined in the work of some scholars and have strong links in some languages (Givoni, 2016). While the difference is acknowledged, it does not impact this research and is consequently not dealt with here

[53] There are also virtual reality tourists, mainly the Palestinian diaspora and supporters who are denied entry into Israel (i.e., as facilitated through the Palestinian Institute for Public Diplomacy) (Kelly, 2023)

to Witness: Solidarity Tourism Across Occupied Palestine, also highlight how there may be underlying Orientalist[54] mindsets that underpin these encounters:

> Despite the volumes of resources developed by Palestinians themselves over the decades of their dispossession, occupation, and oppression, solidarity tourists insist on the need to see what is occurring in Palestine for themselves, to witness these events, because of underlying beliefs that Palestinians are not trustworthy narrators of their own experiences. (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2023, p. 1)

To support her views, Kelly (2023) describes a phenomenon that she frequently witnessed during her field research:

> The formula through which (most) tourists understand what they witness—from shock and disbelief to outrage—is almost always coupled with descriptions of how impossible it was to prepare for what they saw. No matter how many books they read, how much news coverage they saw, how knowledgeable they were about Palestine, they could never have prepared for what they witnessed. (p. 246)

This almost collective reaction of shock and disbelief, coupled with the need to see the "evidence" of occupation (Kelly, 2023, p. 57), may be symptomatic of the central question that Said raises in his essay "Permission to Narrate" (1984): he asks who is in control of the Palestinian narrative (i.e., the narrative that the tourist-outsiders have been exposed to prior to becoming first-hand witnesses) – if not Palestinians, is it Israel, the US? Kelly (2023) explores this dimension of witnessing in Palestine, among others through different lenses. For instance, she mentions the role of privilege in bearing witnessing (i.e., the privilege to deny, to learn, to travel, to leave, etc.) and the potentially "voyeuristic and exploitative" pitfalls of witnessing (i.e., falling into colonial tropes, such as the welcoming nature of Palestinians, or "occupation tourism") (p. 247). In addition, she looks at the "multiple, competing … anxieties, preconceptions, and preoccupations" on both the part of the witness ("the tourist") and those who are witnessed (i.e., Palestinians, or "the toured") (Kelly, 2023, p. 239). She asks how one (i.e., an outsider or international) can be a witness to state violence, yet resist the tendency to define those who experience violence (i.e., Palestinians) either by their subjugation or resistance to it (Kelly, 2023, p. 238). Furthermore, as the outsiders' experience in Palestine is largely "policed and surveilled" by the Israeli state which grants or restricts access, the author highlights the "palpable limitations" that visitors sense while sojourning in Palestine;

[54] Orientalism is most often associated with the Palestinian scholar Edward Said (1935-2003), who argued in his seminal book *Orientalism* (1979) that "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image … Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views on it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (pp. 25-27)

although their work as witnesses begins once they return to their home countries, they often experience feelings of “discomfort” and “uselessness” in relation to the conflict (p. 238). Ultimately, Kelly (2023) acknowledges the tension that exists: while imperfect for all of the aforementioned reasons (and many more), bearing witness to the sociopolitical situation in Palestine can still be a powerful act, perhaps even a responsibility to counteract the international community’s complicity in the occupation, and a mechanism of anticolonial resistance.

2.5.3 The evolution of soft power

Before shifting the focus from the individuals who implement education aid and exchange to the institutions and government agencies that sponsor and mobilise them (sometimes as part of public diplomacy initiatives) (*Section 2.5.4*), it is essential to first address the issue of soft power. Similar to terms such as post-conflict peacebuilding (*Section 2.2.2*), the phrase soft power was coined in the early 1990s, but by the American political scientist Joseph Nye. According to the *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy* (2008), it is “arguably the most referenced term in the public diplomacy lexicon”, and as opposed to hard power[55], it is “based on intangible and indirect influences such as culture, values, and ideology” (Snow, 2008, p. 3). Nye describes the concept in one of his most well-known texts, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (2004): “This soft power – getting others to want the outcomes that you want – co-opts people rather than coerces them ... Soft power is not merely the same as influence ... It is also the ability to attract, and attraction often leads to acquiescence” (pp. 5-6). Being considered the “third dimension[56] of public diplomacy”, its origins in the United States lie at the end of WWII when a crisis prevention rather than crisis management approach was promoted (Nye, 2004, p. 110). Although controversial[57], it was eventually decided that foreign populations should be influenced through the arts

[55] The use of military and economic pressure (Gauttam et al., 2024)

[56] The first dimension is daily communication (i.e., explaining domestic and foreign policy), the second is strategic communication (i.e., selecting themes for impact on policy) and the third is soft power (Nye, 2004, pp. 107-108)

[57] The US education system and the foreign service have been closely linked since the controversial U.S. Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948 (Public Law 402), referenced here (Nelson & Izadi, 2008). Although the circulation of propaganda during peacetime was argued to be in opposition with America's “democratic principles”, this law “legalized peacetime propaganda but forbid its use for domestic purposes” (Nelson & Izadi, 2008, p. 335). This gave the U.S. State Department the task of administering educational exchange programmes so that foreign publics were increasingly exposed to US and Western values; likewise, Americans were expected to develop “mutual understanding” with their international counterparts (Nelson & Izadi, 2008, p. 335). Nowadays, the branch of the State Department that manages these exchanges is The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, which oversees a large collection of programmes for both national and international applicants. The Fulbright Program (named after Senator Fulbright (1905-1995)) is their flagship educational and cultural exchange activity (Bettie, 2015)

(i.e., radio and other cultural exchanges) in times of peace as well as in times of war (Nelson & Izadi, 2015). While European states (such as France, Italy, Germany and the UK) had longer histories of exerting cultural influence on the world stage (Snow, 2008), the US accelerated its investment in initiatives that would yield soft power as the Cold War escalated; at the time, the "war of ideas" with the Soviet Union was being fought, and the USSR had a more advanced propaganda machine (Nelson & Izadi, 2008, p. 335). While the decades to follow saw moments of divestment in public diplomacy, 11th September 2001 renewed the international community's interest in cultivating soft power (Nye, 2004). This sentiment can be seen in the influential US State Department document *The Djerejian Report on Public Diplomacy* (2003), which refers specifically to the limited impact of US public diplomacy in the Middle East: "We have failed to listen and failed to persuade. We have not taken the time to understand our audience, and we have not bothered to help them understand us. We cannot afford such shortcomings" (Snow, 2008, p. 6). The remedy for this human security failure was found in education; it was expected that the "development of lasting relationships with key individuals over many years through scholarships, exchanges, training, seminars, [and] conferences" would provide opportunities for mutual understanding (Nye, 2004, p. 110). Hozić (2014) also observes this, stating that in the context of conflict and post-conflict settings, education and foreign educators play a "key role" in transforming societies, "through training rather than coercion, and through willing self-improvement rather than through commands from above/outside – conversion not at gunpoint but through persuasion" (Gagnon et al., 2014, p. 14).

2.5.4 Education aid, educational exchanges and public diplomacy

Public diplomacy[58], defined as "interactions aimed not only at foreign governments but primarily with nongovernmental individuals and organizations" (Murrow, 1963, cited in Nye, 2004, p. 107) works best in "face-to-face contacts", or what Edward R. Murrow (1908-1965), journalist and war correspondent (in addition to former director of the United States Information Agency (USIA) and former assistant director of the Institute of International Education (IIE)) called "the last three feet" (Nye, 2004, p. 142). Nye suggests that educational exchanges (i.e., study abroad, recruiting foreign language teachers to work internationally, volunteer-aid organisations such as the Peace Corps, etc.), are all excellent ways to facilitate this type of contact (Nye, 2004, pp. 142-143).

[58] Public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy can either be interchangeable, with the intended meaning being "cultural transfer" (Nelson & Izadi, 2008, p. 335), or cultural diplomacy can be considered a specific subset of public diplomacy, the latter emphasising the P2P (people to people, as opposed to government to people) connection (Lee, 2015; Scott-Smith, 2008)

Moreover, higher education is a particularly fruitful venue. Historically, even prior to the formation of nation-states, universities were sites where public and/or cultural diplomacy took place (i.e., in ancient learning centres such as Athens, Baghdad, Al-Azhar, Bologna and Nalanda, etc.) (Lee, 2015, p. 356). Today, third level education continues to be an important site for the exertion of soft power, as is evident through strategies to increase internationalisation and the proliferation of various global organisations, initiatives and partnerships, for example, Erasmus+ (Gauttam et al., 2024), "the Fulbright Programme, the Colombo Plan, the British Council [i.e., Commonwealth Scholarships], the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service), and, more recently, the Confucius Institutes of China" (Lee, 2015, p. 356).

Although the aforementioned organisations, initiatives and partnerships may focus on sending students and faculty abroad, they are equally (if not more) interested in enticing foreign students and faculty to sojourn at academic institutions within their respective national borders. This trend follows suit in volatile sociopolitical environments; while education aid is often invested in compulsory or primary education (*Section 2.4.1*), some donor-states (in particular France, Germany, and Belgium), "have long allocated substantial sums to higher education in conflict-affected countries … in the form of scholarships for study in donor-country universities rather than support for universities in recipient states" (Milton, 2018b, pp. 19-20). Wojciuk et al. (2015) outline the motivations for hosting international students and scholars in their article "Education as a source and tool of soft power in international relations":

> Education, and especially universities and graduate schools attracting foreign students are one of the most important institutions of hegemonic reproduction. The more foreign students a country can educate in its own universities, the more likely its hegemonic ideology will be propagated throughout the world … Hosting foreign students can contribute to a policy change in the students' country of origin. At the same time, having a large number of foreign students is one of the most visible effects of educational soft power ... Education can be used directly as a tool in foreign policy by providing educational services and guidance through development aid. (pp. 307-309)

Both educational exchanges that send students and faculty abroad (outgoing) or receive students and faculty by facilitating and at times funding their stay (incoming), are so "lost in the myriad of global social contacts that their worth is often questioned" (Scott-Smith, 2008, p. 51). However, it is the micro-level P2P (people to people) rather than macro-level G2P (government to people) contact, which on the surface appears to be void of governmental involvement or interest, that makes them so powerful (Snow, 2008). Ultimately, these education aid and exchanges are foreign policy tools aimed at promoting the ideals (and often the language) of the nation-states that fund the initiative

(see *Chapter 3*), in addition to gathering information about and shaping attitudes within a targeted population where (outsider-foreign) access may be largely restricted (Snow, 2008).

Viewing education from a foreign policy perspective re-raises some questions about the ethical implications of aid and exchange, especially when it is situated within conflict-affected communities. First, as repeatedly established throughout each subsection of this chapter, Scott-Smith (2008) asserts that it would be impossible for educational initiatives to be apolitical. For instance, in "Exchange programs and public diplomacy", he states that:

> Even the most politically neutral of exchanges, such as those between high schools, have either political intent behind their creation or are promoted for the purpose of developing cross-border relations that can subsequently lead to political outcomes, such as a reduction in conflict … This is also the case with exchanges run wholly by the private sector, which still operate within a broader political environment (but which are often used by governments exactly to avoid any sense of direct political interference). (p. 50)

Furthermore, even though public diplomacy is characterised by the "process of reciprocity (exchange) and the pursuit of an ideal (mutual understanding)", some scholars would argue that there tends to be a "unilateral" element to most education exchanges and aid (Lee, 2015, p. 355). As previously suggested, it is the funding nation or body that usually (but not always) promotes their national language, culture and values through these initiatives. Accordingly, some researchers argue that this one-sided approach "should be considered informational diplomacy or, more frankly, propaganda" rather than true cultural diplomacy or exchange (Lee, 2015, p. 355). However, in a study of the Fulbright Program, Bettie (2015) reminds her audience that despite being public diplomacy tools (p. 361), the educators and students who engage in exchanges are not trained as such:

> Unlike conventional diplomats, these unofficial ambassadors have no foreign policy briefing, no intercultural communication training or similar preparation. Their unprompted views may be all the more credible for it, and perceived as more sincere or genuine by foreign audiences than a diplomat's carefully crafted statements might be. (pp. 358-359)

Moreover, Bettie (2015) identifies two different standpoints on the utility of education aid and exchange: the first is the information perspective, which sees international education as an instrument of public diplomacy to be used strategically, and the second is the educational and cultural perspective, which sees education exchanges as "inherently valuable" in and of themselves (p. 361). In doing so, she identifies a potential gap:

despite many years of implementing education aid and exchange programmes, the “true purpose” of these initiatives may not be entirely clear for, nor agreed upon by, those involved (p. 370). Nonetheless, despite the illusion of “neutrality” that can give public diplomacy initiatives in education legitimacy, international education has, if not a political scope, some type of political impact.

2.6 Conclusion

While the practitioners and recipients of education aid and exchange may have varying degrees of awareness regarding the political purpose and impact of the initiatives in which they participate, these transnational programmes and partnerships, which often take place between the Global North and Global South, are significant (yet often eclipsed) foreign policy tools. As such, they need to be critically evaluated, as does the role of education (and educators) in the context of conflict-affected settings. In fact, drawing on the two faces of education paradigm, it is clear that “what people are taught, how they are taught and how education systems are organized can make countries more or less prone to violence” (Kester, 2021, p. 257). Moreover, considering that universities are key sites before, during and in the aftermath of conflict, third level education can be an immense resource (or hindrance) for the transformation of conflict in volatile sociopolitical environments. In order to best approach these issues in the field of education and conflict, it is important to shed light on how situations of conflict are conceptualised and by whom (i.e., locals and/or internationals), in the Palestinian context and beyond.

Chapter 3 | Language, identity and conflict: English language teaching in the context of ethno-national conflict

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the relationship between language and conflict. It first looks at how language can be a proxy for national identity, then examines how identity functions in the context of ethno-national conflict (i.e., meaning conflicts between ethnic groups within a disputed nation or territory that distinguish themselves by their language, culture, history and/or religion) (Yehuda, 2023). In addition, it discusses the practice of foreign language teaching in conflict-affected areas, and explores factors that impact the teacher's experience such as the sociopolitical environment and teacher identity. Finally, English language education is examined, specifically the utility of English as a global lingua franca, its status as an imperialistic/colonial language, and its role among other foreign languages in the occupied Palestinian territory.

3.2 Language, conflict and identity

3.2.1 Language, conflict and the nation

Although most nations are neither ethnically nor linguistically homogeneous, languages are viewed as proxies for ethno-national cultures (Gartzke and Gleditsch, 2006; Hobswann, 1996). This conceptualisation is underpinned by a "one nation-one language paradigm" (Lytra, 2016, p. 135) and is particularly salient during situations of conflict, where languages act as strong identity markers (Mabry, 2010). Likewise, as Kelly et al. (2019a) observe, the majority of conflicts are multilingual in nature, yet the centrality and importance of language during wars is often overlooked, being obscured by "monolingual assumptions" (p. 2). This is true for international (or inter-state) disputes, in addition to intra-state disputes, where unrest involves competing ethnic, religious and/or linguistic identities.

Languages not only express identity[59], but they "carry power" in a manner that is both symbolic and pragmatic (Kelly et al., 2019b, p. 507). As Joseph explores in his chapter "Historical perspectives on language and identity" (2016):

[59] Identity is "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (Norton in Norton & Mckinney, 2011, p. 73)

> Of the many ways in which ... belonging is signified, what language a person speaks, and how he or she speaks it, rank among the most powerful ... It is through language that people and places are named, heritage and ancestry recorded and passed on, and beliefs developed and ritualised. (p. 19)

During times of ethnic strife, language is the primary communicative tool or medium through which cultural identities are mobilised to incite violence (*Section 2.3.3*) (Erling, 2017). This happens in the community at large (e.g., in media, political propaganda), as well as in formal educational settings (e.g., in lectures and textbooks) (Trošt & Trbovc, 2020). Moreover, conflicts often have sociolinguistic dimensions that are reflected in language policy. For example, institutionalised "discrimination can take place against individuals or groups based on the language that they speak, and linguistic discrimination may be a cipher for other forms of discrimination" (Prince, 2019, p. 485). One such instance is the "suppression of minority languages", which is often symptomatic of "myths of ethnic purity" and homogeneity (Davies & Dubinsky, 2018, p.100). Accordingly, *The Palgrave Handbook of Language and Conflict* (2019a) highlights how "languages play a crucial role in the making of war and peace … [they are] integral to every aspect of a conflict", yet their significance is usually "taken for granted" (Kelly et al., p. 1). Much like the two faces of education (*Section 2.3.4*), language in conflict and post-conflict settings "can lead to peace building, neutrality and indifference, or to destruction, conflict building and warmongering", with or without the language user's awareness (Janicki, 2017, p. 189).

3.2.2 Emerging together: national identity and language

National and linguistic identity have long been entangled. The idea that language is intrinsically connected to a certain people or society (and later a nation) has its origins in primordialist views popular during the Romantic period, and specifically in German philosophy of the 17th and 18th centuries (Garcia, 2012; Lytra, 2016). While Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) argued that, "with language is created the heart of the people" (Fishman, 1989, cited in Lytra, 2016, p. 134), Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) believed that "nation and language flourished together" (in Davies & Dubinsky, 2018, p. 100). Over the next centuries, a significant shift took place: the idea of *the nation* came to be seen as a social construct (including its defining characteristics, which depending on the scholar and culture, consist of a mix of shared symbols, myths, collective memories, ancestry, ethnicity, religion, political belonging and/or attachments to geographic locations such as a real or imagined homeland) (Levenson & Resnik, 2021).

Regardless, from the Romantic to the Modernist eras, language continually remained central to conceptualisations of national identity. For example, two 20th century political theorists that endorsed the idea of language as a proxy for culture and by extension national membership are Ernest Gellner (1925-1995) and Benedict Anderson (1936-2015) (Mabry, 2010). While there are many criticisms of their views on nationalism which go beyond the scope of this study, their work suggests that language enabled nationalism to flourish. This can be seen in Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983), where he links the decline of religiosity during the Enlightenment to the decrease of Latin being used as a lingua franca. Concurrently, the advent of the printing press opened up a profitable market for books and newspapers, which later led to local vernaculars needing to be standardised for consumption by a larger population (i.e., national languages). In turn, the act of reading enabled those who consumed print journalism and stories to share a common experience with those who were unknown to them (i.e., people they would never actually meet), furthering the idea of an imagined community[60] (or nation). Therefore, it is no surprise that nations came to be associated with language; although they are not inherent to one another, they have been historically intertwined.

Nowadays, language is often perceived as a requisite for national identity (Stokes, 2017), although it can also be associated with a political position or identity within a nation or territory (i.e., as would be the case of Ukrainian in Ukraine) (Eddy, 2010; Smirnova & Iliev, 2017). In fact, nations go to great lengths to establish and maintain national languages at varying degrees of (in)formal and (un)organised effort, some even establishing language academies that oversee the standardisation and evolution of the language[61] (Davies & Dubinsky, 2018). Formal education also aided the establishment of national languages. After primary school became compulsory in many countries, those who were able to attend secondary and tertiary education (which became increasingly common following World War II), needed widespread, standardised languages that enabled them to study across communities (Hobsbawn, 1996, pp. 1069-1072). Furthermore, the concern with universal literacy contributed to the aforementioned standardisation of written language, and consequently impacted the spoken vernacular (Hobsbawn, 1996).

[60] Also the use of “calendrical time” (p. 35) as a literary tool, an adaptation of Benjamin’s notion of simultaneity-along-time, enabled individuals to imagine themselves as part of a nation. For example, they could read texts and encounter multiple stories (eg., in a newspaper) or characters in a story (e.g., in a novel) that never actually meet or interact, yet are somehow connected and part of the same narrative “through homogeneous, empty time” (Anderson, 1983, p. 26)

[61] Some language academies preceded the birth of the modern nation (i.e., Académie Francaise in France and Accademia Etrusca in Italy). Nonetheless, it is argued that “the French Revolution introduced to the world the idea of the ‘one and indivisible republic’, in which the congruence of sovereign people, inalienable territory and single national language was held to be necessary” (Wright, 2012, p. 61)

However, despite the apparent educational and/or commercial necessities involved in the standardisation of national languages, Hobsbawn (1996) reminds us that all language choices have elements of "political self-assertion" (p. 1078). For instance, this can be seen in the tendency for linguistic separatism following national secessionism (e.g., Balkanisation and Serbo-Croat-Bosnian and/or Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian, etc.), in multilingual states that choose to adopt more than one official language, especially following periods of colonisation (e.g., as in Ireland) (Davies & Dubinsky, 2018) and in rarer cases, where a language is created and/or a dead language is transformed into a living, spoken language as a national symbol (e.g., Hebrew in Israel). Furthermore, these language choices also have consequences for diverse communities. For example, Schneider (2017) argues that the Department of Education's preference for monolingual education in Jerusalem following the end of the Ottoman Empire (both during and after the British mandate) "inevitably contributed to the fragmentation of the public space into Jewish and Arab sectors, each with its own 'native' language" (p. 69). In other words, cultural and religious affiliations that at one time were much less divisive can become more pronounced through language choices. Correspondingly, as a "shared language can be seen as a strong indicator for group membership, resulting in … in-group favouritism", one's linguistic identity can become much more significant during ethno-national conflict (Smirnova & Iliev, 2017, p. 212).

3.2.3 Identity during times of conflict

Identities are multifaceted and fluid. Depending on the sociopolitical environment, they are easily shaped and mobilised. This is especially true during protracted conflicts. A particular type of protracted conflict (and one of the many types of conflicts that are used to describe the situation in Israel and Palestine) *(Section 2.2.1)* is called an "identity-conflict" (Goerzig, 2010). The term, which refers to a "protracted zero-sum"[62] struggle during which "groups feel that their identity (the sense of oneself) is threatened", are difficult to resolve (Goerzig, 2010, p. 7). As Goerzig (2010) argues: interests are negotiable, while identity is not. Therefore, the risk for identity-based violence or a relapse into violence is high for "inflammable" contexts, which "are activated and fueled by

[62] "In contrast to a negative sum (or lose-lose) situation and a positive sum (or win-win) situation, a zero-sum situation describes a win-lose constellation in which a gain on one side implies a loss for the other side, such as for example cutting a cake" (Goerzig, 2010, p. 7)

historical and political interests (e.g., Northern Ireland, Israel, Palestine, Cyprus … Bosnia and Herzegovina)" (Kovač, 2017, p. 32).

The aforementioned conflicts are (re)ignited and sustained through polarised identities that become substantial obstacles for resolution and reconciliation. To better understand how certain facets of one's identity can become so weighty, Hancock (2016) introduced a model, the *Integrated Relational Identity Structure*, or IRIS:

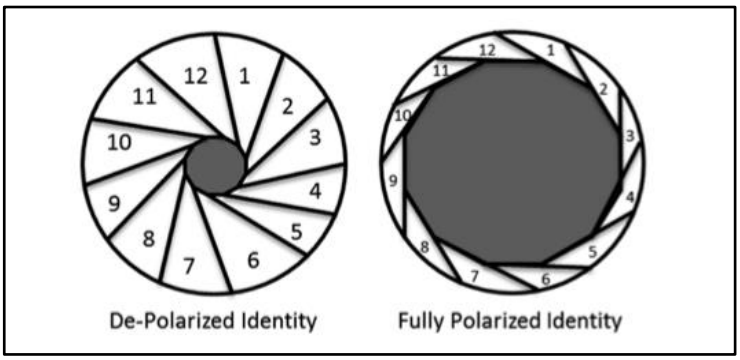

Figure 1: IRIS - de-polarized and polarised identities
Source: Hancock, 2016, p. 414

This model is "used to show how core identities are polarized during a conflict's escalation and how they might depolarize during periods of de-escalation and conflict resolution" (Hancock, 2016, p. 409). In the above figure, the wheel on the left has large numbered sections, each representing an aspect of one's identity, some of which are latent or unactivated in a pre or post-conflict environment. In contrast, the wheel on the right is a visual representation of how the multiple dimensions of one's identity can be overshadowed or deemphasized to accommodate an inflated central identity; this would be more visible as a conflict intensifies and key identities are activated. In other words, the image shows how "the core identity can become more or less important, creating or crowding out room for role identities"[63] (Hancock, 2016, p. 414). These changes are known as "identity narrowing" and "identity widening" (Hancock, 2016, p. 414). Goerzig (2010) preceded Hancock in observing this phenomenon, stating that "identity conflicts are characterised by a loss of multiple roles" (p. 12). This loss satisfies "the need for a unifying, overarching identity which suppresses multiple identities … one identity based on opposition becomes used to put life in order where order is lost. It unifies and makes

[63] Examples of role identities can be one's familial connections (e.g., being a sibling), community connections (e.g., being a neighbour), and educational roles (e.g., being a student), etc.. They often become entirely lost in extreme situations, such as radicalisation (Goerzig, 2010)

sense of what goes wrong and why" (Goerzig, 2010, p. 10). Thus, pronounced in-group and out-group distinctions are exacerbated.

In ethno-national conflict, the core identity, which is represented by the central grey circle in *Figure 1*, is usually synonymous with an ethnicity or nationality. It can be reinforced by other identity markers as well, such as language (e.g., the use of Latin or Cyrillic alphabets in the former Yugoslavia), religion (as in Northern Ireland), and/or an attachment to place (as we see in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict), if not all three in combination or simultaneously (e.g., all three are arguably present in each of the examples given) (Levenson & Resnik, 2021). In terms of counteracting polarised identities, both Hancock (2016) and Goerzig (2010) predict that nurturing other aspects of an individual or a community's identity can aid in the reconciliation process and can "lead to [the] potential transformation of core identities in post-conflict situations" (Hancock, 2016, p. 409).

The role of conflict in identity formation is important to consider when evaluating ethno-national disputes and can enable one to better understand how language re-enforces national identity. In turn, one can also shed light on how individuals in conflict-affected societies may experience outsiders who participate in cultural exchanges or who administer education aid and exchanges, particularly based on the outsiders' linguistic profile and country of origin. Furthermore, those who work abroad in conflict-affected areas are not immune to identity polarisation[64]: they also may experience identity narrowing or widening depending on their connection to the conflict and its unique relationship to their personal identities and lived experiences. This may be particularly relevant to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as it is perhaps one of the most politically polarising and symbolic conflicts globally (McDowell & Braniff, 2014; Shafir, 2017)[65].

[64] Polarisation can be defined in two different ways: ideological and affective polarisation (Pauwels & van Alstein, 2022). "Ideological (or issue-based) polarisation refers to the sharpening of opinions, positions or beliefs[] on a specific issue within a group of like-minded people" (Pauwels & van Alstein, 2022, p. 8). Meanwhile, affective polarisation, "refers to a growing social-emotional distance between groups. Mutual distrust increases and the groups start to show a growing aversion or hostility towards one another. Social identities and in- and outgroup dynamics play an important role" (Pauwels & van Alstein, 2022, p. 8).

[65] Khalidi (1997) also observes this, stating: "... the degree of heat that is often generated by the very mention of the terms 'Palestine' or 'Palestinian' is notable in itself" (p. 12)

3.3 Foreign language education in situations of conflict

3.3.1 Language as a proxy for conflict

Language studies and language education tend to mirror larger social trends (Abbas & Mendel, 2022). A department or ministry of education's provision of foreign and/or additional/second language instruction[66] is closely connected to the sociopolitical environment. For this reason, the Arabic language and conflict scholar Suleiman (2004) extends the notion of language as a proxy beyond the nation to situations of conflict[67], viewing "language and its study [as] a predictor and reflector of deeper social and political dynamics" (Abbas & Mendal, 2022, p. 221). One example of this would be the conflict between Serbia and Kosovo (specifically from 1989-1990), when "a series of laws were passed mandating a unified curriculum to be taught exclusively in the Serbian language", despite the fact that Kosovars had traditionally studied in Albanian (Davies, 2004b, p. 106). This coincided with the abolishment of the parliamentary autonomy of the region and was a warning signal preceding the strife that was to come. Through the conceptualisation of language as proxy for ethno-national conflict, Suleiman (2013) shows how the study of language expresses "competing narratives of the in-group and the outgroup" (p. 13), and highlights how language-related discussions act as a "surrogate channel" for "articulat[ing] issues of politics and identity that one would not, or could not, express openly or directly in the public sphere" (p. 43). Therefore, while there may be pragmatic dimensions to (not) teaching and (not) studying a certain language, the choice to (not) offer or (not) pursue a language is often underpinned by a sociopolitical/sociohistorical ideology (Pavlenko, 2003).

3.3.2 Historical precedents of teaching and learning languages in (post-)conflict settings

[66] Foreign languages being languages that are not typically in use in a society (e.g., German in Japan) and additional or second languages as languages that are acquired as a communicative tool within the social environment in which it is spoken (e.g., German in Berlin) (Cook, 2016); However, it is important to note that these labels, while necessary for clarity, are reductive. The distinction between 'foreign' and 'additional/second' is not always possible. According to Pavlenko (2003), "'foreign' is in itself an ambiguous and problematic label. In many contexts the boundary between minority, heritage, and foreign languages is far from clear-cut" (p.314). Furthermore, drawing on Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, the notion of foreign here "refer[s] to languages conceived of, or 'imagined', as such" (Pavlenko, 2003, p. 315)

[67] Suleiman (2004) builds on the work of Gramsci (1985), showing how language related issues are rarely about language itself: "'Every time the question of language surfaces, in one way or another, it means that a series of other problems is coming to the fore'" (Gramsci in Suleiman, p. 93)

The tension between national and minority languages is well-documented, yet there is much less research available that focuses specifically on foreign (as opposed to additional/second) language teaching and learning in the context of ethno-national conflict. One multilingualism scholar in particular, Pavlenko (2003), began looking at this topic two decades ago, noting the perception that "foreign languages, with the exception of English, often remain at the margins, if not in the shadows, as neutral and objective transmitters of the code and culture of a particular target group, devoid of ideological implications" (p. 314). She identified this as a conceptual gap, arguing that foreign languages (and not just national languages) shape identity. While a more nuanced understanding of English as a foreign language in the context of conflict will be discussed separately (*Section 3.4*), the broader historical patterns in the field of foreign language teaching that Pavlenko outlines are important foundations for this study.

In her 2003 article "Language and the Enemy: Foreign Language Education and National Identity", Pavlenko follows foreign language education through three periods: post-World War I United States, post-World War II Soviet Union, and post-communist Eastern Europe. As if exploring opposite ends of a continuum, she outlines two different educational approaches to teaching "'the language of the enemy' in the context of war" (p. 314); one has its roots in the period of American isolationism, the other was endorsed by the Soviet Union despite policies that restricted contact with foreigners[68] (Pavlenko, 2003):

> The opponents of foreign-language study in the US believed in the intrinsic links between language, thought, and moral and cultural values, and thus tried to protect American children from undesirable influences. In contrast, Soviet educators, from the 1920s on, saw enormous possibilities in using 'the language of the enemy' to promote the ideological agenda of socialism and communism. (p. 322)

The US decided to protect their pupils from the international community and pressured citizens with hyphenated identities, which were seen as incompatible with American identity, to disconnect from their linguistic and cultural heritage for the purposes of national unity. Instead, the Soviet regime valued the languages of capitalist countries: not only would greater knowledge of these languages increase their national security (as seen in the shift in enrolment from German to English as the Cold War intensified), but the languages were also spoken by the proletariat in each of those capitalist countries and the Soviet Union imagined itself as the "leader of the world proletariat" (Pavlenko, 2003, p.

[68] Similar to Pavlenko's account, Lvovich (1997) refers to the Soviet Union as a state "where xenophobia and 'xenophilia' were strangely interwoven" (p. 8)

322). Consequently, specialised schools for talented pupils were created that offered foreign languages as the medium of instruction, with careful attention being paid to embedding course content and teaching materials with “texts, vocabulary and exercises of ideological value” that “glorified Soviet life” in order to avoid “contamination” (Pavlenko, 2003, pp. 323-324). In doing so, imagined communities were created that aligned target language speakers with their Soviet counterparts. For example, the work of writers and editors from communist publications in France and Italy were integrated into coursework, allegiance to the German Democratic Republic was featured in introductory German texts and Arabic materials were imbued with romanticised references to Arab communists and peasants (Pavlenko, 2003).

The success of the Soviet foreign language programmes fell short of expectations for a variety of reasons. First, it was impossible to practise foreign languages with target-language speakers as many Soviet citizens were not able to travel abroad or emigrate (the exception being the Jewish community, which was allowed to emigrate to Israel from the 1970s). This was part of a larger policy that discouraged contact with foreigners (Pavlenko, 2003). Second, low levels of motivation were reported: students saw little applicability to their lives, the content (promoting the virtues of the Soviet Union) was repetitive, and even if students excelled, few would be able to attend conferences, engage in academic exchanges or would be placed in government/diplomatic positions (although some would and were motivated by this aspiration, especially those who were well-situated in society) (Pavlenko, 2003). When looking at outcomes in foreign language learning in conflict-affected societies, Gardner and Lambert (1972) and Gardner’s (1985) frameworks are often cited (Abbas & Mendel, 2022; Donitsa-Schmidt et al., 2004; Tum & Kunt, 2021). In their text *Attitudes and Motivation in Second Language Learning* (1972), two main types of motivation for learning a language are highlighted: instrumental motivation and integrative motivation. While instrumental motivation is related to reaching a particular professional or academic goal, such as admission to university or employment opportunities, integrative motivation represents a desire to meet, interact with and better understand those who speak a particular language (Abbas & Mendel, 2022). As with many conflict-affected societies (to varying degrees), the Soviet Union was unable to foster both instrumental and integrative motivation in the context of language learning.

Regardless of a nation or territory’s approach to foreign language education, to discourage or encourage it, teachers and students may react in ways that resist imposed linguistic identities. For example, Pavlenko’s (2003) analysis of the post-Soviet space in Eastern Europe reveals how “learners are not passive ‘consumers’ of institutionalised

ideologies", but they "engage in resistance and opposition" even in state-sponsored language learning environments (p. 314). For example, she explains that:

> Foreign-language learners may choose to construct oppositional identities in language classrooms: some, for patriotic reasons, may reject the languages imposed on them, while others may instead reject the dominant national identity and create an alternative one through the means of a foreign language. (p. 313)

Leading up to the fall of the Soviet Union, Pavlenko records instances of "passive resistance exhibited by teachers [of Russian as a foreign language] refusing to teach the language properly and learners refusing to learn it", showing how "a patriotic Pole or Hungarian was seen by some as incompatible with being proficient in Russian" (p. 328). Nowadays, many of the communities that traditionally learnt Russian as a second or even first language, especially those that continue to have uncomfortable relations with the Russian Federation as a result of frozen conflicts in the former Soviet Republics (e.g., Ukraine, Estonia, the de facto state of Transnistria, etc.) (Eddy, 2010), have replaced their curricula with local and/or foreign languages (mainly English) and imagine themselves as "sophisticated multilinguals" in a European and/or international community (Pavlenko, 2003, p. 328).

Pavlenko's observation that it is possible to "reject" one's "national identity" and adopt a new one by "means of a foreign language" is also a powerful example of the relationship between language, ethno-national culture and imagined communities. In a memoir about a teacher and translator entitled *The Multilingual Self: An Inquiry into Language Learning,* Lvovich (1997) expresses how her identification with French culture and language was "the only possible escape from the political reality" of being a Jew in 1970s Soviet Russian (Pavlenko, 2003, p. 326):

> Becoming an émigré *de l'intérieur* … made a foreign language belong to me: It was my Dasein, my being-in-the-world[69]. The tragic situation of the Jewish intelligentsia in the Soviet Union, many of whom were deprived of professional careers and formal education, stimulated their learning … creating various unique ways for the reconstruction of self-esteem. Some became political dissidents … some went insane; some turned to their religion or converted to another. I became French. (Lvovich, 1997, p. 2)

The author states that from her home in Moscow she was able to renegotiate her image of herself by speaking French with colleagues, reading French classics, listening to French

[69] For *dasein* or being-in-the-world see *Section 4.3.2*

music and cooking French cuisine with local ingredients. She affirms, “It was a beautiful Me, and the Me that I liked” (Lvovich, 1997, p. 9).

These works demonstrate that language teachers and learners have agency in how they leverage their identities, regardless of the domestic and/or foreign language policies that are imposed upon them. Furthermore, they show how language education goes beyond “linguistic signs and symbols”; it is “a social practice” through which identity is constructed (Norton & Mckinney, 2011, p. 77). When discussing the notion of “investment” in language learning, a term that is reminiscent of instrumental motivation but places greater emphasis on the learner’s “complex identity and multiple desires” (Norton & Mckinney, 2011, p. 75), Norton (2013) argues that:

> Every time language learners speak, read or write the target language, they are not only exchanging information with members of the target language community, they are also organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. As such, they are engaged in identity construction and negotiation. (p. 203)

This sheds light on how “marginalized learners can appropriate more desirable identities” through foreign languages, and how “inequitable relations of power” between linguistic communities impact the “affective factors” involved in teaching or learning a language (Norton & Mckinney, 2011, p. 73). For example, while a teacher or student may be a committed and motivated educator or learner, their social and historical connection to the target language may influence their performance. Moreover, considering that one’s identity is grounded not just in the past and present, but also in how one understands their possibilities for the future (Norton, 2013), language learning (or the refusal to learn) is an investment in an imagined future (or a divestment in a future that seems limited due to ongoing or recent conflict).

3.3.3 “Foreign languages” in intra-state conflicts: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and beyond

In the case of inter-state conflicts, the language of the enemy is often a foreign language (i.e., as English would have been in Russia during the Cold War). However, in intra-state conflicts, the language of the enemy may be an official, additional or minority language that is widely spoken in the state or territory. Interestingly, some scholars still refer to the languages that fall into the latter category (i.e., intra-state) as foreign languages. For example, in Tum and Kunt’s (2021) article “Language learning under the shadow of conflict: Teachers’ beliefs about teaching the language of the ‘other’”, the study is framed

as a foreign language learning initiative where Turkish students in Cyprus learn Greek as a foreign language. This is despite the fact that both Turkish and Greek are official languages on the (albeit divided) island nation. Another example can be found in Or and Shohamy's (2015) chapter "Contrasting Arabic and Hebrew textbooks in Israel: A focus on culture", where they look at the "teaching of Arabic and Hebrew as 'foreign' languages in Israel" (p. 109), citing the work of Pavlenko (2003) as their basis for using this term. Similar to the case in Cyprus, at the time of Or and Shohamy's publication, both Arabic and Hebrew were official languages in Israel[70]. In addition, Abbas and Mendel's (2022) recent article "Hebrew Studies amongst Palestinians in East Jerusalem: Not 'Language of Success' but 'Language of Access'", finds that for Palestinian East Jerusalemites (who are either Israeli citizens, or more likely, permanent residents of Israel), "English is a more important foreign language than Hebrew" (p. 232)[71]. These observations reiterate how the notion of a foreign language is closely related to Anderson's concept of imagined communities as interpreted by Pavlenko: foreign languages are languages that are foreign because they are "conceived of, or 'imagined', as such" (Pavlenko, 2003, p. 315). Furthermore, it demonstrates how polarised ethno-national identities accentuate in-group outgroup distinctions, ultimately emphasising the linguistic otherness (or foreignness) of a given population, even within a singular nation or territory.

For this study, it is important to take a brief look at how Hebrew and Arabic foreign language learning[72] is perceived within the Israeli and Palestinian communities. By doing

[70] Arabic was demoted as an official language to a recognised language when controversial legislation was passed in Israel known as The Nation-State Law (2018). It establishes that in Israel, "the right to exercise national self-determination … is unique to the Jewish people" (Tanous, 2022, p. 6). There is a linguistic component to this law, specifically article 4 (a), which "downgrades the official status of Arabic in that it establishes Hebrew as the exclusive official language of Israel" (Abbas & Mendel, 2022, p. 223). Similar to Suleiman's (2013) notion of a "surrogate channel", Abbas and Mendel (2022) argue that it is aimed at Arabic language speakers rather than the Arabic language itself

[71] There is not full agreement on this position. For example, Amara (2007) argues in his article "Teaching Hebrew to Palestinian Pupils in Israel" that "Hebrew is the most important second language, even more important than English, and at times in some domains even more that Arabic" (p. 245)

[72] Arabic is taught as a foreign language in Jewish-Israeli schools, while Hebrew is asymmetrically taught as a foreign language (i.e., for a longer period of time, starting from the third grade) in Arab-Palestinian schools within Israel (Amara, 2014). In fact, following the end of the British Mandate, it became obligatory for Arabs in Israel to study Hebrew, while Arabic was not included in the Israeli curriculum for another 40 years (Or & Shohamy, 2015). The West Bank does not have any requirements for students to study Hebrew. Within Israel, few integrated, bilingual Israeli-Palestinian schools exist (known as "Hand in Hand schools", as of 2021 there were a total of five) (Khawaja et al., 2021) and it is rare for Jewish and Palestinian-Arab students to study together. It is worth noting that some Palestinian students choose to study in monolingual Hebrew schools, which have better funding and possibly educational outcomes, but in doing so sacrifice their historical narrative (Bekerman, 2016). The majority of pupils either study at a secular or religious Jewish-Israeli school or an "Arab-Israeli" school, the latter being a separate but not autonomous entity serving the Muslim, Bedouin, Christian and Druze communities (Reingold & Baratz, 2020, p. 87). In East Jerusalem, Palestinian students choose between attending a school that uses the Palestinian National Authority's (PA) curriculum (as used in the West Bank) with Hebrew as a foreign language being administered by the Israeli Ministry of Education, or to attend an Israeli school. The PA curriculum prepares students for the Palestinian secondary school

so, one can later situate the role of English in this complex setting (*Section 3.5*). Within Israel, Arabic is a first language for Palestinians with Israeli citizenship (20.7% of the total population) (Bekerman, 2016) and for Palestinians who have permanent residency (i.e., East Jerusalem). It can also be a heritage language for Middle Eastern Jews. Moreover, Arabic and Hebrew are both considered to be holy languages for their respective speakers (Amara, 2014). They have many other similarities in terms of grammatical structures and vocabulary, so "the learning of Arabic would also contribute to the learners' knowledge of Hebrew" (Or & Shohamy, 2015, p. 111). Despite these connections, Israeli interest and proficiency in Arabic as a foreign language is in steady decline (Mendel, 2019), with few Hebrew speakers being competent Arabic users (Henkin-Roitfarb, 2011).

In terms of formal education, Arabic is learnt as a third language (L3) after English (L2) for a minimum of three years, often between the 7th and 9th grades (Or & Shohamy, 2015). However, students can opt out if they wish to study an alternative L3, such as French, the main competing L3 after Arabic (Dontisa-Schmidt et al., 2004). In his chapter "Who Really Wants to Learn Arabic?", Mendel (2019) argues that since its inception in Israel, Arabic language education has lacked a civilian scope. Instead, it is "a springboard for getting accepted into the Intelligence Corps", a prestigious military entity (p. 463). He highlights how it is taught for security purposes, or "to know your enemy", rather than for peace, or to "know your neighbour" (Snir in Mendel, 2019, p. 472). This reflects an approach to foreign language learning that "encourages students to study Arabic not in order to become acquainted with Arabs and Arabic, and not to enrich their points of view, but in order to continue to segregate themselves inside the Israeli security perception and in order to 'get' Arabs in Arabic" (Mendel, 2019, p. 470). Similarly, Or and Shohamy (2015) suggest that many Jewish Israelis are suspicious of the Arab population due to the ongoing conflict, and that for this reason, the language has become stigmatised (Shohamy, 2014). Given these observations, Arabic (in addition to the so-called immigrant languages of Israel such as Russian, Yiddish, etc.), is not highly valued. Rather, it is Hebrew that sits at the top of the language hierarchy despite its limited applicability outside of Israel, along with English (Shohamy, 2014). Therefore, considering that Israelis ascribe "marginal status and prestige" to Arabic (Or & Shohamy, 2015, p. 109), there is little instrumental motivation (the exception being the aforementioned obtainment of elite positions in the military), and even less integrative motivation to acquire fluency in the language. Using Norton and Mckinney's (2011) notion of investment, learners are hesitant to pursue Arabic as they anticipate few cultural or economic returns on their knowledge.

certificate, the *tawjihi*, while the Israeli schools would prepare students for the corresponding *bagrut*, which gives access to universities in Israel but would not be accepted in the West Bank or in some Arab countries

In terms of the Palestinian population learning Hebrew, it is more difficult to make generalisations due to the fragmentation caused by the occupation. For example, one's position and relation to Hebrew varies depending on their legal status and geographic location (i.e., if one is an Israeli citizen, a permanent resident in East Jerusalem, or living in the West Bank, with or without a permit to work in Israel). In addition, Palestinians located in Israel and East Jerusalem would most likely need to take Hebrew as a foreign language, while no such requirement would be in place throughout the West Bank where the study of the language is almost "non-existent" (Abbas & Mendel, 2022, p. 230). Thus, research on Hebrew language teaching and learning is limited. Nonetheless, Abbas and Mendel's (2022) study of Hebrew as a foreign language in East Jerusalem brings to the fore some critical issues that may be widely applicable to the Palestinian community.

Similar to Arabic for Jews in Israel, knowledge of Hebrew is quite low for Palestinians living in East Jerusalem (and even lower for those in the West Bank). East Jerusalem is an area that is legally and physically separated from the West Bank and was largely annexed by Israel, yet Palestinians are not automatically granted citizenship rights and documents (Abbas & Mendel, 2022). In fact, very few have Israeli citizenship and instead hold permanent residency permits. While this is partly because citizenship applications are refused, it is also related to the fact that many Palestinians do not aspire to participate in Israeli political life[73] (Abbas & Mendel, 2022). Abbas and Mendel (2022) argue that as a result of identity and allegiance, which includes the resistance to Israeli rule and occupation, many Palestinians in East Jerusalem have "blocked them[selves] from fully realizing their civil rights" (p. 226). This resistance to Israeli dominance is also reflected in their views towards Hebrew: "unsurprisingly, in light of the ongoing conflict, the Palestinian community - especially in the Occupied Territories [the West Bank and East Jerusalem] - associates Hebrew with the Israeli occupier" (Abbas & Mendel, 2022, p. 229). Abbas and Mendel (2022) explain:

> Palestinian students use Hebrew as a proxy for their views about Israel. This includes the Israeli occupation and future relations with the State of Israel including potential opportunities and constraints this relationship with Israel entails. It also highlights ways in which their Palestinian national identity intersects with and relates to Israeli political and economic power. Therefore, a study of language can

[73] However, there has been an exponential increase in citizenship applications due to the precarious situation in East Jerusalem, including the threat of residency permits being revoked (Abbas & Mendel, 2022). For example, "according to the Israeli Ministry of the Interior between 2003–2016 there was a steep rise in the number of … citizenship applications (69 to 1,081). A total of 8,556 citizenship applications were submitted during this period (only 3,362 were approved)" (Abbas & Mendel, 2022, p. 226)

> reveal … their individual and collective strategies for survival in this complex reality. (p. 224)

Mirroring Arabic in Israel, Hebrew is closely associated with the sociopolitical context. In fact, Palestinian students learning Hebrew as a foreign language report that their first encounters with the language were in the context of military interventions (Abbas & Mendel, 2022). This means that the "politicized context of exposure to Hebrew … could generate a negative association and can affect students' cognitive ability to acquire the language" (Abbas & Mendel, 2022, p. 235). Yet, when assessing attitudes toward Hebrew during moments of heightened violence, Abbas and Mendel (2022) found contradictory evidence: on one hand they came across accounts of students becoming more resistant to learning the language, while in a separate survey, they found little change as students felt that the language would help them advocate for themselves under tense conditions.

This speaks to one important difference when comparing perceptions of Arabic and Hebrew as a foreign language: while Arabic is seen as having little instrumental value for Israelis, knowledge of Hebrew increases the "pragmatic position" of Palestinians, meaning that it enables upward mobility, grants access to resources (i.e., employment/university in Israel) and it facilitates more advantageous exchanges with Israeli military personnel (Abbas & Mendel, 2022, p. 235). However, the aforementioned contradiction also sheds light on another tension. Education has long been a coping strategy for Palestinians[74], enabling them to maintain a "consciousness of collective rights", to resist the "occupation of their minds through their daily practices", and to "build and rebuild their Palestinian identity" (Alzaroo & Hunt, 2003, p. 165, p. 178, p. 179). As Shlomo (2017) states:

> Since 1967, the Palestinian … education system had been one of the major strongholds of resistance to Israeli rule. Palestinians, and their national leadership alike, regard the Arab education system as a key instrument in preserving Palestinian national and urban identity and also as a manifestation of the rejection of Israeli social and national norms and values. (p. 232)

Therefore, while pursuing formal and/or non formal Hebrew language education has clear advantages for Palestinians which could arguably contribute to their "strategies for survival, in all areas: social, economic, political and, as paradoxical as it sounds, also national" (Abbas & Mendel, 2022, p. 239), it is ideologically challenging to integrate the language (Hebrew) in an educational system that aims to counterbalance Israeli cultural influence.

[74] For example, in Evans & Azar's (2007) documentary film *Two Schools in Nablus*, one teacher remarks: "education is our weapon to face the occupation"

That being said, some scholars caution against simplistic notions of conflict, language and ethno-national identity, particularly the idea that taking "from the 'enemy's language' somehow violates the rules of the conflict between two exclusive nationalities" and that learning the enemy's language is purely instrumental (Hawker, 2013, p. 100). Nonetheless, the Arabic-Hebrew dynamic in Israel and the oPt is arguably reminiscent of Pavlenko's (2003) understanding of foreign language education in times of conflict: 1) In Israel, there is an interest in Arabic for securitisation purposes or to know the enemy, similar to the Soviet Union's approach following WWII; likewise, before partition (prior to 1947), the Jewish right wing discouraged teaching Hebrew to Palestinians as they felt it would be a security risk (Amara, 2014). 2) In the oPt, Palestinians may have ideological reasons for resisting the influence of Hebrew, similar to the isolationist approach in the US following WWI. For example, by limiting contact with Hebrew, the community may resist assimilation into Israeli society and be better protected against Israeli cultural hegemony (Amara, 2014). Regardless of these patterns, the teacher-learner stance towards Arabic and Hebrew is not a monolith. Some Palestinian communities are seeing an uptake in Hebrew language education, while "some Israeli Jews have begun learning Arabic as an act of political protest – especially as a response to the Nation-State law" (Abbas & Mendel, 2022, p. 239). In addition, while a community's attitude towards the speakers of a target language greatly impacts motivation to teach or study a language (Ortega, 2009), there are many other factors involved, including but not limited to the teaching materials and methods (Or & Shohamy, 2015) and the teacher's personality and behaviour (Donitsa-Schmidt et al., 2004).

3.4 Language teaching in the context of conflict: professional, personal and sociocultural factors

3.4.1 Factors impacting language teacher efficacy and well-being

When evaluating language teaching and learning, one's attention often turns to the competence of the instructor and the performance of the learner. Teachers are assessed in a seemingly straightforward manner: by their knowledge of the subject at hand (the target language), and their ability to deliver a curriculum using effective pedagogical methods. Consequently, many institutional procedures continue to be grounded in a "positivistic paradigm" that measures "good teaching in terms of student performance" on exams or assignments, which results in a "teach-for-the-test mentality" (Johnson, 2006, pp. 247-248). However, over the past decades teacher-driven, classroom-based research

has become more common, and although not always reflected in practical applications, scholars and practitioners now better understand the complexity of learning environments (Varghese et al., 2005). Not surprisingly, their studies "revealed that the teacher plays a huge role in the constitution of classroom practices", one that goes far beyond managing a centrally organised curriculum or applying a prescriptive teaching theory (Varghese et al., 2005, p. 22). In fact, there are a number of unobservable dimensions to teaching (Borg, 2018), including an inextricable link between the professional and personal lives of teachers. In their discussion of teacher well-being, Hofstadler et al. (2021) assert that:

> There is a considerable spillover between teachers' work and non-work lives, which in turn creates blurry boundaries between the two domains … if we aim to understand the lives of teachers, it is essential to consider both, teachers' personal and professional life domains, and all they entail. It means that research … must take a holistic perspective that avoids an artificial division of teachers' work and non-work lives. (p. 219)

Given that teachers' professional and personal lives are enmeshed, greater attention has been dedicated to identifying key factors that work together (i.e., rather than "atomistically" or in isolation) to influence quality teaching and teacher well-being (Varghese et al., 2005, p. 22). Greater attention to these factors ultimately leads to decreased attrition rates, "a major concern in the Western world" (Roffey, 2012, p. 8). One such attempt is reported upon in Levi et al.'s (2023) article "Language teacher preparation, induction and retention: unpacking two decades of research", which highlights five thematic areas present in a wide range of literature on teacher training and success. These overlapping factors or "features", which are "part of a basket of prerequisites necessary for ensuring that language teachers have the knowledge, skills and well-being needed to succeed and thrive", are: 1) reflective practice, 2) support, 3) teachers' beliefs and identity, 4) pedagogical and content knowledge and 5) the sociocultural context of teaching (Levi et al., 2023, p. 10). Language teaching in conflict affected-areas makes some of these categories particularly critical: it is the sociocultural environment in which teaching occurs which profoundly shapes the teachers/students' needs and outcomes (Nasser & Wong, 2013; Yamchi, 2006).

3.4.2 "Teachers do not teach in a vacuum"[75]: the sociocultural turn in language teaching

[75] Hofstadler et al., 2021, p. 219

Levi et al.'s (2023) research is indicative of a move away from a positivistic paradigm that once portrayed teachers as conduits of knowledge towards a more "interpretative or situated paradigm" (Johnson, 2006, p. 236). This epistemological shift recognised the "complex socially, culturally, and historically situated contexts" in which teachers practise, and led to "the sociocultural turn" in second language acquisition (SLA) (Johnson, 2006, p. 239). By defining human learning "as a dynamic social activity that is situated in physical and social contexts" (Johnson, 2006, p. 237), language teaching and learning was reconceptualised in a variety of ways.

First, as seen in the work of Pavlenko (2003), the connection between social and/or political settings, language status and teacher/student motivation was better established, as was the fact that language "education is never neutral" (Nasser & Wong, 2013, p. 429), nor are teachers (Varghese et al., 2005). It also proposed that "language and thought are inseparable from culture, and that to learn another language is to learn another culture and other ways of knowing the world" (Nasser & Wong, 2013, p. 430). While the relationship between culture and language is complex (i.e., it can potentially be used to essentialise populations in language education, which favours methodological nationalism[76] as opposed to more transnational approaches) (Baker, 2022; Canagarajah, 2006), this sheds light on the potential benefits of language learning in situations of ethno-national conflict (e.g., for peace keeping and reconciliation, such as Irish language learning in Belfast) (Mitchell & Miller, 2019). In addition, it legitimises concerns about language learning, imperialism and cultural hegemony (e.g., Hebrew in the oPt and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) globally), although teachers and students repeatedly demonstrate their agency to resist it, reappropriating languages for their own purposes.

Second, the sociocultural turn modified how information and behaviours are thought to be acquired. Language learning was no longer seen as "the straightforward appropriation of skills and knowledge from the outside in" (reminiscent of Freire's banking model of education), but both an internally and externally (or socially) mediated activity that could be transformational (Johnson, 2006, p. 238). Similarly, the origins of personality traits that are linked with teacher success, such as resilience, may not be "an innate psychological quality, but a socially constructed capacity which recognizes that learning to teach is

[76] Methodological nationalism (Chernilo, 2007) "can be defined as the all pervasive assumption that the nation state is the natural and necessary form of society in modernity; the nation state is taken as the organizing principle of modernity" (pp. 5-6)

complex and demanding, and as teaching is an interactive profession, it is also unpredictable" (Smethem & Hood, 2011, p. 9). This approach dramatically repositions teachers: their ability to cope with difficult circumstances may be less about personality characteristics that were once thought to be inherent (i.e., resilience), and more about the support and training needed to cultivate coping strategies (i.e., also resilience). Moreover, it highlights the dialectical relationship between teachers and students in the classroom: not only are "academic outcomes and social and emotional wellbeing in school" better for students who have "quality" interactions with their teachers, but the "teachers' wellbeing is also generated in several directions by more positive relationships with students" (Roffey, 2012, p. 8). Moreover, "teachers can gain considerable motivation and meaning in their work through the rapport they build with learners" (Hofstadler et al., 2021, p. 229).

Third, the paradigm shift established that "what language teachers need to know and do cannot be separated from the framework and sociocultural context in which their teaching and learning is embedded" (Levi et al., 2023, p. 9). This relates to the importance of on-site learning (i.e., from "lived practices, not just accumulated information"), as the "process of learning [is] negotiated with people" (Johnson, 2006, p. 237) and communities. Levi et al. (2023) identifies this as a widespread gap in language teacher education (LTE): "teacher development is enhanced by situated learning, but this is not sufficiently addressed in teacher education programmes" (p. 9). Thus, language teachers, particularly those who work abroad in situations of conflict, may find that their pedagogical and content (or target language) knowledge fails them without sufficient sociocultural training. However, if they receive training that addresses both the sociopolitical environment and the key attributes of the local educational system, teachers are more likely to provide "contextual pedagogy that relates to student experience" (Millican et al., 2021, p. 576). This includes the use of practices and materials "that are socially, culturally, historically, and institutionally situated in and responsive to teachers', students', and community needs" (Johnson & Golombek, 2020, p. 120). Furthermore, as new skills are learnt and teacher identities are reshaped through lived experiences in diverse contexts (also known as "on the job learning" which brings an awareness "of the gap between … training and the actual challenges faced in the field"), on-going support/mentoring should accompany teachers and facilitate guided reflection (Levi et al., 2023, p. 11).

3.4.3 Language teacher cognition and language teacher identity

In order to better understand the "complexities of teachers' mental lives and the teaching processes that occur in classrooms", research on language teacher cognition (LTC), and

the more recent field of language teacher identity (LTI), is key (Johnson, 2006, p. 236). Following the sociocultural turn (as well as the post-structuralist turn, the ecological perspective and the emotional turn, etc.[77]) (Fairley, 2020), LTC is defined as "what second- or foreign-language teachers think, know and believe", and has been expanded to include "constructs such as attitudes, identities and emotions, in recognition of the fact that these are all aspects of the unobservable dimension of teaching" (Borg, 2018, p. 11). Although LTI will be discussed at length in the following paragraphs, there is considerable overlap between these two areas of study (LTC and LTI). Much like the realms of "cognition, emotion and motivation", they are "mutually influential and distinguishable but not dissociable" (Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015, p. 436).

Perhaps the most explored area using LTC as a framework is that of teacher beliefs (Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015). Some of the ways that Skott (2015) describes teacher beliefs are as: 1) subjective constructs that are true for the person who holds them, 2) both cognitive and affective, 3) generally stable yet can change through social interactions (including those with colleagues), and 4) influential on a teacher's practice and how they conceptualise it (pp. 18-19). When implementing academic programmes, teacher beliefs can be seen as both a resource and an obstacle; teachers' views on pedagogy (i.e., the purpose of education and how it should be carried out) surface in how they behave and in the decisions they make, impacting outcomes in the classroom (Levi et al., 2023; Skott, 2015). However, despite this element of unpredictability, Hofstadler et al. (2021) found that "being able to teach or work in ways that are congruent with your personal beliefs and values" is essential for the professional wellbeing of the teacher (p. 229). Similarly, Lankveld et al. (2017) suggest that teachers are more successful when they perceive their beliefs and values as aligning with the mission of their institution. In contrast, Levi et al. (2023) caution that close reflection is needed to monitor teacher beliefs; as they are hidden from view, "often from the teachers' themselves … they must be brought to the surface" for deconstruction (p. 7). While the centrality of beliefs in teacher practice is uncontested (Borg, 2017) and embracing the social (or sociocultural) turn in LTC is encouraged (Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015), language scholars focus their attention almost exclusively on how beliefs regarding pedagogy and language awareness impact classrooms and/or align (or contradict) with the teacher's practice. Yet, in the context of ethno-national conflict, beliefs that fall outside these areas, such as political positions

[77] In terms of LTI in applied linguistics, the post-structuralist turn reconceptualised "identity as socially and discursively constructed", the ecological perspective "recognizes the importance of temporal, historical, and situational dimensions of identity", and the emotional turn focuses on the "close link between emotion and identity" (Fairley, 2020, pp. 1039-1040)

(Kasumagić-Kafedžić, 2018) or views on human rights (and their corresponding emotional attachments), are often left unexplored. Here, LTI complements LTC by shifting the focus to the "cultural, political, and individual identities" of the teacher (Varghese et al., 2005, p. 22).

Framed by some as "an important strand of teacher cognition research" (Borg, 2018, p. 11), but investigated independently of LTC by others, language teacher identity (LTI) research has gained momentum in recent years and has become an essential component of LTE (Fairley, 2020). In line with the sociocultural turn and previously discussed conceptualisations of identity in the context of conflict (*Section 3.2.3*), LTI is defined as "multiple, complex, shifting, socially constructed, and a site of struggle – and thus a construct that can and should be intentionally influenced" (Fairley, 2020, p. 1037). Barkhuizen (2016) gives a more complete description:

> Language teacher identities (LTIs) are cognitive, social, emotional, ideological, and historical – they are both inside the teacher and outside … LTIs are being and doing, feeling and imagining, and storying. They are struggle and harmony; they are contested and resisted, by self and others, and they are also accepted, acknowledged and valued, by self and others. They are core and peripheral, personal and professional, they are dynamic, multiple and hybrid, and they … change, short-term and over time – discursively in social interactions. (p. 4)

This definition captures the nuances of LTI, particularly the extent to which it is, as Fairley asserts, a site of struggle. For example, as early as pre-service, teachers begin a transformative, social process of *becoming* teachers (Fairly, 2020). Many scholars share this opinion, including Beijaard (2018) who affirms that "learning to teach is an identity making process" in itself (p. 1); it entails understanding what type of teacher one desires to be (i.e., the teacher's beliefs), and adjusting expectations as more abstract notions of teaching are challenged by the reality of the classroom. In other words, developing LTI is both relational and experiential (Yazan, 2018). Once LTI is established, having a strong identification with the profession becomes an "organising element in teachers' lives" (Lankveld et al., p. 326, 2017). This is essential as it decreases attrition rates, enabling teachers to establish meaningful connections to their work and empowering them to leverage their personal and previous professional backgrounds (i.e., their lived experience) to enhance their practice.

While teachers are confronted with a host of internal, often invisible tensions when becoming teachers or adapting to a new context (i.e., the conflict between imagined and performed identities) (Fairly, 2020), they continue to face a variety of external tensions

throughout their careers. For example, they may need to navigate "the identity they are trying to claim for themselves and the identity that is being ascribed or coercively placed on them" when interacting with students, colleagues and institutions (Fairly, 2020, p. 1044). Referred to as the dissonance between "claimed identities versus ascribed identities", the impact of these (usually more visible) struggles varies depending on "how the teacher is positioned by more powerful others", in addition to how the "teacher positions herself as agent in a particular context" (Fairly, 2020, pp. 1042-1045). Considering that LTI "is not an individual phenomenon" but established "through interactions and negotiations within particular contexts", the sociopolitical environment and associations with the specific language that one teaches may significantly affect teachers (Eslamdoost et al., 2019, p. 10). This is particularly true for teachers who work abroad in unfamiliar or challenging contexts:

> Sometimes, contacts with new people and experiences may create what could be called 'identity stress' or even an 'identity crisis', in which a person feels unsure about her/his identity and questions who she/he is. Such identity stress or crisis can be precipitated by … extreme changes in context or constraints which require rethinking values and changing behaviours. (Pennington & Richardson, 2005, p. 7)

Identity stress could be related to how one is positioned in the host society at large (i.e., in ethno-national conflict, being seen as an ally/foe of the in-group/outgroup, or being esteemed/stigmatised due to assumed demographic traits, including perceptions of age, gender, race, language and/or nationality, etc.) (Varghese et al., 2005), or in terms of one's role as a teacher – but frequently the two intersect. Moreover, one area unique to language teaching in comparison with other subjects is identifying/being identified as a native (NS) or non-native speaker (NNS) of the target language. Native speakerism[78], an ideology that positions NNS as being inferior to NS (Holliday, 2017), can grant unmerited professional credibility or call in to question one's legitimacy as a language teacher. For this reason, teachers' "linguistic identities are intertwined with their teacher identities, because their language competence is conflated with their knowledge of content or subject matter" (Yazan, 2018, p. 28). Moreover, being monolingual or multilingual can have a significant impact on LTC and LTI as a language teacher's "beliefs and theories about language teaching and learning … have been considerably molded through their previous experiences as learners and as student-teachers" (Yazan, 2018, p. 22).

[78] Native speakerism, especially when applied to teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), is often associated with race (Rosa & Flores, 2017), specifically White normativity (Jenks, 2017); the native speaker (NS) and non-native speaker (NNS) dynamic also reinforces colonial discourses (i.e., coloniser/colonised) (Pennycook, 1998). This leads to other types of discrimination and impacts LTI in complex ways.

Accordingly, a teacher's tolerance, restriction and/or promotion of monolingual, multilingual and/or translingual approaches may vary.

LTC and LTI provide frameworks for understanding how language educators "teach from somewhere; that their knowledge, beliefs, values, and practices are socially situated and socially constituted" (Johnson, 2006, p. 249). They also "call[] into question the assumption that there can or should be uniformity in what L2 teachers should know and be able to do" (Johnson, 2006, p. 245). The skills, knowledge and needs (i.e., training and level of support) that teachers require to cope with challenges in their classrooms are dictated by the context in which their teaching is located. Moreover, in conflict-affected settings, the surrounding cultural and sociopolitical environments are inseparable from the teacher's pedagogical content knowledge; they should be viewed as key "dimensions" of it (Levi et al., 2023, p. 9).

3.5 The role of English in conflict-affected areas

3.5.1 English as a global lingua franca

While the sociocultural context and LTC/LTI impact how languages are taught and learnt, the target language takes on different connotations across settings and affects how teachers are perceived. At the moment, the most dominant and contentious foreign language is arguably English, which is unrivalled in terms of its expansion across "social strata and domains" (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 3). Considered the first "global language in history" (House, 2018, p. 97), more than a quarter of the world's population are "fluent or competent" English language users (Crystal, 2012, p. 6). This figure includes native (inner circle)[79], nativised (outer circle)[80] and foreign (expanding circle) language users, as seen in Kachru's (1988) well-known *Three circles of English* model:

[79] Native speakers are typically characterised as those from "Britain and US, along with their settler colonies Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand and South Africa" (Piller & Bodis, 2022, p. 2)

[80] Often these English language users live in contexts where "the language has become part of a country's chief institutions and plays an important 'second language' role in a multilingual setting" (Crystal, 2012, p. 60)

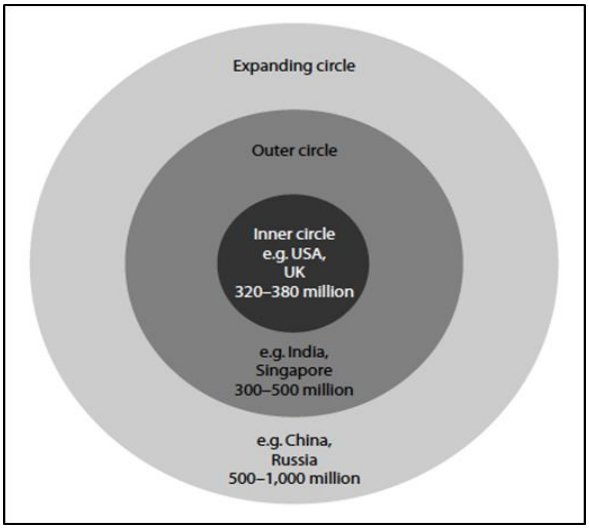

Figure 2: Three circles of English model
Source: Crystal, 2012, p. 61

Mirroring concerns about the use of English internationally, certain aspects of Kachru's labels are problematic. For example, (1) who qualifies as an inner circle, native speaker and why? Are the defining characteristics geographical, biodevelopmental (meaning when a language was acquired), proficiency-related, and/or associated with other factors connected to native speakerism (*Section 3.4.3*) (Cook, 1999)? And, (2) considering that the majority of English users reside outside of the inner circle and use the language to communicate with other outer or expanding circle users, why is "Standard English (ST)[81] as defined by Britain and the US" (Piller & Bodis, 2022, p. 2), the most sought after form of the language? This can be seen in the fact that "the whole ELT [English language teaching] industry - textbooks, teacher education, examinations, and the like - is based on NS standard norms, and success or failure depends on conformity to these norms" (Jenkins, 2007, p. 59).

These questions all contribute to a longstanding viewpoint that the dissemination of English as a foreign (or additional) language is often an imperialistic and hegemonic endeavour (Phillipson, 1992). In line with Nasser and Wong's (2013) observation about the inseparability of language, thought and culture (*Section 3.4.2*), some argue that ELT promotes content about the inner circle's culture through its teaching methodologies and materials/resources (Imperiale et al., 2017), which subtly reinforces its values and beliefs

[81] "Existing approaches to assessing English as a foreign language offered by such tests as TOEFL … and IELTS" are based on Standard English (ST); ST is also known as native-speaker (NS) Standard English (Elder & Davies, 2006, p. 282)

abroad. In doing so, it enables “positive ideologies about the language” to proliferate, granting inner circle nations the ability to “exercise power over those in the ‘periphery’” (Hewings & Tagg, 2012, p. 23). One such ideology is the notion that English is a necessary skill for participation in an increasingly connected, globalised world. When drawing on the concept of cultural hegemony[82], especially the link between consent and coercion, this casts doubt on the extent to which learning English is a “free choice” or an imposition (Ives, 2009, p. 673). Furthermore, as the number of English language users continues to grow, there is apprehension about its impact on language diversity, particularly its threat to minority languages (i.e., linguistic marginalisation) and endangered languages (i.e., language disappearance) (Phillipson, 1992; Sutherland, 2017).

As previously alluded to (*Section 3.3.2*), there have been various scholars who show how communities manage or resist the aforementioned risks of foreign language learning. In the context of ELT, the recognition of English in its function as a lingua franca (ELF)[83] (i.e., English used across all three of Kachru’s circles) has been instrumental in reconceptualising how the language can be taught (Raymond, 2023b). Although English is the world’s “lingua franca par excellence” (Holmes & Dervin, 2016, p. 2), it “is only one language among others present or latent in any [ELF] interaction” (Jenkins, 2015, p. 61). Therefore, this situates English in a multilingual framework and dismantles some of the monolingual assumptions[84] that are incorporated in popular approaches to language education, such as communicative language teaching (CLT) and task based methodologies (Imperiale et al., 2017). It also shifts the teacher/learner’s point of reference away from a normative figure (i.e., the native speaker) to the more inclusive notion of monolingual and multilingual English language users, who exhibit a wide range

[82] Cultural hegemony is often attributed to the linguist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937). While there is no precise definition, Gramsci believed that “consent and force nearly always coexist” (Lears, 1985, p. 568). Therefore, he conceptualised cultural hegemony as "the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” (Gramsci, 1921, as cited by Lears, 1985, p. 568). In other words, in a capitalist society, the dominant group establishes “the values, norms, perceptions, beliefs, sentiments, and prejudices that support and define the … distribution of goods, the institutions that decide how this distribution occurs, and the permissible range of disagreement about those processes” (Lears, 1985, p. 569). In this context, English can be thought of as a product or good

[83] While distinct concepts, ELF can occasionally be referred to in its function as a language of wider communication (LWC) (Birch & Nasser, 2017) and as an international language (EIL) (Khawaja et al., 2021; Seidlhofer, 2011), particularly in Palestine where there is “enforced monoculturalism” due to “enforced immobility” (Imperiale et al., 2017, p. 33)

[84] Also known as “monolingual bias”, SLA traditionally sees each language “as a separate entity not to be ‘tainted’ by the other(s) in a person’s linguistic repertoire” (Jenkins, 2015, p. 59); in the classroom, this can “nullify the source language of the learners” (Imperiale et al., 2017, p. 32). In addition to SLA, monolingual assumptions are also prevalent in the field of language and conflict studies (*Section 3.2.1*). That being said, more recently there has been a move towards the argument that all languages in a learner’s linguistic repertoire are of value (Bruen & Kelly, 2016; Bruen & Kelly, 2017; Gallagher & Colohan, 2014)

of variation in their linguistic output. Afterall, no one's native language is ELF, so the responsibility for successful communication is more equally distributed to all involved in an encounter (i.e., it is no longer solely the English language learner's responsibility to bridge communication gaps by attempting to acquire the language patterns of their inner circle interlocutors) (Baker, 2015; Cook, 1999). This ultimately makes English a more fluid, potentially empowering, creative tool for the user. As Seidlhofer (2011) explains:

> The argument that English is intrinsically hegemonic can only hold if one accepts the implicit (counterfactual) assumption that the intrinsic qualities of the language remain unchanged in different communities and contexts of use rather than get adapted to suit the needs of different kinds of speakers in different contexts. (p. 33)

Instead of being positioned as passive consumers of market-driven, inner circle English, this makes the outer/expanding circle producers of knowledge that can appropriate the language to suit their own needs (Imperiale et al., 2017). Moreover, the reconceptualisation of English as a lingua franca problematises another tenant of foreign language education and ELT that was previously mentioned: the "'inexorable' link between a language and a culture" (Baker, 2015, p. 3). By acknowledging that English is "predominately used for intercultural communication as a lingua franca … in ways which are frequently not related to predefined national cultures" (Baker, 2016, p. 72), the language may be able to facilitate "new ways of talking about culture at a time when transnational relations are dominant" (Canagarajah, 2006, p. 201). Although a much debated concept, some scholars have suggested that ELF is capable of obtaining some form of cultural neutrality (Baker, 2016), but most continue to affirm that EFL communication "involves participants, contexts, histories, purposes and linguistic choices, none of which are neutral" (Baker, 2016, p. 74).

3.5.2 English language teaching and conflict

While "research on Teaching English under volatile social political contexts of war and occupation is a relatively under-researched and under-theorized area", this topic is now gaining some attention (Nasser & Wong, 2011, p. 35). Identified with labels such as language and conflict studies (Kelly et al., 2019) and TESOL's peace-conflict studies (Nelson & Appleby, 2015), much of the research in the field "has been undertaken by teacher-researchers who are working in difficult conditions, often with marginalized populations" (Nelson & Appleby, 2015, p. 311). Perhaps the most broadly applicable investigation of teaching English in times of active conflict, post-conflict reconstruction and displacement is Nelson and Appleby's (2015) article "Conflict, Militarization, and Their After-Effects: Key Challenges for TESOL". Unique in its transnational approach which

eschews any specific conflict for a general overview of the phenomenon itself, the authors observe how the field of EFL has “multiple involvements and entanglements in armed and militarized conflicts and their aftermath” (Nelson & Appleby, 2015, p. 309). For example, they show how English is used in aid, in transnational agencies (e.g., World Bank, United Nations), in peacekeeping operations, as an intranational language between displaced people, and as a language for international cooperation during wars, especially between security and military personnel with diverse linguistic backgrounds (the latter producing a type of ELT known as English for military purposes) (Nelson & Appleby, 2015). Accordingly, their work is informed by the experiences of teachers who are affiliated with “English language programs sponsored not only by education institutions but also by military bodies, international aid agencies, and government departments” (Nelson & Appleby, 2015, p. 318). The authors identify a number of areas that are problematic for these educators, many of whom come from abroad to teach in conflict-affected areas, such as: 1) “the troubled associations of English with colonialism and surveillance”, especially in terms of how both the teacher and learner may be perceived within the host/local community (p. 319); 2) the common occurrence of English teachers working in “cultural geographies” that are unfamiliar to them, which is exacerbated when there is an ongoing or recent conflict (p. 319); 3) the challenges of teaching and learning English against the backdrop of hardship in conflict zones (i.e., witnessing or experiencing health issues, violence, poverty, material changes, etc.) (p. 322); 4) the outside environment pressing in on classroom interactions (p. 324); and 5) working in institutions where there is a deficit in English teachers and/or a lack of expertise/training for those in-service (p. 319). In addition to outlining the difficulties that teachers face, the authors also highlight the “dialectical relation” between conflict and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL): conflict impacts TESOL practice, and likewise, “TESOL practice has a hand in shaping conflict and its after-effects” (Nelson & Appleby, 2015, p. 326). Their conceptualisation aligns with the notion of the two faces of education (*Section 2.3.4),* as well as the idea that language (and language education/policy) can both perpetuate and/or ameliorate situations of conflict (*Section 3.2.1)*. They recognise how English and ELT can become a “mouthpiece of the military” and “a weapon of war”, or “a place of refuge from conflict” and “a site of protest” (Nelson & Appleby, 2015, p. 313).

While acknowledging concerns about English and ELT, such as its use to introduce Western culture and values to politicised contexts (i.e., as reflected in the foreign

language policy of Iran[85], etc.) (Babaii, 2022; Eslamdoost, 2019), its perpetuation of social inequality and its erosion of cultural identities (Erling, 2017), the British Council's (2017) publication *Across the Fracture Lines: the contribution and relevance of English to security, stability and peac*e, focuses on the potential positive impact of ELT in conflict and post-conflict settings. The authors argue that the English language classroom, especially when guided by a "conflict-sensitive curriculum and pedagogy" (*Section 2.3.3*), may be a space to promote "resilience, empathy and resistance" (Erling, 2017, p. 13). Moreover, considering that English is the most frequently learnt foreign language globally, it is potentially the ideal venue for "pedagogic initiatives promoting intercultural understanding and peace" (although some contributors in the volume doubt how effective and even safe this can be when/if English teachers are regarded with suspicion by the community) (Erling, 2017, p. 13). Minett et al. (2022) hold a similar position in relation to ELT following a study of pre-service English teachers and students in Afghanistan, stating that "person to person peacebuilding is already, in many instances, a fundamental part of the language teaching and intercultural communication experience", whether or not it is intended to be (p. 146). Alternatively, related research in the field of transitional justice and language policy shows how English and ELT can be used as an equaliser to social inequality, especially when there is a precedent of asymmetrical access to education during conflict. For example, Price (2019) describes how following the end of the civil war in Sri Lanka (2009), equitable English language education for both the Tamil and Sinhalese-speaking populations enabled ethnic/linguistic groups that were traditionally excluded from administrative and political power to assume more advantageous positions in (an outer circle) society[86]. Furthermore, he illustrates how ELF was key in (post-)apartheid South Africa (1994) where Afrikaans, a language associated with the descendants of Dutch colonisers and the National Party (NP) which implemented apartheid, was less preferred to English, a more seemingly "neutral" language that could act as an intermediary between the many indigenous African languages that were marginalised (Prince, 2019, p. 496). As Erling (2017) (drawing on Pennycook) explicitly states, scholars need to avoid the "colonial celebration" of English in post-colonial contexts, however, it is also important

[85] Since 2018, pupils in Iran have started learning English in middle school as opposed to elementary school. Babaii (2022) argues that this is to avoid exposing younger children to "the language of Western imperialism" (p. 357). He describes how English teaching materials are intended to be (Western) "culture free" (Babaii, 2022, p. 355), with extensive "coverage of home culture" (Babaii, 2022, p. 359). The only language other than Persian that is taught without these concerns is Arabic, which "as the language of Quran and Islamic texts, is not treated as a foreign language" (Babaii, 2022, p. 358)

[86] Here it is important to note that there are also examples that prove the inverse. For example, in Rwanda, Catholic missionary schools traditionally favoured the Tutsi minority over the Hutu, setting up special institutions (1920s) to educate future Tutsi leaders who could support the colonial regime (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000). Decades later, "the official use of English in Rwandan schools may create new inequalities because it benefits the Tutsi, who more likely have English-language backgrounds" (Burde et al., 2017, p. 633)

to acknowledge how conflict-affected societies interact with English and ELT in complex ways (p. 12).

3.5.3 English and ELT in Palestine

While Arabic has been the primary language for Palestinians since the spread of Islam (seventh century CE), Palestine has a long history of multilingualism, of which English has been a frequent presence (Amara, 2003). Typically associated with certain sects of the Christian community, particularly Anglicans, Presbyterians and Quakers, English was spoken in a limited way throughout the Ottoman Empire (1517-1917) with the introduction of missionary schools (however, Turkish was the most promoted language at that time) (Amara, 2003). In addition to Arabic, English and Turkish, a variety of languages were spoken in Jerusalem at the end of the nineteenth century, including Armenian, French, German, Greek, and Latin (Amara, 2003). The extensive multilingualism in the region was even criticised by proponents of political Zionism (see *Section 1.5.2.1*), "who argued that this hodgepodge of residents did not represent a nation in the proper sense and thus had no corresponding set of rights to counter Jewish claims on the land" (Schneider, 2013, p. 68). This supported their idea of *terra nullius*, meaning empty or vacant land, aimed at delegitimising Palestinian nationhood (Brockhill & Cordell, 2019). Later, during the British Mandate, there were three official languages: English, Arabic and Hebrew. English spread widely in this period; it was the language of government, while Arabic and Hebrew were used in segregated educational settings (Amara, 2003). Finally, when Israel was established in much of the area previously known as Mandatory Palestine (1948), English "served as a lingua franca between Palestinians who did not know Hebrew and Israelis who did not know Arabic" (Amara, 2003, p. 220). For this reason, Amara (2003) states that "English is viewed as a neutral language" (p. 220), despite its colonial heritage[87] and the instrumental role that some inner circle nations have historically played in the establishment and maintenance of Israel (e.g., UK and US)[88] (Yamchi, 2006). Khawaja et

[87] Shohamy (2014) identifies a notable exception here. She states that in the final years of the British Mandate, when Jews wanted to overthrow the mandate to reach independence, the English language became associated with colonisation and was seen as a threat to Hebrew. In fact, one of the first acts of the Israeli government was to remove English as an official language (Shohamy, 2014). English then regained prestige "in the 1960s, when it became associated with the United States and globalization" (Shohamy, 2014, p. 3)

[88] While it is argued that Palestinians have positive feelings towards the English language in general, there is not unanimous agreement. For example, Yamchi (2006) cites "the attitude of the students toward the English language" as a challenge for teachers, stating that "Palestine is a postcolonial country that has been engaged in wars since the end of the Second World War and under permanent occupation since 1967. The most important allies of the occupying forces are the United States and the United Kingdom, both English-speaking countries. The one-sidedness of the dominant English-speaking media in favour of the occupying forces … ha[s] helped create a resistance culture toward the English language" (p. 863). Nasser and Wong's (2013) study also found that "students have a 'love-hate' relationship with English" (p. 437), and note that "studies

al. (2021) present a similar position, remarking that “one could posit that since the English language is ‘neutral’, it serves as a mediator” between Israelis and Palestinians, the latter of whom may “not speak Hebrew, or choose not to speak Hebrew” for ideological reasons (p. 226). This aligns with the disconnect between ELF and predefined national cultures (*Section 3.5.1*). For example, past studies have shown how Palestinians have “mixed attitudes towards English-speaking peoples … [and are] not interested in adopting the[ir] modes of thinking and patterns of behavior”, yet students still have a positive attitude towards the language itself (Amara, 2003, p. 222). Nonetheless, this neutrality has a limit as correlations have been made between higher student achievement in English language and “positive attitudes” towards the culture of English speaking people (Amara, 2003). Distinct but similar findings have been cited for Jewish learners of spoken (as opposed to written or Modern Standard) Arabic in Israel (Donitsa-Schmidt et al., 2004).

In terms of formal instruction, English is by far the most prevalent foreign language in Palestine, taught in public schools (70% of pupils attend these), private schools (6% of pupils attend these) and UNRWA schools (24% of pupils attend these) from the first grade[89] (Amara, 2003; Dajani & McLaughlin, 2009; Nasser & Wong, 2013). In addition to being seen as a global language of prestige, social status and modernity (Amara, 2003), English is also a language of academic importance (Khawaja et al., 2021). As such, it is a mandatory subject in high school (i.e., it is featured on the general secondary education examination certificate or *tawjihi* to gain entrance to tertiary education) and at university (Khawaja et al., 2021). It can also be a medium of instruction for some university disciplines, specifically in the sciences (i.e., business, nursing, political science, etc.) and mathematics (Amara, 2003).

When Palestinians gained control of their education system (1994) following the Oslo Accords (1993)[90], the Palestinian National Authority (PA) took ownership of the English language curriculum. Consequently, a curriculum/textbook series with supplementary materials entitled *English for Palestine* was instated/distributed in primary and secondary

conducted in Arabic-speaking countries to examine language-learning attitudes suggest that despite the global appeal of learning English, there is also a resistance toward learning English and toward English-speaking countries, especially the United States” (p. 432)

[89] Starting English language education in first grade was a new development following the PA’s management of the curriculum, and is quite unusual in other Arab countries (Amara, 2003). Previously, children began English instruction in the fifth grade. There has been some criticism of this change, with concerns about pupils needing to develop “critical thinking skills in Standard Arabic before studying English”, especially due to “the diglossic nature of Arabic” (Qaddumi et al., 2023, p. 1360)

[90] Prior to 1994 the West Bank used the Jordanian curriculum, while Gaza used the Egyptian curriculum (Shakhshir, 2011)

schools beginning in 2000 (Dajani & McLaughlin, 2009). Universities do not engage with the *English for Palestine* programme, and Palestinian universities tend to use American textbooks (Shakhshir, 2011). Looking at English language education leading up to university, while *English for Palestine* is used in public schools in the West Bank, private schools may offer English medium instruction (or at least more hours of English language instruction than public schools) and have a curriculum oriented towards Western examinations such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) (Khawaja et al., 2021). In general, *English for Palestine* was seen as a "major step forward" for Palestinians (Shakhshir, 2011, p. 434), but its reception was not entirely positive. For instance, some praise its focus on Palestinian culture and customs (i.e., Ministry of Education) (Khawaja et al., 2021), yet others criticise it for being too diluted in terms of its portrayal of Palestinian culture in order to avoid "anything that might be interpreted as encouraging Palestinian nationalism" (Shakhshir, 2011, p. 434). Another notable critique is the fact that the Ministry of Education reports that their pedagogical approach is communicative language teaching (CLT), but the curriculum offers few opportunities for active communicative practice (Khawaja et al., 2021). Instead, it focuses on "memorization, rote repetition and [the] recall of isolated language chunks that do not provide students with the opportunity to use the language in any spontaneous or unfamiliar context" (Dajani & McLaughlin, 2009, pp. 31-32). When considering that the *tawjihi* (an exam based on recall and memorisation) does not have an English language speaking or listening component, this gap is perhaps to be expected; it reflects a common pedagogical approach in Palestine (Dajani & McLaughlin, 2009; Khawaja et al., 2021). Moreover, beyond the curriculum, implementing the *English for Palestine* programme carried (and carries) a number of lingering challenges. Dajani and McLaughlin (2009) discuss them in their research, for example they identify: 1) unreasonably large class sizes (with, according to Yamchi (2006), mixed abilities), 2) a lack of resources, including reliable internet, and 3) low salaries and few incentives for teachers to take initiative in the classroom, all three of which contribute to a sense of "teacher dissatisfaction" (p. 27). In addition, the authors report issues with teacher training at the primary and secondary school levels as English teachers are graduates of English literature or education departments and have little "training in language teaching methodologies", and even fewer "opportunities to improve their own English language competence" (Dajani & McLaughlin, 2009, p. 35). The aforementioned difficulties are exacerbated by a plethora of sociopolitical challenges that teachers and students experience on a daily basis (i.e., tardiness and absences due to checkpoints, school closures, strikes, demonstrations and military incursions, not to mention unemployment

and poverty, etc.); while these challenges may not be specific to the English language classroom, they have a significant impact on it (Nasser & Wong, 2013).

Apart from primary, secondary and tertiary education, there is another venue for ELT that is particularly relevant to this study and frequent in Palestine: educational exchanges and after-school programmes (Khawaja et al., 2021). There are also programmes that indirectly promote English by using it as a lingua franca for projects in other disciplines (e.g., Middle East Entrepreneurs of Tomorrow (MEET) offered through MIT with 50% Hebrew and 50% Arabic language speakers participating, and Diplomacy and International Communication in English (DICE), open to both Hebrew and Arabic language speakers in Israel) (Khawaja et al., 2021). The aforementioned programmes can be funded and administered by local ministries of education and institutes, or by foreign governments and/or universities. Consequently, it has been argued that some of them are more than just implicit carriers of Western culture through English language education (*Section 3.5.1*). For example, Khawaja et al. (2021) suggest that USDS affiliated initiatives and programme content aid in the "explicit promotion of the (extant) North American values system" (p. 226). At the same time, in situations where English is used as a lingua franca to collaborate on projects (i.e., between Israelis and Palestinians for the purposes of "mutual understanding"), the participants' language levels are rarely similar as there is inequitable access to English language instruction across communities in the region (Khawaja et al., 2021, p. 222). Therefore, while English can appear to be a "mediator" in the context of conflict, in many ways it is "not just a 'neutral' language" (Khawaja et al., 2021, p. 226). As Schlam-Salman and Bekerman (2011) note, English could be an "emancipatory language … outside the enduring Israeli-Palestinian conflict" (p. 49), but its predominance can also be "a double-edged predicament characterized by increased opportunities and social mobility on the one hand and identity loss and westernized assimilation on the other" (pp. 51-52).

The sociopolitical environment and context of occupation in Palestine, which restricts the movement of residents and discourages (if not prohibits) visitors from abroad, brings unique challenges and adds additional significance to the study of English. In a sense, Palestinians are isolated from the international community, or what Imperiale et al. (2017) refer to as "enforced monoculturalism" (p. 33). This prevents Palestinians from practising their English language skills with others from the inner, outer or expanding circles, while also limiting their interaction with diverse cultural communities (i.e., restricting intercultural communication and discouraging integrative motivation). It also contributes to lower levels of instrumental motivation as students struggle with few opportunities for employment in

their area of study and a reduced possibility to seek them out abroad (Yamchi, 2006). In other words, the likelihood that students will be able to use English in the future in a meaningful way (or as Yamchi (2006) says, “in real life” (p. 863)) is questionable (Nasser & Wong, 2013). Nonetheless, knowledge of the English language may be a vehicle to connect with others globally, enabling Palestinians to create and disseminate “counter-discourses” about the occupation which act as a form of advocacy and resistance (Erling, 2017, p. 15). Furthermore, “as a dominant international language”, Nasser and Wong (2013) wonder if “English can play a role in negotiations, dialog, and understanding between … groups in conflict” when used as a lingua franca between Israelis and Palestinians” (p. 442).

3.6 Conclusion

In Palestine and other conflict-affected societies, there are many barriers to access English language education, yet it remains a priority at the local, national and international levels. While English is often perceived to be a neutral language when juxtaposed between two competing ethno-linguistic groups (i.e., Palestinian Arabic users and Israeli Hebrew users), English language education is subject to the two faces of education paradigm: ELT can have both a positive and a negative impact on communities in unforeseeable ways. Moreover, English language teachers have a key role in how ELT is carried out, but their efficacy is often compromised by a variety of factors, such as inadequate training and situational knowledge (i.e., their understanding of the sociopolitical environment), their identity (i.e., in terms of how they position themselves and how they are positioned by others), and their beliefs and values. Considering that national and consequently linguistic identity tend to be particularly salient during times of conflict, the foreign language classroom can become a complex and challenging space which is impacted by (and impacts) the sociopolitical environment.

Chapter 4 | Researching lived experience: Hermeneutic phenomenology as a theoretical framework and applied methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents lived experience as an approach to research. It outlines the chosen methodology used for the project, interpretive or hermeneutic phenomenology, and illustrates how its philosophical foundations underpin all phases of the research process, from the formulation of the research questions to data collection and analysis. It gives an overview of the theoretical framework, based on the phenomenological teachings of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and grounded in the hermeneutic tradition as further developed by his student, Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002). In addition, it offers an in-depth account of the methods used to explore the primary research question: what are the lived experiences of English language teachers who work abroad in conflict-affected settings, specifically in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt)?

4.2 Researching lived experience

4.2.1 A basic conceptualisation

In its most concise terms, lived experience research seeks to understand "the interpretation and meaning that individuals give to everyday life experiences" (Dibley et al., 2020a, p. 6). Perhaps a deceptively straightforward concept, it is especially relevant to scholars in the fields of health and education, particularly when there is a need to "investigate experience as it is lived rather than as it is conceptualised" (Bynum & Varpio, 2018, p. 253). Some illustrative examples can be seen in van Manen's (2016) foundational text *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*, which attempts to capture the essence[91] of being a parent, juxtaposing it with that of being a teacher or educator. This intellectual exercise acts as a guide for novice researchers interested in emulating van Manen's approach to lived experience, or what he

[91] Contrary to romanticised and/or scrutinised notions of essence and its connection to essentialism, the term is derived from the verb *to be*, and in the context of lived experience research, refers to "what something is, and without which it would no longer be what it is" (van Manen, 2016, p. xv). In other words, "the specific whatness of something" (van Manen, 2016, p. xv). It is not a "single, fixed property," but rather "meaning constituted by a complex array of aspects, properties and qualities – some of which are incidental and some of which are more critical to the being of things" (van Manen, 2016, p. xv). In this case, van Manen investigates what it means to be a parent or teacher/educator, and how this way of being-in-the-world distinguishes it from other ways of being/experiences

refers to as human science. Alternatively, Bynum et al.'s (2021) study, which is grounded in the notion of educational safety[92], investigates the experience of shame as felt by medical students in their learning environments; the data uncovers different scenarios which elicit this "deeply held and not openly shared nor easily understood" emotion (p. 186). Furthermore, lived experience has been used to explore how teachers perceive a variety of situations, events or practices, such as trainings for online and blended learning (Philipsen et al., 2019), curriculum design (Sloan & Bowe, 2014) and interpersonal relationships, specifically the teacher-student relationship (Giles, Smythe & Spence, 2012). Numerous examples of lived experience research can also be found in nursing schools, where intimate accounts of chronic illness (Dibley et al., 2020b), traumatic incidents (Ladd, 2021), and end-of-life care (Duffy and Courtney, 2014) are generated and unpacked to reveal unexpected or hidden meaning[93]; these findings have the potential to improve outcomes for patients, caregivers and practitioners. All of these works demonstrate how research on lived experience "attempts to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world … without taxonomizing, classifying, or abstracting it" (van Manen, 2016, p. 9). In doing so, researchers can "more fully understand complex, environmentally influenced phenomena" (Bynum & Varpio, 2018, p. 252) while "fostering human well-being" (Halling, 2021, p. 343).

The study of lived experience is often referred to as phenomenology, which "is at once a philosophy, a perspective, and an approach to research" (Farrell, 2020, p.1). Etymologically, phenomenology has its origins in the "Greek words 'phenomenon' (derived from the verb 'to show itself') and 'logos' (speech). Its meaning, therefore, is to allow something [to] be seen, [to] become manifest through 'what is talked about'" (Eustace, 2014, p. 51). For the remainder of this chapter, the terms lived experience and phenomenology are used interchangeably, as is accepted praxis in the field. While not a feature of this particular study, lived experience or phenomenology can also be known as lifeworld research (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2020) or as previously mentioned, human science (van Manen, 2016) without any significant changes to its meaning. It is important to note that while phenomenology has various synonyms when referring to the study of

[92] Educational safety is defined by Byrum et al. (2020) as "the degree to which an individual can engage at work without fearing negative consequences to their self-image or status … [it] is related to the feeling of needing to display competency to others" (p. 186)

[93] Hidden meaning is a common concept in lived experience research. According to its philosophical underpinnings, "everyday phenomena are mostly hidden" and "the main objective of interpretive phenomenology [or lived experience research] is to uncover or disclose a phenomenon by pulling away layers of forgetfulness or hiddenness that are present in our everyday existence" (Frechette et al., 2020, p. 2). In other words, it is to "bring to light what is taken for granted" (Frechette et al., 2020, p. 1). Laverty (2003) describes this as "illuminating details and seemingly trivial aspects within experience" (p. 24)

lived experience, phenomenology as an approach to research (i.e., methodology) and phenomenology as a philosophical tradition (*Section 4.3*) should not be confused as they refer to very different intellectual endeavours.

4.2.2 What constitutes lived experience or phenomenological research?

There are a variety of approaches to conducting phenomenological research, and this is indicative of two factors: 1) methodologically, phenomenological inquiry is not fixed, meaning there is not a standardised set of research methods reserved solely for the study of lived experience (Crowther et al., 2016; Farrell, 2020; van Manen, 2016); and 2) how lived experience differentiates itself from other types of qualitative research (i.e., grounded theory or thematic analysis[94]), has historically been, and continues to be, zealously debated in academia (Halling, 2021; Peoples, 2020; Smith, 2018; van Manen, 2016; van Manen, 2017; Zahavi, 2019).

Rather than being a methodological deficiency, the lack of prescriptive methods or procedures is a key feature of lived experience research. In fact, phenomenology has been described as "a method without techniques" (van Manen, 2016, p. 131) and "a science of examples" (Van den Berg 1955, in Farrell, 2020, p. 5). This is because researchers are not intended to "adhere to a strict set of analytical techniques" or apply an overarching theory from the outset (Bynum & Varpio, 2018, p. 253). As Kelleher Sohn (2017) observes:

> Phenomenologists seek to describe or interpret the essence and meaning of lived human experience. They seek what is hidden beneath the accumulation of taken-for-granted assumptions that make up most human knowledge of the world. They tend to conduct analysis without a priori theories such as those of the social sciences, hard sciences, and post-structuralisms, with a focus instead on the every-day, first-person accounts of phenomena. (p. 2)

[94] According to van Manen (2016), "one should not confuse phenomenological … analysis of texts as a mere variation of well-known techniques of content analysis, or as identical to analytic-coding, taxonomic, and data-organising practices common to ethnography or grounded theory methods. For one thing, [the] phenomenological method differs from content analysis in that content analysis specifies beforehand what it wants to know from a text … In contrast, phenomenological human science is discovery oriented … the methodology of phenomenology is such that it posits an approach toward research that aims at being presuppositionless … a methodology that tries to ward off any tendency toward constructing a predetermined set of fixed procedures, techniques and concepts that would rule-govern the research project" (p. 29)

Applying a rigid methodological template to these first-person accounts would defeat the purpose of phenomenological research and practice – the point of departure is meant to be the experience itself:

> The phenomenological method is not understood as a set of investigative procedures but rather as methods that are contingent upon the phenomenon in question; informed by philosophical literature, the insights of previous phenomenological researchers, and lived through [our] experiences as researcher[s] … In summary, the phenomenological methodology is a turning towards a phenomenon rather than a preoccupation with research techniques. (Giles, Smythe & Spence, 2012, pp. 217-218)

In this line of thinking, method does not necessarily lead to truth[95] or understanding, and in some cases, it can have the opposite effect. In fact, Crowther et al. (2016) caution researchers that an "over reliance on method leaves what is meaningful hidden and is antithetical to the pursuit of truth" (p. 4).

Paradoxically, despite the aforementioned viewpoint which is a keystone of phenomenological inquiry, lived experience research has separated into different strands[96], most of which have established very clear procedures for how one should carry out a phenomenological study (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). This is indicative of each scholar's unique interpretation of (and relationship to) philosophical phenomenology, which translates into their methodological practice. While van Manen (2017) rightfully argues that "not all qualitative research inspired by phenomenology is phenomenology", he also suggests that "the serious student of phenomenology should be cautious and shy away from simplistic schemes, superficial programs, step-by-step procedures, and cookery book recipes that certainly will not result in meaningful insights" (pp. 777-779). Zahavi (2018) comments on these declarations, stating that, "while insisting that 'the method of phenomenology is that there is no method', van Manen also argues that phenomenology is a tradition that provides 'a methodological ground for present human science research practices'" (p. 258). These contradictory interpretations are at the crux of an ongoing

[95] "Drawing on the Greek word alēt́heia (α, λήθεια), Heidegger describes truth as unconcealment. Truth is not concerned with agreement, correspondence, or/and correctness but an unconcealment of that which is hidden and covered up" (Crowther et al., 2016, p. 3)

[96] "After Husserl and Heidegger had established their two classic versions of phenomenology, other philosophers and methodologists became involved – mainly during the second half of the twentieth century. They added to or refined the ideas and approaches put forward by Husserl and Heidegger. They included Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, Ademeo Giorgi, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Max van Manen" (Sloan & Bowe, 2014, p. 1294)

debate[97] in the field and raise a series of questions, such as: how closely do scholars need to follow certain techniques in their phenomenological research in order to comply with the teachings of phenomenological philosophy, if at all? How do researchers ensure that their research is truly phenomenological (rather than broadly qualitative), and which methods are central to phenomenology as both philosophy and practice? And, as with other qualitative approaches, does the tendency to standardise (or even quantify) phenomenological research contribute to its rigour and reliability, or does it reflect a sense of "mistrust, in research terms … traced back to the advent of Cartesian Dualism and the subsequent rise of logical-empirical research methodologies which resulted in our minds, feelings, and personal accounts being seen as inferior sources of information" (Farrell, 2020, p. 1) (*Section 4.3.1*)?

As previously shown, the extent to which a researcher is inclined to follow certain techniques or models depends upon the precedence that they give to phenomenology as either philosophy or applied methodology. For example, Dahlberg and Dahlberg (2020) highlight the position of some academics who accuse "phenomenological research scholars for not taking *enough* seriously [*sic*] the difference between phenomenology as philosophy and as qualitative research", arguing "that the latter can do (and is better off) without the former" (p. 462). Similarly, the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)[98] scholar, Smith, has been credited with responding to peer criticism about his work by stating that "philosophy does not own phenomenology" (Zahavi, 2018, p. 262). Alternatively, researchers such as Frechette et al. (2020) have complained that "many studies lack coherence with the methodology's philosophical foundations" (p. 1), while Neubauer et al. (2019) see great value in an "alignment between the specific research question and the researcher's underlying philosophy" (p. 90), asserting that:

> To truly understand phenomenology requires developing an appreciation for the philosophies that underpin it. Those philosophies theorise the meaning of human experience. In other words, engaging in phenomenological research requires the scholar to become familiar with the philosophical moorings of our interpretations of human experience. (p. 91)

[97] The debate is a series of ongoing discussions between van Manen (2017) in "But is it phenomenology", Smith (2018) in "Yes - it is phenomenological: a reply to Max van Manen's Critique of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis", Zahavi (2019) in "Getting it wrong: van Manen and Smith on phenomenology", and most recently Halling (2021) in "Moving beyond the van Manen, Smith, Zahavi debate"

[98] According to Dibley et al. (2020a), IPA is often a point of confusion in phenomenological research as it is not a variation of hermeneutic phenomenology, but is instead a stand-alone methodology used above all in the field of psychology. While being praised for its clinical applicability, it has been criticised for "being too structured and process-drive [which is arguably] in direct opposition to the principles of hermeneutic research" (Dibley et al., 2020a, p. 27)

This statement reflects the sentiments of the majority of phenomenological researchers. While prioritising the experience as lived over the methods for examining it, most would suggest that the methodology used should "follow from and reflect the philosophy chosen as it carries on throughout the project" (Laverty, 2003, p. 28). At the very least, this entails having a familiarity with some phenomenological philosophers (i.e., Husserl, Heidegger, Gadamer, Sartre, and/or Merleau-Ponty, etc.) and a working knowledge of their teachings. As Finlay (2009) states, "researchers entering the phenomenological field have to decide for themselves where they stand on questions concerning what paradigm phenomenologists embrace, [and] what their research means" (p. 18). An overview of my personal approach to phenomenological research, including my understanding of the main tenets of phenomenology as a philosophy and as an applied methodology (and the extent to which they overlap), is the focus of *Section 4.3* and *Section 4.4*.

4.3 Phenomenology as philosophy

4.3.1 Origins of phenomenological philosophy: Husserl, Cartesianism and descriptive or transcendental phenomenology

The founder of phenomenology as both philosophy and applied method is widely considered to be the German philosopher, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). His earlier career "focused on mathematics as an object of study" where he cultivated an academic interest "in the nature of knowledge" before moving on "to examine other phenomena" (Neubauer et al., 2019, pp. 92-94). This "epistemological focus", which explored questions regarding how humans know what they know and what humans are capable of knowing, led Husserl to reject the notion of "objective observations of external reality ... [he] instead argued that phenomena *as perceived by the individual's consciousness* should be the object of scientific study" (Neubauer et al., 2019, p. 92). Moreover, Husserl "asserted that the definitive basis for knowledge was experience" (Dibley et al., 2020a, p. 7) and he openly criticised his predecessors' "attempt to apply methods of the natural sciences to the human sciences"[99] (Laverty, 2003, p. 22):

> Husserl insisted on the superiority of the lived experience … over any other form, indicating that all human activities originate and begin with the lived world, and

[99] Dilthey first made the distinction between the natural or physical sciences (i.e., natural events, things, objects, etc.) and the human sciences (i.e., thoughts, values, feelings, emotions, etc.) (van Manen, 2016, p. 3)

> rejecting the claim that empirical[100] science is the only producer of 'truth' ... He claimed that the empirical sciences, while objective in their research, could not uncover the phenomenological meaning of the lived experience. (Dibley et al., 2020a, p. 7)

Husserl's work departed from that of his predecessors in that 1) it emphasised the subjective nature of an individual's perceptions of a phenomenon, and 2) it considered the significance of the experience as lived to be elusive to the scientific method. However, he was still very much grounded in the intellectual framework of his time, which was dominated by Cartesianism[101]. This can be observed in his focus on consciousness (i.e., understood as an entity which is independent from the outer world and its influence) (Eustace, 2014), and his claim that the empirical sciences could be objective in their research (Dibley et al., 2020a).

The so-called Cartesian tradition, also known as the Cartesian Divide or Cartesian Dualism, was based on the teachings of Descartes (1596-1650) and continues to shape our understanding of the world. Farrell (2020) summarises this concept in her article, "Researching Lived Experience in Education: Misunderstood or Missed Opportunity?":

> Cartesianism is based on a fundamental distinction between the 'inner' world of the mind or soul and the 'outer' physical world with which it comes in contact … This dualistic view, where the subject experiences, and has knowledge of, the outside (object) world through sense data and resulting mental representations, underpins not only Husserlian phenomenology but Western thought in general. (p. 2)

Academically, the valorisation of positivist research and the division between the humanities and sciences in educational institutions can be traced back to Cartesianism. In the context of phenomenology, Husserl thought that with the proper intellectual tools, humans had the ability to separate themselves (i.e., their consciousness) from their environment (i.e., "nullifying historical or pre-conceived theories" and cultural influences) (Dibley et al., 2020a, p. 8), and capture "experience in its primordial origin or essence, without interpreting, explaining, or theorizing" (van Manen, 2017, p. 775). In other words, one "could transcend the phenomena and meanings being investigated to take a global

[100] According to Dibley et al. (2020a), "empiricism generally means what is observed, going back to Aristotelian philosophy. In this context phenomenological understandings could be conceived as empirical. However, empiricism became associated with scientific concepts and procedures during the period of the Enlightenment, requiring protocols for a 'scientific method' based on rules and measurement" (p. 4)

[101] Some scholars, such as Laverty (2003), may disagree with this, stating "both Husserl and Heidegger took exception to the Cartesian split … Husserl believed that while such a sharp distinction does not exist [between the inner and outer worlds], individuals were capable of a direct grasping of consciousness" (p. 27)

view of the essences discovered" (Sloan & Bowe, 2014, p. 1294). This led Husserl's particular understanding of lived experience research to be coined descriptive or transcendental phenomenology, where "the phenomenon can be studied objectively, even though what is being studied is subjective experience" (Dibley et al., 2020a, p. 9).

To accomplish this task, Husserl put forth an approach to observation and understanding known as bracketing[102] (Dibley et al., 2020a). This process recalls Husserl's roots in mathematics, where one "brackets in a mathematical equation", but in the case of phenomenology, one brackets their "previous understandings, knowledge, or assumptions about the phenomenon of interest" (Farrell, 2020, p. 3). Peoples (2020) describes this as attempting to look at an experience as if you were encountering it as "a stranger in a strange land … suspending judgments to focus on analysis of experience" (pp. 30-31). A similar way of conceptualising bracketing is Halling's (2021) depiction, which envisions it as a state "where one looks at experience with a sense of wonder, trying to see things as for the first time" (p. 346). Husserl's successors in phenomenology were quick to question this practice, which became the most divisive amongst his teachings. As Dibley et al. (2020a) ask in their text *Doing Hermeneutic Phenomenological Research: A Practical Guide*, "can we negate our understanding of the world and look at situations without any preconceived ideas?" (p. 9). The extent to which this is possible, and the extent to which one should bracket in their lived experience research, either as Husserl intended or in an updated form, continues to be the core issue in phenomenology[103]. This controversy led Husserl to proclaim himself a "leader without followers'", while Paul Ricoeur (1987) commented that phenomenology was a "story of the deviations from Husserl" (Farrell, 2020, p. 3).

4.3.2 Developments and deviations in phenomenological philosophy: Heidegger, Gadamer and the introduction of hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenology

[102] Bracketing is also known as "reduction" (from the Latin, *reducere*, "to lead back") and "***epoche'"*** (from Greek meaning a "cessation" or suspension of judgement) (Farrell, 2020, p. 3). "Husserl did not use these three terms as three separate entities; rather, they are interchangeable" (Dibley et al., 2020a, p. 8)

[103] Some argue that popular interpretations of bracketing (as laid out in this chapter) are flawed; Dahlberg and Dahlberg (2020), who practise a form of bracketing that they've coined "brindling", argue, "that which should be put in brackets is instead our natural attitude where we take for granted that the world is as it seems to be, and start to question how it is and shows itself, and how it is meaningful (p. 460)

Martin Heidegger[104] (1889-1976) was both a student and colleague of Husserl, and Husserl secured Heidegger's place at the University of Freiburg following his own retirement. However, Heidegger's publication, *Being and Time* (1927), marked a radical departure from Husserl's understanding of phenomenology (Farrell, 2020). In this text, which is considered one of the most significant contributions to 20th century philosophy, Heidegger introduced the concept of hermeneutics[105] to the study of lived experience. Here it is important to note that Heidegger's hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenology is not an expansion of Husserl's descriptive or transcendental phenomenology, it is a proper deviation. As Miles et al. (2015) comment, "rather than one philosophy superseding the other, both have value and are dependent on the research question being asked" (p. 3). Moreover, each type of phenomenology is still used as an applied methodology, and the choice to use either Husserl or Heidegger's teachings as a conceptual basis for research comes down to the epistemological and ontological paradigms to which the researcher subscribes. As Zahavi (2018) remarks, choosing a type or "strand" of lived experience research is "about employing a comprehensive theoretical framework concerning the structure of the subject's relation to itself, to the world, and to others" (p. 283).

When comparing Husserl and Heidegger's philosophy, one of the most significant differences is the ontological nature of Heidegger's work, as opposed to the epistemological focus of Husserl. Heidegger "was interested in the nature of being and temporality", asking the fundamental question of what it means to be or exist (i.e., what is implied when we say that something *is*?), rather than focusing on what one is capable of knowing (Neubauer et al., 2019, p. 21). In doing so, he followed "Aristotle's understanding of ontology as 'first philosophy'" (i.e., being as such), and was critical of his more recent predecessors and colleagues for having "forgotten the question of being", especially as it is the foundation for all other philosophical endeavours (Davies, 2010, p. 6). In addition, Heidegger saw understanding and interpreting not as something that we do (i.e., an action

[104] Heidegger was a member of the National Socialist party in Germany from 1932 to the end of WWII, for which he lost his role as Rector of Freiburg University and was banned from teaching for a number of years (Dibley et al., 2020a). Following the discovery of the so-called *Black Notebooks*, the divide widened amongst scholars: some (Bourdieu, Habermas) view(ed) him as an anti-Semitist whose views flawed his philosophy, others (Arendt, Derrida) saw his membership as "a symbolic gesture … a survival tactic", similar to many Germans of his time (Dibley et al., 2020a, p. 11). Heidegger himself remained mostly silent on the subject. As scholars such as Dibley et al. (2020a) express, I am comfortable with the work itself, and I have chosen to draw on it accordingly

[105] Also known as the "hermeneutic turn"; Etymologically, "Greek *hermeneuein* meaning to 'translate' or 'interpret', is thought to be derived from the Greek God Hermes, whose job it was to interpret and communicate messages from Zeus and the other Gods to ordinary mortals" (Farrell, 2020, p. 3). Nowadays, Henriksson et al. (2012) define it "as the science and art of interpretation and meaning" (pg. x). The tradition of hermeneutics emerged as text interpretation in protestant theology (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004)

of our inner world in relation to the outer world), but instead as an integral part of our being: “understanding is a basic form of human existence in that understanding is not a way we know the world, but rather the way we are”[106] (Laverty, 2003, p. 24). For this reason, he also discounted the notion of interpretation as being “an additional procedure” that one performs (Finlay, 2009, p. 11). Instead, he believed that “we experience a thing as something that has already been interpreted” (Finlay, 2009, p. 11). In hermeneutic phenomenology, the objective is not to disentangle interpretation from experience (i.e., to identify its essence as Husserl instructed), but to revise our interpretations.

Another significant difference between the philosophical stances of Husserl and Heidegger in terms of phenomenological research (which arguably presupposes the previous point), is Heidegger’s defiance of Cartesian Dualism, exemplified in his belief that “consciousness is not separate from the world … but is a formation of historically lived experience”[107] (Laverty, 2003, p. 24). He understood meaning-making as an “inter-subjectively constituted” phenomenon, or in other words, “a broadly historical-cultural phenomenon, not an (individual) psychological one” (Schwandt & Burgon, 2006, p. 101). Consequently, this results in “the individual and experience … as co-constituting each other” (Laverty, 2003, p. 27). In terms of lived experience research, there are two notable consequences that emerge from this perspective: the first is that Heidegger “saw bracketing as impossible, as one cannot stand outside the pre-understandings and historicality[108] of one’s experience” (Laverty, 2003, p. 27); the second is the idea that “an environment is not laden with objects to which the subject must attach meanings[,] rather the lived environment is at once meaningful” in and of itself (Farrell, 2020, p. 3).

To investigate the above concepts, Heidegger coined a term which would become the most commonly cited of his philosophical lexicon, *dasein* or being-in-the-world[109] (in

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[106] “Claiming that to be human was to interpret, Heidegger stressed that every encounter involves an interpretation influenced by an individual’s background or historicality” (Lavery, 2003, p. 24)

[107] Heidegger uses the term “thrownness” to describe the historical context in which one finds themselves: “the life projects of an individual are embedded in the historical and social context into which one is ‘thrown’” (Davies, 2010, p. 3)

[108] Historicality (also known as “historicity” by Dibley et al., 2020a) refers to “a person’s history or background, [and] includes what a culture gives a person from birth and [what] is handed down, presenting ways of understanding the world. Through this understanding, one determines what is ‘real’, yet Heidegger also believed that one’s background cannot be made completely explicit” (Laverty, 2003, p. 24)

[109] “Being-in-the-world” is a translation of the original German word, *Dasein*, which means “there-being” (Farrell, 2020, p. 3). It is not separated but hyphenated to convey interconnectedness (Farrell, 2020). For Heidegger, the “mode of being of human beings is to be there, that is, in the world” (Farrell, 2020, p. 3). It is the “idea that knowledge of our everyday existence is intersubjective, temporal, and relational” (Vandermause & Flemming, 2011, p. 369)

contrast to Husserl's being of the world), which encompasses the "way that humans understand themselves and their relationship to the world" (Dibley et al., 2020a, p. 16). The hyphenated construction of this term, being-in-the-world, "refers to the idea that knowledge of our everyday existence is intersubjective, temporal, and relational" (Vandermause & Fleming, 2011, p. 369). Moreover, Heidegger believed that "human beings make decisions and understand phenomena through their lived experiences … however, they interact without necessarily being consciously aware" of this dynamic (Dibley et al., 2020a, p. 17). Therefore, hermeneutic researchers "seek to reveal aspects of phenomena that are rarely noticed, described, or accounted for … [and they] illustrate essential, yet often forgotten, dimensions of human experience in ways that compel attention and provoke further thinking" (Crowther et al., 2016, p. 2). This is done by using an interpretive paradigm[110], which recognises the researcher's "past experiences and existing knowledge as embedded in and essential to the interpretive process" (Bynum & Varpio, 2018, p. 253). Instead of Husserl's promotion of bracketing to transcend one's biases and assumptions, Heidegger calls for an awareness of one's fore-sights or fore-conceptions[111]. In addition, he believed in the "relevancy of context", where truth is not singular but "multiple and context specific" (McConnell-Henry et al., 2011, p. 29). It is through continual reflexivity and the revision of previously held beliefs that one arrives at a more meaningful understanding of experience as lived (Peoples, 2020). The guiding principles for doing this work are detailed in the teachings of Gadamer.

Hans Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), a former student of Heidegger, further developed the notion of hermeneutic phenomenology and is credited with extending it "into practical application" (Laverty, 2003, p. 2). Although he studied the works of both Husserl and Heidegger at Marburg and Freiberg in the 1920s, many of his ideas aligned with the interpretive paradigm established by the latter. This can be seen in his most well-known publication, *Truth and Method* (1975), where Gadamer proclaims that "to try and eliminate one's own concepts in interpretation is not only impossible, but manifestly absurd. To interpret means precisely to use one's own preconceptions so that the meaning of the text

[110] "The philosophy that guides the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology is situated in this interpretive paradigm and can be understood as a historical movement in research. It follows positivist and post-positivist paradigms that have evolved in human thought since the Age of Enlightenment (1600-1800) and the Scientific Revolution of that period which signals the beginning of Empiricism. The subject-object dualism of Cartesian thought, with its emphasis on reason, cause/effect and calculation, is focused on a different kind of questioning than that found in the interpretivist tradition" (Dibley, 2020a, p. 4)

[111] Fore-sight/fore-conception can include preconceived knowledge about a phenomenon, including biases, understandings and/or judgments; one revises these as they interpret (paraphrased from Peoples, 2020, pp. 32-34)

can be made to speak to us" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 203). Gadamer saw "the work of hermeneutics not as developing a procedure for understanding, but to clarify further the conditions in which understanding itself takes place" (Laverty, 2003, p. 25). In other words, he "developed a way of thinking that is dynamic and relates all aspects of being human in any particular inquiry" (Dibley et al., 2020a, p. 25). In order to accomplish this, he proposed and/or expanded upon these three guiding principles (Miles et al., 2015):

(1) the *fusion of horizons*: the reciprocal and reflexive process of coming to a deeper understanding of another's lived experience through the medium of language, where we "co-create a new situation when ideas come together", for example, through an interview exchange between a researcher and a participant when insights merge or "fuse" (Dibley et al., 2020a, p. 25)

(2) the *hermeneutic circle*: the nonlinear process of coming to understanding, where one looks at the individual parts of a lived experience, relates them back to the broader themes, then repeats, each time revising their knowledge; it is circular, "or a better explanation is that it is spiral since circular would mean that one's understanding does not really change since a circle gets back to the same point" (Peoples, 2020, p. 33). While Husserl would attempt to step outside the circle, Heidegger and Gadamer would argue that we are always within it, moving "back and forth" (Dibley et al., 2020a, p. 127)

(3) the *temporality of truth*: when something is true because it is meaningful, not because it is objectively true or false; when analysing lived experience, Heidegger and Gadamer believe that there is a "constant play of showing and hiding … [truth emerges] over time – it is relational, in much the same way as knowledge cannot be separated from the knower, truth cannot be separated form the one who is purporting it" (Miles et al., 2015 , p. 289)

Furthermore, Gadamer's scholarship greatly expanded the importance of the role of language in hermeneutic phenomenology, acknowledging that it is "the medium through which access to the lifeworld is possible" (Suddick et al., 2020, p. 3). Following in Heidegger's footsteps, he connected it to ontology rather than epistemology, which deviated from the more prevalent approaches to philosophy during his time (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). For example, according to Gadamer, "language is not independent of the world: the world is represented by language and language is only real because the world is represented within it" (Sloan & Bowe, 2014, p. 1294). In fact, Gadamer conceptualised "language and understanding as inseparable structural aspects of human 'being-in-the-world'" or *dasein* (Laverty, 2003, p. 25). In terms of hermeneutics, he "concentrated on

how language reveals being … [arguing that] understanding can only come about through language" (Sloan & Bowe, 2014, p. 1294). Moreover, he believed that "the basic model of understanding is that of conversation", the intellectual space where we "encounter the self and others" (Eustace, 2014, p. 51). Similar to Heidegger who conceptualised interpretation as part of experience (i.e., one experiences and simultaneously interprets – interpretation is not an additional step that one performs), Gadamer (1979) claimed "that understanding and interpretation are ultimately the same thing … [and that] understanding occurs in interpreting" language (Gadamer, 2004, p. 199). This underpins and lends itself to the applied methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology, from strategies for data collection to the analysis of data as text (i.e., text being an interview recording, transcript or reflective writing about one's interpretations).

4.4 Hermeneutic phenomenology as applied methodology

4.4.1 Understanding hermeneutic phenomenology as research praxis

For this project, the tradition of interpretive or hermeneutic phenomenology serves as both my philosophical foundation and applied methodology. In line with the aforementioned tenets of lived experience research, I conceptualise it as a way of coming to understanding rather than a template that one applies to data. As reiterated by Holroyd (2007), "the work of hermeneutics is not to develop a procedure for understanding, but to clarify the conditions of understanding" (p. 1) *(Section 4.3.2*). Therefore, after conducting an in-depth investigation into the various strands (*Section 4.2.2)* or ways of using the methodology, I decided to avoid the arbitrary replication of any one phenomenologist or school's methods (or templates). Instead, my work is guided, but not dictated, by the original philosophical concepts as developed by Heidegger and Gadamer (*Section 4.3*) and by examples of previous studies that conduct phenomenological research in a similar fashion, particularly those that are documented in Dibley et al.'s (2020a) text *Doing Hermeneutic Phenomenological Research: A Practical Guide*.

This approach to hermeneutic phenomenology as an applied method is supported by the teachings of Gadamer[112], who argued that familiarity with "theory is itself a praxis" (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2020, p. 459). In addition, this excerpt from *Phenomenology: the*

[112] Gadamer cautions against imitation, even of Heidegger, stating, "I of course count myself among Heidegger's students. But I say this: Do not imitate Heidegger; let yourself be inspired by him!" (Gadamer & Dutt, 2001, cited in Smythe & Spence, 2020, p. 7)

basics, penned by prominent contemporary phenomenological philosopher, Zahavi (2018), exemplifies the thought-process behind my choice:

> Any method, procedure, or approach that is supposed to merit the label phenomenological must be familiar with phenomenological theory. This is a necessary requirement. In a non-philosophical context, however, a relevant and creative use of central phenomenological concepts … will be more valuable and productive … Ultimately, those interested in applied phenomenology should adopt a pragmatic attitude … To qualify as good phenomenological research, the phenomenological tools being employed must show their pertinence, must make a valuable difference, [and] must allow for, say, new insights or better therapeutic interventions. (pp. 284-285)

Thus, to shed light on the phenomenon of teaching English in conflict-affected settings and to offer recommendations for those involved in education aid and exchange programmes in the context of conflict, I set out to collect or "'borrow other people's experiences and their reflections on their experiences in order to better … come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience" (van Manen, 2016, p. 62). While the research focused on individual accounts of lived experience, it was not the individual experiences themselves (nor analyses of them) that were of primary importance. Rather, it was the comparison of multiple accounts of the phenomenon in question, and the common meanings that emerged from them, which led to a deeper understanding of the experience (*Section 4.2.1*).

Despite a large degree of variation in the profiles and backgrounds of research participants (*Section 4.5.1*), the process of locating what is shared amongst those with a similar lived experience is what gives hermeneutic phenomenological research its strength or power (Given, 2008). However, aside from making the transition from philosophy to methodology, which is referred to as "the great drama"[113] (Lawyer 1998, cited in Holroyd, 2007, p. 7), it is also a very challenging aspect of this type of work:

> The most difficult and controversial element of phenomenological human science may be to differentiate between essential themes and themes that are more incidentally related to the phenomenon under study … In determining the universal or essential quality of a theme our concern is to discover aspects or qualities that make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is. (van Manen, 2016, pp. 106-107)

[113] This refers to how establishing a procedure for data collection and analysis is widely acknowledged to be a challenge for phenomenological researchers, as Dahlberg and Dahlberg (2020) also reiterate: "Transforming philosophy into research practice is indeed a difficult enterprise", particularly as "neither phenomenology nor hermeneutics in itself prescribes any particular method of data collection or analysis" (p. 463) (*Section 4.6.1*)

It is important to note that the complex sociopolitical environment in which the experience under investigation took place made it particularly difficult to isolate what was characteristic rather than incidental to the phenomenon (i.e., teaching English in the oPt). As "experiences related to conflict and conflict resolution are particularly impactful and meaningful for those involved in them" from both a personal and professional standpoint (Cooper, 2014, p. 71), incidental qualities (i.e., that which would have been experienced by many individuals visiting or residing in the oPt, not just English language teachers) at times overlapped with essential themes (discussed further in *Section 8.4*). Nonetheless, this research aimed "to present a description … [of the] experience in a way that is comprehensible and identifiable to anyone who has had that particular experience" (Peoples, 2020, p. 58). This is referred to as resonance (a "hallmark of trustworthiness" in lived experience research) (Smythe et al., 2007, p. 1396) and/or the "phenomenological nod"[114] by some researchers (Dibley et al., 2020a, p. 117).

In line with methodologies that are grounded in an interpretive paradigm (*Section 4.3.2*), this research did not seek "right answers" regarding the nature of the experience, or what is described as "a one-to-one correspondence to objective reality" (Holroyd, 2007, p. 8). In fact, the actual accuracy of the events described had little importance; it was the participants' understanding of their significance (i.e., the meaning that was assigned to the events) that mattered (i.e., truth as unconcealment) (McConnell-Henry et al., 2011) (*Section 4.2.2*). This approach intentionally departed from more positivist types of research that embrace the scientific method in hopes of freeing the researcher from their bias[115] while collecting fixed data (Holroyd, 2007). Instead, the project cultivated an ongoing, iterative and intersubjective exploration of my, the researcher's, and the participants' assumptions about and impressions of the experience under study. In brief, I was not intent "on knowing more but of knowing differently"[116] (Holroyd, 2007, p. 3). As Holroyd (2007) suggests, phenomenological research is not about reaching an "endpoint"

[114] According to Dibley et al. (2020a), the phenomenological nod "refers to the way in which humans indicate, through the gesture of the nod, their agreement … the 'nod' is an affirmation from the reader that the meanings revealed from the lived experience of others … have resonance with, or make sense to, them" (p. 117)

[115] Also known as fore-sights, fore-conceptions (Peoples, 2020), fore-projections or pre-understandings (Holroyd, 2007)

[116] Gadamer refers to this learning process as a negative dialectical experience, "when the individual is transformed in such a way that his or her previous views are completely negated", and/or *a* reversal in consciousness, "where we can never return to our previously held views" after a transformative life experience (Holroyd, 2007, pp. 8-9). Retrospectively, one's previous reflections on their experiences become "that which one took as its 'truth'... and not its truth at all" (Holroyd, 2007, p. 9)

equaling in “knowledge”, but about engaging in a hermeneutic process which leads to deeper understanding (p. 9).

4.4.2 Phenomenological research questions

This project’s research question, which was previously outlined in *Section 1.3*, is: what are the lived experiences of English language teachers who work abroad in conflict-affected settings, specifically in the occupied Palestinian territory? It is inherently phenomenological, as Peoples (2020) states:

> Phenomenological research questions have one unwavering rule. The inquiry must always be about experience as lived. Phenomenological inquiry is only about experience and nothing else … research questions must not assume that something is present. (p. 27)

Considering that the experiences of English language teachers in conflict and post-conflict zones are largely undocumented, a phenomenological research question enabled me to explore what was significant and relevant about the experience without leading the participants, either intentionally or unintentionally, to an area of personal interest (*Section 4.5.6*). For this reason, phenomenological research is ideal for situations where little is known about a phenomenon, and for researchers who are intent on knowing “what happened and what it means to those who had the experience” (Cooper, 2014, p. 72). Moreover, as previously discussed (*Section 1.3* & *Section 4.2.2*):

> A phenomenological study is not designed to result in the development of theory, though there may be theoretical implications. Nor is it designed to develop a model or evaluate a program, though the results of a phenomenological study may inform the development of a model or revision of a program. What phenomenology can provide perhaps better than any other methodology, however, is a detailed, comprehensive description of experience. (Cooper, 2014, p. 72)

In his chapter (2014) “Phenomenology in Peace and Conflict Studies Research”, Cooper indicates that phenomenological research questions and research design differ from those found in other qualitative methodologies such as grounded theory, ethnography, case studies and narrative inquiry. According to Cooper (2014), these approaches tend to place more of an emphasis on explaining and theorising.

4.4.3 Researcher positionality

This study can be considered insider research. Having personal experience in the area under study (*Section 1.4*), my professional profile satisfies the project's inclusion criteria (see *Section 4.5.1*). This was known by the participants during all phases of the project. For instance, when recruiting participants with whom I had no previous professional or personal contact (*Section 4.5.2*), I intentionally introduced myself as a former English language teacher in Palestine and identified the environment in which I worked (i.e., disclosing my professional position, location and the timeframe during which I was in the oPt. Although this dynamic can be seen as a liability in more traditional constructs of the researcher-research-participant relationship (i.e., particularly in research paradigms which strive for objective, neutral and/or value-free data), insider research is common in hermeneutic phenomenological studies (Dibley et al., 2020a). In fact, Dibley (2022) suggests that researchers are meant to arrive at a topic through their lives and interests, not in isolation from them.

For the phenomenological researcher, having a shared lived experience with participants can be an immense resource. However, this does not exclude the researcher's lived experience from critical evaluation. Personal knowledge is not synonymous with understanding and insider researchers must remember that "even though an experience might be shared, it cannot be assumed that all those sharing that experience have the same understanding of it" (Dibley et al., 2020a, p. 144). This is further discussed by Neubauer et al. (2019) in the article, "How phenomenology can help us learn from the experiences of others":

> The researcher's past experiences and knowledge are valuable guides to the inquiry. It is the researcher's education and knowledge base that lead him/her to consider a phenomenon or experience worthy of investigation. To ask the research to take an unbiased approach to the data is inconsistent with hermeneutic phenomenology's philosophical roots. Instead, researchers working from this tradition should openly acknowledge their preconceptions, and reflect on how their subjectivity is part of the analysis process. (p. 95)

In light of this recommendation, I tried to foster a heightened awareness of my own lived experience, including my preconceptions or pre-understandings regarding the phenomenon. In order to facilitate reflection and reflexivity throughout all stages of the project, I began by composing a piece about what brought me to the topic at hand prior to data collection, then maintained a research journal where I documented thoughts that came to mind as a result of the interviews, including memories of my own lived experience that were triggered by the research and new and/or revised insights that emerged (*Data Analysis, Section 4.6*). During data collection and analysis, I often noticed when the

participants' experiences resonated with my own and/or deviated from what I expected to hear. In these instances, I tried to be cautious as resonance, or a lack thereof, does not necessarily confirm or disprove data. In doing so, I cultivated a phenomenological attitude[117], where one is open to the experience of the other and to viewing the phenomenon of interest in a fresh or different way. This requires an open phenomenological stance, where one is attuned to the participants' stories through careful listening, thinking and questioning (Dibley et al., 2020a).

It is important to remember that much like the act of interpreting in hermeneutic phenomenology (*Section 4.6.2*), "reflexivity is not something that a researcher 'does' at specific points during a study. Rather, it is a constant process, a hermeneutic cycle in itself, in which the researcher is *always-already* critically analysing their own position" (Dibley et al, 2020a, p. 145). As Dibley et al. (2020a) state (*Section 4.6.1*), it is not meant to be a formal process as we do not come to understanding in structured, "linear ways" (p. 118). Moreover, despite one's attempt to be conscious of how their demographic background, knowledge and experience impact the data, the interpretive research paradigm acknowledges that one can never fully achieve complete awareness (i.e., our frame of reference or horizon is by nature limited). Thus, while the data was largely generated by the participants (i.e., respondents were encouraged to speak freely about topics of their choosing), the analysis is invariably shaped by and imbued with my own lived experience (i.e., which conditioned what "bubbled up", or in other words, what appeared meaningful and significant) (Dibley et al., 2020a, p. 127). Nonetheless, as a researcher concerned with rigour, I aimed "to be as certain as we can be that the ideas taken forward are supported by the data" (Dibley et al., 2020a, p. 145).

Interestingly, during data collection, participants frequently acknowledged our shared lived experience[118] and asked about my lived experience in terms of how it resembled or differed from their own. In these cases, I aimed to return the participants to their stories, while maintaining a comfortable conversation that acknowledged their inquiries: I did not refuse to talk about my own experience – I would briefly relate my experience back to the observations that they had already made which resonated with me, enabling me to

[117] Husserl contrasted a phenomenological attitude with a natural attitude, the latter being "our common and familiar understanding of the world" which "constitutes our normal everyday life" (Dibley et al., 2020a, p. 8). It is that which is "taken-for-granted" and can hide deeper meaning (Dibley et al., 2020a, p. 8)

[118] For example, participants would make comments similar to, "You've lived there, so you probably know…" (Anne, 05); "You know what it's like…" (Travis, 06)

honestly engage in dialogue while minimising the introduction of new issues or themes. This was a desire to adhere to Dibley et al.'s (2020a) principle of giving oneself to the research, which "creates an atmosphere of trust" by "being open with people" (p. 88).

4.4.4 Procedural ethics and ethics in practice[119]

To ensure that this project prioritised the wellbeing of the participants involved, its content and design were reviewed and ethics approval was granted by Dublin City University's Research Ethics Committee (REC) in September 2021 (Ref: DCUREC/2021/195) (*Appendix E*). In regards to recruitment (see *Section 4.5.2*), all participants were provided with a *Plain Language Statement* (*Appendix B*), an *Informed Consent* document (*Appendix A*), and were given the opportunity to ask questions via email or video call prior to taking part in the study. Some individuals availed of this opportunity, requesting a call, exchanging emails and/or inquiring about the availability of supplemental information (i.e., study abstract). Information regarding General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (*Section 4.7*) was also communicated.

One of the reasons I was drawn to hermeneutic phenomenology was its methods, which I found to be ethical in practice. Lived experience research creates "space for the participants to narrate their lives in sufficient depth", without being heavily influenced by the researcher's preconceptions of the topic (Poole, 2020, p. 4). This contrasts the power imbalance present in research that tends to lean "heavily in the researcher's favour" and makes it difficult for the participant "to resist the direction in which the research is leading them"[120] (McConnell-Henry et al., 2011, p. 31). Moreover, I also felt that hermeneutic phenomenology was an appropriate approach for my specific research context. While respondents were not required or encouraged to discuss situations that they found to be troublesome (*Plain Language Statement, Appendix B*), it did engage a population that had teaching experience in a politically contentious, conflict-affected setting. Participants were instructed to only disclose what they felt comfortable sharing and were reminded that the interview itself could be a potentially triggering or unexpectedly moving experience depending on what had occurred while they were in the oPt (*Plain Language Statement, Appendix B*).

[119] Terminology used by Dibley et al., 2020a, p. 69

[120] "The desire of participants to say 'the right thing' is known as the 'halo effect'" (McConnell-Henry et al., 2011, p. 30)

Having a sense of the challenges that teachers face in the oPt, I tried to be as sensitive and supportive as possible. Following Ryan et al.'s (2009) recommendation, I felt it was "important … that interviews do not necessarily cause distress but may provide a medium through which interviewees can express their distress" if they choose (p. 313). At the end of each interview I checked in with the participants to ask how they felt about discussing their time in Palestine with me (*Interview Guide, Appendix D*). While some recognised that it led them to revisit aspects of the experience for the first time in months or years, they unanimously expressed that the interview itself was positive and/or useful for various reasons. Multiple participants reiterated how it was refreshing to speak with someone about their experience who both understood the context and cared to hear their stories[121].

In terms of the ethics of research competency (Dibley et al., 2020a), I attempted to learn as much as possible about the methodology and phenomenological methods (especially phenomenological interviewing), mainly by attending summer schools, modules and participating in seminars on phenomenology and other qualitative research techniques. I invested much time in independent research to draft an exhaustive literature review and a thorough theoretical basis for my methodology chapter. I felt that this would enable me to not only honour the participants' time and experience, but to eventually represent their voices and stories in the most ethical way possible. In addition, I carried out a pilot study (*Section 4.5.4)* and presented my research at different phases for feedback, specifically during a research seminar (School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies at DCU, 2023) and as a guest speaker at an event for English teachers at a Palestinian institution (2023). These experiences (among others) enabled me to continuously reevaluate my approach throughout different stages of the project. As Dibley et al. (2020a) argue, becoming a researcher through doctoral studies is a voyage, and it is through this voyage that we learn to become ethical (p. 87).

4.5 Data Collection

4.5.1 Inclusion criteria

This study aimed to collect the lived experiences of English language educators who had experience teaching abroad with adult learners in the oPt, therefore the sample was

[121] For example, one participant said that "it's therapeutic to be able to candidly speak about it" (Olivia, 02), another commented that "it's wonderful to … have a conversation with somebody who actually gives a damn" (Simon, 10), and a third participant remarked, "it's neat to talk about, but not everybody understands when you do talk about it" (Victoria, 07)

purposive. However, following Laverty's (2003) suggestion, every effort was made to build a sample that was as varied as possible:

> The aim in participant selection in … hermeneutic phenomenological research is to select participants who have lived experience that is the focus of the study, who are willing to talk about their experience, and who are diverse enough from one another to enhance possibilities of rich and unique stories of the particular experience. (p. 29)

As a consequence, there is a large degree of diversity in the demographic profiles of participants, yet all adhere to the following inclusion criteria:

Table 1: Participant inclusion criteria

Participant Inclusion Criteria	
1)	Experience as an English language teacher in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), specifically East Jerusalem / West Bank
2)	Completed experience prior to the study interview and was no longer residing in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt)
3)	Teaching experience was primarily conducted with (but not limited to) adult learners, preferably in tertiary, university contexts
4)	Non-resident English language teachers who came to the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) from abroad
5)	Over 18-years of age

Upon consultation with the ethics committee at my institution, it was decided that all participants had to be residing outside of the oPt at the time of their interviews. Accordingly, all interviews were conducted after the respondent had completed their teaching appointments in the oPt.

4.5.2 Research context

During the earliest stages of the project, it was decided that only individuals with teaching experience in the West Bank and East Jerusalem would be considered candidates for this

research. Gaza was intentionally excluded for two reasons: 1) the sociopolitical environment was and continues to be considerably different than that in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, making it difficult to compare across experiences, and 2) there are a number of issues regarding access that would significantly limit the number of eligible participants who have relevant English language teaching experience on-site in Gaza[122]. For similar reasons, I decided to narrow my focus to individuals who had collaborated predominantly with adult learners rather than children, and excluded local Palestinian English language teachers (i.e., permanent residents in the oPt) from the sample. Again, I felt that the experience of working with children could not be generalisable to that of working with adults as it presents a different set of challenges and opportunities in situations of conflict. In addition, access to educators who had experience working with children would have been limited. Moreover, while collecting the experiences of local English language teachers would be invaluable, particularly in order to compare the experiences of the two cohorts and to better understand the interactions between them, their lived experiences are dramatically different from those of teachers who come from abroad through education as aid and exchange programmes. A single theoretical framework would not be able to encompass the experiences of such a diverse group of educators.

While I anticipated that my focus would be limited to formal education (i.e., those with experience working within Palestinian universities in structured modules or courses), I did speak with individuals about their experiences with non-formal adult education, which led me to add this dimension to the study. I found that teachers were often assigned and/or encouraged to teach simultaneously in both formal and non-formal education projects in the oPt. Their accounts of these experiences are frequently interlaced. For this reason, it would have been reductive to compartmentalise experiences or to forcibly exclude one type of experience in favour of another. In terms of their specific teaching placements, their projects differed significantly. For example, some teachers mentioned being affiliated with a language centre that served the larger university community (i.e., teaching core English language classes), while others worked exclusively with English language and literature departments (i.e., teaching modules such as composition or literature) or lectured in the field of applied linguistics. Therefore, collectively they worked with students across a variety of faculties. The majority of the teachers taught credit bearing modules,

[122] All experiences explored in this study took place prior to or were interrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, all of the teacher experiences relate to being on the ground or physically on-site in the oPt. Individuals collaborating with adult learners in Gaza are likely to conduct their teaching activities online (Imperiale et al., 2017)

others led non-credit bearing workshops for students, extracurricular activities (i.e., English clubs, performances, etc.) and/or supervised capstone projects or dissertations. Based on their unique skill sets, some teachers worked with differently abled students. Moreover, many teachers collaborated with local peers to develop events (i.e., such as conferences), conduct trainings for faculty and/or were tasked with assessing teaching practices, revising curricula and/or mentoring colleagues within their respective departments. At times, the teachers did activities such as substitute teaching, grant writing, worked with international offices on campus and/or conducted research with local colleagues.

4.5.3 Recruitment

As a former English language teacher in the oPt, I remain part of an online community of practice and activated my existing network to locate study participants with teaching experience in Palestine. I then utilised snowball sampling to reach out to additional interviewees, but with limited success. Finally, I contacted the offices of education aid and exchange organisations that had previously sponsored English language teachers, although many programmes had been discontinued prior to data collection. While some agreed to circulate the study invitation, others were unresponsive. In the end, I received few responses from eligible participants using this venue. In short, some study participants I knew personally, having met or formed relationships of varying degrees with them in the past, but I had little or no connection with others prior to conducting the research.

In summary, all participants were notified about the study and were invited to take part by email and/or through other online channels, as mentioned above. Initial contact was made using a recruitment notice (*Study advertisement*, *Appendix C*). Once participants expressed interest, I provided them with all necessary documentation (i.e., *Plain language statement*, *Appendix B*) and invited them to review and sign a consent form (*Informed consent, Appendix A*) should they decide to move forward (*Section 4.4.4*). They were advised that their participation would entail sitting for one 60 to 90 minute recorded interview using an online platform (*Section 4.5.6*). They were also informed that while the interviews would be conducted in the form of a video call, only the audio portion of the interview would be recorded to minimise the amount of identifying information collected. In addition, references to names, institutions, and locations would be pseudonymised.

4.5.4 Sample size

In total, there were 10 participants who took part in the study, including one whose data was used exclusively for the pilot study. In phenomenological research, depth over breadth is preferred, especially as an overabundance of data "would become difficult to grasp … and to organise for further analysis" (Malterud, 2016, p. 4). Rather than stabilising the target sample size in advance, I initially set a projected range of 12-15 participants, which I later revised to 8-12 participants. This modification was done following an extensive review of previous studies, which led to a more refined understanding of the methodology. Accordingly, Malterud et al. (2016) argue that "an approximation of sample size is necessary for planning, while the adequacy of the final sample size must be continuously evaluated during the research process" (p .2). Contrary to many researchers, my continuous evaluation did not rely on the concept of achieving saturation[123]. According to hermeneutic phenomenology, saturation cannot be achieved as we can never know everything about a topic; moreover, our interpretation is thought to be fluid and subject to context[124]. Therefore, as opposed to working towards saturation, this study relied on the notion of information power as described by Malterud et al. (2016) in their article, "Sample Size in Qualitative Interview Studies: Guided by Information Power"[125]. Malterud et al. (2016) notice that while dominating many qualitative studies, "saturation is closely tied to a specific methodology [Grounded Theory], and the term is inconsistently applied" (p. 1). They observe that often "authors just claim that saturation was achieved, inferring that addition of more participants did not add anything to the analysis, without specifying their understanding of how saturation has been assessed" (Malterud et al., 2016, p. 1). Instead, the concept of "information power indicates that the more information the sample holds, relevant for the actual study, the lower amount [*sic*] of participants is needed" (p.1). As this study investigated a very specific experience that relatively few individuals have lived (i.e., being an English teacher from abroad in the oPt working with adult learners), a lower number of respondents was required to generate sufficient data to answer the research question.

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[123] The concept of saturation "was originally coined by Glaser and Strauss (1999) as a specific element of constant comparison in Grounded Theory (GT) analysis. Within the GT framework, sample size is appraised as an element of the ongoing analysis where every new observation is compared with previous analysis to identify similarities and differences" (Malterud et al., 2016, p. 1)

[124] "Time, space and context are pivotal to … understanding. Given Heidegger's belief in the relevancy of context, it follows that every time an experience is re-visited, the meaning may alter, depending on the disposition, or mood, of the researcher or participant" (McConnell-Henry et al., 2011, p. 29)

[125] The term plays off the notion of power calculations which determine the sample size for quantitative studies (Malterud et al., 2016)

4.5.5 Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted in August 2022, which consisted of one individual interview and its corresponding analysis. While no significant changes were made to the project following the pilot study, minor modifications were made to the data collection techniques (i.e., the manner in which the interviews were conducted). The findings from the pilot study were not included in the final analysis (*Section 4.5.3*).

4.5.6 Demographics

Each participant was assigned a pseudonym and participant number, which are used both in the interview transcripts and in the dissertation. In lived experience research, it is common practice to refer to participants with pseudonyms rather than numbers as it "emphasises the human situatedness of the research" (Dibley et al., 2020a, p. 109). All information that was considered identifying was removed. In order to give greater anonymity to the participants, the demographic information was collected in broad categories, particularly in relation to the participant's age at the time of experience and the year(s) during which the experience took place.

The demographic breakdown is as follows:

Table 2: Participant demographic data

Participant pseudonym	Age range	Identified gender	Career level	Timeframe Active in oPt
(01) Mariam*	40-49	Female	Between Mid-career Advanced-career	2010-2020
(02) Olivia	30-39	Female	Mid-career	2010-2020
(03) Marcus	30-39	Male	Mid-career	2010-2020

(04) Patricia	40-49	Female	Mid-career	2010-2020
(05) Anne	60-69	Female	Late-career	2010-2020
(06) Travis	40-49	Male	Mid-career	2010-2020
(07) Victoria	40-49	Female	Mid-career	2010-2020
(08) Nicole	20-29	Female	Early career	2010-2020
(09) Benjamin	50-59	Male	Volunteer	2010-2020
(10) Simon	60-69	Male	Retired	2010-2020

*Participated in pilot study

The actual length of time that participants spent in the oPt within the time periods indicated in *Table 2* ranged from weeks to two academic years. In addition, the majority of the participants had previous related experience in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region prior to teaching in Palestine, and some self-identified as having high levels of Arabic language proficiency. Moreover, some had previously visited or spent time in the oPt. In terms of the participants' backgrounds, there was a strong cultural representation from Anglophone countries, mainly the United States, followed by the United Kingdom and Ireland. In addition, participants self-identified with diverse social groups, including ethnic groups and the LGBTQI+ community. Some respondents mentioned being native speakers, but others did not address their language profiles. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, while some of the participants applied directly to positions in (or developed projects for) the oPt and were therefore self-selected, others applied to teaching programmes where they were paired with a project.

4.5.7 Phenomenological interviewing

Due to the phenomenological focus of the research (i.e., the individual's lived experience) and the sensitive sociopolitical context, only one-to-one interviews were carried out – no focus groups were used. As previously mentioned, the interviews were conducted using an online platform (*Section 4.5.2*). While in-person interviews may be preferred to interviews done remotely, particularly in phenomenological research where the notion of *dasein* or being-in-the-world may arguably be interrupted (Dibley et al., 2020b) (*Section 4.3.2*), online interviews enabled this research to take place: respondents were geographically distributed across various countries and continents at the time of data collection.

The interviews were conducted between September 2022 and April 2023. As mentioned (*Section 4.4.4*), they were projected to last between 60 and 90 minutes, but in practice ranged from 41 to 100 minutes in length. Follow up interviews were not conducted, nor was any member-checking[126] carried out. Many researchers using hermeneutic phenomenology caution against the aforementioned practices. For example, rather than increasing reliability, they argue that follow up interviews may be a way to "cover" poor interview technique, and that the practice itself is ethically questionable if the topic is sensitive (McConnell-Henry et al., 2011, p. 28). Furthermore, "although member-checking has long been accepted as the gold standard in quantitative research, it is not the pinnacle for expressing rigour in Heideggerian phenomenology because it contradicts many of the underpinning philosophies" (McConnell-Henry et al., 2011, p. 28). Hermeneutics frames human understanding "as evolving and thus open to ongoing revision and interpretation" (Crowther et al., 2016, p. 7), and views truth as multiple and fluid (i.e., "every time an experience is re-visited, the meaning may alter") (McConnell-Henry et al., 2011, p. 29) (*Section 4.3.2*). Therefore, as the researcher is not attempting to prove, generalise or validate data, follow up interviews and member-checking would be illogical according to the methodology's interpretive paradigm (McConnell-Henry et al., 2011).

In terms of format, the interviews were phenomenological, meaning they were unstructured. This is "underpinned by the assumption that little knowledge exists about the topic of interest therefore there are no predetermined questions to pose" (Ryan et al.,

[126] "Member-checking [is] the returning of findings to participants for them to validate their contributions" (McConnell-Henry et al., 2011, p. 29).

2009, p. 310). Moreover, it encourages participants to speak about what is relevant to them in their own words (i.e., the interpretation and meaning they have given to the experience under investigation), which reduces the risk that the researcher could "inadvertently colour the interview with their preconceived notions" (Dibley et al., 2020a, p. 143). As is common in phenomenological studies, a guiding prompt was circulated to each participant in advance (i.e., *Can you describe your experience as an English language teacher in Palestine?*). This was included in an email to confirm the interview date and time. Sharing the prompt before the interview "allow[s] time for the participant to think about the experience more deeply" (Vandermause & Fleming, 2011, p. 370), while also setting the focus for the upcoming discussion.

In general, participants spoke at length about their experiences with minimal intervention. However, a series of possible open-ended probing[127] and/or clarifying questions were identified in advance (i.e., *Could you tell me more?*; *What do you make of it now?*; *Tell me what a typical day was like for you as a teacher in Palestine*, etc.) and included in an *Interview guide* (*Appendix D*). I also drew on a series of phenomenological techniques to encourage the participants to tell their stories, such as: 1) a respect for pauses and silence to avoid rushing the interviewee (McConnell-Henry et al., 2011, p. 36), 2) paraphrasing to demonstrate active listening and to "confirm or deny the accuracy of the interpretation" (McConnell-Henry et al., 2011, p. 35), 3) echoing what the interviewee said verbatim to (again) convey active listening and encourage "the interviewee to proceed with the conversation" (Ryan et al., 2009, p. 311), 4) using incomplete sentences for the interviewee to finish, which "draws the participant into the conversation without signaling a presupposed response" (Vandermause & Fleming, 2011, pp. 372-373), and 5) returning the participant to the story if they were "diverting the conversation" (Vandermause & Fleming, 2011, p. 373). As Poole (2020) outlines, this approach is a departure from many qualitative interviewing techniques where "respondents are positioned as passive 'vessels of answers'... [during] a search and discovery mission" (p. 4). Instead, in hermeneutic phenomenology, the respondent is "seen as a productive source of narrative knowledge… [who] stories the information, assembling it into a coherent account" (Poole, 2020, p. 4). This conceptualisation significantly influenced the design and objectives of my data collection.

[127] "Researchers use 'probing' when they have failed to grasp fully what participants have said and want to clarify the responses, eliciting further information to improve their understanding" (McConnell-Henry et al., 2011, p. 34).

During the interviews, I took some notes to remember paralinguistic cues and other contextual information that would otherwise be lost (*Section 4.4.3 & Section 4.6*). However, I found that much of my attention was dedicated to the social interaction between myself and the participant. I believe that having a shared experience with the respondents potentially helped "establish rapport and trust from the outset" (Ryan et al., 2009, p. 311). It also allowed me to quickly understand contextual references and information that would otherwise be incomprehensible to a researcher who was unfamiliar with the oPt (or would require extensive explanation). Despite being a novice researcher, I did my best to maintain "a relaxed, confident and attentive approach" through "verbal and non-verbal" cues (i.e., with "open posture, appropriate facial expressions and good eye contact") (Ryan et al., 2009, p. 311). All interviews ended with a short set of demographic (*Section 4.5.5*) and debrief questions (*Interview guide*, *Appendix D*).

4.5.8 Generating a hermeneutic text: interview transcription

Once each interview was conducted, the audio files were transcribed using a verbatim approach that removed idiosyncratic speech elements (such as stutters and involuntary vocalisations) that would have rendered the transcript difficult to comprehend (Oliver et al., 2005). As previously mentioned (*Section 4.5.5*), pseudonym and participant numbers replaced identifying information, and locations and institutions were substituted. These transcripts formed what is referred to in hermeneutic phenomenology as the text for analysis (see *Section 4.6.2* for a discussion on compartmentalising data and the sequence of interviews, transcription and analysation of text). All audio recordings and the anonymised transcripts (or texts) were then transferred for long-term storage to DCU's password protected cloud, which was only accessible to the primary investigators (i.e., researcher and two doctoral supervisors) following a two-step verification process.

4.6 Data analysis

4.6.1 Hermeneutic phenomenological analysis: spinning the golden (or philosophical) thread

Similar to the data collection process, hermeneutic phenomenology has "no defined steps or stages that must be followed" when analysing data (although again, there are various strands that offer templates for doing so) (Dibley et al., 2020a, p. 114) (*Section 4.4.1*). As Smythe et al. (2007) argue (much like Holroyd, 2007 in *Section 4.4.1* and Laverty, 2003 in *Section 4.3.2*), in lived experience research, the analysis phase "is a journey of 'thinking'

rather than a specific, pre-determined process by which 'findings' can be pinned down" (p. 1390). The researcher does not try to explain the experience (Dibley et al., 2020a) (*Section 4.4.2* and *Section 4.6.2*). Instead, their objective is to more deeply understand a particular phenomenon and what it means to the individuals who lived it. However, establishing a methodological approach that leads to meaningful understanding in the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition is one of the difficulties that researchers (and above all novice researchers) encounter throughout their work. Dibley et al. (2020a) demonstrate:

> The challenge with analysis in hermeneutic phenomenological research is that there is no easy way of understanding or visualising the process, because it's not meant to be so formal. We do not, in the world, come to new understandings in formal, linear ways – we move back and forth between our pre-understanding, taken for granted knowledge and new evidence, gradually moulding and refining our thinking … Hermeneutic phenomenological data analysis is instead a journey through 'things which need to be thought about' … it's an act of philosophical and phenomenological faith. (p. 118)

Therefore, in order to arrive at an appropriate strategy for approaching the data, I relied on Heidegger and Gadamer's notions of the hermeneutic circle (*Section 4.6.2*) and the fusion of horizons (*Section 4.6.3*).

4.6.2 Coming to understanding: the hermeneutic circle

The hermeneutic circle formed the basis of my approach to data analysis, which represents an iterative, circular process (Dibley et al., 2020a) where the researcher goes through cycles of reading, writing and dialogue (or dwelling)[128] (Smythe et al., 2007). Neubauer et al. (2019) describe this:

> Robust phenomenological research involves … engaging in a hermeneutic circle wherein the researcher reads the data, constructs a vague understanding, engages in reflective writing, then re-engages with the text with revised understandings. In cycles of reading and writing, of attending to the whole of the text and the parts, the hermeneutic researcher constructs an understanding of the lived experience. (p. 95)

This is visually represented in the following image:

[128] Dwelling is not synonymous with idleness; it is instead an active process of "pondering, wondering and asking questions of meaning" (Dibley et al., 2020a, p. 125). In a sense, it is a form of meditative thinking, where you do not force interpretations (or treat them as something that one does), but allow for meaning to take shape (Dibley et al., 2020a). As Smythe et al. (2007) state, "thinking is not a 'working out' but rather a 'letting come'" (p. 1391)

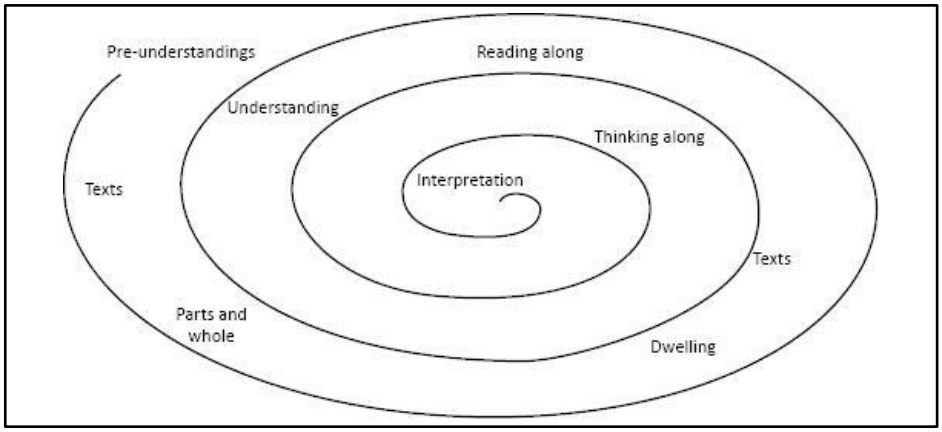

Figure 3: The hermeneutic circle
Source: Dibley et al., 2020a, p. 128

As observable, the interpretive process does not begin once the researcher decides to analyse a text. Instead, the hermeneutic circle opens at the earliest stages of the research, as one formats their research question and reflects on their positionality (Dibley et al., 2020a). In addition, rather than being an actual circle, it is more of a spiral, which Peoples (2020) highlights:

> Circular would mean that one's understanding does not really change … a circle gets back to the same point. In a spiral process, understanding increases by moving from the understanding of parts to the understanding of the whole and again back to parts, continually changing as new data are introduced. (p. 33)

In line with these conceptualisations, an outline of my data analysis is as follows:

Table 3: Data analysis

Step	Action taken	Reason
I	Drafted reflective piece about lived experience (i.e., what brought me to the research question); maintained research journal with reflections about interviews and new or modified insights	Uncovering pre-understanding & prejudice that impact analysis
II	Reviewed transcripts, making tracked notes about first impressions in the margins using a word processing program	Earliest forms of codes, themes and patterns emerged
III	Wrote reflective summary of each transcript, including ideas that were striking or resonated; as more interviews were conducted and transcripts were produced, I also made connections between the lived experiences of participants	Dwelling with data through Written reflections

IV	Reviewed methodology; reviewed theoretical framework; presented first iterations of work for feedback	Re-reading and discussing data to aid in thinking and questioning
V	Re-read transcripts and summaries; identified and revised themes	Uncovering deeper or hidden (i.e., initially obfuscated) meanings
VI	Once clearer themes and patterns emerged, returned to transcripts for supporting verbatim quotes	Revising earlier interpretations
VII	Organised verbatim quotes by patterns or themes, continually returning to the original transcripts to locate them in context and to listen to audio recordings	Dwelling with new or modified insights; moving from the parts to the whole
VIII	Decided on three main thematic areas to best organise my findings	Identifying themes to best interpret the lived experience
IX	Wrote findings into chapters, which encouraged meditative thinking, and returned to transcripts, summaries and notes as needed; revisited methodology and theoretical framework for guidance	Rendering an interpretation or arriving at a fusion of horizons (*Section 4.6.3*)

The above table does not properly express some nuances of doing hermeneutic phenomenological analysis. For example, while identified in certain areas, the act of dwelling with the data took place throughout all phases or the project; it is not an activity that you track, and it is non-linear (Dibley et al., 2020a). In addition, as lived experience researchers are not concerned with obtaining objective data, there is no need to compartmentalise different stages of the research process. For example, the transcription and data analysis took place in conjunction with data collection (i.e., I conducted new interviews while transcribing and analysing previous ones). Again, this emphasises the extent to which data analysis takes place during all stages of the research; similar to reflexivity (*Section 4.4.3*), it is something that is *always-already* happening according to Heidegger's notion of being-in-the-world (i.e., as humans experience the world, they are simultaneously interpreting and analysing what they experience) (Dibley et al., 2020a).

4.6.3 Findings, themes and the fusion of horizons

The fusion of horizons is the point where the researcher and the participants' understanding of an experience fuse "to present a warranted interpretation" (Dibley et al., 2020a, p.128). It includes "a dialectic between the pre-understandings of the research process, the interpretative framework and the sources of information" (Koch, 1995, p. 835). As seen in the below figure through the image of an eclipsed sun, the researcher

and the participants' interpretations are always limited[129] (i.e., the individual's horizon is what is visible to them at that given time – it is not everything that can possibly be seen or known):

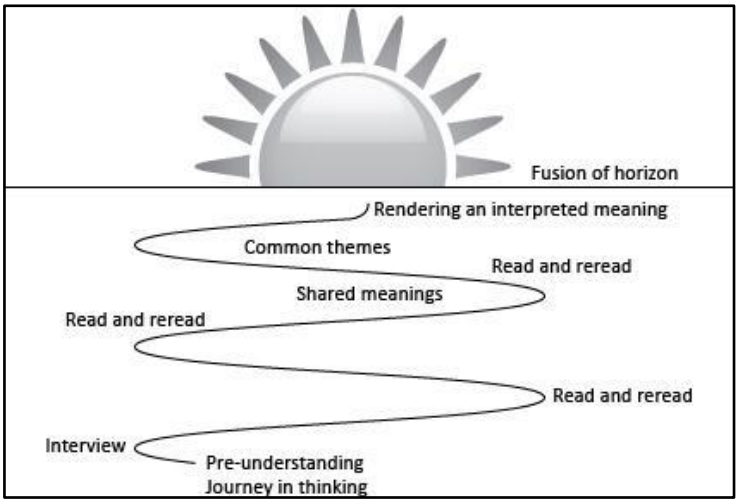

Figure 4: The fusion of horizons (or new understanding)
Source: Dibley et al., 2020a, p. 129

Although our interpretations are incomplete, the fusion of horizons is still a point of arrival following a lengthy engagement with the hermeneutic circle[130] (i.e., the path leading towards the horizon in the above image). It is the co-constitution of the lived experience under investigation, which "incorporates the Dasein [or being-in-the-world] of both researcher and researched" (Dibley et al., 2020b, p. 1199). This results in the findings, which are presented in terms of patterns and themes (Diekelmann, Allen, and Tanner, 1989). However, it should be reiterated that the intention of hermeneutic phenomenological research is not to conduct a thematic analysis, but to better understand a particular experience and what it means to those who have experienced it. Accordingly, van Manen (2016) advises that "ultimately the concept of theme is rather irrelevant and may be considered simply as a means to get at the notion we are addressing. Theme gives control and order to our research and writing" (p. 79). Therefore, rather than an endpoint, the themes are a vehicle for understanding experience.

[129] Smythe et al. (2007) state, "we can only ever live in a context of time, place and situational influences" (p. 1392)

[130] Similar to Heidegger's concept of truth as unconcealment (*Section 4.2.2*), Smythe et al. (2007) compare this process to being on a forest path, where there is always an interplay between darkness (concealment) and light (unconcealment); "our fresh insights" are an outcome of "'what we have grasped'" merging with "the still-not-yet-known" (p. 1391)

Thus, the key findings for this project have been summarised in three chapters:

> *Chapter 5*: *Education aid and exchange for public diplomacy: a disempowering model?*
>
> *Chapter 6*: *Teaching abroad in challenging circumstances: bearing witness to the occupied Palestinian territory*
>
> *Chapter 7*: *Perceptions of English language teaching in Palestine: utility, prestige and pedagogic consequences of teaching under occupation*

In the words of Smythe et al. (2007), rather than being a summary of the "'the same thing' said again and again" by participants, the thematic areas chosen struck me as "something that matters significantly, something … to point the reader towards" (p. 1392). In terms of the process of narrowing down and refining themes, the following table goes into detail about the project's thematic development:

Table 4: Evolution of themes

Initial themes	Emerging themes	Final themes
	Programme administrators ignoring political implications of projects	1) <u>Disempowerment</u>
Lack of training and support	Being a pawn in a larger mechanism (i.e., public diplomacy initiatives)	Lack of sociocultural, sociopolitical and educational knowledge Gaps in training Gaps in support and guidance
Education aid fatigue	Understanding situations of conflict: - Being surprised - Randomness of violence - Disconnect between knowledge and experience; expectations and reality on the ground	Design of P2P initiatives Administrative issues Lack of structure Objectives of exchange unclear
Positionality and privilege	- Little prior knowledge - Influence from media - Doing research – being prepared - Traumatic experiences	Neocolonial assumptions Power imbalances Unilateral exchanges
Conflict on campus	Not understanding cultural norms - Indirect communication (i.e., being told something, then finding out that it was not what the person actually thought)	Few local mentors or cultural informants Uncomfortable relationships with colleagues Challenges building connections in community
Divisive nature of conflict	- Being (in)appropriate - Wasta; nepotism - Social dynamics (who you should (not) interact with) - Values as derived from the Holy Quran (welcoming per obligation)	Students as advisors and confidants to visiting teachers 2) <u>Bearing witness</u>
Heightened sense of impact (being a very positive or		First hand and secondary witnessing Lack of psychosocial support

very difficult experience)	Operating by trial and error Being (un)prepared Difficulty managing content of a sociopolitical nature Being unheard – not feeling listened to Extreme flexibility Lack of structure Expectations for support Lack of support from: - Local liaisons - Colleagues - Programme administrators Interactions with local colleagues: - Being (un)welcome - Being visible as an outsider - Being competition - Being a suspicious presence - Being dismissed - Being resented - Being an annoyance or "pain" (i.e., an inconvenience) - Local teachers support (buy in) impacted student attendance Inequalities - Relationship between visiting and local teachers (i.e., power dynamics) - Funding/funders - Wages being withheld from local teachers - Outsider, not understanding the context, tasked with coming in to make suggestions - Aid fatigue - "White outsider" - Age hierarchy - Low vs. high stakes (i.e., "it's not my job on the line") Being surprised - By student knowledge ("atypical students") - Student familiarity with other cultures and cultural products - Openness to using tools (i.e., queer theory) Interactions with students: - Challenges building trust - Students as cultural informants - Welcoming - Helpful - Despondent, apathetic, defeatist Coping mechanisms: - Leaning on students as cultural informants in absence of support - Isolation - Giving up - "Taking a step back"	Conflict in the classroom Coping mechanism: Bearing witness or avoidance Sense of uselessness Trivialisation of work Polarised experience: high impact Standpoint of witnesses: identity & positionality - Nationality - Ethnicity/race - Gender - Sexual orientation - Age - Political opinions - Lived experience of discrimination Disconnect between experience as lived and conceptualised 3) <u>English teaching under occupation</u> English as a lingua franca English perceived as a neutral language English competency and enforced immobility or monoculturalism English language education as a form of resistance to occupation Utility of English Pragmatic benefits: Employment Education Mobility English for self-representation Self-expression Telling one's narrative in an international context Challenges in the oPt Rote-learning, memorisation, plagiarism Technology and resources Materials not fit for purpose Navigating context of conflict in the classroom Negotiating classroom practices with colleagues and students

	- Personal growth - Hypervigilance Polarising experience Having expectations that go beyond English teaching? Having high expectations for oneself Perceiving the environment to be high stakes Making an impact - In the community - On students (i.e., “it was the first real by impact I thought I had ever had”) Differences in experience due to: - Nationality - Gender - Ethnicity - Age - Political opinions (and lack of) - Sexual orientation - Personal situation, such as having a partner or network Restriction on movement - Isolation for international community - Limiting access to World Englishes - Limiting one’s ability to apply English skills English language - Tool for self-expression (i.e., talk about being under occupation; social media) - Self-preservation - Social change - Status symbol - Escapism - Emigration - Employment - Colonial language - Intercultural communication - Trivialising English language teaching in the context of conflict - Gap between practice and theory - Interrupted education - Strikes - Imprisonment - Closures - Plagiarism The sociopolitical environment impacting the classroom - In assignments - Topics brought up for discussion - Scenarios and situations in the language classroom - Gender: different motivations for men and women to complete coursework - Palestinians not exposed to other teaching styles	

	Living in a Palestinian environment - Witnessing ill health - Wealth inequality - Expensive	

4.6.4 Organising data with a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS): an ongoing debate

The use of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) such as NVivo or Atlas, is a highly contentious issue in hermeneutic phenomenological research. While a preoccupation with the negative effects of technology can be traced back to Heidegger, many leaders in the field today have inherited his fears. By looking at Frechette et al.'s (2020) discussion, we can understand where the concern and the opportunity in using CAQDAS lies:

> A hermeneutical approach to data analysis distinguishes interpretive phenomenological research from other types of qualitative inquiry. Stemming from the concept of the hermeneutic circle, a back-and-forth movement from part to the whole is privileged … Data analysis is an interpretive process, and imprinting lived experience in writing opens up the possibility for interpretation. (p. 9)

In terms of reservations, some scholars claim that the use of software cannot produce "phenomenological insights" as it disrupts the researchers' holistic connection to the text, compromising their ability to move dialectically from the part to the whole (van Manen, 2014, p. 319). Moreover, van Manen (2014) reminds us that "codifications, conceptual abstractions, or empirical generalizations can never adequately produce phenomenological understandings", and that phenomenology is not "commensurate with abstracting, coding, and procedural approaches; developing taxonomies; looking for recurring concepts or themes; and so on" (p. 319). Kelleher Sohn (2017) further clarifies that "it is difficult to avoid becoming a tool of our tools", and that using a software can result in less of an investment in phenomenological writing (*Section 4.6.1*) and an overinvestment in coding (known as the "coding trap" and "data fetishism") (pp. 1-6). This arguably impedes the interpretive process (or one's ability to dwell on a text), skews findings and "instrumentalises a process that should be intuitive" (Peoples, 2020, p. 66). That being stated, there are a number of recent phenomenological studies (Bynum et al., 2021; Frechette et al., 2020; Kelleher Sohn, 2017) that have utilised or even championed the use of CAQDAS, and in particular NVivo. Contrary to van Manen (2014), some scholars argue that a software can actually help to "facilitate this back-and-forth movement from part to the whole" (Frechette et al., 2020, p. 9) by enabling the researcher

to organise and recall large amounts of information that would not be possible without technological assistance.

After weighing the concerns and advantages of using CAQDAS in lived experience research, I decided to seek assistance for NVivo, completing both beginner and intermediate level training, in addition to attending review sessions (2019-2021). I also consulted established researchers in hermeneutic phenomenology, who advised me against using it for doctoral research (2022). At that point, having understood that the software was a container for my data that "does not do the interpretations or analysis" (Dibley et al., 2020a, p. 110), I was undecided about its utility. Thus, I ran a trial, importing then analysing three of my transcripts (roughly 30% of my data) using the tool (2023). While initially enthusiastic, I ultimately chose not to use NVivo to facilitate my data analysis. On one hand, it enabled me to organise large amounts of information; I could assign multiple codes to a portion of text, which was useful in the beginning stages of my analysis when meaning began to emerge. However, what I ultimately struggled with was a sense of being removed or disconnected from the transcripts – I felt as if I was sorting and isolating verbatim excerpts and codes rather than looking at them in the context of the larger text(s). For each of my transcripts, I ended up returning to the word processing software where I had initially reviewed material, made notes and drafted interpretive summaries to transfer the work that I had done using CAQDAS. Therefore, I decided that from both a quality and productivity standpoint, it was best to discontinue using the software (although I would be open to trying it again in the future). Finally, while not the purpose of phenomenological research (van Manen, 2014), nor of using CAQDAS for a phenomenological study, I did use the features of NVivo to search for patterns in the transcripts. Interestingly, I found that the sensitive sociopolitical context obscured more superficial attempts to recall data[131], which renewed my belief in hermeneutic phenomenology as the most suitable methodology for the project.

4.7 General Data Protection Regulation

During the study, the data was only accessible by the primary investigators: myself, the researcher, and two doctoral supervisors. Every precaution was taken to ensure that the

[131] If a researcher were to search for content/data regarding a certain phenomenon in the context of conflict, the language used to describe it could differ significantly based on the individual's personal beliefs regarding the conflict, their awareness of the multiple ways that it can be construed, and/or a concern for wanting to discuss the experience in a way that is deemed politically correct. For example, while one individual said that "they were right on the border … Border is not the right word, we're not supposed to use that word" (Travis, 06), another spoke about being "on one side of the fence, the security fence, the apartheid wall, the barrier, whatever you choose to call it" (Simon, 10) (also referenced in *Section 1.5.2.2*)

contributions remained confidential. Therefore, all names, references to institutions, locations, timelines or other information that reveal identity were substituted in order to protect anonymity. As written in the *Plain Language Statement Form (Appendix B)*, this study engaged a relatively small sample in comparison to other types of qualitative research, and this offered less anonymity to participants than a larger study would have. Moreover, confidentiality does have limits and can only be protected within a reasonable legal framework (i.e., it is possible for data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information claim or mandated reporting by some professions). Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study and any time, and that their data would be deleted (*Plain Language Statement Form, Appendix B)*.

As the data will be held for a period of five years following the completion of the PhD, it will be destroyed by myself, the primary researcher, in 2029. Furthermore, the data will not be shared with any third parties, nor will it be transferred outside the EEA (European Economic Area). All participants have the right to access their data at any time, and this dissertation is available for public consultation (without a paywall) using Dublin City University's DORAS (DCU's Online Research Access Service).

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter outlined some of the features of hermeneutic phenomenology which differentiate it from other qualitative methodologies. As Bynum and Varpio (2018) summarise, this includes: "(i) its interpretive nature and focus on lived experience, (ii) the inclusion of researcher experiences in the processes of data collection and analysis, and (iii) the dynamic, thoughtful process of reflecting and writing that guides data analysis" (p. 252). It also explored the philosophical underpinnings of the methodology, which for the purposes of this specific project, can be traced back to the work of Heidegger and Gadamer. In doing so, the chapter aimed to show how the guiding principles of Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology drove all stages of the research process, as a golden thread that carries on throughout the project, and shaped the methods used. As an organisational tool, the resulting findings are presented thematically and form the next three chapters of the dissertation.

Chapter 5 | Education aid and exchange for public diplomacy: a disempowering model?

5.1 Introduction

As the first thematic area of the research findings, this chapter explores aspects of the participants' teaching assignments in third level Palestinian institutions (i.e., mainly at universities, but also in non-formal adult education programmes) that were perceived as disempowering by the respondents. It identifies moments when the visiting teachers felt ill-equipped to manage their experiences in the oPt, particularly in ways that may have been ameliorated through project management, training and support. In order to better understand the possible origins of these deficits, it then delves deeper into the inequalities and power imbalances that are inherent to many education aid and exchange programmes for public diplomacy. The section concludes with an examination of how these issues ultimately impact the teachers' ability to teach English, giving specific emphasis to their working relationships with local colleagues and students.

5.2 (Dis)empowering teachers in conflict-affected settings: issues with administration, training and support

5.2.1 Project management and structure

One of the most commented on aspects of the teachers' experiences in Palestine was the reported lack, if not complete absence, of structure. While being a cause of stress for multiple respondents, some instructors perceived this positively as a high degree of project flexibility enabled them to focus on tasks that were of interest to them, particularly if they were assigned non-credit bearing projects and workshops[132]. To illustrate, Benjamin (08) quotes his coordinator in Palestine inviting him to modify his English-language teaching assignment (i.e., related to the development of public speaking skills) based on his background, saying, "bring your own strengths, your own skills, and that would be great". Accordingly, Benjamin (08) later describes incorporating additional training and other areas of interest (i.e., tools to improve mental health such as

[132] For example, Travis (06) was given a series of tasks that were non-credit bearing, saying, "there was no value evaluation or assessment attached to my teaching, which is great … so that gave me licence to do, to go for it"

meditation) into his classroom[133]. This was thought to have had a positive impact on the students beyond their English-language public speaking skills. Consequently, the teacher, who strongly identified as "a facilitator of development … trying to empower people to see that they can make choices rather than learning by rote or … loads of material", found his experience to be particularly rewarding (Benjamin, 08)[134]. Drawing on the literature regarding language teacher cognition (LTC) and language teacher identity (LTI) (*Section 3.4.3*), this is an example of a teacher's beliefs and identity aligning with their practice (Hofstadler et al., 2021). Thus, the unstructured nature of his project was empowering; he was able to use his past professional[135] and personal experience as a resource (Yazan, 2018), which rendered his work meaningful (*Section 3.4.3*).

The experience of being able (or needing) to shape or define the overall scope of one's project was recurrent throughout the interviews. As Nicole (09) concisely states, "how that [the project] looked … and things like that weren't kind of outlined, it was sort of … make of it what you will". This was especially true for educators who were tasked with (re)establishing teaching projects within Palestinian institutions as their (the teachers') sponsoring programmes focused on developing, building and/or renewing ties with past and/or new local partners. Despite the overall positive feedback given by instructors such as Benjamin (08), this was difficult for many of the visiting teachers. Nicole (09) elaborates on the process:

> So we were kind of the guinea pigs, kind of coming in, figuring out how things worked … there were definitely a lot of challenges just in terms of navigating … like… what this role kind of looks like, like, what is this space? What do we want it to be? … there were a lot of kind of challenges along the way with that.

The extent to which the teachers needed to define their roles (and create a teaching and learning environment that coincided with their views on pedagogy) (*Section 3.4.3*) in the absence of pre-existing structure, varied widely. There were cases reported where the instructors felt that their projects were excessively underdeveloped. Moreover, when reaching out for guidance and expressing concern, they described being "ignored" (Anne,

[133] Benjamin (08) states: "I must have said to people, 'do [you] want us to do this maybe nice meditation, you know, relaxation at the, at the end of the session, to just take a break from the world as such, you know?'. And so they were, they were very, very hungry for that, that aspect of support with their, their mental health, their well-being, you know, probably even more so than they were for support with improving their English … they soaked it up like sponges"

[134] Benjamin (08) aimed to "help people unlock themselves as it were, and realise that they have agency over their own lives, and … to help them get excited about, about learning and believing in themselves and developing their own self esteem to the extent that they believe that they're worthy of an education"

[135] Benjamin (08) had "a background in working with people in mental health recovery"

05) by the sponsoring and/or host institution(s). Olivia (02) elaborates on this, stating, “we didn't really feel like they [the sponsoring programme] wanted to hear from us, it was kind of like you, you fill in … to make the [diplomatic mission] look good and to make the [country] look good”. When identifying apparent lapses in programme management and administration, Anne (05) illustrates her experience with examples, recounting that she was “basically dropped off there [in a Palestinian village or city] and forgotten about completely by everybody”. This is reflected in her narration of her first day of work at the university:

> … no one was there to meet me ... I was hoping I was going to the right place. And so I got there. And the head of the department, lovely [person], very brilliant … [they] had just found out I was coming and did not know what to do with me. They hadn't met my liaison, [my liaison] hadn’t explained anything. Anything to anybody. I didn’t have an office … they had no courses outlined for me. My liaison kept asking me, “Well, what do you want to do?”. And I’m like going, “that’s your job. You tell me, what am I supposed to be doing”.

The pressure that Anne (05) describes, to unexpectedly design her own teaching assignment upon arrival, was further compounded by other aggravating factors. For example, while a large degree of ambiguity is expected and perhaps tolerable as new projects develop, the teachers’ accounts demonstrate how opportunities to receive basic training (to arguably alleviate the “challenges” described in the above excerpts) were overlooked by administrators both pre-departure and/or once on-site. Travis (06) gives evidence of this deficit:

> They kind of said, like, do whatever you want … I didn’t even know what topics were appropriate or not appropriate. I mean, obviously, I used my best judgement … But still, like, I wasn’t, I had no prep as to expectations, or, or what was appropriate … there was a, you know, a few times when … I remember seeing on a [student’s] face that like, “oh, wow … we can talk about that?”

Here, Travis’s (06) account exposes a common feature of the visiting teachers’ experiences: they were often deprived of core knowledge pertaining to the sociopolitical, cultural and/or educational context in which they taught (see also *Section 6.5.1*), as is consistently the case with foreign teachers who work in conflict-affected environments across the globe (*Sections 2.3.3, 2.5.1, 2.5.2*) (Burde et al., 2017; Kester, 2021; Millican et al., 2021; Milton, 2018b). Considering this observation, it is difficult to understand how teachers can be expected to confidently develop and lead their own projects (such as Anne (05)) or skillfully select content (such as Travis (06)) without significant guidance

and/or support regarding the local community's needs (nor does it seem desirable that they do so).

5.2.2 Cultural training and psychosocial support

The aforementioned lack of understanding regarding what is culturally "appropriate" and relevant is further echoed in the accounts of the study participants. For instance, like many of the teachers interviewed, Nicole (09) goes into detail about being confronted with student questions that engage sensitive topics, particularly those related to areas that are at the core of the Palestinian context, such as "politics" and "religion". She reflects on shortcomings in her and her colleagues' abilities to address these:

> I think one of the things we hadn't talked about in preparation for it [Palestine] was like navigating those kinds of conversations about more sensitive topics, like politics, religion, that a lot of students asked, and were curious about, and a lot of it being, you know, we're there to teach English, but we're also there to create … cultural connections … and to really make it … a safe space for those conversations to be had. And I think that that was a place where we stumbled a little bit on just coming up against questions that we weren't quite prepared for … within our program, and sort of becoming almost [a] representative of our, you know, of [our country] ...
>
> … one of the things that wasn't as talked about as we prepared to come into this space was how to navigate those conversations in a way that is productive and is both informative … we did a lot on kind of teaching skills and things like that. But some of those conversations … was something that was challenging, but really important to also creating … trust and connection with the students so that that learning can happen … we again, kind of learned on the go how to sort of navigate those conversations. But in the moment, it sometimes was challenging. So I think that more, you know, dialogue around that is hugely important.

These excerpts highlight another complexity of language-based, educational exchanges in conflict-affected settings. While the primary task was to teach the target language (English), Nicole's (09) programme's affiliation with a governmental agency made her and her colleagues acutely aware that their presence was part of a people to people (P2P) diplomatic initiative[136] (*Section 2.5.4*). Therefore, despite not having received much (if any) training on how to respond to the above topics (i.e., political and religious) in advance (see also *Section 6.5.1*), they (Nicole (09) and her colleagues) felt the need to respond to student inquiries regarding sensitive topics in a manner that was appropriate (i.e., "productive" and "informative") given their professional role (i.e., as *de facto* "representatives" of their national culture) and responsibilities (i.e., to establish "cultural

[136] Simon (10) also gives evidence of this when describing the language he used to develop his project, stating, "I had to be very very careful about what I said and how I said it."

connections" with students). This concern is related to what Bettie (2015) refers to in her research as "ambassador unaware", or the concept that visiting teachers have different degrees of consciousness regarding their "unofficial diplomatic roles" in education aid and exchange programmes (p. 358) (*Section 2.5.4*). For example, while some teachers see themselves as cultural representatives (such as Nicole (09)), other may see themselves as technical workers carrying out an apolitical activity (see secular missionaries in *Section 3.5.2*) who embark on the exchange to further their careers (Bettie, 2015; Gagnon et al., 2014; van Ommering, 2020).

Before moving on to related accounts given by other study participants, it is worth noting that in the above passages, Nicole (09) aims to nurture an environment which is "safe" for "dialogue" about issues related to politics and religion. She sees this as a necessity to establish "trust" so "that learning can happen" (i.e., learning in general – of the English language, about her culture and otherwise). Thus, Nicole (09) views the sociopolitical environment as being inseparable from her classroom (a perspective underpinned by the sociocultural turn in language teaching and the notion that "teachers do not teach in a vacuum") (Hofstadler et al., 2021, p. 219) *(Section 3.2.3*). Interestingly, while it is inevitable that visiting teachers will face difficult questions during their projects in conflict-affected settings and would benefit from strategies to manage them (Bruen et al., 2016) (*Section 2.3.3*), this raises a series of ethical questions. For example, can the local classroom be made "safe" in these contexts? Which conversations (if any) should (and shouldn't) be had to minimise the possibility of risk and/or harm to the interlocutors? Although it is best practice for educators to engage rather than ignore the surrounding sociopolitical environment (Davies, 2017; Kester; 2021; Phipps, 2014) (*Section 2.3.3 & Section 6.5.1*), what challenges do foreign teachers face in leading those conversations (Davies, 2017), especially if they are not receiving adequate training regarding the local context and conflict-sensitive approaches to education (Omeje, 2015) (*Section 2.3.3*), as previously evidenced? These and related issues will be addressed further in *Section 5.3*, where the underlying purpose and structure of education programmes for public diplomacy are unpacked.

While the preceding paragraphs looked closely at where the teaching experiences were "lacking sort of in the training and in the preparation" (Nicole, 09) needed to empower visiting teachers to carry out their projects, Victoria (07) identifies a related area that could be addressed to better support those taking part in education aid and exchange programmes. She reflects on the importance of not only managing conversations with

locals about political and religious issues, but on how to respond to real-life events as incidents occur. This is discussed in the following example:

> … I had support, but it wasn't as supportive as I think a person needed in this role … because of the tensions in the city, the political tensions, religious tensions, because of those, you know, you come to school and somebody's brother got murdered yesterday. And then that created a whole thing … So it was really strange … it was a really unique environment to be in, because it was tense all the time. And I felt, man, of all the things I needed support in, this is what I need support in. (Victoria, 07)

In the above excerpt, Victoria (07) describes experiencing distress due to her direct and indirect exposure (i.e., through her students' accounts) to the conflict in Palestine (see *Chapter 6* for an in-depth discussion on the act of first-hand and secondary witnessing). As reported almost unanimously, the visiting teachers were greatly impacted by the hardships[137] that they witnessed and/or experienced. However, references to support and/or strategies/approaches for managing them were nearly non-existent in the interviews. In fact, in preparation for their projects in Palestine, no participant mentioned having received any training whatsoever in terms of how to deal (either professionally or personally) with difficult situations[138], or with students and/or colleagues that have experienced them (Milton & Barakat, 2016) from a psychosocial standpoint[139] (*Section 2.4.2*).

In summary, due to the deficit of information regarding the local context (and situations of conflict in general) (see lay discourses on conflict, *Section 2.2.3*), the P2P design of education aid and exchange programmes, the divisive nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (McDowell & Braniff, 2014; Shafir, 2017) and the act of bearing witness to conflict

[137] For example, as quoted in *Section 6.4.3*, Marcus (03) states: "... I think I was just so constantly shocked by one sort of deprivation or one difficulty that they faced after another … God, it's really hard"; and, as quoted in *Section 4.4.3*: "... it's more of a heartbreak than anything" (Anne, 05)

[138] Participants did mention receiving guidance on safety procedures (ie., if one needs to evacuate), and that the support offered by the sponsoring governmental agencies was a comfort/motivating factor for accepting the position. Patricia (04) gives an example of this, believing pre-departure that "they [the government representatives] will keep me safe, I'll have resources". She also says, "when I was in Palestine, I did literally have the [branch of armed forces] on a speed dial in case there was ever any issues" (Patricia, 04); however, another participant talks about attempting to rely on a government agency for assistance but was unsatisfied with the support offered: "I was terrified. And I did some pretty panicky phone calls. When I got back [home] I called the embassy … they were not supportive" (Anne, 05)

[139] "Psychosocial support refers to activities that address both the psychological and social needs of individuals, families and communities. Psychosocial support is an activity that improves the ability of an individual or community to function after, or through critical situations such as emergencies, disasters, social or health difficulties" (ICRC, 2015)

(*Section 2.5.2 & Chapter 6*), the majority (but not all)[140] of the teachers expressed a desire for significantly more administrative support and/or felt that they would have greatly benefited from further training (see *Section 6.5.1* for additional examples). It is important to acknowledge that these findings are grounded in the lived experiences of the visiting teachers, therefore, a variety of external factors are not taken into account in this chapter, such as the volatility or instability of conflict settings and how this may contribute to rapid changes in administration and/or the administrators' limited capacity to facilitate exchange (Buckland, 2005) (*Section 2.4.3*). In addition, differences in cultural practices[141] (*Section 7.3.4*) and/or individual personalities, could have been at play. Nonetheless, many of the teachers' observations may be related to the neocolonial assumptions that can underpin education aid and exchange, which is the topic of the next paragraphs.

5.3 The foundations of educational diplomacy: identifying neocolonial assumptions and power imbalance in Global North-South exchanges

5.3.1 The two faces of people to people (P2P) contact

The teachers faced a number of challenges when carrying out their projects in the oPt, yet they continued to reaffirm the importance of educational exchange, including the mobilisation of educators and students across geographic barriers. While the impact (both positive and negative) of these programmes is often intangible and therefore difficult to measure (i.e., such as increased or decreased "mutual understanding" and a "change in attitude" regarding "foreign nations and cultures" (Bettie, 2015, p. 359), the latter being related to the notion of soft power (Nye, 2004) (*Section 2.5.3*)), the participants' opinions about their (and their projects') overall influence on the local community were generally favourable. Patricia (04) speaks about this in her discussion of "educational diplomacy", which draws on Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis (*Section 2.4.2*):

> ... the whole fact of educational diplomacy, that there's a lot of times when you can make things better in the world, not by going in and kicking ass and fighting, but just getting people to learn about you and get to know you and learn your culture

[140] Those who were less inclined to express the need for further training/assistance mentioned their previous experience and/or access to key information prior to departure. For example, Simon (10) states, "I felt that I went there with a considerable amount of knowledge about, first the political situation and the conflict, the political conflicts there, but also with a lot of knowledge about the education system, about how education sort of works in general in the Arab world"*;* Patricia (04) also comments: "I felt at least I had done some research, been prepared and found some information out"

[141] As quoted in *Section 7.3.2.2*, "if you need structure … my experience was that, that was not there at all. And that wasn't important to them" (Travis, 06)

> and your values. Because again, so many times I meet people, you know, like my own students, and I'm the first [person of her national culture] they've ever met … but when you get to know each other one on one, in a classroom, everything just changes …

The "one on one" aspect of educational diplomacy, referred to as P2P contact (*Section 2.5.4*), is particularly relevant to the Palestinian context. In fact, recalling Snow's (2008) observation that educational exchange gives foreigners access to places that are otherwise inaccessible (*Section 2.5.4*), Simon states that "the only people [from abroad] who can be there [in Palestine] long term are people who are there on programmes like [a government sponsored educational exchange programme]". Considering that restrictions on movement when entering and leaving the oPt (*Section 1.5 & Section 6.2*) result in very few opportunities for cross-cultural connection or exposure to English language speakers from around the world (i.e., see enforced monoculturalism, Imperiale et al., 2017) (*Section 3.5.3 & Section 7.3.1*), this makes the education aid and educational exchanges investigated in this research valuable.

However, despite the potential positive effects of public diplomacy initiatives in the oPt, the optimistic outlook[142] on educational exchange in conflict-affected settings may benefit from further evaluation. If we take another look at the concept of the two faces of education (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000) (*Section 2.3.1*), initiatives similar to those referenced in this study may be underpinned by the widespread assumption that education, and consequently aid and exchange programmes, are inherently good even when questionably executed[143]. This may be one reason for the aforementioned oversight in teacher training and support outlined in *Section 5.2.* The programme sponsors (i.e., government agencies and otherwise) could be working under the assumption that any P2P contact is useful (or at least not damaging), regardless of the foreign educators' ability to understand complex and sensitive issues related to both cultural difference and the context of conflict. This idea is compounded by an additional issue raised in *Chapter 3*. Public diplomacy rests on the premise that the participants (or "ordinary citizens") of exchanges are "accurate, capable representatives of their country" (Bettie, 2015, p. 359). Thus, in contrast to diplomats, they do not receive a "foreign policy briefing" or "intercultural communication training" (p. 359) (*Section 3.5.4*). In fact, it is assumed that

[142] Bettie (2020) observes, "much of the literature on exchanges is uncritical, excessively flattering, and limited in scope" (p. 212)

[143] Burde et al. (2017) describe the common perception that EiE initiatives are "neutral, if not wholly positive" in *Section 2.3.1* (p. 625)

the success of educational exchange lies in the unscripted, seemingly “genuine” or “sincere” nature of P2P encounters (p. 359), which in theory, appear more neutral (to the visiting teacher and/or host) and less tainted by government involvement (Snow, 2008) (*Section 2.5.4*).

The teachers’ narratives in this study arguably call into question these assumptions, and consequently the efficacy of the approaches that they inspire. As Bettie (2020) observes, there may be “discrepancies between the theoretical basis for exchange diplomacy and the daily realities of exchange program practices” (p. 212). For example, are opportunities for more meaningful (and potentially safer/healthier) exchanges being missed by sending undertrained and uninformed teachers abroad, and in some cases such as the oPt, into conflict and post-conflict zones? Another area that may require greater attention is the ambiguity in defining the objectives and/or goals of P2P initiatives. Bettie (2015) argues that the “true purpose” of them is often not clear to those involved (p. 370) (*Section 3.5.4*). If one does not understand the objectives of their project as envisioned by their employer (i.e., the sponsoring programme) or the local host institution, this may further thwart the visiting instructors’ ability to establish structure in their projects and/or to develop a clear sense of purpose and/or teacher identity (*Section 3.4.3*).

5.3.2 The West knows best: neocolonialism and recipient aid fatigue

In terms of the observations made in *Section 5.2* and *Section 5.3.1* regarding teacher training, one additional issue remains which may shed light on the phenomenon of sending teachers to the oPt with undefined projects and limited country-specific training (or what Seitz (2004) refers to as situation-adequate differentiation) (*Section 2.5.1*): neocolonial assumptions that view knowledge (and consequently pedagogy) from the West or Global North as superior to that found in the Global South (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2015) (*Section 2.5.1*). As described by Metro (2014) in *Section 2.5.2*, programme sponsors may see Western approaches to education as “universal best practices rather than culturally specific products” (p. 164). This viewpoint presupposes that visiting teachers who participate in Global North to Global South exchanges are already equipped with the necessary knowledge to teach and improve English language education in the host community (i.e., by virtue of their Western training and their ability to replicate it, not their understanding of the local context). Moreover, drawing on the concept of native speakerism (*Section 3.4.3*), it is likely that the inner circle and/or native speaker status (Kachru, 1988) of the majority of the participants from the Global North contributes to this

(mis)perception[144]. In summary, in comparison to their local counterparts, it may be erroneously assumed by programme administrators from the Global North that Western visiting scholars possess both superior teaching skills and content knowledge (i.e., English language knowledge) regardless of the sociocultural context in which the teaching and learning takes place.

These neocolonial assumptions that underpin educational exchange were acknowledged by some of the study participants, as was the region's colonial past[145]. In fact, an awareness of them created discomfort and/or tension for the instructors both during and after their experiences in the oPt. For example, Simon (10), describes having to critically evaluate local and regional practices in English language education without taking on the role of "the white outsider telling them what they were doing wrong". Alternatively, Marcus (03) speaks at length about how he observed a significant power imbalance between himself and his Palestinian colleagues (see also *Section 5.4*), which strikingly, he became increasingly uncomfortable with upon his departure. This is explained in the following passage:

> … that sort of power dynamic … had I just been … going in and just teaching students … that maybe would not have been quite so, so visible, but like, because I was also working with teachers, it was very much. I felt that sort of the thing … that I was going in to … try and make the institution better. And so whatever, you know, my suggestions or my ideas about teaching, should be followed. And, you know, in that … way, they're making a better institution. But of course, you know, all of … those caveats … you're an outsider, you don't know the context. A lot of people I was working with were much older than me … and I felt that they'd also, like seen it all before, you know, they'd seen … [the] outsider coming in and sort of trying to make suggestions about how to do things better. So, yeah, I think I also found that … power dynamic, awkward at times, at least sort of challenging … I find it now quite, quite awkward … some of the assumptions maybe that an outsider can come in and tell them how … to do the job better … relating it to Palestine, the fact that … it is, you know, a recipient I suppose of lots of these kinds of projects, lots of these kinds of like capacity-building or whatever you want

[144] It is important to note that while the majority of the teachers mentioned being well-received as native speakers, others explained how ultimately local hierarchy resisted native speakerism. Marcus (03) illustrates this: "I always found this situation funny … I had this colleague who I taught with … And then this other guy, who … was older, very senior. And it always made me laugh, that … when we were having this conversation about like, how you pronounce a word of English, or what the plural form is, you know, questions about accuracy, that [s/he'd] always … ask [the other] guy … "Oh, Dr. … what's the right way of saying this?" And I remember thinking … why did you ask him, because you never asked me? … This clear sense of like hierarchy to the teachers … Some of them, the more senior ones, were really looked up to and were very, very strong in language, knowledge of language …"

[145] For example, Simon (10) says, "… all or nearly all of the societies there [in the Arab world] are directly or indirectly post-colonial or colonial in terms of, they were shaped by colonial, or directly or indirectly by colonial forces. Obviously those in Palestine were shaped in a lot of ways by Anglophone rather than Francophone influences."

> to call it projects, because of its situation … I suppose … there's … a disempoweredness, about the place in general. (Marcus, 03)

Marcus's (03) account touches on many of the issues discussed throughout *Chapter 5*, including the teachers' lack of familiarity with the Palestinian context, the assumption that Western expertise can "make the institution better", and the paternalistic "power dynamic" (Kester, 2021) that, as the Western authority figure, the visiting teachers' advice "should be followed" (see *Section 2.5.1*). Another key observation in the above passage is Palestine's position as a long term aid recipient (i.e., in the form of "capacity-building … projects"), and consequently, the local teachers' familiarity with how the donor – recipient (i.e., programme sponsor – host institution) relationship unfolds. The comment that "they'd … seen it all before", suggests that the Palestinian teachers have become accustomed (and perhaps acquiescent) to interventions from the Global North despite the shortcomings of Western-sponsored education aid and educational exchange programmes. Drawing on the literature of interventionism in conflict-affected states (see the origins of post-conflict, *Section 2.2.2*), education aid and educational exchange have long been implemented by the Global North without "the consent or the invitation" of the host population (Hozić, 2014, p. 27). Thus, the apparent "inevitability" of such interventions (i.e., that they are a permanent feature of the local landscape regardless of their efficacy and/or value for the local community) (Sharp, 2020, p. 127) and the prolonged and/or imposed presence of "outsiders" (Marcus, 03) in Palestine may contribute to the sense of resignation that Marcus's narrative conveys.

As will be discussed at length in *Section 5.4*, the visiting teachers' often believed that their local colleagues had reservations about their presence in the oPt and/or projects. However, while Marcus (03) represented his Palestinian counterparts as collaborative despite intuiting that they were experiencing aid fatigue[146], Olivia (02) reports having encountered overt resistance to Western interventions in the local community. Here, she speaks about how this ultimately impacted her work:

> I don't know what happened. It just kind of felt like, I'm not really getting anywhere … and then just kind of the discouragement, um, from other sources, that say, "yeah, a lot of you people come in, and they try to come in and help us, and you're not helping". And that just kind of killed … my plans and confidence and that. And I was like, I see exactly what point that they are saying. There is this vicious cycle of just coming in and … like talk, talk, talk … [but] what are you actually going to do

[146] The notion of aid fatigue can be applied to donors and recipients. Here, it refers to the latter (recipients) and is defined as follows: "recipient fatigue is a phenomenon where global south recipients (both communities and organisations) of development aid feel short-changed by the relationship, the lack of community centered prioritisation and impact of the proposed interventions" (Elongue & Van Dyck, 2021, p. 3)

> about our situation? Like what are you exactly going to help us do? And so that was the kind of attitude that I was given, and I was like, I don't want to be that person.

Olivia's (02) refusal of the role assigned to her by the aforementioned "sources" in the oPt (i.e., "I don't want to be that person") (see ascribed identities, *Section 3.4.3*) and the level of discomfort that she consequently feels towards her project is almost incapacitating. This passage demonstrates how the power imbalance in Western-led interventions is not only disempowering for recipients from the Global South (i.e., and/or in conflict and post-conflict zones) (*Section 2.5.1 & Section 2.5.2*), but also for the visiting teachers from the Global North (i.e., described above as "discouragement" and a reduction in "confidence"). In addition, contrary to English language teachers who participate in exchanges abroad in areas that are not considered to be conflict or post-conflict settings, the context of conflict led some of the interviewed educators to question and/or trivialise their work (see also *Section 7.3.3*). For example, although teaching English is Olivia's (02) primary responsibility, she feels that her work fails to actually "help[]" Palestinians. In short, in such a polarising context (*Section 3.2.3*), the act of teaching English is not enough – the teacher, while not tasked with or arguably able to change the sociopolitical situation, struggles with maintaining a sense of purpose. Interestingly, this perception is also documented in Kelly's (2023) research; she notes that individuals who are outsiders or foreigners in Palestine often feel a sense of "uselessness" in relation to the surrounding conflict (p. 238) (*Section 2.5.2*).

5.3.3 Reconciling approaches to pedagogy in Global North-South exchanges

Shifting the focus to the participants' experiences in the classroom and their teaching practice, the visiting instructors frequently encountered gaps between their teaching and learning preferences and the preferences and/or habits of their Palestinian students and colleagues. While implicitly tasked with the importation and diffusion of Western approaches to pedagogy in the oPt, they often described coming to realise that unmodified pedagogical models from the West may not be suitable for the Palestinian context. For example, Nicole (09) describes the "learning curve" that led her to reconcile methods of teaching English in the Global North with those characteristic to the oPt in the below passage:

> I think one of the bigger challenges, kind of first going in, was really the different kind of educational structure and schools here in [her country of origin] and schools in Palestine …. we wanted to make our English language courses really fun, and something that students really wanted to come to … So we really wanted

> to make it engaging. But what we found from a lot of the students was that a little bit more structure, and a little bit more, kind of consistency with that, was actually more beneficial for them. So what they were maybe used to in school was more rigid, kind of rules for things and just like a very consistent structure of how things go. So that was kind of a learning curve towards the beginning … feeling out, how do we create the space of both bringing in our own teaching styles and kind of what we have gotten used to, and found engaging in our own kind of school experiences, and then also meeting students halfway with, like, what they were comfortable with, and what was going to work best for them, in terms of … how they had been learning and kind of receiving content. (Nicole, 09)

Rather than an "engaging" and presumably interactive classroom experience, Nicole (09) finds that her students actually prefer a more traditional approach to language education, which in the oPt features structured exercises and an attention to "rules" (i.e., exercises that require memorisation, repetition and/or the recall of language rather than those requiring the spontaneous use of English as outlined in *Section 3.5.3*) (Dajani & McLaughlin, 2009). Accordingly, while on-site she adjusted her teaching style, balancing her views on pedagogy with her students' preferred method of "receiving content".

Another participant found himself in a similar predicament regarding the use of technology in the classroom (see also resources in *Section 7.3.2.2*). His "tech heavy" (Travis, 06) approach was in sharp contrast to how his local colleagues and students were used to interacting with digital tools (*Section 3.5.3*). While he initially believed that technology added value to his English language classes, in retrospect Travis (06) questions the utility of having introduced a variety of technological teaching aids into the Palestinian classroom:

> … looking back on it. I don't know, was that even the right approach? I mean, was it overkill? Like did that even help? ... You know, in my mind, they're like, "Oh, this is so cool." … there was no way to even evaluate that … I'm tech heavy. So being a tech heavy guy thrown into a Palestinian classroom was a real challenge … And I'm travelling all around with *services*[147] with like this big bag of computer equipment. I looked like a spy. What was I doing?

In this playful account, Travis (06) highlights a potential disconnect between his teaching style, the educational materials that he used and the needs of his students in the oPt. Not only was his classroom approach unorthodox, but he wonders if his demeanour (i.e., bringing large quantities of electronics on public transport) made the local community uncomfortable. Although Nicole (09) and Travis (06) describe two related yet distinct

[147] As Issa and Eishesh (2018) state, "public transport in certain cities and on long-haul routes … is supplemented by shared-taxis (mainly 7-seat vans)" that operate similar to buses (p. 2). These are called "services" (Travis, 06) and they are the primary way that visiting teachers in the oPt travelled to their host institutions

experiences, both of their accounts reveal a tension between best practices in pedagogy as conceptualised by the Global North and the Global South. This raises some questions, particularly in situations of conflict. For example, as some teaching styles that are common in the Global South are associated with an increase in violence (i.e., authoritarian teaching styles such as frontal lectures and rote learning) (Cole & Barsalou, 2006) (*Section 2.3.3*), to what extent should the visiting teacher replicate and/or incorporate these models, especially if they are the preferred modes of learning in the host community and/or serve a pragmatic purpose (i.e., such as the management of very large classes and/or the need for consistency/alignment with the teaching practices of local colleagues)[148]? Moreover, to what extent should visiting teachers impose models from the Global North that are associated with conflict-reducing pedagogies (i.e., such as student-centred learning and the promotion of critical thinking skills) if doing so entails carrying out an act of educational neocolonialism? While these questions remain open to debate, Nicole's (09) commentary highlights how the "process of learning is negotiated with people" (Johnson, 2006, p. 237) (*Section 3.4.2*), especially in Global North-South exchanges where a variety of teaching and learning styles need to be recognised and validated. Furthermore, both narratives show how ensuring that English language education is "culturally, historically, and institutionally situated in and responsive to teachers', students', and community needs", is rarely a straightforward process (Johnson & Golombek, 2020, p. 120) (*Section 3.4.2*).

5.4 Unilateral partnerships with institutions, colleagues and students in the occupied Palestinian territory

5.4.1 Being imposed on host institutions, colleagues and students

The ambiguous and underdeveloped nature of some projects suggest that, to a certain extent, the visiting teachers were imposed on the Palestinian institutions. This is most evident in Anne's (05) account; rather than being introduced to a project that was co-developed by the sponsoring programme and host, her arrival appears to surprise her local colleagues, taking them off guard (i.e., "he had just found out I was coming") (*Section 5.2.1*). While this could also be indicative of an administrative lapse, the experience may speak to the power imbalances that are often embedded in donor-

[148] Some participants spoke about their local colleagues being unhappy with their (the visiting teachers') Western teaching styles. For example, Travis (06) felt that the local faculty noticed when [his] "students were having such a great time in the class. And when they went to these other rote learning things, they were just bored out of their mind sitting there"

recipient relationships. In the following quotation, Simon (10) illustrates this dynamic. He draws on an analogy coined by a former colleague[149] and uses it to reflect on international partnerships between Palestinian institutions and education aid or exchange programmes operating in the oPt:

> She characterised the relationship as an arranged marriage. Which I think characterises a lot of bi-national partnerships. It is the country that is providing the money that is pretty much calling the shots in terms of what happens, how it happens, and this of course has consequences for the relationship. (Simon, 10)

Thinking about the "relationship" between the visiting teachers and their local colleagues as an "arranged marriage" helps to understand the resistance that programme participants from the Global North reported encountering. For instance, in Global North-South "partnerships", the recipients can be overlooked or even excluded from the ideation and design of the programmes that are meant to improve their institutions (Milton, 2018b; Milton & Barakat, 2016) (*Section 2.5.1*). Therefore, if education for public diplomacy is orchestrated in a top-down manner, the individuals who are meant to implement exchanges may not actually be involved in the planning process[150]. Nonetheless, it is often these same individuals who are tasked with the extra work required to accommodate the visitors (and the visitors' suggestions to improve the institution), even though they (i.e., the local teachers and administrators) may have insecure employment, inconsistent salaries and few opportunities for career development/advancement (*Section 1.5*, *Section 2.3.3* & *Section 5.4.2*). Travis (06) senses this, stating that, "I think, having this [his nationality] English teacher there was just more of a, I don't know, not annoyance, but like, just another level of … a pain for them. Or, you know, like … makes their job harder" (Travis, 06).

In addition to being an inconvenience for some local administrators and staff, having visitors who are unknown to the community could be problematic. This is particularly true for teachers who are affiliated with nations or governments that are perceived as antagonists in an ongoing or recent conflict (i.e., as may be the case in Palestine with British and American teachers) (see also nationality in *Section 6.3.1*). Anne (05) discusses this, saying, "they're … in the centre of conflict … they're very nervous about strangers",

[149] The colleague was not referring to the situation in the oPt specifically; it is Simon (10) who makes the connection between the quotation and the situation in the oPt

[150] Anne (5) speaks about her supervisor's lack of knowledge at the start of her project: "[s/he] was wonderful and sweet and so kind. But … [s/he] knew about as much as I did"

then later mentions that her students "were really leery" at the beginning of her exchange. Other instructors voiced similar concerns, such as Victoria (08) who recounts being advised by her students to be cautious. She explains, "... they were always nervous of who else was listening. I had several students tell me, 'don't trust anyone here'" (Victoria, 08) (see also students as confidants and informants, *Section 5.4.3*). Considering the sociopolitical context, where students and faculty can face administrative detention[151] for voicing their opinions on public platforms and university campuses can be subject to raids (*Section 1.5*), this apprehension is understandable. However, what is interesting is that the research participants rarely reported cases where local staff (who may share the same fears as their students) helped to facilitate the exchange or foster the acceptance of the visiting teacher in the local community[152] (however, one such example can be found in *Section 5.4.2*). In the following passage, Patricia's (04) account of her first day in the classroom conveys this:

> When I walked into my one English class … it was English for English majors, and they walked in, and the shocked look on their faces told me, no one told them that they were going to have [her nationality] professor. And so they're like, "What are you doing here?" And literally, "Why are you here?". "I am your teacher". "You are?". "Yes". "Where are you from?". "[country of origin]". "Oh…".

During the interview, Patricia (04) expresses the extent of her students' surprise and/or confusion when they encountered her for the first time. This incident, where the visiting teacher is essentially imposed on the students, has implications for the language learning classroom: by failing to formally address or contextualise the visiting teacher's presence, it becomes difficult to establish a relationship of trust and to foster "a safe space" where learning and exchange can happen (Nicole, 09). Moreover, it is a reminder that even if the teachers see themselves as neutral or apolitical figures doing technical work (i.e., teaching English), their mere presence "is inherently political" (Seal & Smith, 2021) (*Section 2.3.3*) and may bring about unexpected consequences for the host (Gagnon et al., 2014) (*Section 2.5.4*).

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[151] The term refers to being jailed without charge. B'Tselem (2023) defines this as when "a person is held without trial without having committed an offense, on the grounds that he or she plans to break the law in the future. As this measure is supposed to be preventive, it has no time limit. The person is detained without legal proceedings, by order of the regional military commander, based on classified evidence that is not revealed to them")

[152] Olivia's (02) recollection supports this observation: "I remember being in the campus … Nobody would talk to me for a long time … So, you know, I asked … "Why is that?" … [her colleague] said that, "well, they probably think you are a spy" … [Olivia then thought to herself,] "Shouldn't you tell them that I'm not?"; Anne's (05) experience also reinforces this idea in terms of networking: "I was not introduced to anyone … No one introduced me to anybody"

5.4.2 Asymmetrical relationships with colleagues

As alluded to throughout the research, the participants' relationships with their local colleagues were often complex. While the visiting teachers described being both welcomed and supported by administrators and educators based in the oPt, they also commented on tension in the relationship. For example, a common sentiment reported was that of feeling like a threat or a source of competition. Victoria (08) describes this happening with a senior-level employee at her institution who was in a position of authority, stating, "it almost seemed like, [s/he] thought I was somehow competing with [them]. Right. And so I feel like I got daggers from [them] ...". Another instructor spoke about how he perceived a fellow teacher to be communicating feelings of resentment or disapproval with their facial expressions[153] (Travis, 06). Alternatively, the same instructor acknowledged how other local faculty were allies, suggesting that their buy-in motivated students to attend his workshops. He states, "I think they were like good encouragement. So they would also take me under their wing a little bit" (Travis, 06). Moreover, some accounts show the extent to which the teachers' experiences with their colleagues varied within a single department or institution, in addition to how much they impacted and shaped their experiences in the oPt. Here, Anne (05) illustrates the influential role that local teachers and administrators had in her teaching project:

> So my first couple of weeks was really traumatic. And then my officemate colleagues came back to work. And they had dealt with foreign teachers before and they were absolutely brilliant. Changed my world completely. My liaison still, [s/he] was … I don't know if resentful is a good word … [s/he] was just very dismissive.

Considering that the purpose of this research is to understand the visiting teachers' experiences in the oPt, our insight into the local administrators and teachers' feelings about the participants is at best limited. Nonetheless, the repeated references to difficulties in the aforementioned relationships is significant. The following paragraphs will unpack factors that could shed light on them, particularly the unilateral nature of exchanges (Lee, 2015).

International educational exchanges are associated with the notion of reciprocity, yet education as aid and exchange for public diplomacy is often one-sided (*Section 2.5.4*).

[153] "... there were other professors. Some were more progressive than others. I also did recognise one in particular, that would give me the stink eye … they were … like, this foreigner is coming here, making my job harder" (Travis, 06) (see also *Section 5.4.1*)

Similar to Simon's (10) quotation in *Section 5.4.1*, it is the funding country who brings their language, culture, values and preferred pedagogical methods to the host institutions (Lee, 2015). While the visiting teachers' unanimously expressed a desire to learn about Palestinian culture, Levantine Arabic[154] and/or the sociopolitical situation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem (and ultimately describe having learned much about them)[155], the design of the exchange (i.e., where the English native-speaker or inner circle users from the Global North educate students and/or conduct teacher training with colleagues from the Global South) is asymmetrical (*Section 3.5.1*). Furthermore, the exchange participants' employment status in comparison to their local colleagues also complicated the relationship. As Travis (06) touches on, the visiting instructors are not held to the same standards (nor are they subject to the same risks or repercussions) as their local counterparts. He states, "at first it was uncomfortable for me. But then I'm just like … I'm going to do my thing. That's why I'm here … it's temporary. Right, my job wasn't on the line, you know, I didn't have to be evaluated" (Travis, 06). Thus, taking into account the fact that the visiting teachers engage in partnerships that are designed unilaterally (*Section 5.4.1*), where they use their Western expertise to advise local teachers about how "to do the job better" (Marcus, 02) (*Section 5.3.2*) yet carry no responsibility for the implementation of their suggestions, resistance or backlash to their presence is understandable.

These power imbalances that are inherent to Global North-South education aid and exchanges made the participants' feel a sense of "discomfort", another sentiment that Kelly (2023) argues is characteristic to the experiences of outsiders in Palestine (*Section 2.5.2*) (p. 238). Outside of their host institutions, the visiting teachers frequently described receiving preferential treatment in their day-to-day lives (i.e., meaning they were entitled to the human rights of which their Palestinian colleagues, students and friends were deprived). For example, in terms of physical mobility, the visiting teachers' nationalities enabled them to travel freely, an experience that is unavailable to many residents of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. In the following excerpts, two teachers describe their awareness of this issue:

> I got past this checkpoint, just because I'm [her nationality]. So that was the first time it really struck me the difference between my life and their lives. And I think … new teachers who are going into countries like this really need to understand that and to be prepared and … supportive, as much as possible. (Anne, 05)

[154] The variant of Arabic spoken in Palestine

[155] For example, similar to many other participants, Patricia (04) says, "I love the learning aspect of it, the learning the new language here and there, and getting to know my students"

> You know I am very aware, and certainly when I was in Jerusalem visiting Islamic holy sites, I was very aware of all my Muslim friends who will never be able to do that. Because they would not be able to get a visa to enter Israel so they will never get to experience this part of their culture. And … of course, many of the people in the West Bank, likewise, are cut off from visiting these sites … so, just seeing the multitude of ways that the occupation shapes and disciplines the life of … folks in the West Bank. (Simon, 10)

This dynamic, of being in a position of privilege in comparison to the host community, also carried into the workplace. For example, some instructors mentioned their colleagues having ill health or not being able to readily access treatment that would otherwise be available (i.e., the occupation restricts mobility and results in limited economic resources)[156] (Marcus, 03). They also spoke about their local colleagues' precarious employment conditions, which Marcus (03) explains at length in the below passage:

> So basically what happens with sort of tax revenue in parts of the West Bank is that the money … goes to the Israeli Government or the Israeli Ministry of Finance … and then they sort of transfer that money to the Palestinian Authority. And so … millions, billions of shekels, dollars … merited by the Palestinians and their sort of tax revenue is taken by the Israelis, but then … passed to them. And at one point … they withheld it … basically the Israelis withheld this money and all my colleagues … were basically getting paid 50% of their salary … I think they ended up coming two or three days a week because they are accustomed to travel and they said, "oh, it costs you to travel in, so they can't expect you to travel all the way, every day, if you're not getting paid". So … their morale really dropped, you know, because they were getting paid a lot less … And yeah, that was a real, a huge challenge … not receiving their salaries …. I think that was … some kind of punitive step … for some infraction. And, you know, of course, the knock on effect was that it was just on ordinary teachers and their students as well, right. Because they couldn't teach their students in the same way … And, yeah, I mean, the effect for me was, obviously, I was … [in the] slightly awkward situation where you're already financially being far more well-rewarded ... They know that. So of course, you know I would still get a relatively generous salary the whole way through. So in that respect, I always felt slightly awkward.

Here, as Marcus's (03) project is funded by a programme sponsor from abroad, he continues to receive a salary while his colleagues earn a fraction of their wages for "punitive" reasons (arguably similar to collective punishment) related to the wider conflict (Reuters, 2023). In turn, the students' education ultimately suffers, and Marcus's (03) position of privilege becomes more and more pronounced as the inequalities in the workplace grow. Furthermore, taking a closer look at cultural norms in Palestinian society, the visiting teachers' positionality intersected with pre-existing inequalities in unexpected

[156] Marcus (03) states: "So certain things that I was just like conscious of, you know, on a day to day basis … like the ill health of my colleagues … partly as a result of stress and partly just there are too many obstacles … people can't get treatment"

ways. For instance, while the participants' experiences varied greatly depending on their institution and location, their status as "foreigner" enabled them to resist certain gender roles, as Victoria (07) illustrates in this excerpt:

> They had me attending … the English department meetings, which was interesting, because I was the only woman that was in attendance. There were other English teachers that were female … they weren't seen as important enough to sit at the table with the men. So me, as the foreigner, I get a special seat at the table … They kind of relegated the women to a downstairs basement office, which was also interesting. So the men were on the upper floors, and the women were all squished in one office. So it was a clear delineation between the sexes, which again, is challenging, but that's just part of the culture. One thing I thought was interesting is a couple of the other female teachers said, "Oh, wow, well, when you got here, you got a computer, and they put curtains up in this office. Well, we never had a computer in here before. And, you know, we never even had curtains". And so I did feel, I don't want to say animosity, because that's maybe too harsh of a word. But there was definitely a[n] 'us against them' kind of mentality, which made it difficult as an English teacher to make friends there at school. (Victoria, 07)

While her role as foreigner disrupts the status quo, as Gagnon et al., (2014) warn, this brings about "unanticipated consequences" (*Section 2.5.2*) – mainly "animosity" or what she seems to describe as resentment – which causes conflict in Victoria's (07) relationships with other female colleagues (p. 4). On one hand, the preferential treatment that she receives as an outsider helps to break down the gender divide, but on the other, her privileged position in comparison to her Palestinian female colleagues is accentuated (i.e., reinforcing the gap between "us" and "them").

In summary, the asymmetrical, imbalanced and/or unilateral nature of the education aid and exchange programmes creates difficult working relationships for the visiting instructors, particularly for those working closely with local teachers and administrators (as opposed to students, which will be the topic of *Section 5.4.3*). The so-called daily stressors (Burde et al., 2017) that members of the host community face are in stark contrast to those experienced by the visiting teachers (although, as explored in *Section 6.4.1*, at times the line between first-hand witnesses of and participants in a conflict is blurred). In fact, the power dynamic described both on and off campus could offer insight into the lack of support (or even antagonism) that some visiting teachers reported experiencing at their host institutions. Moreover, the discomfort (Kelly, 2023) and "awkward" feelings (Marcus, 03) that the teachers' develop as a result of the aforementioned inequalities could be a significant obstacle to overcome when establishing collegiality; as Kelly (2023) notes, it may not be easy to form relationships with individuals who experience violence without inadvertently defining those individuals "by their subjection or resistance to it" (p. 38).

5.4.3 Students as confidants and cultural informants

Many of the research participants were the only non-Palestinian instructors in their respective departments at their host institutions[157], therefore, they looked to local colleagues for assistance and support. As explored in *Section 2.5.2* and *Section 5.4.2*, education aid and exchange contexts often rely on the role of the privileged informant (or individuals who give the visiting teachers' a better understanding of the local context and "break the boundary between insiders and outsiders") (Metro, 2014, p. 174)[158]. However, this figure (the privileged informant) is not without consequence; it is a role that often perpetuates power imbalances similar to those discussed in *Section 5.3*. For instance, as Metro (2014) highlights, the notion of an individual who can work across the Global North and South divide is based on the idea of social stratification; their (the privileged informants') acceptance by outsiders creates disparities amongst locals, while their relationships with foreigners tend to require deference. In fact, in education contexts, the visiting teachers usually maintain the role of instructor, while the informants (i.e., the local teachers) slide back to assume the role of the learner who assists (Metro, 2014). As some local faculty were not willing and/or available to provide support, the students (who may have felt more comfortable with the asymmetry which characterises the visitor-privileged informant dynamic) emerged in the interviews as being central to the visiting teachers' experiences in the oPt. Thus, in the absence of a reference point amongst local teachers and administrators, a new role emerged within the host institutions: the student informant.

Interestingly, upon arrival in the oPt, multiple teachers began their interviews by highlighting how they were advised not to disclose their nationalities to students or suggest that they were representing their countries through public diplomacy initiatives (see *Section 6.3.1*). However, following an initial period of adjustment (described in *Section 5.4.1*), the teachers found the students to be overwhelmingly positive about the educational exchange and receptive to them. This situation is best described by Victoria (07):

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[157] Marcus (03) illustrates this and during the interview conveyed the sense of isolation that he felt while working on his project without the support of other visiting instructors who were in a similar position: "I didn't really have any [his nationality] colleagues … I felt probably I didn't really have like, people who were doing the same thing as me"

[158] For example, in *Section 5.4.2*, Anne (05) notices that her helpful local colleagues "had dealt with foreign teachers before and they were absolutely brilliant"

> I was quickly introduced to the students and found that they were very excited to have me. And when they did find out I was [from her country of origin], they didn't really care. So it was more of the administrative side that was concerned with the nationality thing and the sentiment at the time.

In terms of the students' apparent enthusiasm, the teachers had various hypotheses about why they were so well received. Some participants commented on students being familiar with and attracted to Western cultural practices. For example, Victoria (07) describes this saying, "I had … students, I think that got close to me, because I was 'the other'. I was Western and then therefore would understand their own Western ideas". This depiction fits in particularly well with the figure of the privileged informant, who is able to appreciate and understand the cultural practices of the visiting teachers and can therefore act as a bridge between the outsider-visitor and the host community. Patricia (04) gives further evidence of this dynamic in her account. She goes into detail about delegating the informant role to her students below:

> And I met a lot of different students that were just so funny … [some students] were very good in culture. And it was … interesting to talk with them to kind of say, "Okay, I had this planned for class. And this is my idea for a topic. Is this, okay, is this offensive?" You know, and I actually could rely on them in an adult way to say, "Okay. Yeah, this is alright, maybe be careful of this". So they were kind of just like my consultants, and it was great. They could do that, and they were interested in it, and have discussions back and forth.[159]

Considering that the visiting teachers reported a lack of training regarding the local context (*Section 5.2.1 & 5.2.2*) and at times lacked guidance from administrators and colleagues (*Section 5.4.1 & Section 5.4.2*), the students becoming advisors or "consultants" was key to the success of some instructors. Furthermore, the arguably unilateral element to the relationship (as described in the above passage) was reframed as reciprocal in most of the teachers' accounts. For example, Victoria (07) remarked, "I do think … it helped both of us. So I felt like I fit in. And they felt like they fit in". In addition, many (but not all) of the teachers described forming close relationships, where they acted as confidants to students, and students acted as confidants to them[160]. This occurrence speaks to Roffey's (2012) and Hofstadler et al.'s (2021) research, where the wellbeing of teachers is contingent on generating positive relationships with students and creating a

[159] A similar quotation, which is explored in *Section 6.5.2*, is Victoria (07) stating, "I would often go to the students and be like, 'This is what just happened. What does this mean?' Like, 'what is going on with this?'"

[160] For example, Victoria (07) says, in comparison to her local colleagues who seemed apathetic to a critical incident, "… when I told my students they're like, 'Oh, my gosh, I can't believe …'. I felt like I at least got a little sympathy."

meaningful rapport (*Section 3.4.2*). Nonetheless, similar to other findings in *Chapter 5*, it does raise some questions, such as, would this instructor-student relationship be appropriate in other contexts (either in the visiting teachers' cultures and/or the host culture), and if not, what is problematic (if anything) about putting students, who seem to be empowered by their new role, in this position?

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to question the widely-held belief that P2P (or public diplomacy) exchanges are inherently valuable, while investigating its link with deficits in training and programme development for educators who embark on teaching projects abroad in conflict-affected settings. In addition, it highlighted the neocolonial assumptions that both privilege knowledge from the Global North and underestimate the importance of the sociopolitical environment in teaching and learning. These have rendered English language education an "apolitical technical activity", a practice which can leave visiting teachers in the oPt, as van Ommering (2020) argues, "empty-handed" and disempowered (p. 21) (*Section 2.3.3*). Considering that experience as lived differs from experience as conceptualised (*Section 4.2.1* & *Section 6.4.3*), attempts to fill in gaps in knowledge regarding the host institution and the cultural context (i.e., through training) will always be lacking. However, the asymmetrical relationships between visiting teachers and the local institutions, faculty and administrators, has proven to be yet another barrier for educators from abroad to access key knowledge and support resources. Ultimately, the research found that students can be important cultural (or as Metro (2014) labels, "privileged") informants and confidants for teachers in difficult contexts (p. 174).

Chapter 6 | Teaching abroad in challenging circumstances: bearing witness to the occupied Palestinian territory

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses another key finding and feature of being an English teacher from abroad in the oPt: the experience of bearing witness to the ongoing conflict. It begins with the difficulty of gaining access to the oPt as narrated by the participants (i.e., the act of preventing one from being a witness). It then outlines how the positionality of teachers based on a variety of factors such as their political opinions, nationality, age, gender, ethnicity and/or sexual orientation impacts their standpoints as witnesses. This is followed by a recounting of moments when the line between being an observer-witness and being a participant-actor in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is blurred. Finally, when framing the experience in the oPt through the act of bearing witness, it follows the teachers' as they question who is listening to witness accounts of the oPt. In doing so, it raises additional questions about what impact the reception (or dismissal/refusal) of those accounts has, specifically in terms of the teachers' lived experience.

6.2 Preventing one from bearing witness: "... they didn't want anyone to witness them being bad, somebody who actually had a voice" [161]

Most teachers' accounts of their time in Palestine begin with either their program orientations or their arrival in Israel to enter the West Bank. While some of the study participants were sponsored by government agencies and were therefore guided through the process, at times with accompaniers that escorted them from the plane to arranged transportation, the feeling that they were doing something wrong just by being present in the West Bank was pervasive and followed the participants throughout all stages of their experience. Accordingly, almost every encounter or anticipated encounter at a checkpoint or immigration office, at a border or airport, was unsettling and weighed on the participants. Some of the participants reported that at the time of their teaching appointments (2010-2020) Israel was "turning back academics that they didn't want there because they thought they were going to cause problems, because of things they had already said or done" (Simon, 10) (see also *Section 7.3.1* for restrictions on academics entering the West Bank). This is particularly the case if a scholar was an active social

[161] Full quotation: "... they [the IDF] would leave because they didn't want anyone to witness them being bad, somebody who actually had a voice. And so I know there's a lot of times when maybe me being there made it a little bit better" (Patricia, 04)

media user or if their academic work was critical of the State. In fact, there was always uncertainty as to if a teacher would actually be allowed to enter or reenter Israel after making an international journey:

> To get to Palestine, we were advised not to tell the immigration authorities when we were coming in, why we were there … which is quite sad that you're going there and there's no, there's not even a guarantee that you're going to get in. So it is a great privilege. (Benjamin, 08)

The level of questioning and screening at points of entry (such as airports and checkpoints) could be perceived as directly aggressive and overwhelming ("pretty traumatic", "stressful" and "hostile", "with an AK 47 pointed at me") (Olivia, 02), or more subtly make participants uneasy. Regardless, many individuals described living in a constant state of hypervigilance. For example, one participant recalled this experience during a conversation at a checkpoint, wondering: "Is he [the Israeli soldier] making casual conversation or is this a test? Is he checking to see if I really am from [name of city]. And it's that sort of constant sense of suspicion or fear that I think lots of those experiences engender" (Simon, 10). Paradoxically, although the majority of the teachers interviewed were participating in highly structured academic programmes sponsored by established organisations, institutions or government agencies, they were always fearful of a misstep: "Your security and your feelings of peace are also under attack because you're somewhere where you're not supposed to be" (Olivia, 02). This teacher's words speak to a characteristic of the experience: the sense of simultaneously being welcome and unwelcome, or of being where you are supposed to be (i.e., for your teaching appointment in East Jerusalem or the West Bank, for which you have secured the necessary contracts, visas, permits, etc.), yet feeling as if you are not supposed to be there (i.e., according to Israeli sentiment and the situations described above). One individual lightheartedly commented about being vague during her arrival in Israel in regards to her teaching appointment in the West Bank, and how this would carry on throughout the entirety of her experience: "And that would be the first of many lies that are needing to be told when wandering around between Palestine and the Israeli side" (Patricia, 04).

6.3 Teacher identity and positionality: the witnesses' standpoint

In accordance with the literature on teacher identity and cognition (*Section 3.4.3*), the professional and personal backgrounds of the teacher greatly impacted their experience in Palestine. In the participants' accounts, factors such as nationality, political opinion, gender, age, perceived ethnicity and sexual orientation came into play, causing the

teachers to take certain standpoints as witnesses, and to be ascribed certain positions in regards to their roles as witnesses by others. The impact of these factors on the teachers' lived experiences is considered in the following sections.

6.3.1 Nationality

The participants' experiences in Palestine were clearly situated in their cultural backgrounds, and above all, in their affiliations with certain nations. Being English language teachers specifically, with strong (and/or assumed) cultural-linguistic connections to either the United States, United Kingdom and/or Ireland, made this part of their identity stand out. This was further reinforced by many programmes being framed as person to person cultural exchanges, where the goal is not just to teach language, but to integrate cultural content. While the participants mostly spoke about being "warmly welcomed" (Victoria, 07), especially by students (*Section 5.4.3*), it is worth noting that the three aforementioned nations have differing levels of involvement with the sociopolitical situation in Palestine, both historically and more recently (*Section 1.5*). Therefore, some teachers felt that local staff, students and community members viewed them in light of their national culture's political relationship with Palestine, or reported hearing concerns about their safety or credibility due to it (in addition to other factors, such as those related to ethnicity and sexuality) (see *Section 6.3.3*). The following excerpts represent a comparative view of three different experiences:

> When I got there, I was warmly welcomed. With the caveat that they suggested I didn't tell anyone I was American … They were not really happy with American sentiment at the time of my arrival. So that was kind of an interesting way to start a new position … I didn't always admit that I was American … I just didn't ever know, like, can I trust these people? Should I say this? Should I not say this? It was always kind of filtering what was going to come out of my mouth, because I wasn't quite sure who would hear it, how they would take it or what the implications would be. (Victoria, 07)

> I think they felt a connection when they knew I was from Ireland, because … Ireland is probably seen as a friend to Palestine at a government level, national level, and through our shared history of, you know, facing oppression … maybe radicalised or political young men there, would probably, I think, identify with the likes of the IRA and Gerry Adams and people like that, perhaps. But it's mostly at a human level … The organiser was … very aware of, I think, Irish history. I think he's been to Ireland, and he kept saying to people that Ireland's been through so much … it took 800 years to be free of English oppression … so we need to be patient with … what we're dealing with here. (Benjamin, 08)

> In Palestine, like they're really aware of like the *Balfour Declaration*. And I remember being like, you know, being told, not aggressively, but certainly been told on numerous occasions by Palestinians, particularly older Palestinians, about

> the *Balfour Declaration*, about what the British had done … So there is an awareness of British wrongdoing, it is really strong I think, people are really, really aware of it. … I did hear antipathy toward Britain and British people for what they represented. (Marcus, 03)

While Irish participants did not report experiencing feelings of animosity while being present (or being witnesses) in Palestine, the majority of British or American participants reported concerns about being perceived negatively or with suspicion due to their nationality. Upon arrival, American participants were repeatedly advised by local administration to withhold information about their profiles, nationality or otherwise, although they usually decided to be open about their country of origin with students and colleagues (i.e., not necessarily due to being "proud" or not (Victoria, 07), but because they would have found it dishonest or logistically difficult to do otherwise). In a sense, while British and American teachers were witnesses, and at times witnesses to the sociopolitical situations that their countries of origin created or perpetuated, their Irish colleagues were positioned as both witnesses and as individuals who had a shared lived experience with Palestinians.

Interestingly, the connections that the teachers made to the events that they witnessed were contingent on the cultural context (*Section 4.5.3*) of their own nations. In other words, drawing on hermeneutic phenomenology as philosophy, how witnesses interpreted their experiences was clearly impacted by their pre-understandings and historicality (*Section 4.3.2*). For example, while Irish participants tended to make parallels with British colonialism, British participants (among others) related it to apartheid[162]. Alternatively, American participants discussed the situation in Palestine in how it resonated with the civil rights movement, the legacy of slavery, the Black Lives Matter movement and the displacement of Native Americans. For example:

> Palestinians in their own homeland are under military and martial law, military law … The settlers are under civil law, you know, a different code. And, you know, so it's, it's an apartheid state, really, you know. They're treated differently. And, I mean, it's like Ireland, maybe, in the, I don't know, the 14th century or the 15th century here during the penal laws or something, when the English occupation, you know, tried to take our religion and our language and things like that. (Benjamin, 08)

[162] British participants did not specifically mention South Africa and its former policy of apartheid, but as South Africa was excluded from the Commonwealth (1961) due to its apartheid policy (and was later re-admitted once it came to an end in 1994), it is plausible that this contributed to the comparison. Nonetheless, there were individuals from the US, UK and Ireland that used this language

> … all the Palestinians had to get off the bus, had to line up, and to get back on the bus and show their papers to make sure that they were supposed to be there and allowed to go … And it was just very symbolic … somehow, like, you know, the whole American bus issues and Rosa Parks[163] … I can't even imagine having to live like that all the time. And yet, there's so many people that there, and in the United States, it happens to all the time. So it really kind of accentuates your white American privilege. (Patricia, 04)

> I thought a lot about other stories I have heard and things that I saw and I came away with a profound sense of the consequences of the occupation for everyone involved, obviously it's the Palestinians who bear the brunt of them, but it's not as if the Israeli Jews have gotten a free pass here. I mean it's much like the writings of Toni Morrison[164] about slavery. Yes, obviously it is the enslaved people who suffered but it's not as if there were no consequences for the white people involved. And those consequences continue to this day. (Simon, 10)

> I think I just hadn't expected it to be as tough and to be as difficult … I hadn't realised the extent to which there was this kind of apartheid system … it was mind boggling, really, that you know, these are places that were like 20 minutes apart in a car on a good day. And yet … the populations were totally separate. Just yeah, absolutely this is an apartheid state, really. And I think I hadn't realised … how bad it was … for Palestinians more than the Israelis, of course, but the fact that they [Israelis] also had this living two totally separate lives. (Marcus, 03)

In addition to the historical and cultural references, in the last two excerpts we also see an awareness of the negative impact that the sociopolitical environment has on both parties involved (Israelis and Palestinians) despite the asymmetrical nature of the conflict (i.e., where there is a significant socioeconomic and military imbalance between groups) (*Section 2.2.1*). Again, this dynamic could relate closely to the societies in which the teachers were socialised, especially the US and UK. For participants from these countries, there seems to be a heightened awareness of the inherited consequences that present-day nations face as a result of their imperial and colonial pasts. In other words, while the legacy of imperialism and colonialism continues to put certain social groups at a disadvantage, everyone in society ultimately suffers.

6.3.2 Political positions: being (dis)connected to/from the conflict

The teaching experience in Palestine was quite difficult to manage for some participants, while others reported thriving with relative ease. There were various factors that rendered the experience challenging, enriching and/or enjoyable, yet it would be impossible to

[163] Rosa Parks (1913-2005) was an African American civil rights activist and one of the most well-known figures in the US from the civil rights movement; she disobeyed segregation laws (1955) by refusing to give up her seat on a crowded bus to a white passenger

[164] Toni Morrison (1931-2019) was an American novelist who wrote extensively about the experiences of black Americans, the legacy of slavery and the repercussions of racism

isolate them all and make causal inferences or assumptions due to the huge degree of diversity in each teacher profile, their teaching assignments and the local sociopolitical environment (which can vary significantly depending on the town and historical moment). However, one pattern did emerge in the study that may have significantly shaped the teachers' experiences: their political position in regards to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For instance, if a teacher felt deeply connected to the plight of Palestinians prior to their arrival in the West Bank (or if they acquired this during their time there, which was frequently the case), they may have found the experience to be particularly challenging. The act of bearing witness and not intervening (or being powerless to intervene), was described as difficult:

> But when you're watching men with slingshots against men with rifles, it does something to you … if I were to stand, I would stand with the Palestinians … That's been probably one of my biggest challenges coming back is because people think that I had such a horrible time over there because I was living with Palestinians. And they don't want to hear that [it] was the best and the worst experience of my life, but not worst because of people, but worst because of my own perceptions and my own feeling of **"**I can't fix this". (Anne, 05)

In addition, participants were profoundly impacted by the situation in the oPt when they could personally identify or empathise with the type of marginalisation and discrimination that they felt Palestinians experienced. In this excerpt, a teacher, who is part of a disadvantaged ethnic group in her country of origin, reflects on how her own lived experience became enmeshed with the Palestinian experience:

> I feel like I was really pro-Palestinian. And I still am, but I think I've come to a place where I'm neutral, where I can talk about it … but I was at a place where – absolutely not. And that was really hard for me to be in that position because … you're in such an isolating situation, you know, you can't even, you can't even talk for the other side, and this is not your fight. And that's something that I had to realise … it kind of engulfed me, my lived experience and their experience. And I had to start to kind of disconnect from that. Like, I'm not Palestinian. It's not my fight. I have my own fight. I need to neutralise to be more of that outsider looking in. (Olivia, 02)

Alternatively, individuals who framed the experience with clear boundaries between themselves and Palestinians in terms of their social position and connection to the occupation (i.e., assuming the outsider position, as cited above by Olivia (02)) seemed to navigate the Palestinian context with a greater sense of ease. This is demonstrated in statements made by Simon (10), who says, "I tried to be aware of all of that, sort of how I

did and didn't fit into the social situation there"[165]. He later adds, "I am very aware that I could not and cannot now end the occupation" (Simon, 10). Although these teachers generally reported a more favourable experience in the oPt, they also describe moments of being significantly touched by what they witnessed. For example, the same participant (Simon, 10) talks about his experiences going back and forth from the West Bank to Jerusalem:

> You know, I had to go through the checkpoint, and seeing all of the Arabs between the ages of 16-30 had to get off, and have their papers checked. Seeing the soldiers get on with their guns and check people's papers. That is a very visceral type of experience.

Finally, individuals who seemed to be largely disinterested in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict recounted fewer critical incidents. During the interviews, they also appear to have experienced fewer difficulties with their teaching assignments, and if they did have challenges, they were often attributed to logistics (i.e., lack of organisation, technology, etc.) (*Section 7.3.2.2*). Furthermore, the notion (and perhaps weight) of bearing witness was addressed by these participants but with less frequency. Here one teacher speaks about their ability to adapt to teaching assignments globally, as evidenced in their experience in the oPt:

> And I don't find it that hard to live somewhere. Honestly, there's not that much to it … So I think I could do this pretty much everywhere … Some teachers that are focused on maybe the historical or social issues or things that were related to, to human rights, and all these kinds of things that are so important there and that people are aware of, that didn't come to play in my decision … And this experience … was purely coincidental, which I find fascinating because I don't think, I wouldn't necessarily pick this place … But some people would. (Travis, 06)

While not an assignment he would have chosen, this teacher ultimately described carrying out his work with relative ease. Again, this observation may be related to the fact that the teacher was less invested in the sociopolitical environment, and thus, experienced it with less tension. It also raises questions regarding how self-selected and non-self-selected individuals (*Section 4.5.5*) may have different reactions to working in the oPt. That being said, this specific teacher did not go through the experience of teaching in the Palestinian context unaffected: he acknowledged the impact that the environment had on him,

[165] In the original transcript, the participant also relates this quotation to positionality, preceding it with the statement: "I am also very aware that my age helped me there … I was an old guy. Everyone called me professor all the time" (Simon, 10). In contrast to Olivia (02) who identifies and was identified with a disadvantaged ethnic group (*Section 6.3.3*), Simon reports benefiting from his age (also gender, ethnicity, nationality, etc.) in Palestine's hierarchical society. While here his self-awareness as an outsider is linked with his ability to approach the experience in the oPt with greater ease, these factors have likely also contributed (as the participant himself identified)

particularly in relation to his positionality within Palestine and in his country of origin, stating, “I grew as a person … [I] became more aware that not everybody grows up in suburban [name of region], and has a great education and does whatever they want in life” (Travis, 06).

6.3.3 Race, gender and sexual orientation

Constructions of race and ethnicity influenced not only the participants’ interpretations of their experiences as teachers in Palestine (as seen above in *Section 6.3.1* & *Section 6.3.2*), but they also contributed to the erroneous ascription of identities to teachers by individuals in the local community. This was most commonly experienced during the teachers’ interactions with Israelis at sites where identity is controlled and verified (points of entry)[166]. For example, one teacher speaks about feeling targeted at checkpoints for additional searches and notices that she was treated differently from her co-nationals that identified with other ethnic groups:

> I don't want to make everything about race, but definitely some things are different. Maybe if they saw a different face, maybe they would have said, ‘yeah, just go right on through’, but immediately, the guard said, “no”. (Olivia, 02)

> I don't know if that is a racial thing or whatever, but … I was “the Palestinian” … it wasn’t until they saw my passport that it’s like, “oh, okay, we'll treat you a little bit better” [imitating the thought process of personnel at checkpoints]. (Olivia, 02)

As observed here, this teacher suspects that she was physically profiled as Palestinian by Israeli military personnel and was treated in a hostile manner accordingly. It is her national passport which seems to alter the power dynamic during encounters. In a sense, her status as an outsider-witness and an insider-participant is confused by those involved in the conflict, which may have contributed to the strong connection that she felt to the sociopolitical situation in Palestine (*Section 6.3.2*). Furthermore, as discussed later in the chapter (*Section 6.4.1*), these interactions raise an important question regarding the act of

[166] The significance of these ‘points of entry’ is best explained by the Palestinian scholar Khalidi (1997): “The quintessential Palestinian experience, which illustrates some of the most basic issues raised by Palestinian identity, takes place at a border, an airport, a checkpoint: in short, at any one of those many modern barriers where identities are checked and verified … Such borders and barriers are rarely more than a source of passing inconvenience for most of those citizens of the world who are fortunate enough to possess an American, European, or other first world passport … But for Palestinians, arrival at such barriers generates shared sources of profound anxiety. This is true whether this is a formal frontier between states, or a military checkpoint … Borders are a problem for Palestinians since their identity—which is constantly reinforced in myriad positive and negative ways—not only is subject to question by the powers that be; but also is in many contexts suspect almost by definition. As a result, at each of these barriers which most others take for granted, every Palestinian is exposed to the possibility of harassment, exclusion, and sometimes worse, simply because of his or her identity” (pp. 1-2)

bearing witness: at what point does one transition from being a first-hand witness to being an active participant in a conflict? This is especially relevant to Olivia's (02) case, where due to her ethnicity, she is positioned as an actor (i.e., a Palestinian, albeit mistakenly) in an ethno-national conflict and is treated as such.

While some of the participants' experiences with gender are examined in *Chapter 5* (i.e., being a female teacher from abroad in Palestine) (*Section 5.4.2*) one's relationship status (i.e., single, partnered, married, etc.) and sexual orientation were relevant to the study. On one hand, individuals who could disclose their relationship status and had a partner or spouse who accompanied them to Palestine found that it improved their experience. As one participant commented, "if you come with a partner … that adds a whole other dynamic to it. For me, it was essential, [s/he] was with me" (Travis, 06). This may be due to the fact that many participants without partners or spouses on-site reported feelings of isolation (Olivia, 02 & Marcus, 03)[167] and loneliness (Anne, 05), in addition to an absence of personal or professional support (Anne, 05 & Victoria, 07)[168]. On the other hand, when a participant was involved in a relationship that they were not able to fully disclose, it was an added complication. This can be observed in a teacher's experience of discussing his sexual orientation with the host institution:

> So I said, "I'm gay, how do you want us to deal with that?". And she said, "I would strongly recommend that you tell no one this" … Her biggest fear was colleagues, particularly some of the … male Muslim colleagues … might use it against me in some way, in a way to discredit things that I may say, suggestions I may make, etc.. Or if students found out, there could be some sort of homophobic backlash against me. Now, none of this surprised me … And part of the reason it worked was again cultural stuff. In the Arab world, a man can ask another man about his family, but you never ask about your wife. You'd never say, 'how is your wife?' ... So this worked to my advantage because people could ask about my family and I would say, "they're fine". "And do you have children?". "Well no, God didn't bless us with children". That would just stop the conversation ... So it was easy for me to get around that. The culture worked to me being able to do that. (Simon, 10)

[167] Many of the programmes in Palestine mobilise a small number of teachers and place them individually at sites across the oPt and East Jerusalem, which may contribute to this sense of isolation: "I felt probably I didn't really have … people who were doing the same thing as me. I felt like it was just me doing it." (Marcus, 03)

[168] While not related to romantic relationship status, it is important to note that individuals who had a strong community of teachers to collaborate with also had a more positive experience and did not report as many feelings of distress or isolation. For instance, Nicole (09) states, "my program did well in terms of connecting us with other [teachers] … I think it would have been a very different experience if I had been kind of navigating it entirely on my own. So I think that piece was … huge for the experience and was really valuable to me. And also, you know, again, just having someone to kind of bounce ideas off of, and kind of get their insight as well."

While this participant refrained from widely disclosing the fact that he was gay[169], his other identities, including being "a cisgendered white guy" (Simon, 10), paired with norms and social etiquette related to addressing gender in the Palestinian cultural context (and a working knowledge of them), enabled him to negotiate this aspect of his identity and position himself in a way that other participants (such as Olivia, 02) were not able to do[170].

6.4 Bearing witness: walking the line between observation and participation

6.4.1 First-hand witnesses, secondary witnesses and participants

The majority of study participants talked at length about the different ways that they bore witness: at times they were secondary witnesses, listening to the accounts of their colleagues and students, and other times they were first-hand witnesses, who observed the conflict from a distance or alongside Palestinians *(Section 2.5.2).* As secondary witnesses, teachers heard about the effect of the occupation on the local community; these accounts emerged in informal and formal conversations (in addition to other mediums, as seen below), both on and off campus. The following excerpts shed light on the experience of being a secondary witness to the conflict within the context of the teachers' third-level academic institutions:

> They were just so open, but they would tell me stories. And how do you not react when one of your students tells you that she nearly lost her baby because she got stopped at a checkpoint and they wouldn't let her go to the hospital? … I still don't know. (Anne, 05)

> A lot of my colleagues lived in Jerusalem or East Jerusalem and had to come back and forth through the checkpoints so I heard lots of stories about their experiences and how they negotiated things … So all of that was very much a part of my education about the consequences of the occupation for Palestinians in terms of their daily lives. (Simon, 10)

[169] Within the context of this paragraph we do not see the challenges that the participant faced by not disclosing his sexual orientation. For example, he later spoke about its impact on his relationships with students: "I was just very sad that I couldn't try to offer him [a student] certain types of support in a way that if I had a gay student in [my country of origin]. I would minimally have been able to let him know, well first he would have known, because it would have come out somehow in my teaching, that yes I am a gay man. I mean in a sociolinguistics class, of course we can talk about these things." (Simon, 10)

[170] In the original transcript, this participant (Simon, 10) recognises how certain identities (ethnic, national, gender, etc.) can at times be leveraged by stating, "All of these things are things that worked to my advantage in lots of kinds of situations. They can work to my disadvantage, but in general they worked to my advantage, and they have obviously all my life."

> [For] homecoming[171] … they did a display. And all I can kind of describe it is like a … haunted house … you're supposed to walk through. But instead of it being like regular monsters … it literally had photos of … Palestinians who were in Israeli prisons, children who were in Israeli prisons, dioramas of like the way they hung people … to make them uncomfortable, so that they would make them talk … it was a horror house, but of what happens in Israeli prisons to people and documenting various martyrs and things like that … And this is them, learning about their history. (Patricia, 04)

These types of incidents, where teachers were unexpectedly or spontaneously confronted with the lived experiences of their Palestinian students and colleagues, were a frequent topic of conversation in the participant interviews, and accordingly, another characteristic of the teachers' experience in the oPt. As documented in Alzaroo and Hunt's (2003) article "Education in the Context of Conflict and Instability: The Palestinian Case" (*Section 3.3.3*), and Kelly's (2023) book *Invited to Witness: Solidarity Tourism Across Occupied Palestine* (*Section 2.5.2*), the tradition of resistance through education, particularly the practice of sharing information about the occupation (as reflected in the homecoming display, which serves both Palestinians and visitors), has a long history in Palestine.

Some participants found it difficult to manage these exchanges, both in terms of their own feelings[172] and in how they chose to react when encountering these stories in and outside of the classroom (as alluded to by Anne (05) above). Ultimately, the participants approached them as opportunities to learn about the sociopolitical context, in other words, to bear witness (see bearing witness as a coping mechanism, *Section 6.4.2*). Occasionally, teachers needed to more formally engage with these stories, particularly when they impacted academic administration and instruction. For example, despite many years of teaching internationally, one participant remembers how her involvement with a student's experience changed her views on education:

> I had one student who didn't show up for the final because he got stopped at a checkpoint for three hours … and what do you do? And I had to go jump through all these hoops, because he had to prove that he got stuck. Well, how do you prove that? ... So I thought that I'd heard it all until I went to Palestine. And there's so many external things that you really have to be flexible in, things you didn't know you were going to have to be flexible in. Because I thought, "oh, education is education is education, and classroom protocol is the same" – and it's not. You really have to adapt it to what's going on. (Anne, 05)

[171] Homecoming is an event that is common at US and Canadian secondary and tertiary institutions at the beginning of the academic year; it is an event or a series of events (i.e., games, performances, parties) to welcome back members of the academic community (i.e., including alumni, etc.)

[172] Benjamin (08) described some of the stories he heard as "horrible" and "really upsetting", while Victoria (07) stated that, "I have never heard so many horrific stories about death, and kidnapping, and rapes"

In contrast to secondary witnessing, first-hand accounts of the occupation were also a key feature of the teachers' experience in the oPt. The quantity of first-hand accounts of conflict-related violence and harassment in the interviews are too numerous to list, nor do they serve the objectives of the research (if anything, arbitrarily recounting them could be reminiscent of Kelly's (2023) notion of occupation tourism, which she warns can be exploitative) (*Section 2.5.2*). However, the extent to which first-hand accounts often overlap with direct participation in the conflict is striking and potentially insightful. One teacher describes this well, showing how different layers of his experience (i.e., as a first-hand witness, secondary witness and as an actor who interfaces with the conflict) are interwoven in complex ways:

> All these sort of challenges really, the challenges and difficulties faced by me, but not necessarily … like faced by the teachers, faced by institution, and sort of, by extension, sort of, that I faced as well trying to work with them. So I suppose the biggest thing was … the occupation really, like the difficulty … the difficulties that I had and the difficulties the teachers had as a result. (Marcus, 03)

The participant then demonstrates how the situations faced by his Palestinian colleagues (i.e., having their wages withheld, being unable to access adequate medical attention despite ill health, etc.) (also in *Section 1.5* & *Section 5.4.2*) and the palpable inequality that this created in the workplace between the conditions of local and foreign teachers (*Chapter 5*), was extremely challenging to manage:

> Talking about teachers not getting paid … it had already felt quite challenging, but … that … was really difficult … I sort of started feeling quite a lot of stress and anxiety towards the end of the year. And I knew I was kind of finishing fairly soon … I just started getting … anxiety attacks, maybe? Yeah. So I think that … a combination of sort of finding the context difficult, finding sort of daily life challenging as well ... like I said before, I could see that the teachers that I knew, Palestinian teachers, certainly … in terms of mental health, it is a difficult place to live. And I sort of came to see that for myself as well … And at one point we had, one weekend, there was … an Israeli IDF incursion into my area … I didn't feel unsafe. But I could see from my balcony these kinds of IDF armoured personnel carriers and stuff. And soldiers sort of going down the street. So it was quite, it was a bit stressful, actually. (Marcus, 03)

This account shows the complicated relationship between observation (bearing witness) and participation, and the overlap between the two experiences (i.e., being subjected to the aforementioned IDF incursion is arguably not just an observation, but an experience that the teacher fully participated in). Another aspect of the above excerpt, which is seen repeatedly in the research, is the recognition that the foreign teachers' experience in the Palestinian context is temporary (and a choice – they can and will leave), while local

teachers and students must confront these difficult situations indefinitely (without choice). Some potential consequences of this dynamic are discussed further in *Section 6.4.2*.

6.4.2 Permission to participate

Time and again, the interviews frame the challenges that the study participants faced as opportunities to better understand the challenges faced by Palestinians. For example, in the previous section's final excerpt, the teacher's experience of strained mental health while living in a difficult sociopolitical context is presented as part of the lived experiences of Palestinians, which the teacher comes to understand while on-site (i.e., "I sort of came to see that for myself") (Marcus, 03). A similar approach to living in a conflict-affected zone is echoed in the following two statements:

> But just being … very humbling in terms of, this is something that we're experiencing, in a kind of isolated time in our lives, but this is, you know, a daily reality for a lot of people. And that was really important to keep in mind. (Nicole, 09)

> Like I was just trying to do this experience and to say like, okay, I can take this in a positive light, like, yes, it's stressful, but on the positive side, I get to kind of feel like what it feels like to be passing through checkpoints and being, you know, treated as such. (Olivia, 02)

While seen in multiple accounts, these pieces of text borrowed from Marcus (03), Nicole (09) and Olivia (02) show how teachers in the oPt may use the act of bearing witness as a coping mechanism. For example, when encountering difficulty, the "positive side" (Olivia, 02) is that the teacher gains a greater understanding of the Palestinian experience. This will enable them to more accurately bear witness in the future. However, while the teacher's negative experience becomes a tool for understanding the sociopolitical context, what are the implications of it (the negative experience) for the teacher's personal and professional life? This raises questions regarding how the teacher manages critical incidents while abroad: do they feel as if they have permission to experience (i.e., struggle with and seek support for) the challenges of living in the oPt, or do they tend to be dismissive of their own lived experiences? This observation is reminiscent of the complications that the teacher encountered when their lived experience became enmeshed in the lived experiences of Palestinians (*Section 6.3.2*).

Another facet of this can be seen in the teachers' expectations upon arrival. At times they were offered assignments which were intended to minimise the amount of stress that they would face but decided against accepting what was perceived to be an easier task or

project in order to put themselves 'in the shoes' of Palestinians. In this excerpt, a participant speaks about being encouraged to work in a hybrid setting as opposed to facing a tedious daily commute to a Palestinian third level institution, but requests the latter:

> I sort of told my boss, "oh, I'm going to, like, I want to work there all the time ... I want to sort of experience what it's really like there, in this place" … So, I think that was a naive decision on my part to be like, "Well, I'm gonna go, I'm gonna try and experience it as if I was a local member of staff". And that was quite a foolish experience that definitely made it more difficult for me … I could have made decisions early on, that would have made my life easier. (Marcus, 03)

This episode is representative of a frequent teacher experience: participants often begin their sojourns wanting to truly understand the local conditions, which at times motivates them to accept (or even select) conditions which become excessively difficult or unmanageable. In retrospect, they realise that no matter how many challenges they encounter, they will never fully understand the lived experience of a Palestinian in the oPt. Another teacher reflects on this through a conversation with one of her students:

> She said, "your experience here, obviously you can't ever say that you understand. You can always say that you empathise … because you can leave". And I was like, that's a good point. And she was just like, "you know, so your experience and your trauma. It matters, but it doesn't matter like it does to us, because you have the privilege of leaving, leaving easily, which we don't have. We can't go to Tel Aviv in a taxi and just get on the plane and go. You can do that". (Olivia, 02)

This quote exemplifies some of the potential issues surrounding the positionality of visiting teachers in education aid and exchange programmes in the West Bank (see also *Chapter 5*). The research participants describe being both observer-witnesses and participant-actors in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but are repeatedly confronted with the fact that their lived experience is always distinct from that of Palestinians. On one hand, the role of bearing witness (or "empathising") (Olivia, 02) is complex and taxing (i.e., as Anne (05) says, "I can't fix this") (*Section 6.3.2*). On the other hand, the teachers resist assuming or are not given permission to assume (as is Olivia's (02) case while in dialogue with her student above) the role of a participant-actor in the conflict; the teachers feel that this (the participant-actor role) is reserved exclusively for Palestinians, perhaps due to the fact that they (the teachers) have voluntarily accepted or sought out teaching assignments in the oPt.

6.4.3 The disconnect between the experience as lived and as conceptualised

Looking comparatively at the participant accounts of teaching in the oPt, the majority of teachers express a degree of surprise or of mismatched expectations in regards to their experience. This can be observed throughout this chapter, mostly in relation to the sociopolitical situation, which teachers generally do not anticipate being so extreme or contentious. In addition to being shocked by the nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, teachers also expressed a discrepancy between their preparation and being 'on the ground'. The following are a selection of statements that discuss these sentiments:

> Understanding the region, you know, the tension that goes on … it's very much expected. But this situation that I described, like many others, wasn't expected in that way … Yes, I knew this town. I knew that history. I knew there's Israeli occupation in that town ... So that I get, but I think – the extent and the randomness of some of it … (Victoria, 07)

> Yeah, it was a shock how tough it was and how bad it was there … that took me by surprise … I think most of all, just the sheer unpredictability [of] the whole thing was really tricky. (Marcus, 03)

> And it definitely was something that I don't think we were entirely, until you're in it, were really, you know, prepared for what that looked like. (Nicole, 09)

> But there were some crazy, crazy times. And I don't think you're almost ever prepared, even though you know what's going on in the region. (Victoria, 07)

> And I've always understood that side of things [the Israeli side], and then to go to Palestine and to see that other side and actually lived through that other side and seen these things happening, it was just crazy to understand what exactly was going on. (Patricia, 04)

> So the future I suppose for the West Bank is bleak. And Gaza is even worse. But yeah … I was surprised. (Benjamin, 08)

> People talk about the settlements and the incursions in the West Bank, but I was expecting a couple of villages or something with barbed wire around them … they've developed a huge infrastructure, right throughout the West Bank, from what I can see. So I was shocked by the level of incursion that's taken place, and just the sadness that then they built roads, you know, good quality roads, which only the Israelis can use, the Palestinians have to go the long way around, on poor quality roads … it's the unfairness of it all. (Benjamin, 08)

> Whereas the sort of day to day life for Palestinian teachers … I think I was just so constantly shocked by one sort of deprivation or one difficulty that they faced after another … for example, not being able to travel to different areas, and not be able to visit family, and not be able to leave the country … God, it's really hard. (Marcus, 03)

> So many people were like, "oh my God … it's going to be so scary and you're going to be so unsafe", but … people took such good care of me. And were very friendly and open. And it was a very different experience than I imagined it was going to be. (Patricia, 04)

These excerpts describe the lived experiences of the research participants in a remarkably similar way: despite being derived from various teachers, many of whom have extensive experience living in the region and each of which have varying degrees of familiarity with the conflict, they uniformly express a state of surprise or shock at what they encounter. Moreover, they are struck by the volatility of living in a situation of conflict, as Victoria (07) remarks on the "randomness" and Marcus (03) on the "unpredictability" of it. Teachers also express a sense of not being able to prepare for such an experience in advance, as being "in it" (Nicole, 09) is so different from what you may imagine it to be prior to departure (Patricia, 04).

While it is difficult to make inferences about the disconnect between expectations and experience, Kelly's (2023) research identifies the aforementioned occurrence (of "shock and disbelief") (p. 246) as a characteristic of the visitors' experience of bearing witness in Palestine (*Section 2.5.2*). She attributes this, and the desire to be a first-hand witness, to Orientalism. In other words, despite extensive accounts of the occupation by Palestinians, there is a certain degree of mistrust of their narrative; Western witnesses feel that they must see Palestinian dispossession for themselves (Kelly, 2023). However, upon reexamination of the above excerpts and situating them in phenomenological theory, I believe that this occurrence may speak to one of the key premises for doing hermeneutical research: the recognition that the individual's experience as lived differs significantly from the experience as it is conceptualised[173]. It is through practical experience (or first person accounts) that assumptions and taken-for-granted knowledge are deeply called into question (*Section 4.2.2*). Furthermore, as previously discussed (*Section 2.2*), situations of conflict (and in particular the Israeli-Palestinian conflict) are often misunderstood. Not only do individuals rely on lay discourse to define conflict, but the language widely chosen to describe it (i.e., post-conflict, protracted conflict, intractable conflict, using the term conflict instead of occupation, etc.) may be highly politicised (*Section 2.2.1*). Therefore, the sense of surprise that accompanies a period of lived experience in the oPt may also be symptomatic of the teachers' need to readjust their understanding of the Palestinian context and to revise their notions about conflict more generally[174].

[173] This notion is further addressed in *Section 6.5.2*, with Victoria (07) stating that "when you're living in it, it gives you a completely different perspective"

[174] The use of lay discourse to conceptualise conflict can be seen in the following example: When receiving her project, the teacher remembers her reaction: "I thought, well, that one [project] would be really kind of scary and challenging. I didn't know much. You only knew what little you see on the news" (Patricia, 04)

6.5 Bearing witness: “Who’s listening? … Who can I tell the story to that is going to hear what's really going on?” [175]

6.5.1 Ignoring witness accounts

Most participants referenced either their applications/the hiring process, pre-departure program orientations and/or their departure/reentry during the interviews. When discussing these, a theme emerged: while on-site or after departure, some teachers described not feeling as if their lived experiences of the oPt were being heard (or listened to) by their local and/or foreign programme administrators. For instance, one individual expressed feeling as if “nobody really cared … what I had to say” (Olivia, 02). Similarly, another participant said, “they [leadership] never really listened when I tried to explain” (Anne, 05). As a consequence, incoming teachers may not have been given much information about their predecessors’ experiences, nor were they always informed about the extent to which the sociopolitical context would impact their experience. These excerpts highlight this dynamic, including how it plays out prior to the teacher’s arrival in the oPt and how it unfolds once they are on-site:

> So I remember being at the … orientation, and … they had our city names written on our badges, and it’s like, okay, nobody's gonna know what [name of town in Palestine] and [name of town in Palestine] and all these places are … so that was our introduction to diplomacy ... To be able to say: Palestine? Israel? Jerusalem? (Olivia, 02)

> I just wish I’d known more before I went. Because even at our orientation … Nobody really explained to us how different this was going to be … this place is special, because it’s been in war for 80 years … if you’re going to go there to live and to teach, you need to know what you’re getting yourself in for … And so, yeah, I think there should be education for the teachers. (Anne, 05)

> It would have been nice to know that somebody cared that this [a critical incident] happened … administration should have had their briefing with me or should have given me some insights. I shouldn’t have just been on my own discovering these things that happen, you know. And the [programme sponsor] … they didn’t tell me any specifics, either. So … I don’t feel like I necessarily was supported all the time. Maybe that’s a politically correct way to say it. (Victoria, 07)

Setting aside the issue of support (addressed in *Section 5.2.2*), Olivia (02), Anne (05) and Victoria’s (07) comments suggest that there may have been an oversight in each of their respective programmes: rather than recognising the conflict and its impact on the

[175] Victoria (07)

teachers' experiences, this aspect (which is arguably the most characteristic and pronounced of an English language teaching project in Palestine) went largely unaddressed. While perhaps a strategic choice made by administrators, colleagues and sponsors for reasons that go beyond the scope of this project (i.e., could there have been political restraints, liability issues, and/or a fear of discussing the sociopolitical situation?), this is a paradox when considering that research in the field of conflict and education has long recommended that situations of conflict be acknowledged rather than ignored in academic environments (Davies, 2017; Kester; 2021; Phipps, 2014) (*Section 2.3.3*). Furthermore, critical pedagogy and conflict-sensitive education suggest that in order to be effective, teachers must situate the curriculum within the context of their students' lives (Kester, 2021; Millican et al., 2021) (*Section 2.3.3*). As teachers from abroad will already be at a disadvantage and will struggle in this capacity (Burde et al., 2017; Kester, 2021; Millican et al., 2021; Milton, 2018a) (*Section 2.3.3*), sending them into the field without basic knowledge (i.e., such as how one should most correctly refer to the location in which they will be teaching, as Olivia (02) describes above[176]) puts both teachers and the objectives of the education aid and exchanges that they represent at risk. Moreover, the lack of clarity makes teaching abroad in a contentious location all the more challenging.

6.5.2 "Invited to go home"[177]: observing, listening and (refraining from) telling stories

While some teachers reported that their own accounts of lived experience in the oPt were minimised or dismissed, many seemed to observe and listen to the lived experiences of their Palestinian students and colleagues (also discussed in the context of secondary witnesses, *Section 6.4.1*) as an act of solidarity. Considering that teachers frequently expressed feelings of powerlessness and/or futility when confronted with the occupation[178], being a first-hand or secondary witness was at times the only action they felt they could take. For instance, during interviews, the teachers would highlight their

[176] In the Israeli-Palestinian context, place names are identity markers, and thus, a sensitive issue (Suleiman, 2019). There are English, Arabic and Hebrew variations of singular villages, towns and cities, and their use is related to the highly contentious practice of renaming sites to suit one's historical narrative (ie., to support "claims of possession and authenticity") (Suleiman, 2019, p. 394). Suleiman (2019) remarks that, "Names are not idle labels: they do matter in Israel and Palestine", and he argues that Arab names are often replaced with Hebrew names "to challenge and erase all Palestinian counter-claims of sovereignty over the land" (pp. 394-395)

[177] (Kelly, 2023, p.1)

[178] Kelly (2023) describes this as "discomfort" and "uselessness" (p. 238), as cited in *Section 2.5.2* and *Section 5.3.2*

conversations and exchanges with students, identifying them as being reciprocally valuable and meaningful (see also *Section 5.4.3*). As Anne (05) remarked, “they were as receptive to me as I was to them, because I love to hear their stories”. Moreover, the following excerpts from Victoria (07), which are illustrative of moments where her students acted as her cultural experts, advisors or informants (previously explored in *Section 2.5.2 & Section 5.4.3*), demonstrate the extent to which she perceived the act of listening as being powerful:

> I would often go to the students and be like, “This is what just happened. What does this mean? Like, what is going on with this?”. Or, “Oh, I read in the news, this happened”. And it was, they were pleased that I … cared and was paying attention to what was going on in their city, in their country, but also that, they could provide insight, they could provide the other side of the story … that gave them the feeling of, “Hey, what is going on is important, and somebody is listening. And maybe that means some change is going to happen” [imitating student thought process].

> I think it opened my eyes to what’s really happening in that region. So the news media outlets, they’ll say what they want to say, when you’re living in it, it gives you a completely different perspective. But it also makes you want to help … I think the point is that somebody’s listening. It’s really just like an underlying social construct, we all just want to feel like we’re heard, we all want to feel like somebody cares. And I think that was what I really enjoyed about that. That I could care about them, and that they could care about me in their own way.

Drawing on Kelly’s (2023) research, Victoria’s observations and attentive listening to her students’ experiences and/or insights about the conflict could have been perceived as a form of resistance against the international community’s complicity in the occupation (*Section 2.5.2*) – a complicity that functions by ignoring or dismissing the Palestinian narrative. When applying phenomenological philosophy (*Section 4.4.1*), the notion of knowing differently (i.e., changing mindset) rather than knowing more (i.e., amassing information) (Holroyd, 2007) often emerges in the teachers’ accounts. Many participants speak about their experience in the oPt as correcting misinformation about Palestinians and the conflict. For instance, in her closing interview remarks, Anne (06) states that “the general public, I think, should know that the stereotypes are not true”, while Nicole (09) sees the act of returning and correcting “misconceptions” about Palestinians as a continuation of her lived experience in the OPt:

> I think the experience had a huge impact … it’s been so powerful to have conversations, informed conversations, after my experience, about what's really going on there ... It felt really, just really important … that I was able to … to not only, you know, share my knowledge while I was in Palestine and you know, to teach English in those contexts, but to bring so much back home as well, and to sort of bring those conversations into to my communities, and challenge some …

> of the misconceptions, I think, [it] has been a really powerful part of that experience.

This sentiment is echoed in Simon's (10) account of witnessing Palestinian agency and resilience (or what is referred to as *sumud*[179]) and his desire to share his experience of it:

> You may know the Arab word *sumud*, which Palestinians use, which is interesting because originally it was translated as steadfastness, a lot of times I see it translated as resilience. I had read a lot about that before I got there. Now of course I have a lived experience of it. In terms of seeing how Palestinians negotiate things they have no control over. And often, the grace with which they manage to do that, is just, I have profound respect for it. I hate that they have to do it. I hate that I am not in a position to bring about real change there, but in some sense, I talked earlier about the notion of *shaheed*, the martyr, what I can certainly do is bear witness to what I saw, and that is one of the things I have tried to do since I've come back.

As previously mentioned (*Section 2.5.2*), the concept of the *martyr* (originally derived from the Greek word for witness) communicates a will to validate a truth beyond oneself (Peters, 2001) for which, having been present as a witness, one can attest. Many of the teachers describe this as an important part of their experience: it began on-site in Palestine (or even prior to their arrival in the oPt) and continues after, despite years having passed since their reentry. However, as exemplified in the next paragraph, not all participants shared this reaction.

While some teachers expressed a certain degree of disinterest in the sociopolitical situation in the oPt (*Section 6.3.2*), everyone interviewed commented on their role as a witness[180]. Those who felt a deep connection or who had a strong reaction to the conflict generally expressed two different (if not opposing) approaches to managing their lived experiences. The first approach is as described above by Victoria (07), Nicole (09) and Simon (10): to advocate for Palestinians by bearing witness (i.e., meaning they not only observe and listen, but later recount). Some of these participants also expressed a desire to return to the West Bank[181]. The second approach shares the act of observing and

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[179] Ryan (2015) defines *sumud* as: "a tactic of resistance to the Israeli occupation that relies upon adaptation to the difficulties of life under occupation, staying in the territories despite hardship, and asserting Palestinian culture and identity in response to Zionist claims which posit Israelis as the sole legitimate inhabitants of the land. Sumud represents a 'resilient resistance'—a tactic of resistance that relies on qualities of resilience such as getting by and adapting to shock" (p. 1)

[180] Travis (06), who expressed not being particularly interested in the conflict prior to starting his teaching appointment, stated: "But ultimately, it made me feel … I grew as a person. And to be able to see with my eyes, what that environment was like"

[181] "But even with all those crazy situations, I'd go back in a heartbeat" (Victoria, 07)

listening, but at some point (i.e., either while on-site or upon their return), the participant expresses a desire to avoid sharing information about their experience or has an aversion to the oPt. For example, Olivia (02) talks about having had the need to disengage or emotionally "shut down" in Palestine[182]. At the time of the interview, she found that she rarely spoke about teaching in the oPt in the years following her experience and wondered to herself: "Will I be able to go back one day? Maybe. Maybe not. I don't know … will I actually be able to go back, or will I emotionally be able to go back?" (Olivia, 02). Likewise, Benjamin (08) talks about how since returning to his country of origin, he resists exposure to content about the conflict, stating: "To be honest with you … I tend to avoid news about Palestine and the West Bank, because I just find it upsetting. And I'd find it upsetting now for a long time. And I don't know what the answer is". Other participants expressed a related sentiment, but described it as a reaction to external pressures in their communities, as demonstrated in the following collection of excerpts:

> I don't talk about Palestinians much. Because you never know. You know, if somebody's going to be anti-Palestinian, and they don't want to hear it. And that also really upsets me (Anne, 05)

> I think that's why I don't want to go back, because they don't deserve the stereotypes that they have said about them. They don't deserve the hate. (Anne, 05)

> Then you go home … and you're listening to things people are saying, and the stuff they're saying, against people who were your students and who you love … I really just can't. It's really, it becomes very difficult to sweep that under the rug, keep peace. (Patricia, 04)

> Even when I was doing things like interviewing for teaching jobs, and they say "tell us about yourself and where you have been teaching". And when I would get to, you know, Palestine [and other positions] … you could see the fear behind their eyes. Like, they didn't understand me, they didn't know why any sane person would do that. (Patricia, 04)

In summary, although teachers described being witnesses and valued their roles as such, in some cases, the lived experience appears to have become more of a personal resource (or a burden) than a call to advocacy. The research clearly indicates that these two different approaches, or what I would suggest conceptualising as 'coping mechanisms', are present in the teachers' narratives, yet the reasons for this divergence are unclear. That being said, the teachers who refrain from talking about their experiences often cite having felt "very strong emotions" (Olivia, 02) during their appointments, such as "upset"

[182] Olivia (02) says, "I didn't want to have to deal with a lot of the craziness around"

as in the cases of Anne (05) and Benjamin (08), which may suggest that engaging with the experience can become overwhelming[183].

6.6. Conclusion

While not all facets of identity that were potentially relevant to the study could be discussed at length here, some of the factors highlighted (i.e., nationality, political positions, constructions of ethnicity/race and sexual orientation, etc.) show how teacher identity and positionality greatly impact the visiting English language teachers' experiences in the oPt. Regardless of the teachers' personal or professional background, this chapter also aimed to demonstrate how the act of bearing witness is experienced by the majority of study participants. It found that first-hand observations and secondary encounters of the Palestinian narrative are a significant part of the teacher's lived experience in the oPt (and that these two different types of lived experience, the Palestinians' and the teachers', interact in complex ways). While this may be a common occurrence to those who sojourn in the oPt in other capacities (i.e., an incidental theme that could be applied beyond the field of education aid and exchange), it is nonetheless a defining characteristic of this study. Finally, by situating the teachers' experiences of bearing witness in the context of phenomenological philosophy, the data demonstrates how one's lived experience of a conflict-affected setting is significantly different from how it is imagined to be. This impacts the teacher in a variety of ways, from their expectations prior to arrival, to the decisions they make once on-site, in addition to how they cope with the challenges they encounter both during their experience and in the years that follow.

[183] Olivia (02) best describes this, comparing her experience in the oPt to being "quite a storm"

Chapter 7 | Perceptions of English and English language teaching in Palestine: utility, prestige and pedagogy under occupation

7.1 Introduction

As the third and final thematic area that frames the study's findings, this chapter begins with an overview of how the visiting teachers (as opposed to local teachers or students) situate the English language and English language pedagogy in Palestinian society. It looks at how English is conceptualised as a global lingua franca rather than as a colonial language associated with Anglophone countries. Moreover, through the participants' accounts of their conversations with students and colleagues, it explores the utility of English in the Palestinian context, particularly in relation to activism, employment and displacement. The chapter closes with a discussion about the defining characteristics of teaching English in the oPt, or in other words, the experience of ELT under occupation. In doing so, it sheds light on a number of sociopolitical and cultural issues, such as (but not limited to) isolation or enforced immobility, interrupted education, pedagogical content, a deficit of resources and student motivation.

7.2 English language in the oPt

7.2.1 Perceptions of English as a global language: "it's simply that English is what matters"[184]

In line with current literature on the use of English globally (*Section 3.5.1*), the study participants identified the language as being "valuable" due to its vast diffusion (Crystal, 2012) and consequently, the educational, professional and communicative opportunities that it unlocks. In addition, they saw it as being particularly important for conflict-affected populations (and by extension, perhaps the international community as a whole) (i.e., see the relationship between human security and education in *Section 2.5.3*). One respondent summarises this below:

> … whatever one's value commitments about the political situation there, I would assume that we can all agree that an educated Palestinian populace is better than one that is not educated and that right now knowledge of English is very important. It is going to be a key part of whatever it means to be educated in the contemporary world, and certainly in that part of the world. (Simon, 10)

[184] Simon (10)

Moreover, the teachers commented on how important the language was thought to be by Palestinians, who seem to perceive it as an essential skill, in the following observations:

> Well I think given the fact that English right now is the language of wider communication, probably the most highly valuable language of wider communication around the world, Palestinians see it as, if not a necessity, something close to a necessity. (Simon, 10)

> English overall … for all the populations that I worked with, would just emphasise, like, how they were told how important it was, you know, just continuously by teachers and others that it was this … really valuable skill to have for their future, for jobs. For a lot of youth I was working with, [they] were looking at getting scholarships and going to college abroad and really sought English as their kind of key to getting into some of those opportunities. So, it was very interesting to see like how powerful English was perceived by all of the students that I worked with. (Nicole, 09)

While it is correct to say that English is "something close to a necessity" in the oPt, particularly considering the fact that English language instruction begins in the first year of primary school and is a mandatory subject on the general secondary education examination certificate or *tawjihi* (*Section 3.5.3*), the extent to which it is promoted is striking. For example, Nicole (09) mentions that the adults and youth she interacted with in her project were reportedly "told how important it was … continuously by teachers and others". This resonates with the notion of cultural hegemony in the context of ELT (*Section 3.5.1*); for many societies, learning English is less of a choice and more of an imposition, especially if learners are led to believe that their participation in a global world is dependent on obtaining a high level of proficiency in a "powerful" language such as English (Nicole, 09). This may be even more likely in conflict and post-conflict societies, which are plagued by high unemployment rates and where young adults rely on international funding and opportunities abroad to further their education and careers (see brain drain in *Section 2.4.2* and youth bulge in *Section 2.4.3*).

As explored in *Chapter 6*, the visiting teachers found that their nationalities significantly impacted their experiences in the oPt (*Section 6.3.1*), specifically in how they related to the Palestinian context and the extent to which they felt (un)welcomed by the local community. However, despite nationality being an influential factor that also shaped their beliefs, identities and positionality (see LTC and LTI in *Section 3.4.3*), they felt that their Palestinian students and colleagues made very few associations between the English language, their national cultures (i.e., the US, UK and their settler colonies such as Ireland) (Piller & Bodis, 2022) (*Section 3.5.1*), and the colonial and imperial pasts of some of these nations. Marcus (03) gives a clear example of this in the following excerpt:

> I don't think anybody sort of equated English language to Britain, equated English language to this colonial power … I think there was not really that association with the UK. And there wasn't really an association with English as a kind of, as a dominant language … I never heard from students that they didn't like English. They found it difficult, sure, and they weren't necessarily that good at it, but there was never a type of antipathy towards English because of what it represented.

This observation sharply contrasts the participant's previous observation in *Section 6.3.1*, where he explains how Palestinians are acutely aware of Britain's historical involvement in the conflict, and accordingly, have reservations about individuals from the UK and their institutions. As quoted (*Section 6.3.1*), Marcus (03) states, "I did hear antipathy toward Britain and British people for what they represented". Similarly, the majority of teachers interviewed did not report resistance to the language itself despite identifying a range of other issues related to their nationalities. This finding suggests that the English language is usually perceived as a global lingua franca or a language of wider communication (LWC) (Simon, 10) in the oPt rather than as a language associated with specific, predefined cultures (*Section 3.5.1*). Despite various scholars who disagree with Amara's (2003) position (i.e., Nasser & Wong, 2013; Yamchi, 2006), this supports his argument that English has long been a lingua franca between those who did not know Hebrew and those who did not know Arabic in the Israeli-Palestinian context, and that this dynamic has carried on today with English being often "viewed as a neutral language" (p. 220) (*Section 3.5.3*).

In addition to being a global lingua franca, another reason as to why Palestinians may have a favourable attitude towards English is its juxtaposition with other foreign languages in the oPt, mainly Hebrew. In short, English provides an alternative for those who prefer not to speak or learn Hebrew for ideological reasons. As previously mentioned (*Section 3.3.2*), the choice to embrace or reject a foreign language (even if it is a mandatory subject, as would be the case for both Hebrew and English in East Jerusalem) (*Section 3.3.3*), has a long precedent in conflict and post-conflict contexts. Simon (10) makes the link between the Israeli-Palestinian context, Hebrew and other historical precedents in this example:

> Now I will also say that students, particularly the ones in East Jerusalem who had studied [Hebrew], who of course had had to study [it], if not all, for most of their educational careers, they generally hadn't done much with it. I wasn't surprised by this. I remember … before the fall of the Soviet Union, we would get [university] applications from students in the satellite states. Students that would be at the top of their class in everything, and their Russian grade would be the lowest possible passing grade … Clearly what was going on was something symbolic, it had nothing to do with ability. And I saw a similar kind of thing … among some of the

> East Jerusalemites. On one hand [they] complained about having to study Hebrew, on the other hand [they] complained that their knowledge of Hebrew wasn't any better, because often it was their knowledge of Hebrew that let them get a job ... (Simon, 10)

While acknowledging that "you get a lot of individual variation" in the languages that Palestinians study and later choose to use at certain places and times (i.e., such as at a checkpoint), Simon (10) goes on to identify the aforementioned dynamic as symptomatic of "a sort of politicisation of the languages and … the struggle for power". This is reflected in recent research by Abbas and Mendel (2022); they also reported the conflicting views on Hebrew within the Palestinian community that Simon (10) described (*Section 3.3.3*). For instance, while Palestinians may see Hebrew as a means to access a range of opportunities and as a tool for self-advocacy (i.e., in other words, the language arguably has high instrumental value)[185], they still resist learning it if they conceptualise Hebrew to be "a proxy for their views about Israel" (Abbas & Mendel, 2022, p. 224) (*Section 3.3.3*). In comparison to Simon (10), teachers who were based in communities with very few East Jerusalemites tended to observe greater resistance to Hebrew. Marcus (03) exemplifies this, commenting on how his students "were certainly not learning Hebrew". Regardless of location or place of origin (East Jerusalem, West Bank, etc.), the interviews reinforced the idea that Palestinians have an overwhelming preference for and an overall positive perception of English. Anne (05) illustrates this, linking the language with prestige in the Palestinian context, stating, "if you speak English … it suddenly raises you. I actually had a translator telling me this, and it raises your status and people will listen to you more".

Despite their students and local colleagues' apparent enthusiasm about the English language, some visiting teachers described feeling uncomfortable with the linguistic (and therefore cultural and political) implications of their work. For instance, Olivia (02) declares that there is "a very political, obviously, aspect to learning English, and I think that goes with probably most if not all conflict areas". Echoing the discussion on cultural hegemony and the promotion of English at the beginning of this section, she then states, "the attitude towards English, I feel that … [there] is this very soft diplomacy … and that whole kind of hegemonic kind of … dated, you know, mentality, doesn't really mesh well with the reality that I think is on the ground sometimes" (Olivia, 02). Regardless of these reservations, some of the ways that Olivia (02) and the other participants witnessed students

[185] When highlighting the "growing competition between English and Hebrew", Simon's (10) interview also speaks to the notion of instrumental value, which he applies to both of these foreign languages in the oPt: "sooner or later the Palestinians have to deal with the State of Israel or its institutions in all sorts of direct or indirect ways, and so, Hebrew/English language skills come in handy for them"

appropriating English for their own needs and agendas are discussed in the next subsections.

7.2.2 Utility I: self-expression, self-preservation and self-representation

English language learning was understood by all of the participants to be of great importance for Palestinians, but there were some additional themes that surfaced regarding their reasons for holding this opinion that were unique to the oPt. For example, multiple teachers commented that due to the isolation that Palestinians face from the international community (*Section 7.3.1*), they were generally unable to use English in more traditional ways, or what Yamchi (2006) refers to as "in real life" (p. 863) (i.e., they are less likely to use English for recreational travel or to speak with internationals as access to the oPt is restricted) (*Section 3.5.3*). Marcus (03) gives evidence of this, stating:

> Something, I guess that's interesting … about the Palestinian is that they are perhaps a bit more limited in terms of their possibilities to travel, to go abroad and use English, I guess that's something that's slightly different to some places I taught … So perhaps in terms of like language learning, English learning … It might not have that same, like, practical value.

Instead, the participants observed a strong desire for Palestinians to use English to tell their stories to secondary witnesses (as discussed in *Chapter 6*) and to inform them about their sociopolitical situation. In the interviews, this is portrayed as both an act of self-defence against stereotypes that promote an "image of Palestinian youth in the West … as stone throwers … terrorists" (Benjamin, 08) and as an act of resistance to the occupation. Erling (2017) refers to this occurrence as the dissemination of counter-discourses *(Section 3.5.3*). The following quotations are representative of this point of view:

> English is a fundamental for them. I had several teachers tell me that … they want to be able to express themselves in a worldwide context to let people know … that they're good people … that they're not these evil, you know, spawns of Satan … and they don't hate the Israelis … or the Jewish people for whatever reason. (Anne, 05)

> The reality is that a lot of Palestinians … were using this English as, you know, a conduit to express themselves. I mean, they have their own beautiful native language, but I think the power of learning a foreign language, and a global language like English, is that they have that ability to express their feelings, and in a different language in a different way, to access other opportunities and resources, to connect to the outside world. I think a big deal for Palestinians is to obviously not just express themselves, but also as self-preservation. (Olivia, 02)

> A lot of the students might not have had the opportunity to use everyday ordinary English[186]. They wanted English to be able to explain their situation, to be able to speak to media or others that they were involved with about their situation as a nation, as their situation as a young person in a nation that was under occupation. So that was a real eye opener for me … And as I got to know the students more, I realised that this was just the fabric of their life. They didn't have job opportunities for English. They had a need to be able to express themselves, whether it was on social media, whether it was through NGOs or other organisations they were working with, they wanted to be able to talk about their stories. (Victoria, 07)

As recounted above, the visiting teachers described Palestinians engaging with the global community using English and observed them sharing their lived experiences through outlets such as social media[187]. Accordingly, some noticed that their students wanted to learn how to use the language in complex ways that would enable them to communicate their narratives. This arguably aligns with the conceptualisation of language education as a social practice through which identity is constructed and expressed (Norton & Mckinney, 2011) (*Section 3.3.2*). One teacher commented on this occurrence, stating that in comparison with her previous teaching assignments, her Palestinian students wanted to know "the most complicated words and phrases" (Victoria, 07). She then reacts, saying, "I was like, blown away … I was really impressed with how they use the language" (Victoria, 07). These observations could be related back to the sociocultural turn in SLA (*Section 3.4.2*) – they demonstrate the extent to which the ELT classroom is situated in the learners' sociopolitical context, impacting both their motivation for acquiring the language and the ways in which they use it (i.e., in this case, to advocate for themselves and their community). In addition, it sheds light on how the teachers' content (i.e., English language) knowledge is inseparable from the cultural and sociopolitical context in which they teach (*Section 3.4.2*). This highlights the need for educators to situate their teaching practice in the lived experiences of their students (*Section 2.3.2*).

7.2.3 Utility II: employment and escapism

Elaborating on the notion of "self-preservation" that Olivia (02) previously mentioned (*Section 7.2.2*), Palestinians have a long history of using education as a means to thrive in

[186] Victoria (07) clarifies what she means by "ordinary English": "I've been an English teacher in [another country] … it was interesting here, because what they wanted to know in English were really high level concepts about their political situation … religious beliefs, their ideology, which I hadn't experienced in [the other country]. In [the other country] [it] was the complete opposite. Don't talk about any of that stuff. We don't want the students to have that … tell them how to ask for a hamburger and how to take a taxi … but not the kind of serious conversations that we were having in Palestine."

[187] In addition to Victoria (07), there were other teachers that mentioned social media usage, such as Nicole (09): "I think English was really emphasised as just this kind of crucial, really important skill to have … and English was definitely being widely used also on … social media platforms"

a variety of difficult circumstances (*Section 3.3.3*), particularly in situations of displacement. As Shakhshir (2011) argues, not only has advanced education "afforded them protection in many Arab and non-Arab countries", but it has also provided Palestinians with long term "financial and psychological stability" both at home and abroad, in and outside of refugee camps (p. 3). This concept is present in the teachers' accounts of English language education in Palestine, as Simon (10) concisely states: "They believe that English is a skill that will help them get opportunities if they can leave, if they choose to leave, if they are forced to leave". While acknowledging that opportunities in the oPt are scarce, the following excerpts focus on the issue of employment in the Palestinian context as it relates to English language knowledge:

> You have to realise that for a lot of people learning English … it's … an opportunity to get out. You know, honestly that's what I kept hearing, is that they want to get out, they want to leave, you know, so they're part of the brain drain, because they don't find those opportunities there. It was really unfortunate, that was really the sad part, is that a lot of them didn't want to go abroad and bring it back to Palestine. Some of them didn't have that hope. It's just, they just wanted to leave. So that was rough. And so there's a socioeconomic aspect that's really strong in the Palestinian context. (Olivia, 02)

> Some of the participants were very bright, and go-getters and learning languages and really pushing themselves and looking to become maybe doctors in the future or pharmacists or whatever it may be. And unfortunately … they were probably looking to emigrate to go to … Dubai or Saudi Arabia or the States or wherever, with those qualifications that they'd acquired, because there were very, very few career job opportunities for them in their home. (Benjamin, 08)

> There's a lot of interest in … the nonprofit space. There was … such a high value placed on English I think as a skill. And that a lot of the adults I would talk to would say that it would give them such a leg up in terms of applying for jobs in terms … of the international organisations and some of the spaces that were kind of available. (Nicole, 09)

Many participants believed that their students were learning English (and at times Hebrew) (*Section 7.2.1*) to be more competitive for the limited employment available within the West Bank or East Jerusalem (i.e., as Nicole (09) states, with (I)NGOs) (*Section 2.2.2*). Moreover, some aspired to be English language teachers themselves, as Victoria (07) explained during her interview[188]. However, the stronger pattern that emerged from the research was the perception that Palestinian students were above all motivated to learn English in order to leave the oPt, if possible or necessary. In some cases, it was to

[188] Victoria (07) states, "Some students, genuinely I think, wanted to be English teachers. So the students I have kept in touch with, a few of them are English teachers, and it's lovely"

access opportunities abroad, such as study programmes or scholarships[189], in others, it was to find stable employment. One participant (Travis, 06) labels this desire as "escapism", but gives it two meanings. He states, "And I got to see that, you know, they were using their education in many different ways, but one of them was to escape [meaning to leave the oPt]. I think there was a lot of escapism in learning English" (Travis, 06). He later uses the term in a more traditional way, adding that he felt his classes provided temporary relief for his students despite the difficult circumstances that surrounded them: "that was really good. It was just a sense of enjoyment for everybody for that one or two hours. And the rest of life is difficult" (Travis, 06). These observations speak not only to the challenges of education under occupation in the oPt, but to conflict-affected settings in general, where again (*Section 2.4.2 & Section 2.4.3*) the phenomenon of brain drain is rampant, and issues related to youth bulge exacerbate one's ability to access resources. Moreover, drawing on the inequitable distribution of education in conflict and post-conflict contexts (*Section 2.3.2*), there are a series of cultural issues in the region that further aggravate the aforementioned challenges, such as (but not limited to) *wasta*[190] (i.e., the necessity of having connections), which will be explored further in *Section 7.3.4*.

7.3 Education under occupation: characteristics of teaching English in the occupied Palestinian territory

7.3.1 Enforced immobility and monoculturalism

As previously referenced by various teachers (*Section 6.4.2*, *Section 6.4.3*, *Section 7.2.2*), restricted movement and consequently widespread physical isolation from the international community, is one of the most striking characteristics of the Palestinian experience for the study participants. They notice that the problem is two-fold: on one hand, Palestinians encounter difficulty exiting or are unable to leave the oPt, while on the other, non-Palestinian visitors are discouraged or prevented from accessing the oPt (*Section 6.2*). Similar to Imperiale et al.'s (2017) research on enforced immobility and consequently enforced monoculturalism in the Palestinian context (*Section 3.5.3*), the

[189] Access to some forms of tertiary education in the oPt is limited, as would be the case with certain subjects at the doctoral level; therefore, Palestinians may need to go abroad to further their education in specific disciplines

[190] One participant describes her interpretation of and experience with *wasta*: "There was an importance to figure out who to align with, you know, the idea of *wasta*, the kind of, I scratch your back, you scratch mine. You had to realise some people were higher in the food chain than you were" (Victoria, 07); Another participant, Simon (10), defines it as "the value or the necessity of connections"

teachers often suggest that isolation has an adverse effect on educational outcomes. Topics such as the quality of instruction, (un)achieved proficiency, the learning experience and the development of intercultural awareness and/or communicative competence are discussed below.

During the interviews, participants wondered if a lack of exposure to native speakers of English and/or speakers of English as an additional language, and specifically English teachers and institutions from abroad, reduces the quality of English language instruction and the level of English language competency overall. For instance, Olivia (02) expresses this concern, stating, "The ability for teachers from the outside to get there. And then you know, what they face and probably tell others, I don't know … I think that kind of impacts the quality of maybe, you know, teaching or teaching English there in a certain sense". Her observation about teachers being deterred (both physically and psychologically) from entering the oPt may be alluding to the widespread concern that outside "special expertise" cannot be brought to academic institutions in the West Bank (Human Rights Watch, 2023)[191]. This prevents Palestinian universities from increasing their intellectual capital and deprives students and faculty of high quality educational experiences. Moreover, participants such as Simon (10) highlight how Palestinians have limited exposure to the English language (and to linguistic diversity in general). This can have a detrimental impact on their ability to practise the target language in spontaneous situations and diverse or authentic contexts (Dajani & McLaughlin, 2009) (*Section 3.5.3*). He identifies this deficit in the following quotation:

> … access to native speakers is so limited because of rules about who can and can't be there … I came to see this as one of the consequences of the occupation, sort of the limiting of access, direct interactional access, to either native speakers of English or speakers of English as a world language who come in and are completely comfortable using the language even though it's not their native language. (Simon, 10)

Using Kachru's (1988) three circles of English model, enforced immobility and restricted access to the oPt prevent Palestinians from having contact with a wide-range of speakers

[191] Organisations such as Human Rights Watch have expressed concerns about increasing restrictions for academics who would like to visit or reside in the oPt. At times these are scholars from abroad, at other times they are Palestinians who have spent time abroad and face a number of restrictions returning due to issues with Israeli-released permits. Human Rights Watch (2023) gives some examples in the following statement: "An administrator at Bethlehem University said that 70 percent of the faculty in one of the school's programs come from abroad and the administration worries that the regulations will make it even harder for them to recruit and maintain professors. A spokesman for Birzeit University said that they lost eight faculty members between 2017 and 2022 due to West Bank entry restrictions, which they said caused them to lose unique expertise and affected the quality of the education the school provides."

of different types of English, including native, nativised (i.e., referred to above as “English as a world language”) and foreign language varieties (*Section 3.5.1*). This arguably compromises the opportunities that Palestinians have to increase their proficiency in the language, particularly in its use as a lingua franca across all of Kachru’s circles. While beyond the scope of the project, it is also worth noting that this is a wider issue related to linguistic diversity – individuals in the oPt are also unable to interact with speakers of other languages, even “speakers of Arabic from other parts of the Arab world” (Simon, 10). Recalling Imperiale et al.’s (2017) original term of enforced monoculturalism, this enforced monolingualism is problematic. Not only is it an issue given the diglossic nature of a language such as Arabic (Qaddumi et al., 2023) (*Section 3.5.3*), but it is damaging from an intercultural communicative competence standpoint, which is explored further throughout the subsection.

As supported in the literature on ELT in the context of conflict (*Section 3.5.2*), all of the teacher interviews established the “dialectical relation” between the sociopolitical context and the English language classroom (Nelson & Appleby, 2015). However, teachers in more remote (and contentious) locations within the oPt seemed to notice this even more. Travis (06) observes the impact of acute isolation in one such town:

> … this specific location [in the oPt], had a unique character, and that character permeated throughout the whole, you know, community, which then permeated into like, their education and the way they looked at things. And, and again, it was like, nobody ever went there. Nobody, nobody had an opportunity to work with foreigners of any kind.

He then claims that these insular and closed environments prevent Palestinian students and teachers from experiencing diverse approaches to pedagogy, stating, “they really were never exposed to a different style of teaching” (Travis, 06). In his experience, his local colleagues tended to rely on “rote-learning” (Travis, 06) or “memorisation” (Simon, 10), as would be common practice in the Arab world (S*ection 7.3.4*). This is considered a well-known shortcoming of ELT pedagogy in Palestine (Dajani & McLaughlin, 2009) (*Section 3.5.3*), and while being a global issue, it is a frequent occurrence in conflict-affected settings (Cole & Barsalou, 2006) (*Section 2.3.3*). In terms of language learning, it arguably leads to questionable outcomes, particularly in terms of oral language proficiency which is rarely assessed in the oPt (*Section 3.5.3*). Furthermore, it contributes to the development of unbalanced skill sets: while students may exhibit receptive language

proficiency (i.e., reading and listening), they may lack productive proficiency (i.e., speaking and writing)[192].

In addition to unfavourable outcomes in language teaching, rote-learning is also criticised for its association with uncritical thinking and the endorsement of a singular narrative; the latter is usually championed by (perceived) authority figures in educational settings, such as teachers and textbooks (Cole & Barsalou, 2006) (*Section 2.3.3*). Considering that intercultural competence has been a learning objective in foreign language education since the 1990s (Kasumagić-Kafedžić, 2018), with English language specifically being seen as the ideal venue for this given its global reach (Erling, 2017) (*Section 3.5.2*), these monocultural educational spaces that rely on memorisation (such as the one described in Palestine) are likely to inhibit intercultural learning. Moreover, they work against recommendations for teaching and learning in situations of conflict, where critical pedagogy in language and intercultural studies should promote "the critical use of language, and a critical approach to one's own culture and identity" (Kasumagić-Kafedžić, 2018, p. 152). When taking into account that conflict-affected contexts are already at risk of identity polarisation (*Section 3.2.3*), this is a significant loss. In fact, the education exchanges that the teachers participated in are seen as valuable because they disrupt this cultural and educational homogeneity. Benjamin (08) aptly describes this, commenting, "as you probably know, they don't get too many visitors from overseas. So for some, maybe for some, it's interesting just to maybe meet and work with one or two people from overseas to get a different perspective on things". In this case, multiperspectivity is thought to be facilitated simply by interacting "with folks who are not locals" (Simon, 10). Other teachers saw this as an objective in itself, such as Patricia (04) who states, "the whole thing with [the programme], it is supposed to be a cultural exchange, where I'm teaching them about [her] culture. And then they're teaching me about Palestinian culture"[193] (see *Chapter 5 for a discussion on educational diplomacy and reciprocity*).

[192] Some of the teachers alluded to dynamics in the classroom that would support this statement, such as the following comment by Simon (10): "... at [Palestinian university] there were still professors that came and read from a textbook the entire time, which is not such an uncommon practice across the Arab world"; Olivia (02) makes a related observation: "the students that did have a higher command of English, I was able to do a lot more with them, but just you know, did a lot of focus on writing, which every country that I've taught in the Middle East always seems to be … it's a lost art form". This is further explored in *Section 7.3.4*

[193] Travis (06) echoes Patricia's (04) understanding of her programme's objectives, stating, "I think it was a very different approach to learning languages than they were ever used to before. And that's something that's kind of part of this whole English programme … to take a different approach to communication, and not that rote-learning thing"

7.3.2 Managing issues: interrupted education, resources, content and motivation

The participants described managing or encountering a series of issues while teaching English in the oPt. While different combinations of these challenges were present in each interview, some of the topics that frequently came to light were interrupted education, a deficit of resources, difficulty using content and sustaining student motivation.

7.3.2.1 Interrupted education

One common observation was the extent to which the sociopolitical environment disrupts language education. Not only do teachers and students need to contend with shortened academic years and unexpected pauses due to instability and violence (*Section 1.3*), but they also must face a number of physical barriers to arrive at their institutions each day, such as checkpoints, separation walls and infrastructural blockages (Smith & Scott, 2023). The participants highlighted two additional occurrences that compound this problem: student arrests and frequent strikes (*Section 1.3 & Section 3.5.3*). For instance, in the following quotation, Patricia (04) speaks about the impact of student arrests on her campus (as recounted to her by students):

> They [the students] would get arrested. They would be put under administrative hold for six months or a year. And then they would be released when there was no evidence to keep them. And this just kept happening to them. So they were in college in a class. Would get arrested in the middle of it. Got put in prison for six months to a year. Get back out. Of course the class ended. They had to start all over again. And this had been going on for ten years with these kids and [they had] never been able to get that degree to better themselves because they just had to keep getting arrested, and then released and arrested.

As a result of the lack of continuity that Patricia (04) describes, students develop huge gaps in their English language knowledge and are left with the daunting task of repeating coursework once they are released from administrative detention (see *Section 5.4.1*). This invariably puts a strain on sustaining students' long-term motivation (see also *Section 7.3.2.4)*, especially as situational factors that interrupt one's ability to approach their studies in a persistent and steady manner (i.e., also referred to as the "steady acceleration process" that leads to "sustained momentum") are increasingly thought to be key in fostering foreign language learning (Dörnyei, 2020, p. 151). For teachers, this results in multi-level classrooms and students who bear traumatic experiences from their imprisonment (among other problems) (Milton & Barakat, 2016) (*Section 2.4.2*).

The second issue highlighted in terms of interrupted education was the occurrence of protests and/or strikes. While various teachers describe incidents where they were accidentally involved in these episodes (i.e., particularly when there was an escalation between Palestinian protesters and IDF soldiers[194]), this subsection refers to their direct impact on education. In general, protests and strikes usually act as a form of unarmed resistance in the oPt (Zeira, 2019) and are extremely common on and off university campuses. Simon (10) discusses their repercussions in the below excerpt:

> The response at the university is to have a strike. And if students are unhappy with something the administration has done, they have a strike … I think that in many ways what the strikes do, the strikes represent a case of cutting off your nose despite your face because the educational process is disrupted, often the school calendar year is shortened or compressed. Minimally students are forced to show up at unusual times to make up classes that are missed, etc. Well it's not always possible for students to be there because of other commitments. So I think that was one of the very clear consequences. (Simon, 10)

In summary, despite the intentions behind the strikes or protests[195] (i.e., such as mobilising Palestinians and building an "organizing infrastructure", "raising a national consciousness" (El Kurd, 2021, p. 140) and an awareness of collective rights (Alzaroo & Hunt, 2003)) (*Section 3.3.3)*, they cumulatively result in a substantial number of campus closures and reduced contact hours. Thus, these events ultimately disrupt academic routines and limit opportunities for affirmative feedback (Dörnyei, 2020).

7.3.2.2 Resources

As identified by Dajani and McLaughlin (2009), the teachers dealt with a shortage of basic resources in the English language classroom (*Section 2.4.3 & Section 3.5.3*). While this may have been due to issues regarding access and isolation (i.e., there are a limited number of goods and services available, all of which must pass through and are regulated by Israel) (International Trade Administration, 2023), it is also financial – as Marcus (03) comments, "Palestine … was hugely expensive". Olivia (02) indicates this saying, "I felt on the Palestinian side, obviously, there's a lack of, maybe, being able to afford it or access to resources or just difficulty". One example was given by Victoria (07) who said that at her

[194] Anne (05) speaks about the inevitability of being involved in protests: "that was the first thing they told me: 'if there's ever a protest then stay at home'. Well, if I'm at work, there's only one way to get home. I have to go that way."; Victoria (07) talks about a similar incident: "I go walk in town … no joke. Israeli soldiers pointing guns down. Young Palestinians throwing bottle rockets, smoke bombs … and then … reporters all snapping pictures, and I just happened to walk around the corner"

[195] Similar to the act of witnessing in *Chapter 6*, Al-Jazeera reporter Basravi (2023) recently noted, Palestinans strike because, "Raising their voices is the least they can do. In some cases, it is all they can do"

institution, “the library was so outdated … some of the books were like research books from the 70s”. Travis (06) also found this to be a challenge, but more in terms of technology and connectivity, stating:

> I thought there’d be internet, ubiquitous internet, I was just naive to realise that, yeah, they said they had internet but it is unusable. So that threw me for a loop because I came with a projector, I came with a laptop, I thought, ‘okay, they probably don't have a lot of technology in the classroom’, which they didn’t. And I thought, ‘Okay, let me expose them to … technology more so’ … I really had to get good at that kind of prep, you know, like, going into any situation. I was ready, everything from making sure everything’s powered up to having like that long extension cord, because you never know, to getting there early to moving the desks around so I could project on some random wall. And then … getting all these chairs over to that area so they could see it … it was like serious setup … and breakdown. So that added a lot to it. Because that’s how I was comfortable teaching, I needed visuals, I needed prompts, I needed colours, I needed them … to use that to express themselves. And it wasn’t really available until I set it up. And most of the time it worked. Sometimes it didn’t. But I don't know what I would have done without it.
>
> So, if you, as a teacher, and as an educator, if you need true, if you need structure, in your, in your environment, and in your institution, my experience was that, that was not there at all. And that wasn’t important to them. So I had to be flexible to make it. I had to be like a true self starter ... So I had to be adaptable to that. Because otherwise, if I wasn't adaptable, or flexible, my teaching would have suffered. I probably would have been uncomfortable …

Overall, the aforementioned deficits were perceived as manageable by the teachers; they often expressed being able to adapt to their surroundings following an initial learning curve, as Travis (06) describes above. In a sense, his approach was an attempt to replicate the Western classroom in the Palestinian context: by bringing in the lacking resources (i.e., in this case, visual aids that encourage active participation), the teacher felt more comfortable, and he was also able to expose his students to different teaching and learning styles, as previously mentioned (*Section 7.3.1*) (although he later wondered if this was ultimately the best strategy, as discussed in *Section 5.3.3)*. Victoria (07) took a similar approach, procuring a number of books through donations and external funding that would both complement her classes and add to the institution’s library[196]. However, in addition to locating and securing missing resources when possible, the teachers also spoke about the importance of simply being “flexible” (Anne (05)) with what was available, particularly as some “things [are] outside of our control” (Nicole (09)). Olivia (02) also

[196] Victoria (07) speaks about this process: “I got some donations from English speakers that I knew in the region … And then [with the external funding] I went to the bookstores and just bought as many literature books and new books and whatever fiction/nonfiction as I could, because I thought … at least when I leave, at least, maybe there's just a little bit more to read”

mentions this, saying, “And so I just kind of rolled with the punches … it’s nothing that … I couldn’t make do with the resources that I had”.

7.3.2.3 Content

Similar to their struggle with the absence of resources, some teachers were also challenged by the unsuitability of standard ELT content when situated in the Palestinian context. This resulted in an increased need to adapt materials that were not fit for purpose (Sowton, 2019). In other words, some teachers worried about content that, although applicable to a variety of learning environments internationally, could seem insensitive or problematic given the sociopolitical (and at times cultural[197]) situation in the oPt. This is discussed by Nicole (09) as an area that required careful consideration:

> And just being really sensitive to like the content of what, even what's in the lesson plans, and the examples being used in the scenarios and situations that you have students work through as they're using the language skills. Just being sensitive to, you know, those kinds of dynamics as well, was something that we kind of navigated, again, as we went, so it was a lot of learning on the go.

This observation clearly has a strong link with conflict-sensitive education (*INEE, 2013; Kester, 2021; Omeje, 2015*) (*Section 2.3.3*) and the sociocultural turn in SLA (i.e., specifically the need for contextual pedagogy) (*Section 3.4.2*). It may also be connected to the multidirectional relationship between conflict and education (Buckland, 2005) (*Section 2.3.2*), also conceptualised as the dialectical relation between conflict and ELT (Nelson & Appleby, 2015) (*Section 3.5.2*). For instance, Buckland (2005) states that conflict has an impact on education (i.e., resources, content, etc.), and likewise, education has an impact on conflict. While Nicole (09) gives an example of how the materials that one uses in the language classroom need to be evaluated in terms of their potential impact, Victoria (07) observes how the assignments that she received from students were imbued with references to the surrounding occupation:

[197] It is important to note that while there was concern with content, especially in regards to the conflict, there were also multiple teachers that reported moments of surprise with how students interacted with cultural content that seemed unsuitable for or unfamiliar to the Palestinian context. Simon’s (10) example best exemplifies this: “... we were using a book from the States … and there is a section on style shifting, personas and things like this … and the example used in the textbook was that of some research that’s been done on African-American drag queens … So we are talking about it in class … and one of the students, from [a conservative town] who wore a hijab of course … raises her hand and says, ‘I know that website’ … and she started telling her female classmates about the make up tips she had learned from RuPaul’s Drag Race. And I’m thinking, ‘where is the video camera now?’ This is what I want to be able to show … about life in Palestine and about how complicated the world is. You know? And it was one of those sort of phenomenal, surprising moments when I was learning all kinds of stuff about, ‘ok, this world is a lot more complicated than I thought it was’. And this same woman later for her senior project, her and her classmates used… queer theory … It’s like, this is not what most people would expect Palestine to be like … But that’s what’s going on there.”

> It was kind of dark, though. I mean, in terms of, you know, when they'd write an assignment, or they'd have an essay or something, it was often times very, very dark. And I really try and like, let's talk about something positive … So it was challenging sometimes, because that's not what they needed. They needed to like vent and get it off their chest. And I have never heard so many horrific stories about death, and kidnapping, and rapes.

As discussed in *Chapter 6*, this demonstrates how being a secondary witness to the conflict often became an unexpected and difficult task to mediate in the English language classroom (*Section 6.4.1*). However, considering that the sociopolitical context cannot be separated from course or module content (i.e., “Teachers do not teach in a vacuum”) (Hofstadler et al., 2021, p. 219) *(Section 3.4.2)*, it may also be an inevitable part of teaching English in the oPt and in conflict-affected settings in general.

7.3.2.4 Student motivation

Most research indicates that Palestinians place a high value on education (Alzaroo & Hunt, 2003; Shlomo, 2017). It has enabled them to build and maintain a Palestinian identity, to resist the occupation (*Section 3.3.3*) and to thrive in the face of social turmoil and displacement (*Section 7.2.3*). Despite the fundamental role of education in the lives of Palestinians, many teachers described student motivation for English language learning as ranging widely depending on the institution and student population. Throughout the interviews, a common pattern emerged: while some students were enthusiastic to learn English and viewed it as an essential skill (*Section 7.2.1*), others appeared to be unmotivated and/or were struggling with the limited opportunities that the oPt offers. The teachers describe their impressions in these excerpts:

> I was really pleased because I did have a lot of wonderful students that really made the most of it. I had a lot of students, however, that were very despondent, just apathetic to the class, didn’t want to participate and submit assignments. (Victoria, 07)

> Some of them were defeatists and thought, well, this is my life. I mean, there’s no way I can really improve it … which was very disheartening, too. (Anne, 05)

> And I thought, my God ... the maturity … but then also the resigned feeling of, we’re not getting out of this, might as well have some fun along the way. It was a really … just interesting thing to learn like, okay, they understand where they are, they understand what’s going on … and they’re resigned to it. And it’s kind of like, interesting and heartbreaking all at the same time. (Patricia, 04)

The teachers' use of terms such as "despondent", "defeatist" and "resigned" to describe their students' attitudes all communicate a similar sense of hopelessness regarding the applicability of English language coursework to their (the students) lives and careers, if they are able to find employment[198]. This resonates strongly with Norton and Mckinney's (2011) notion of investment, or the idea that language learning is an act of investment (or in this case, divestment) in an imagined future (or a perceived lack thereof) (*Section 3.3.2*). Again, it also relates to Gardner and Lambert's (1972) concepts of instrumental and integrative motivation (*Section 3.3.2*). On one hand, students are deprived of opportunities and therefore may not aspire to reach certain goals (i.e., instrumental motivation). On the other hand, enforced monoculturalism (i.e., isolation from the international community) and immobility (*Section 3.5.3*), which prevent Palestinian students from interacting with those that speak the target language, greatly undermine integrative motivation. Moreover, Patricia's (04) observation that students "understand where they are … what's going on", is particularly nuanced and striking: not only is it "disheartening" and "heartbreaking" to bear witness to the sociopolitical situation in Palestine and its implications for their students, but it is perhaps a challenge to witness the occupation without defining those who experience it either by their subjugation or resistance to it (as is argued in Kelly's (2023) research) (*Section 2.5.2*).

Another sub-theme related to motivation that surfaced in the interviews was the impression that certain student groups (again, in particular institutions) did not aspire to improve their lives through education. Rather than being a form of discouragement or despondency, it was understood by the teachers to be a lack of interest in scholarly work and/or a deficit in academic preparation[199]. The following teacher quotations speak to this assumption:

> … many were not very academic, and the student body and as a whole, this was not a very academic aspirational body … for me, and for the other teachers that I was working with there, it was quite a challenge really, in terms of … there weren't particularly high standards or high expectations there. (Marcus, 03)

> But in general, I don't think they had aspirations to go to advanced degrees or expected to use this degree to be successful in business or something right? (Travis, 06)

[198] As previously quoted, Olivia (02) also comments that "some of them [her students] didn't have that hope" (*Section 7.2.3*)

[199] For example, Simon (10) says that, "It just seemed like public education there seemed to be very very poor."

In these cases, the students were often thought to have been enrolled in the academic institution for a variety of non-academic reasons, such as to gain access to certain occupational sectors (Marcus, 03), to socialise (Travis, 06), to satisfy social conventions (i.e., the family's desire for them to make a good impression in the community) (Travis, 06) and/or to improve marriage prospects (Victoria, 07)[200]. However, despite this point of view, some of the interviews also stressed the importance of education, illustrating many instances in which students exhibited high levels of motivation (*Section 7.2*). Anne (05) alludes to this, stating, "they know that the only way that they can get better lives for themselves and their families is through education. And so I think that's where the dedication comes from"[201].

While interesting that the teachers observe large differences in levels and types of motivation among their students, this research does not aim to identify causal factors that can explain why the teachers' understanding of student motivation has such a wide range. However, rather than being a deficit in the study's findings, it reflects current scholarship in the complex field of motivation: (much like teachers) (*Section 3.4*) students, and particularly adult learners, are affected by a variety of factors in and outside the classroom. Moreover, dynamic social contexts (such as those found in the oPt), environmental conditions (i.e., the learning context) and a host of personal traits, all interact to produce different (and at times contradictory) behaviours and unique learner profiles (Papi & Hiver, 2020). Therefore, as each individual has their own learning path or motives for (not) studying a language, this diversity in terms of motivation is to be expected (Papi & Hiver, 2020).

7.3.3 Perceptions of impact

Across the interviews, participants seem to consider their experiences in the oPt as being an invaluable asset, if not the most important professional experience that they have had to date. At all phases of their careers – from the early to mid and advanced stages – the educators describe the profound impact that their teaching appointments had on them. This is evidenced in the following collection of quotations:

[200] While this topic will be discussed further in *Section 7.3.4*, Victoria (07) states "So in talking with the students, I found that many of the female students were only doing this program … [or] English degree to basically boost or bolster their marriage resume"

[201] Patricia (04) makes a quite similar statement: "they are taking English because they're looking to do something to better their lives and help their families"

> So I would say, yeah, it has definitely been, you know, one of the absolute kind of standout experiences in my life. (Nicole, 09)
>
> I think about it all the time. It's just kind of a constant. (Nicole, 09)
>
> I've moved away from the teaching space, but a lot of the reason why I'm [in a different field] … has a lot of its roots, I think, too, in my time in Palestine. Just wanting to be a support for people in different challenging situations. And I think, so much of what I learned about myself and about what I value came from that experience. (Nicole, 09)
>
> But I do feel like I love the culture, like I learned so much about, you know, the religious culture, but also just about the history of the region and the conflict. Understanding it … it was a really big learning experience for me personally. (Victoria, 09)
>
> In terms of my experience there, I had a phenomenal time. I think of it in many ways as being a capstone in my career. It challenged me to draw on lots of different types of things I had done throughout my professional career, in my personal life. It just gave me lots of opportunities to learn. (Simon, 10)
>
> I think the biggest thing was, I just I learned so much. It was a beautiful country. I loved being there. (Patricia, 04)

In addition to focusing on the impact that the experience had on the teacher, some participants talked about the impact that they felt they had made on their students (and arguably the sociopolitical situation through people to people (P2P) public diplomacy) (*Section 1.1*, *Section 2.5.4* and *Section 5.3.1*). Patricia (04) best exemplifies this with her account:

> We had a ceremony and the director of the [English language project] … she asked a couple of the students to speak … They asked this one very outspoken girl that was in my English class … And so she gets up there. And she said, “You know … when I first started this class, and I had a/n [nationality] professor … I was really afraid. Because, you know, I thought because of what I see on the news, that she would hate me” … She said, “I thought that she would hate me and I would fail because she’s [nationality] and [they] hate us” … And she said, “but [Patricia], she talked to us, and she made us realise that the media, they say bad things about us to her. And it’s just the media being bad, and that we shouldn’t listen to all that, and we should listen to individual people. And I learned that it was okay” … It was just like, I never thought about that when I started class. But my students thought I hated them. Not because of anything I said. But just because they've been told that we hate them … it really hit me. You know, you never know the … the impact you have as a teacher and that was like … the first real big impact I thought I had ever had. (Patricia, 04)

These statements and Patricia’s (04) story all show how despite (and perhaps due to) the difficulties that the teachers encountered, the experience was perceived positively, and as a catalyst for personal and professional growth (for themselves and others). Moreover, the research indicates that the participants placed a heightened sense of value on this

particular teaching assignment because they were able to learn so much from it (again, framing it as a "standout experience" (Nicole, 09) that supersedes or equals all previous and later teaching positions). Interestingly, this perceived high level of impact (meaning both the experience's impact on the teacher and the teacher's impact on their students) echoes with the high risk-reward dynamic discussed in *Section 2.4.2* and *Section 2.4.3*.

As if amplifying the notion of the two faces of education (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000) (*Section 2.3.2*), tertiary education in conflict-affected areas is thought to be a site where both the opportunities for meaningful intervention and the potential risk of doing harm (Millican, 2018b; Milton & Barakat, 2016) are elevated (i.e., due to the university's societal function, the student age demographic, higher education's close relationship to politics, etc.). The above observations may suggest that the visiting teachers at tertiary institutions (or working with adults) in the oPt also feel the weight and responsibility of the aforementioned high risk-reward dynamic. In fact, some teachers spoke about their desire to have a significant impact on the communities that they worked with, and accordingly, expressed feelings of disappointment when their expectations were not met. For example, Olivia (02), when speaking about her students, recounts her aspiration to be "pivotal in their education, in their future career", yet in another moment regretfully states that as a whole, her plans did not come to fruition: "I wanted to do a lot of stuff. You know, talk to different interest groups, and talk to different organisations. And I wanted to go here, and there and everywhere, and for some reason, a lot of it, just kind of fell through". Therefore, by observing the highs and lows of the experiences as shared by the participants, I would argue that in comparison with visiting English teachers in more traditional settings, those who are involved in education as aid and/or exchange programmes in conflict and post-conflict contexts are more susceptible to experiencing their teaching assignments in a polarised fashion. In other words, the added pressure to perform or have an impact (i.e., high expectations) makes teaching in volatile sociopolitical environments an experience that tends to be, at best, exceptionally rewarding, and at worst, leaves the participant feeling disillusioned with their work, leading them to trivialise the task of English language teaching when situated in such a high stakes environment (see also *Section 5.3.2*). Interestingly, whether or not the experience was perceived in a negative or positive light, teaching in the oPt somehow seemed to be more significant than ELT in other contexts, as Travis (06) mentions: "... it was beyond English learning. It was way beyond".

7.3.4 Cultural issues

Although the consequences of the occupation were the foremost concern for the participants, there were a number of cultural issues that were raised that also impacted the English language classroom in the oPt. To a certain extent, they may relate to the challenges that Palestinian institutions and their students face as a result of the conflict, such as a lack of resources (*Section 7.3.2.2*) and the difficulty of sustaining motivation (*Section 7.3.2.1* & *Section 7.3.2.4*). However, according to the participants' expertise and work experience, some potentially problematic cultural practices (as identified during the interviews) were considered widespread throughout the MENA region as a whole.

Perhaps the foremost cultural practice that was highlighted during the interviews was the distribution of certificates or credentials. Many participants commented on this, including Patricia (04) who stated, "they love opening ceremonies and closing ceremonies, and they give out the certificates and the completion certificate for like, the workshops and the English classes". While some teachers seemed to appreciate these moments, such as Travis (06), who thought that they were an opportunity for "fun" and "joy" that he could facilitate[202], others spoke about their concerns regarding the frequent distribution of certificates. Two teachers discuss this below:

> And a number of the issues were bigger cultural issues, you know the focus on credentials rather than skills, which remains a key thing. What matters there is, in the Arabic world they would use the word for diploma, or certificate. What matters is that you have these credentials not that you necessarily have the knowledge and skills that … we would expect that to represent. Also, the value or the necessity of connections. *Wasta* as they would say. (Simon, 10)

> [It] is very difficult because students have kind of a lackadaisical type of attitude, unless you're giving them clear incentives, like a lot of things are incentive based … you have to give some kind of certificate or something that they can show for it. So I'd create different ways to get them involved. (Olivia, 02)

Simon (10) focuses on the potential disconnect between "credentials" and "knowledge and skills", which aside from its cultural origins, is a risk in conflict-affected areas where unqualified educators may be given employment for reasons that go beyond their academic capabilities (i.e., similar to the aforementioned concept of *wasta*) (*Section 2.4.2 & Section 7.2.3*). Instead, Olivia (02) relates this to her students' absence of integrative motivation (*Section 3.3.2*) and the need to reward them with a qualification as they are

[202] Travis (06) commented: "I think it's kind of … an English class thing anyway … they were like really formal about it … they would do it like in an auditorium and there would be … like a graduation ceremony … sometimes they'd bring a photographer to take the picture and all … I really love doing that because it was the fun part, you know … we built that rapport, I think a lot of people make new friends. They're excited about this accomplishment … And like, it brought some true joy to their lives."

otherwise disengaged. In either case, the risk is that student and teacher language proficiency may be measured by certification rather than on their actual ability to use English (Sowton, 2019).

Considering that students were perceived as being more interested in obtaining a diploma than in acquiring essential English language skills, a separate but potentially related issue is that of plagiarism. Episodes of students submitting work that was not their own, either by having someone do it on their behalf or by taking it directly from another source, were brought to light by the participants. This is best exemplified in Marcus's (03) story:

> I remember sort of coming across these students during the academic year and … they weren't interested in the academic work particularly. And then just like being shown, "oh, this is the … dissertation [a student] produced". I'd look … "ok cool, he's got some ethnography and, you know … he's got some very technical sounding equations and stuff like that" – and he hasn't, he hasn't put in a word of it.
>
> … what am I supposed to do with this? Like, you know, I'm not going to change anything by saying … it's all been plagiarised. It's all been written by someone else … so I think some of that kind of academic culture there … a bit of a shock, I suppose in terms of just the fact that it's kind of institutionally accepted that a lot of students will produce work like that … So maybe [I] just raised my eyebrows to some of the stuff I was working with … didn't quite state it broadly … "you know, these students are not capable of anything *like* that … what's going on?" Anyway, so that was a bit of an academic culture shock for me.

As communicated above, the teachers who encountered this issue were often less surprised by their students' plagiarised submissions, and more taken aback by their institutions' apparent acceptance of such practices. Moreover, the teachers that report this seem to be unsure about why the practice is accepted (and even more confused about how to address it), although a variety of possible reasons can be identified in the literature on education in situations of conflict (*Section 2.3.3*). For example, some local instructors may be disinterested or may approach the issue with a sense of apathy due to precarious employment (i.e., inconsistent or low salaries and few incentives) (*Section 3.5.3*). Alternatively, others may be navigating complex social structures that are not visible to the visiting instructors (i.e., related to hierarchy (Marcus, 03) and *wasta* (Victoria, 07 & Simon, 10))[203], or they may simply lack the support and/or expertise to develop a pedagogical

[203] This is best exemplified in Victoria's (07) account: "it was a very complex social system … I do think … there was an importance to figure out who to align with, you know, the idea of *wasta* .... And you didn't want to say things in front of other people who were family with them or friends with them … To me, it was very complex … But then I really had to realise, okay, we don't talk about this with these people. We keep our conversation brief with these and it was hard to feel out". She adds, "I think some of the challenges for me as a teacher came from the administration. You know, [their] culture is different … in the way they move or get

practice that can navigate such problems (i.e., through adequate teacher education). While this is characteristic of conflict and post-conflict contexts where teachers are not "equipped, motivated, appreciated, and supported" (Ommering, 2020, p. 3), the practice nonetheless models, rewards and perpetuates academic dishonesty (Burde et al., 2017; Davies, 2004b) (*Section 2.3.3*).

Overall, the teachers seemed to notice a discrepancy between what they were told the approach to English language instruction was at their various tertiary institutions, and what they actually observed as being common practice in the classroom. Simon (10) alludes to this in the following excerpt:

> I'll just say [I came to understand] the gap between practice and theory in terms of what people said the goals were … and what folks were actually doing. So for example, you know, everyone said that oral proficiency was highly valued, but it was never tested. And when you observe classes, you immediately saw … that everyone was using small groups … But if you pay any attention at all, every small group is speaking in Arabic even though this is English class … when time comes for the report back or whatever, the student in the group who is the best speaker of English is the one who speaks for the group. And you see it replicated over and over and over. Well, that of course has consequences … for what students are and are not able to do … It is also pretty clear that, and this is again true in many parts of the Arab world, there is still a focus on memorisation.

Simon's remarks are well-documented in research regarding the implementation of ELT in the oPt. As previously stated (*Section 3.5.3*), the Palestinian Ministry of Education claims that the English language curriculum uses a communicative approach to language teaching (CLT), yet assessment practices do not reflect this. Instead, knowledge about English tends to be more valued than one's command of the language itself (Sowton, 2019). Accordingly, as Dajani and McLaughlin (2009) noted (*Section 3.5.3*), "memorization, rote repetition and [the] recall of isolated language chunks" are frequently reported to be the primary teaching methods found in the oPt, while attempts to utilise a more interactive approach, such as forming small groups to manage large class sizes, appear to be carried out in a superficial and ineffective manner (pp. 31-32). This discrepancy, between what the teachers are told to do and expect, and what is acceptable and expected within their institutions, can be a source of confusion and frustration for some visiting educators.

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things done … And so it was always like, some underlying question marks. Well, what does, what is this going to mean? They say they want this. But do they really want it? Is it actually going to happen? Or is it just going to kind of fall off the radar?" (Victoria, 07)

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter investigated English language teaching and learning in the oPt from the participants' point of view. As opposed to focusing on how local teachers and students experience ELT within Palestinian institutions, it enables us to better understand the lived experiences of visiting educators as they navigate teaching assignments in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. It looks at various conflict and culture-related challenges (which at times overlap), in addition to the distinct ways that English language teaching and learning is conceptualised in the oPt. While considered to be a global lingua franca that enables Palestinians to unlock many opportunities and to thrive despite the ongoing occupation, it is also a language that may be difficult to effectively teach and learn in the Palestinian context. Nonetheless, all of the teachers interviewed identified a range of characteristics that distinguished their experiences in the oPt from previous and later teaching positions. In addition, all felt that their time in the oPt was extremely valuable, both personally and professionally, regardless of whether they described their experiences in a positive and/or negative light.

Chapter 8 | Recommendations and conclusions

8.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the principle findings of the study in regards to the research question: what are the lived experiences of English language teachers who work abroad in conflict-affected settings, specifically in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt)? As outlined in *Chapter 5*, *Chapter 6* and *Chapter 7*, the findings are thematically grouped into three categories: I) disempowerment, II) bearing witness, and III) English in the Palestinian context or teaching English under occupation. Based on these findings, a series of recommendations are made to better support teachers who embark on similar experiences in conflict-affected communities. These include the need to I) foster equitable exchanges, II) provide adequate sociopolitical, cultural, educational and psychosocial training, and III) generate support structures and offer guidance. The contributions of this work are then identified, particularly its methodological and practical implications, in addition to its limitations and areas for future research.

8.2 Summary of research findings

8.2.1 Answering the research question

The study's findings address the research question in that they shed light on the lived experiences of English language teachers in conflict and post-conflict settings, specifically those who have teaching experience abroad in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) (i.e., East Jerusalem and the West Bank). The data was collected using phenomenological interviews and was analysed iteratively: the researcher reviewed (and continually re-reviewed) phenomenological philosophy (*Chapter 4*), the relevant literature (*Chapter 2* & *Chapter 3*) and the interview transcripts. This process is conceptualised as the hermeneutic circle, or a way of coming to understanding which culminates in a fusion of horizons (*Section 4.6.2 & Section 4.6.3*). In other words, the researcher's interpretation and the research participants' interpretations were in dialogue with each other (and with related studies and relevant literature), resulting in a revised understanding of the experience under investigation. The findings are organised into three thematic areas to give coherence to the dissertation (*Table 5*) and are explored in the corresponding subsections (i.e., *Section 8.2.2*, *Section 8.2.3* & *Section 8.2.4*):

Table 5: Findings chapters and themes

Theme	Chapter	Chapter title and thematic area
Theme I	Chapter 5	Education aid and exchange for public diplomacy: a disempowering model?
Theme II	Chapter 6	Teaching abroad in challenging circumstances: bearing witness to the occupied Palestinian territory
Theme III	Chapter 7	Perceptions of English and English language teaching in Palestine: utility, prestige and pedagogy under occupation

8.2.2 Theme I: Disempowerment

"there's … a disempoweredness, about the place in general" - Marcus, 03

The first theme centres around the notion of disempowerment, which after dwelling with the data (Smythe et al., 2007; Dibley et al., 2020a), emerged from the interviews in a pronounced way (*Section 4.6.2*). Many teachers identified shortcomings in their programmes that prevented them from teaching with confidence. For example, while working or volunteering in a conflict-affected environment is inevitably difficult, the respondents described the challenges that they faced as being exacerbated by a lack of knowledge, support and/or guidance. This was evident at various points before, during and after their experience in Palestine. Moreover, some also felt uncomfortable with the unilateral nature of their exchanges, the asymmetrical power imbalances between themselves and their local colleagues, and the experience of being in a position of privilege in the host society. Some of these issues were arguably preventable, others reflect inequalities that are embedded in aid and exchanges between the Global North and the Global South or are, as one participant states, "consequences of the occupation" itself (Simon, 10).

In terms of knowledge, support and guidance, the teachers described deficits in knowledge about the sociopolitical, cultural and educational context of Palestine. Drawing on Heidegger's notion of (un)ready-at-hand, or that which becomes noticeable once it is no longer available, the participants struggled with not having the tools (i.e., knowledge) to comfortably navigate conversations in the classroom and select module content. Even at the most basic level, the teachers struggled with understanding what was appropriate. For

example, in *Chapter 6*, the respondents describe not being advised on how they should refer to Palestine, both within and outside the geographical areas where they taught (i.e., Palestine? Israel? State of Palestine? Occupied Palestinian territories? Palestinian territory? West Bank? Jerusalem?) (see *Section 6.5.1*). While the extremity of this problem is specific to Palestine and similar contexts where the very existence of a place or identity is a contentious issue (Khalidi, 1997), an overall lack of essential information is evident in the narratives (see *Section 5.2.1* & *Section 5.2.2*). Moreover, they (the narratives) reflect a more pervasive problem in conflict-affected societies – outsiders who engage in education aid and exchange often struggle to properly understand sensitive topics in the host society (Burde et al., 2017; Kester, 2021; Millican et al., 2021; Milton, 2018a; Phipps, 2014).

As evidenced above and throughout *Chapter 5*, the visiting teachers did not receive adequate training in terms of the sociopolitical, cultural and educational context prior to their departure. Once on site, some (but not all) continued to struggle with locating resources such as colleagues and administrators who could act as cultural informants (Metro, 2014) or individuals who are cultural bridges between the visitors and the host communities (*Section 2.5.2*, *Section 5.4.2* & *Section 5.4.3*). Instead, some participants described sensing resentment or discontent from their local counterparts and had to rely on students for advice on sensitive issues. Although this research focuses on the visiting teachers' experiences and does not aim to confirm the aforementioned sentiments, it does explore the link between these uncomfortable relationships and the power imbalances that the respondents describe within and outside their institutions. For example, the teachers highlighted differences in compensation, in the allocation of resources and in employment status, while some narratives suggest that educators may have been imposed on their respective departments (*Section 5.4.1 & Section 5.4.2*). In addition, the teachers described having received preferential treatment in their daily lives in terms of basic human rights, more specifically regarding the freedom of movement[204] (e.g., during exchanges at checkpoints and being able to travel with relative ease).

Overall, the teachers describe feeling uncomfortable with their positionality or their position of privilege in Palestinian society. Some instructors discussed the donor-recipient relationship, which is complex in educational interventions in post-conflict and conflict settings (Hozić, 2014) (*Section 2.2.2*). They alluded to their roles in facilitating unilateral (rather than reciprocal) exchange programmes between the Global North and South, where the sponsoring or funding nation promotes their own language, culture and

[204] Article 13, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

pedagogical methods (Snow, 2008) (*Section 2.5.2*). According to the literature, these are often founded on a series of neocolonial assumptions, mainly that the English language is a necessity to thrive in a globalised world (Ives, 2009), that education is "wholly positive" in situations of conflict (Burde et al., 2017), especially Western forms of knowledge and approaches to pedagogy (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2015), and that people to people (P2P) exchange is good regardless of the quality of the exchange (Bettie, 2015). In other words, while many of the visiting teachers did not have structured projects (*Section 5.2.1*) nor clear objectives regarding the purpose of their exchanges (Bettie, 2015), one thing was clear – the sponsoring programmes assumed that just by being at the institution, the Western teachers would "make the institution better" (Marcus, 03). That being said, while open to criticism, the exchanges investigated in this research did address some long-standing issues in English language education in Palestine. For example, scholars have identified issues in language education in the oPt such as an overemphasis on rote learning and memorisation (Dajani & McLaughlin, 2009; Yamchi, 2006). In contrast, the visiting teachers often aimed to create "engaging" classrooms (Nicole, 09) that used teaching aids such as technology (Travis, 06) to provide for a more interactive student experience. Ultimately, while the teachers reported a tension between their teaching and learning preferences, and those of their local colleagues and students, they described negotiating classroom practices with their learners (*Section 5.3.3*) "to adapt to what's really going on" (Anne 05). This caused them (at times retrospectively) to reevaluate their ideas regarding English language education (see LTC, *Section 3.4.3*) in education aid and exchange contexts.

8.2.3 Theme II: Bearing witness

"I hate that I am not in a position to bring about real change there, but … what I can certainly do is bear witness to what I saw" - Simon, 10

The second theme relates to the act of bearing witness to the conflict in Palestine. Every participant directly commented on or alluded to their experience of witnessing and made connections to their standpoints as witnesses, particularly in relation to their national, ethnic and political identities prior to arriving in the oPt. Moreover, the complex relationship between witnessing and participating in a conflict came to the fore, with some of the visiting teachers drawing on the act of bearing witness as a coping mechanism to process difficult experiences both during their projects and after their departures. The respondents consistently expressed feelings of "shock" (Benjamin, 08 & Marcus, 03) and disbelief regarding the severity of the conflict and the challenges or "deprivations"

(Marcus, 03) that Palestinians faced on a daily basis. While this is in line with Kelly's (2023) research on common perceptions of outsiders who bear witness to the situation in Palestinian (*Section 2.5.2*), it is also a pillar on which the study of lived experience rests: the significant difference between experience as lived and experience as conceptualised (Bynum & Varpio, 2018) (*Section 4.2.1*).

Using the Heideggarian concepts of historicality (Laverty, 2003) or historicity (Dibley et al., 2020a) and thrownness as a point of departure, which refer to the person's background (historicality/historicity) and the historical moment in which they live (thrownness) (*Section 4.3.2*), the participants' understanding of the conflict in Palestine was heavily conditioned by their own life experiences and identities. For example, participants from the US made connections to the civil rights movement and slavery, participants from Ireland compared the occupation to Britain's colonisation of Ireland, and individual's from the UK referred to the oPt as an apartheid state (*Section 6.3.1*). Moreover, the manner in which they reported being treated by local collaborators and members of the community changed depending on these national affiliations and other ascribed identities: while some individuals were considered "a friend to Palestine" (Benjamin, 08) with a shared lived experience, others were asked to refrain from disclosing their nationalities upon arrival in the oPt or witnessed animosity based on the role that their countries of origin had (and continue to have) in the conflict in Palestine (*Section 6.3.1*). Considering that languages are often affiliated with nations (*Chapter 3*) and can be proxies for conflict (Abbas & Mendel, 2022; Suleiman, 2013), language teachers are particularly impacted by this facet of one's identity in conflict-affected settings. Looking at other types of identity, this study also found that individuals with strong political attachments to the oPt may find the experience more challenging than those who are less invested in "human rights, and all these kinds of things that are so important there" (Travis, 06). In addition, teachers who have a lived experience of discrimination may be deeply affected by their observations in the oPt (*Section 6.3.2*). These findings have many implications related to the unique challenges that teachers may encounter in Palestine based on their individual profiles and the manner in which they came to their projects (i.e., if they applied to go to the oPt specifically, meaning they were self-selected, or if they were assigned the project by a third party) (*Section 4.5.5*).

Throughout the interviews, the teachers described being first-hand witnesses (i.e., they were present during the event being witnessed) as well as secondary witnesses (i.e., they were informed about incidents that occurred in conversations with colleagues and students, at times during classes or in academic assignments) (*Section 6.4.1*). They found

both types of witnessing to be distressing and did not receive any psychosocial training to manage them. Moreover, there were moments when the line between being a first-hand witness and a participant in the conflict was blurred, especially for individuals who were mistakenly profiled as Palestinian (*Section 6.3.3*). For example, when subject to intimidation at checkpoints and other points of entry in Israel and the West Bank, the teachers described the challenges that they faced, yet consistently framed them as opportunities for learning that enabled them to better understand the Palestinian experience. In such instances, the act of bearing witness became a coping mechanism, allowing the teachers to "see the positive light" (Olivia, 02) of an otherwise unpleasant experience (*Section 6.4.2*). In fact, the research found that when confronted with a difficult situation, the participants reported reacting in one of two ways: the first was to see the act of bearing witness as a responsibility that would enable them (the teachers) to later recount incidents that occurred in the oPt. To illustrate this, Nicole (09) states how powerful it was to have "informed conversations … about what's really going on there … and challenge some … of the misconceptions" upon returning home (*Section 6.5.2*). This also gave the teachers a sense of purpose as some struggled with feelings of, as Kelly (2023) identifies, "uselessness" (p. 238) – being in the oPt made them "want to help" (Victoria, 07) but there was little they could do to "end the occupation" (Simon, 10). As opposed to bearing witness, the second coping mechanism that the teachers used was to withdraw or "shut down" (Olivia, 2) as much as possible during their teaching projects. Once they returned home, they avoided information about (Benjamin, 08) or conversations that concerned (Anne, 05) the oPt (*Section 6.5.2*).

Perhaps the most common reaction to bearing witness to the oPt was one of surprise or shock regarding the severity of the conflict and the situation of Palestinians (and also Israelis, as everyone who is involved in asymmetrical conflicts, even those in a position of power, face consequences – as Simon (10) says, nobody gets "a free pass") (*Section 6.3.1*). This reaction is well-established as part of the outsider experience in Kelly's (2023) research. She suggests that the desire to bear witness in the oPt is connected to Orientalism and the notion that Palestinians are not credible bearers of their own narrative (*Section 2.5.2*). Hence, witnesses from the West need to see the situation for themselves. This sheds light on the teachers' experiences and has implications for programme administrators and sponsors from the Global North: by discounting the Palestinian narrative, they may underestimate the severity of the conflict in the oPt and, as a consequence, send teachers abroad with little training. However, this study explores another plausible explanation: the disconnect between lived and conceptualised experience, which is the premise for pursuing qualitative research that uses hermeneutic

phenomenology as a methodology. In other words, this study suggests that living, volunteering and/or working as an outsider in a conflict setting is an experience that will inevitably be different from what one expects it to be; lived experience uncovers “taken-for-granted assumptions” (Kelleher Sohn, 2017) and calls into question “preconceived knowledge” (Peoples, 2020). In addition, the contentious nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (McDowell & Braniff, 2014) and, as explored in *Chapter 2*, a lack of clarity in terms of how conflict is understood (both in academic and lay discourse) (*Section 2.2.1*), further obfuscate and/or widen the gap between lived and conceptualised experiences in conflict settings.

8.2.4 Theme III: English in the Palestinian context or teaching English under occupation

“I think the power of learning a foreign language, and a global language like English, is that they have that ability to express their feelings … to access other opportunities and resources, to connect to the outside world. I think [English is] a big deal for Palestinians … to not just express themselves, but also as self-preservation.” - Olivia, 02

The third theme focuses on the role of English in the Palestinian context and explores issues in English language education as identified by the study participants. In contrast to the importance given to nationality in theme II, the teachers suggest that English is not closely tied to any one national culture but is instead viewed as an international language that is also used as a lingua franca between Hebrew and Arabic speakers in the oPt (Amara, 2003) (*Section 3.5.3*). Moreover, the participants believe that English unlocks a number of educational and professional opportunities for Palestinians, both at home and abroad. In addition to its pragmatic uses, English was depicted as an important tool for self-representation: the teachers reported that their Palestinian students and colleagues used the language to communicate their narratives of displacement and occupation to the global community. Furthermore, while not always specific to teaching English (but applicable to education in general), a number of cultural, political and/or economic issues were identified by the participants that made their teaching projects challenging. Despite the difficulties that they encountered, almost all of the respondents identified their teaching experience in the oPt as the most significant of their professional lives.

In terms of English being conceptualised as an international language, the visiting teachers believed that their students and colleagues had positive rather than negative connotations of the English language. For example, they did not report encountering Palestinians who associated the language with colonialism and/or inner circle nations

(Kachru, 1988) such as the US and Britain (*Section 3.5.1 & Section 7.2.1*). Rather, they perceived English to be a "language of wider communication" (LWC) in the Palestinian context (Simon, 10). The participants also suggested that English may (at times) act as a lingua franca between Israelis and Palestinians in the oPt. This supports Amara's (2003) opinion: he argues that English has historically been perceived as a "neutral" language, or a lingua franca for Israelis and Palestinians who do not speak each other's languages (p. 220). While English (like all languages) is not neutral (Khawaja et al., 2021), nor is teaching English (or any other subject) a technical, apolitical activity (Gagnon et al., 2014; Kester, 2021; Scott-Smith, 2008; van Ommering, 2020), both the context of ethno-linguistic conflict (which juxtaposes Arabic and Hebrew with English) and the language's global reach (Crystal, 2012; Erling, 2017) make English the preferred foreign language in the oPt and the region.

English skills are desirable for a number of reasons. The participants highlighted the pragmatic value of the language in the oPt, particularly the access that it grants to academic and professional opportunities at home (*Section 7.2.1*) and abroad (i.e., "if they choose to leave, if they are forced to leave") (Simon, 10). While English is very much a necessity in the Palestinian context, particularly as it is a mandatory subject at nearly all stages of education (and arguably a gatekeeper for accessing university) (see *tawjihi* in *Section 3.5.3*), it also enables Palestinians to "get out" (Olivia, 02) or "escape" (Travis, 06) (e.g., through foreign scholarships and employment) despite restrictions on movement or enforced immobility (Imperiale et al., 2017) (*Section 7.2.3 & Section 7.3.1*). Furthermore, the respondents repeatedly emphasised the importance of English as a tool for self-representation and self-preservation. For example, they observed how their students used English "as a conduit" (Olivia, 02) to communicate with the international community about "their situation as a young person in a nation that was under occupation" (Victoria, 07). Similarly, the teachers' Palestinian colleagues were depicted as eager "to let people know … that they're good people", using English to rectify stereotypes and correct misinformation "in a worldwide context" (Anne, 05). By being able to tell their stories in English (which is an integral part of inviting one to bear witness to the situation in Palestine or *theme II*), they also have greater control over their narrative (Said, 1983), which arguably contributes to the community's survival (*Section 2.5.2*)[205].

[205] As discussed in *Section 7.2.3*, education has traditionally enabled Palestinians to thrive in situations of displacement: they have remained academically and professionally competitive in international settings, and resisted the occupation by maintaining a strong sense of Palestinian identity (Alzaroo & Hunt, 2003) (*Section 3.3.3*). This paragraph suggests that English language education may have a similar place in Palestinian society: on one hand, English is "a key part of whatever it means to be educated in the contemporary world" (Simon, 10), and on the other, it enables Palestinians to express their identities and share their narratives

The teachers identified a number of challenges teaching English in the Palestinian context. Some were directly related to the occupation, such as the restriction of movement on entering and leaving the oPt, which was seen as a key factor that distinguished the participants' experiences in Palestine from other teaching projects. For example, as students were less likely to go abroad, English did not have the same "practical value" (Marcus, 03) and students had very few opportunities "to use everyday ordinary English" (Victoria, 07). Yamchi's research (2006), which claims that Palestinians are seldom able to use English "in real life", reflects this observation (p. 863) (*Section 7.2.2*). Accordingly, student motivation was likely impacted (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Norton & Mckinney, 2011; Papi & Hiver, 2020) (*Section 3.3.2*), as was course or module content (i.e., specifically what students wanted to know and learn) (*Section 7.2.2*). Moreover, due to the isolation that Palestinians experience from the international community, the teachers noticed that very few educators from abroad were on-site in the oPt (Simon, 10), which impacted the quality of teaching and/or the expertise on the ground (Olivia, 02), diminished the local teachers and students' exposure to diverse teaching styles (Travis, 06), and reduced the likelihood that Palestinians could spontaneously practise English with interlocutors from around the world (i.e., not just native speakers, but with any of the English-users represented in Kachru's (1988) circles) (*Section 3.5.1*). Another issue related to the sociopolitical environment was interrupted education stemming from student arrests, campus closures and/or strikes, which resulted in significant gaps in education, reduced contact hours and disrupted academic routines (Dörnyei, 2020) (*Section 7.3.2.1*). Culturally speaking (and as discussed in *theme I*), teaching and assessment styles that promoted rote-learning and memorisation were often utilised by local colleagues in the oPt (*Section 3.5.3*, *Section 5.3.3* & *Section 8.2.2*), plagiarism was tolerated (*Section 7.3.4*), and content was not fit for purpose (*Section 7.3.2.3*). Furthermore, the teachers found it difficult to navigate complex social relationships within Palestinian institutions which they attributed at least partially to indirect communication styles and *wasta*, or the need to have connections (*Section 7.3.4*). Despite the various challenges, the participants referred to their teaching experiences in Palestine as the most significant of their lives, from being "the first real big impact" they had ever had (Patricia, 04) to the "capstone" of their careers (Simon, 10). However, their teaching projects, which were perceived as being high impact, weren't without risk – the teachers' expectations for themselves were also high, with some feeling that their work as an English teacher was insignificant or trivial in the context of conflict (*Section 5.3.2* & *Section 7.3.3*).

8.3 Recommendations

8.3.1 Introduction

Much like situations of conflict, every teaching project is unique depending on its location (i.e., the institution, city or town) and timeframe (i.e., the period during which the experience was undertaken and any significant sociopolitical events that may have occurred). In addition, the individual teacher's identity influences how they experience their teaching projects and how others (i.e., local colleagues, students and the greater host community) experience and interact with them. Furthermore, the teacher's political position and their ideas about teaching and learning in the context of conflict impact how and what they teach (i.e., LTI & LTC, *Section 3.4.3*). That being said, the findings summarised in *Section 8.2* have resulted in recommendations that are organised into three broad categories: (I) fostering equitable exchanges, (II) providing adequate sociopolitical, educational, cultural and psychosocial training, and (III) generating support structures and offering guidance.

8.3.2 Recommendation I: Foster equitable exchanges

The participants' experiences were greatly impacted by their interactions with local colleagues and students (i.e., Anne (05) says that a group of colleagues "changed my world completely") (*Section 5.4.2*), yet the relationships between them were often uncomfortable. This study explores the potential link between difficult working relationships and the inequalities that are built into educational exchanges in the oPt. While some asymmetries are inevitable, others can be ameliorated. Thus, as a first recommendation, administrators and facilitators should try to foster more equitable aid and exchange programmes. In practice, local collaborators should be involved from the earliest stages of programme ideation and planning (i.e., preferably those who will be involved in the exchange on a day-to-day basis rather than a designated point person). It is the host community's administrative and academic staff who best understand their own needs and the needs of their institutions (i.e., be it training, teaching, development of curricula and/or collaborating on research). In other words, if the host community drives the design of the project, it will serve them better. This approach may also shift the hosts' perception of the teaching projects, from being an imposition or an additional task for local teachers to manage (for which there is no financial gain or benefit), to being an opportunity for delegating tasks and responsibilities that go beyond the institutions' capacity as a result of an ongoing or recent conflict (i.e., discrediting the notion that the

visiting teacher's presence "makes their job harder") (Travis, 06). Moreover, as students were essential to the teachers' success (*Section 5.4.3*), they could advise on extracurricular activities during the planning stage or formally assist the teachers once they arrive (i.e., as a teaching assistant). By formalising and consequently valorising the roles of mentors and cultural informants (Metro, 2014), those involved may feel more comfortable with the terms of the exchange. Furthermore, if the objectives of the exchange are agreed upon in advance, the project will naturally take shape and have some structure, although deviations are to be expected. Above all, this approach recognises the value of local staff and student knowledge (of their sociopolitical/sociocultural context and beyond), reducing the extent to which the exchange is driven (often unknowingly) by neocolonial assumptions. In short, the goal is to negotiate the terms of the projects in advance, rather than impose them (or to neglect establishing them altogether).

8.3.3 Recommendation II: Provide adequate sociopolitical, educational, cultural and psychosocial training

Gaps in sociopolitical, educational, cultural and psychosocial training were one of the most pronounced findings of this study. While people to people (P2P) public diplomacy initiatives intentionally exclude foreign policy briefings to provide for more "genuine" or "sincere" exchanges (Bettie, 2015, p. 359), most teachers did not feel confident in their teaching assignments with the training they had received. In addition, educational practices in Palestine were not typically discussed pre-departure, and limited cultural information was given. Moreover, strategies for managing difficult conversations and situations, such as trauma that students discuss in class or in assignments, were not specified. These observations lead to the second recommendation: programme sponsors should provide adequate country-specific training for teachers who are going abroad to undertake projects in conflict-affected settings.

While recipients of training do not need to subscribe to the foreign policy positions of their sponsoring (often governmental) organisations, it is helpful to understand these positions as the host community may initiate conversations about them and/or treat the teachers as if they endorse such positions (as evidenced in *Chapter 6*). Regarding educational training, basic information about common modes of teaching and learning would be useful (i.e., such as the *tawjihi* and assessment in the Palestinian context, which has conditioned teachers and learners), as would information about hierarchy within institutions, and gender dynamics in classroom and office spaces. In terms of cultural practices and

identity, key historical events and their significance to the host society should be mentioned to participants as they are usually referenced (i.e., such as Nakba or the Right of Return in the Palestinian context). Moreover, cultural attitudes relating to religion, the LGBTQI+ community, and constructions of race and ethnicity should be discussed, as relevant. Finally, strategies for facing conflict-related trauma as first-hand and secondary witnesses should be given to the instructors (i.e., perhaps something similar to psychological first aid), or at the very least, the types of issues that visiting teachers are likely to encounter should be previewed to set expectations.

At first glance, such extensive training may seem unreasonable. However, it does not need to be excessive in terms of time and financial resources. In addition, training pre-departure could be largely facilitated by past teachers and may be a welcomed opportunity for reflection and debriefing (and could be a remedy for the issues discussed in *Section 6.5.1: Ignoring witness accounts*). Upon arrival, local staff and students may appreciate being able to share their knowledge and experience with the visiting instructor, especially if it is framed as an integral part of carrying out the projects that they had helped design. In any case, providing adequate training is a question of ethics: it is essential for the physical safety and emotional well-being of the visiting teachers (i.e., it is unacceptable that teachers go to a conflict setting without knowing how to refer to a place – particularly in the Palestinian context where place names are deeply significant – or that they are unsure about what topics are considered appropriate for classroom discussion). Moreover, considering that research overwhelmingly supports the idea that the sociopolitical context should be acknowledged (rather than ignored) in education settings (Davies, 2017; Kester; 2021; Phipps, 2014), and accordingly, that educational experiences should be grounded in the lived experiences of the students (Kester, 2021; Millican et al., 2021), visiting teachers need to have knowledge about the local context. Furthermore, cultural knowledge empowers teachers to not only teach with greater confidence, but to negotiate their identities in more advantageous ways within the host community (although, as discussed in *Section 6.3.3,* this is true for some identities, but not others). At times, merely reminding teachers of their roles (in this case, as English language teachers) and limitations (e.g., they cannot stop the occupation) can be helpful. That being said, one of hermeneutic phenomenology's founding principles, that experience as lived is different from experience as conceptualised, reminds us that training will always be lacking and cannot be a substitute for the knowledge acquired through lived experience, particularly lived experience in the Palestinian context where information may be less accessible for reasons previously discussed (*Section 2.5.2*) (i.e., the Palestinian narrative is often discredited (Kelly, 2023) and the contentious nature of

the conflict (McDowell & Braniff, 2014) discourages individuals from openly expressing their views on it).

8.3.4 Recommendation III: Generate support structures and offer guidance

Multiple respondents expressed not feeling supported by their sponsoring programmes, host institutions and/or local colleagues (as explored in *Recommendation I*). This was partially attributed to deficits in training (as discussed in *Recommendation II*), but also to perceived disinterest, indifference or a lack of empathy in response to the participants' encounters with critical incidents and/or challenges in their projects (*Section 5.2.1* & *Section 5.2.2* & *Section 6.5.1*). In fact, an absence of support and guidance was a significant barrier in some of the teachers' personal and professional lives while in Palestine, particularly for individuals who felt isolated (e.g., Marcus (03) comments "I didn't really have … people who were doing the same thing as me", while Anne (05) says "I was not introduced to anyone" and "forgotten about" following her arrival). Furthermore, as noted in *Section 6.6.3*, the teachers who described working closely with others or who had a more extensive support network (i.e., they had a partner or spouse accompany them or formed connections in the community) reported having an overall more positive experience (e.g., (Nicole (09) states that her programme connected her with other teachers and individuals in the community, which was "huge for the experience and was really valuable to me"). Therefore, the third and final recommendation is to help teachers generate support structures on the ground, and to offer guidance throughout the various stages of a project (i.e., before, during and after).

While programme administrators are not tasked with or qualified to offer psychological care (but should be ready to direct individuals to psychological resources, as necessary), providing basic support to the participating teachers should be conceptualised as an essential task and responsibility (i.e., similar to any other mentor-mentee relationship). Programme sponsors can advise teachers on frequently reported challenges prior to departure or upon arrival (such as navigating one's positionality, witnessing the occupation, and/or experiencing the project in a polarised fashion) (*Chapter 6* & *Section 7.3.3*). They should also create opportunities for participants to discuss concerns or discomfort without fear of repercussion (i.e., teachers may be hesitant to express discontent if they believe that recounting difficult experiences will be interpreted as a lack of resilience by the sponsoring programme or institution) (see *Section 3.4.2* for a discussion on inherent versus cultivated resilience). Moreover, considering that the teachers' identities (i.e., related to age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity-race, etc.),

previous lived experiences (i.e., of discrimination) and/or political opinions greatly impact their experience in the oPt, recognising the diversity of the teachers is important when providing support. In addition, programme administrators should notice if a teacher applied to go to Palestine (i.e., was self-selected) or if they were assigned the project by a programme sponsor as this may have implications (e.g., a self-selected candidate may be more informed, yet also more (or less) emotionally triggered by the conflict, while a non self-selected person may lack historical or cultural knowledge, yet be less (or more) susceptible to polarised sociopolitical environments) (*Section 6.3.2*).

In terms of guidance, programme administrators can be helpful in two different ways. The first is to provide advice on the teaching projects using the knowledge that they have acquired from past teachers. For example, Marcus (03) describes declining modifications to his teaching project that would have made it more manageable in order to experience life in Palestine as if he were a "local member of staff" *(Section 6.4.2*). This is a common approach taken by newly arrived teachers (perhaps as they struggle with their positionality), yet it may result in projects that are excessively difficult in the long term. Programme administrators could identify these types of patterns and inform incoming participants in order to guide their choices. The second way is to help build the teachers' network, directing them to resources in the local community based on their interests early in their experiences. For example, some participants mentioned volunteer experiences as being important venues for connecting with others, especially if their teaching assignments were less than ideal. Victoria (07) comments:

> … it [volunteering] was great for me to get involved in the community in a different aspect … in a foreign country, you just need that togetherness, you just need to feel like you're a part of something. And so that gave me another outlet for that connectedness.

Other participants talked about missing physical activity, which helps to both manage stress and to connect with others. Marcus (03) says:

> I found it quite difficult to play sports … so maybe I just didn't meet the right people. But so normally I enjoy playing football and tennis and stuff and it felt like there wasn't really the facilities and infrastructure to their sport, in a way that I experienced in other places.

While there may be a reduced offering of recreational activities in conflict settings, those that are available may be very difficult for newly arrived teachers to learn about. Thus, programme sponsors can assist teachers to access existing networks of internationals and locals for hobbies, sport, language classes and volunteer activities. In short, those who are more connected in the community do better. If these connections can be made early on in a variety of different ways, the teacher may be better equipped to cope with difficult experiences and may be able to create multiple support systems.

8.3.5 Final thoughts on recommendations

Teaching in the Palestinian context is a challenging experience, and to a certain extent, the teachers' ability to cope with it may be a reflection of how the sponsoring programmes prepare and support their educators. This study argues that teachers require different levels and types of support depending on their personal and professional backgrounds. It also maintains that it is the responsibility of the programme sponsors to ensure that reasonable steps have been taken to foster equitable exchanges, in addition to providing teachers with adequate training, support and guidance. The recommendations identified in this study coincide with Levi et al.'s (2023) research on indicators of teacher success (discussed in *Section 3.4.1*), which outlines five key areas that impact the teachers' personal well-being and professional efficacy: 1) reflexive practice, 2) support, 3) teacher beliefs and identities, 4) pedagogy and content knowledge, and 5) knowledge of the sociocultural context. In the participants' narratives, the importance of debriefing as a form of reflexive practice emerges, as does the need for support and guidance. Moreover, teacher beliefs and identities were central to the teachers' experiences in the oPt, as was their knowledge of (and lack thereof) the sociocultural context. While a study on English language teachers in situations of conflict may be expected to render recommendations that are more specific to language teaching (or critical pedagogy and conflict-sensitive education as previewed in *Section 2.3.3*), this is simply not what emerged from the data. The findings and corresponding recommendations reflect the content of the phenomenological interviews, which are intended to direct the researcher to what is significant about the experience for those who lived it (*Section 4.4.2*).

8.4 Additional contributions

This project adhered to the tenets of hermeneutic phenomenology without being constrained by them [206]. The "leeway" (Smythe et al., 2007, p. 1391) that this approach provided was necessary as applying hermeneutic phenomenology as philosophy and methodology to situations of conflict required the researcher to re-conceptualise certain notions. For example, in phenomenology, the researcher aims to isolate what is essential rather than incidental to an experience (*Section 4.4.1*). In the context of the research participants, this would be that which distinguishes the English language teachers' experience in the oPt from other types of professional or teaching experiences and/or locations. However, as the respondents were invited to speak freely about their experiences (*Section 4.5.6*), that which was incidental (i.e., the context of conflict) became the focal point of most interviews. Although many of the findings and recommendations made could be applied to foreign workers in Palestine in general, it is the setting (the oPt) which distinguishes the experience under investigation (teaching English in the oPt) from other experiences. Thus, the interplay between incidental and essential themes[207] was unexpectedly complex (i.e., arguably, that which was incidental became essential in this particular study). When undertaking phenomenological research in conflict and post-conflict settings, future studies will need to adapt more traditional understandings of essential (i.e., "what something is, and without which it would no longer be what it is") (van Manen, 2016, p. xv) and incidental characteristics of experience (in *Section 4.2.1*) to suit the context, as this project has done.

This study presents an extensive overview of how conflict and occupation is defined in both lay and academic discourses (*Chapter 2*). Having originally set out to clearly define the perimeters of my own research, I came to understand that there is no clear definition or classification of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (nor any other conflict). Instead, labelling conflict is often a strategic rather than descriptive endeavour. Moreover, it is one's perception of a conflict (in this case, that of the sponsoring organisations/governments and their programme participants) that significantly impacts how interventions are carried out in conflict-affected settings (i.e., the perception dictates where, when and how an intervention takes place and by whom). While this raises more questions than it answers, I believe that the level of ambiguity regarding situations of conflict is immense and that the

[206] Smythe et al. (2007) describe this process through Gadamer's analogy: "Gadamer talked of the play essential to the wheel of a bicycle. If the nut is screwed too tight the wheel cannot turn, yet if too loose there is danger that the wheel will fall off. In the leeway, the space between structure and freedom, there is room to play, to respond to the unrest and think again" (p. 1391)

[207] As Smythe et al. (2007) argue, themes "are not necessarily 'the same thing' said again and again, but rather an understanding we have seen something that matters significantly, something that we wish to point the reader to" (p. 1392)

work of academics and practitioners may also unintentionally draw on poorly interrogated assumptions to describe conflict. While this work does not establish precise terms (or rectify unsuitable terms) to describe the situation in Palestine, it draws attention to this oversight.

In education aid and exchange programmes from the Global North to the Global South, the recipients and/or the host communities (i.e., in this case, Palestinian institutions, local academic and administrative staff, students, etc.) are often portrayed as disempowered. For example, Marcus (03) and Olivia (02) allude to how their colleagues and students were fatigued by the proliferation of capacity-building projects in the oPt (*Section 5.3.2*), while *Chapter 5* makes the connection between deficits in training and the neocolonial assumptions that privilege Western knowledge (i.e., the idea that the presence of the Western teacher will improve the institution). However, this study both intentionally and unintentionally inverts the positionality of those who are considered empowered and disempowered in an exchange. Intentionally, the research set out to better understand the experiences of a privileged (and perhaps for this reason, overlooked) community: inner-circle or native speaker English language educators from the Global North who taught abroad (mostly) in Palestinian universities[208]. This shifted the research focus away from those who receive aid and/or the impact that aid has on communities, to the individuals who distribute it. Unintentionally, the data found that all of the participants involved in asymmetrical exchanges are disempowered, even those who are in a position of power. This highlights the consequences of inequitable exchanges for all involved and reminds us that being ethical means not only minding the recipients of aid, but also supporting the practitioners.

8.5 Limitations

While it is a natural limitation of the research question, which focuses exclusively on the lived experiences of the visiting teachers, the perspectives of the host community are ultimately unknown and would complement this work, shedding light on a number of issues that are (at the moment) understood exclusively through the perspectives of the participants. Thus, the recommendations made in *Section 8.3* are a point of departure that should be modified with input from local administrators and faculty (as suggested below in

[208] The researcher's (2021) ethics application states, "As little is known about the lived experiences of English language teachers in the Palestinian territories, this study will actually help us to better understand if this particular group is vulnerable, and in doing so, what recommendations can be made to mitigate potential risks to this population" (p. 9)

Section 8.6). For example, from the host community's perspective, were the relationships with the visiting teachers experienced as uncomfortable, and if so, why? Did the exchange participants from abroad make their "job harder"? Do they perceive the inequalities and power imbalances that this dissertation identifies, and/or do they feel that the visiting teachers adequately grasped the sociocultural/sociopolitical context?

The frequency with which the visiting teachers refer to difficult working relationships led the researcher to believe that something was there that required investigation, but the local perspective is necessary to better understand what *that something* is in a more definite manner. This limitation also applies to the point of view of the programme sponsors and/or administrators. While this project identifies a number of deficiencies in training, support and guidance as recounted by the participants, are there pragmatic and/or strategic reasons as to why certain types of training or support are not in place? Does their approach, which appears to minimise rather than engage the context of conflict, enable these exchanges to take place? As Lazzarini (2021) suggests in relation to Gaza in *Section 2.2.2*, is there a tendency to approach the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with "post-conflict response[s]" or interventions without acknowledging the root causes of the conflict itself?

The context of conflict resulted in additional limitations. As repeatedly mentioned (*Section 2.2.1, Section 2.2.2 & Section 2.3.2*), every situation of conflict is different and it is difficult to make generalisations from one study and apply them broadly (i.e., whether it is in relation to the literature used to form *Chapter 2* and *Chapter 3* of this dissertation, or when putting the recommendations made in *Section 8.3* into practice). Nonetheless, by conceptualising conflict as a continuum rather than attempting to identify different types of conflict and their corresponding responses (*Section 2.2.3*), the observations made in this dissertation may speak to a variety of settings, from low to high intensity conflicts and occupations, to those of a protracted or intractable nature. Finally, considering that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is contentious, it is possible that some participants were not as candid as they may have been if discussing a less controversial topic. This is above all true for participants from the US, where taking public positions on the conflict (particularly after 7th October 2023 but also before) can have repercussions, especially for academics.

8.6 Future research

The teachers who were interviewed for this study undertook their teaching projects in the oPt from 2010-2020, therefore their experience either concluded prior to COVID-19 or

came to a conclusion following a COVID-19 evacuation of exchange participants residing in Palestine. Similar to most places, remote or distance learning and online exchanges in the oPt have become more frequent since then – they are an enormous resource for communities in situations of conflict. Thus, further research in this area is merited. In particular, it would be useful to better understand the experiences of individuals carrying out people to people (P2P) public diplomacy initiatives when the so-called “last three feet" (Nye, 2004, p. 142) is a virtual space (*Section 2.5.4*). Moreover, considering that knowledge acquisition about the sociocultural/sociopolitical environment is perhaps the most significant challenge for visiting educators, and that training is often lacking in this area, what happens once the teacher or exchange participant no longer has the lived experience of the place? Framing this inquiry in phenomenological philosophy, we know that there is a gap between experience as lived and experience as conceptualised – how are P2P initiatives affected if this gap is never filled?

In addition, the study participants mentioned a number of issues in relation to gender, often making observations that were contradictory with one another. For example, comments about differences in motivation, participation and attendance between male and female students were made, as were comments about male and female interactions in the classroom (e.g., that men were dismissive of women during discussions, that it was a challenge to get different genders to work together, and that women tended to be more engaged and/or vocal in the classroom). Moreover, the visiting teachers reported a number of experiences related to their genders, particularly as outsiders (i.e., a female from abroad reported being positioned differently than Palestinian females in the oPt). In addition, in situations of conflict, the issues that teachers and students face are different based on their gender, some contradictory to what an outsider may expect (e.g., travelling to university in the oPt may be safer for women than men as young men are stopped at checkpoints and arrested more frequently). Thus, while not dealt with in this dissertation due to restrictions on length, how gender intersects with the topics discussed should be explored further.

While briefly mentioned in this dissertation, further inquiry should be made into three additional areas. The first is how the English language may contribute to inequalities between Israelis and Palestinians, particularly in its use as a lingua franca as access to English language resources is unbalanced between the communities (*Section 3.5.3*). The second and third are continuations of this work: what are the lived experiences of administrators organising P2P programmes, and perhaps more importantly, what are the

lived experiences of the host communities in P2P educational exchanges, particularly the teachers and administrators who receive visiting teachers?

8.7 Conclusion

The final chapter of this dissertation summarised the study's findings, which are the rationale for the recommendations. It argues that in order to better support educators and consequently improve the quality of P2P interventions, programme sponsors need to foster equitable exchanges, while guaranteeing adequate training, support and guidance for the participant-teachers. In addition, suggestions for future areas of research are provided, while the limitations of this work are acknowledged. This study's contribution to knowledge is not limited to its findings, but can also be seen in its methodological approach (i.e., applying hermeneutic phenomenology to situations of conflict) and in its dialogue with existing literature (i.e., problematising academic and lay discourses of conflict). As a concluding remark, this project conveys the importance of doing lived experience research in education, as so much of what contributes to productive teaching and learning environments falls outside easily identifiable categories and attempts to measure them. Moreover, this work does not aim to diminish the importance of educational diplomacy – it intends to do the opposite, believing that educational diplomacy is a powerful tool, particularly when carried out ethically and in a way that empowers all who are involved.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Informed consent

Dublin City University
Informed Consent

I. Research Study Title

The Lived Experiences of English Language Teachers in Conflict and Post-Conflict Settings: A Study of the Palestinian Context

Principal Investigator:

Lacie Raymond (Lacie.Raymond2@mail.dcu.ie), School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies (SALIS), Dublin City University

Supervisors:

Prof. Jennifer Bruen, School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies (SALIS), Dublin City University

Dr. Agnès Maillot, School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies (SALIS), Dublin City University

Data Controller:

Martin Ward, Data Protection Unit, Dublin City University

Funded by:

School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies (SALIS), Dublin City University
Irish Research Council

II. Purpose of the research

This research aims to better understand the experiences of English language teachers who have worked abroad with adult learners in (post-)conflict settings, specifically in Palestine.

>> *Participant*: Please complete the following
(circle yes/no, or put an “x” under yes/no)

III. Confirmation of requirements in the Plain Language Statement

I have read the Plain Language Statement	Yes	No
I understand the information provided	Yes	No
I understand the information provided in relation to data protection	Yes	No
I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to discuss this study	Yes	No
I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions	Yes	No
I am aware that my interview will be recorded (audio only with Zoom or Signal)	Yes	No

IV. Confirmation that participation is voluntary

I understand that my participation is voluntary	Yes	No
I understand that I am not obligated to share information that I do not feel comfortable discussing and I can skip topics	Yes	No
I know that I can withdraw from the study at any time	Yes	No

V. Confirmation of arrangements made to protect confidentiality

I am aware of the precautions that the researcher is taking to keep my data confidential (i.e., pseudonyms, password protection, substituting institution names, places, timelines with a code, etc.)	Yes	No
I understand that confidentiality has limits dictated by the law (i.e., data is subject to subpoena, freedom of information claim or mandated reporting, etc.)	Yes	No
Although all identifying information will be removed from the data to the best of the researcher's ability, I know that this research involves a small sample, making anonymity more difficult to maintain	Yes	No

VI. Confirmation of arrangements made to retain / dispose of data

I understand why my data is being collected and retained	Yes	No
I am aware of how the data will be retained (i.e., it will not leave the EEA, nor be shared with third parties, etc.)	Yes	No

I am aware that my data will be destroyed after 5 years following the completion of the PhD (anticipated date of data destruction: 2029)	Yes	No

VII. Signature

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researcher, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project:

Participant Signature: _____
(Signature)

Participant Name: _____
(Block capital letters)

Witness: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B: Plain language statement

Dublin City University

Plain Language Statement

I. Introduction to the Study

This study is entitled: The Lived Experiences of English Language Teachers in Conflict and Post-Conflict Settings: A Study of the Palestinian Context

It aims to better understand the experiences of English language teachers who have worked abroad with adult learners in (post-)conflict settings, specifically in Palestine.

The research is part of a PhD degree funded by the School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies at Dublin City University and the Irish Research Council.

Investigator: Lacie Raymond (Lacie.Raymond2@mail.dcu.ie), School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies, Dublin City University, Dublin 9

Supervisors: Prof. Jennifer Bruen and Dr. Agnès Maillot

II. What does my involvement in the study require?

Participants will be asked to describe their experience of being an English language teacher abroad in Palestine, and they will be invited to share their reflections on those experiences. This conversation will take place during an online interview of 60 to 90 minutes in length using Zoom or Signal. In order for the researcher to consult the data after the interview, it will be recorded (audio only) and transcribed.

III. What will happen to my data?

The data generated from the interviews will be stored for 5 years after completion of the PhD. As the project is expected to conclude in 2024, this means that the data will be destroyed in 2029. Prior to this date, it will be stored on a password protected Dublin City University Google Drive which can only be accessed through a 2-step verification process.

IV. How is my data managed in terms of confidentiality?

Your data will only be accessed by the primary investigators (i.e., Lacie Raymond and two doctoral supervisors), and will be kept as anonymous as possible. Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym prior to their interview, and all data will be stored and referenced using this pseudonym.

Moreover, every precaution will be taken to ensure that the content of your contribution remains confidential. Therefore, all references to institutions, locations, timelines or other

information that could potentially reveal your identity will be substituted with a code in order to protect your anonymity.

Please note that this study will have between 12-15 participants. With a small sample it can be difficult to guarantee the same level of anonymity that participants in a larger study would have. However, the researcher is sensitive to this, and as stated above, will remove any information that they consider to be identifying during the dissemination stage of the project (e.g., in the dissertation or at a conference presentation).

That being said, confidentiality does have limits and can only be protected within the limitations of the law (i.e., it is possible for data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information claim or mandated reporting by some professions).

V. What are the risks of taking part in this study?

Teaching in a (post-)conflict zone may have been a challenging experience for you. Please only share what you are comfortable talking about. You will not be asked to talk specifically about an incident that you consider to be difficult or traumatic (unless you would like to), but you may find that speaking about your time in Palestine brings back strong emotions or feelings. Therefore, this could be a potentially triggering experience.

Participants are welcome to stop the interview and withdraw their participation at any time. In doing so, their data will be deleted and will not be used in the study. Participants are also encouraged to seek mental health services in their community if they find that talking about their experience is overwhelming.

VI. What are the direct or indirect benefits of taking part in this study?

By sharing your story, you will contribute to a better understanding of the English language teacher experience in Palestine. In doing so, future teachers in (post-)conflict zones will be better prepared, supported and overall more successful in achieving their personal and pedagogical goals. Ultimately, students in the communities with whom you work(ed) will also be better served by more effective teachers and teaching. Personally, you may even find that telling your story is in itself a powerful act.

VII. Statement of voluntary involvement in the Study

Involvement in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from it at any point.

VIII. Privacy Notice

The research data will inform a PhD research project culminating in a dissertation that will be accessible to the public free of charge. Study participants will be informed once this document is available. The data may also be presented publicly during conferences and/or in academic journals.

The only data that will be collected and connected to your pseudonym is your age range (e.g., 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-64, 65+), career level (e.g., entry-level, mid-level, retired,

etc.), gender (if you wish to disclose this), and the content of the interviews, which will broadly ask about your experience.

As previously mentioned, your data will be held for a period of 5 years following the completion of the PhD. Data will not be shared with any third parties, nor will it be transferred outside the EEA (European Economic Area). You also have the right to access your data by emailing the primary investigator (Lacie.Raymond2@mail.dcu.ie). If you choose to withdraw from the study, your data will be deleted.

Please note that the Data Controller for Dublin City University is Martin Ward, who can be contacted by email at data.protection@dcu.ie, or by telephone at +353 (01) 7005118/ 7008257. You also have the right to lodge a complaint with the Irish Data Protection Commission.

IX. Notice from the University

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000, e-mail rec@dcu.ie

Appendix C: Study advertisement

English Language Teachers in Palestine

Nabil Anani, In Pursuit of Utopia #7 (2020), Zawyeh Gallery, Ramallah

Were you an English language teacher who came from abroad to work with adult learners in Palestine? If so, you are invited to participate in a study that will be taking place in Spring 2023.

The study is designed to explore the lived experiences of English language teachers who have worked abroad in (post-)conflict settings, and in particular, Palestine. While many English language instructors teach in (post-)conflict contexts, very little is known about their personal and professional journeys. By learning more about your experience, we can help future teachers to be better prepared, supported and overall more successful when working in these unique environments. In doing so, the communities who experience ongoing or recent conflict will also benefit from more effective teaching.

Please contact Lacie Raymond at Lacie.Raymond2@mail.dcu.ie for further information.

This study is part of a doctoral research project funded by the School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies (SALIS) at Dublin City University and the Irish Research Council.

DCU
Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University

IRISH RESEARCH COUNCIL
An Chomhairle um Thaighde in Éirinn

Appendix D: Interview guide

I. Interview questions

In order to generate and collect teacher narratives that are as self-directed as possible, the interview will focus one main question:

1. Can you describe your personal experience as an English language teacher in Palestine?

II. Examples of guiding questions / probes

1. Why is that significant to you?
2. Why do you think that happened? What do you think was going on there?
3. Could you tell me more about... ?
4. How did you feel about that?
5. Do you know why / can you explain why you felt like that? (Dibley et al., 143)
6. What were you thinking about when that happened? (Dibley et al., 99)
7. What do you make of it looking back now?
8. Could you fill in the details about…? (Dibley et al., 99)
9. Where was that?
10. Did that, or something similar to that, happen again?

III. Examples of additional questions

To be used if the participant finds it difficult to generate a narrative

1. Do you want to talk about the experience of teaching in Palestine, maybe starting from before your departure?
    a. How did you come to teach in Palestine?
    b. Did you feel prepared to teach in a (post-)conflict setting such as Palestine?
    c. What was it like for you when you arrived?
    d. What training did you receive?

2. Tell me what a normal (typical) day was like for you as a teacher in Palestine? (Dibley et al., 99)

3. What was teaching in Palestine like in comparison to your other experiences of teaching English abroad (or at home)?

VI. Debriefing materials

1. How did you feel about sharing your experience with me?

    a. Did you feel comfortable?
    b. Did you feel upset or overwhelmed at any point during our interview?

        If the participant responds that they did feel quite upset or overwhelmed, I will reiterate the importance of seeking mental health support in their community

2. How would you rate the experience of being interviewed?

    a. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 = negative experience, 10 = positive experience)

    b. Could you explain why you gave it that score?

3. Do you have any suggestions about how this interview could be improved?

[Appendices: 2039 words]

Appendix E: Sample excerpts from reflective writing and research journal

19 August 2022

"I went thinking that it was a place where intercultural studies really mattered. And it meant very little (intercultural studies as I knew it), because the context was so different. When you start dealing with oppression, social injustice, intercultural communication becomes overwhelmingly complex. What should be taught is questionable. Sometimes people may not want to understand, sometimes it may be defeating to understand another."

7 September 2022

"I knew exactly what [s/he] was talking about and [s/he] asked if what [s/he] said resonated with me. I said that it did, which was true. It felt like bringing me in, which I wanted to resist, but I felt it would be unethical to not acknowledge that I shared some feelings about [their] experience, or could see how they could feel a certain way. There was a closeness that I didn't expect because I don't really know [her/him]."

22 September 2022

"With participant [number], I've added the phrase 'no need to prepare in advance'; I want them to know exactly what we are talking about, and to have it simmering in their mind, but I don't want them to feel pressure to pre-construct a narrative, which [another participant's] apprehension … taught me. [S/he] wasn't sure if [s/he] would be able to talk about [her/his] experience for an hour, so I decided to try and take the pressure off.

23 September 2022

"... the most important point to this last interview, which was different as I didn't know what I was going to find, was that the incidental knowledge was central to the discussion, which is not surprising. I have to ask myself: to what extent is incidental information actually quite relevant as the context of the place (and which is incidental and could apply to anyone coming from abroad working in the West Bank) is also the defining element of the research? I think that this is one of the complications of doing research in a conflict zone: the conflict can take over a bit; it's the experience of the conflict which impacts the society, the surrounding environment and ultimately the teachers. There is probably a different way to put this; maybe a point of explanation could be separating incidental from essential knowledge in the context of conflict, as the conflict, i.e., the environment which is usually incidental, becomes central?"

14 October 2022

"I feel … the tension, of wanting to not just take the words, but to give some back as well, but also feeling like it would have been inappropriate. I know that it wasn't my job to say, 'no you're not crazy, I felt the same', but it feels unethical to not share knowledge that could lighten the load for someone else in terms of their memory, when they are trying to make sense of it, and they just can't."

4 November 2022

“While listening to [her/him] tell [her/his] story about getting dressed for the initial meeting, it is clear how much one doesn’t know about what is appropriate for the context, and this is not discussed. Why? … I remember … my first day, and asking the person who took me to the university to stop so that I could get something to drink because, between the exhaustion and climate and stress, I felt faint myself.”

“This interview provided a challenge: is [s/he] ‘on track’? Or is [s/he] leading me somewhere? Is what [s/he] saying very significant? And trying to decide was the difficulty of the interview. The difficulty of the mundane is a recurring theme, so I suppose it’s not so off …The students becoming guides … is curious to me. What is going on there?”

8 November 2022

“I’m not sure if I am on the right track or not with these interviews. Should I have asked about English? I suppose if I can ask about other things that participants brought up, then I can. Either way, the fact that I feel that I need to ask – this is a finding, because the environment is everything here. It’s the protagonist … In terms of HP, how does this mix in with incidental/specific? I’m not sure … [the participant] approached the interview as a series of stories, which was interesting.”

8 December 2022

“[The participant] talks about being forgotten about; this was my experience as well. I was also forgotten about by my supervisor, nobody showed up to take me to university. Also, not being introduced to anyone really resonates with me as well.”

18 January 2023

“Regarding my conversation with [participant]. [Their] advice was: you need to ask yourself why is this person telling me this, then have them fill in the blanks. And this is correct. I’ve struggled so much with staying true to the methodology and asking questions, intervening. I don’t want to intervene, however, I also want to invite them to tell me about what is relevant. [Her/his] experience [that s/he described] in Palestine was incredibly interesting, but I didn’t pick it back up…”

“… one's demographic and connection to the conflict coming in greatly impacts and shapes their experiences - teachers are aware of their own positionality. Maybe, for future recommendations, rather than aiming to put the political aside, or to stay politically correct, it is important to acknowledge (not minimise) that everyone will have a position on the situation (depending on their knowledge going in) or that if they don’t feel strongly about it now, it is possible that they will. So, they need to be aware of how this impacts their understanding of themselves and their students and colleagues. Maybe exercises to understand their position and views on injustice?”

“HP is not about explaining why a person felt that way, so maybe I don’t need to worry about those follow up questions as much as I had thought?”

20 January 2023

"... I think I have tended to exclude myself from the interview rather than owning my place as a participant in a conversation. I interjected to ask for clarification, to inspire further conversation but often to move them, encourage them to speak … The positive side is that I did not lead them anywhere, the negative side is that there is a richness that I could have cultivated."

2 February 2023

"Perhaps I already spoke about this, but I think that in fear of shaping or colouring the interview, I actually took myself out of it too much. So, I found myself putting myself back in toward the end. When having a presence during the initial interviews, I was taken aback when someone tried to get me to weigh in on a topic, but a conversation is a give and take, and I'm not supposed to see the participant as a 'vessel of information'."

18 August 2023

"... this person is … more successful than their colleagues in Palestine, from a personal point of view. They were not particularly bothered by their place in Palestine or the context itself. They don't see it necessary to be in touch with the culture, but still find that they have unique insight into it. This leads me to think that the more that someone is sensitive to the contextual issues … the more that they suffer, in a sense, abroad."

23 August 2023

"... my own, maybe mistakes, come up while listening to these narratives. For example, not a mistake, but I remember when students would have a very religious component to their presentations, that the other students would all look at me to gauge my reaction. It's interesting that some students had a sense of what was appropriate for non-Palestinian audiences, and some didn't … at the time I thought I was helping them to translate their ideas into English in a way that was functional when, for example, they were abroad or interacting in the outside world. But I still think that was a mistake."

13 September 2023

"The challenge of NVivo is that it cuts off pieces of text from the larger text, which perhaps makes you lose some of the nuances. However, these nuances are difficult to maintain even when not using a software as a container. This is why the reflective summaries and reading the text as a whole was essential. However, I think this actually helps when doing the type of close reading that I would like to do but that is difficult to keep in mind as you go across all narratives. On one hand it is a lot of work as I import and go through again the initial coding that I already did as I transcribed."

15 September 2023

"Not only is knowledge not being transferred, but there is no opportunity for debriefing in a meaningful way – a lost opportunity. I'm finding it much more intuitive to work on the [word processing programme], for the technical features, of how to recall information, moving from the parts to the whole. It [NVivo] felt one step removed, although it was just a container. However, it does allow you not to miss things when recalling information and seeing the frequency. Maybe a combination is best, although too time consuming. NVivo feels like a safety net and lets you see frequency of occurrences across narratives which is something that is done more intuitively perhaps without it."

“I think it’s natural for teachers to struggle with this. It is also somehow unique that the teacher does not share the same stake in the conflict that the students do. If [s/he] were a local teacher, they could be in the struggle together, but [s/he] is not. [S/he] is actually positioned in a privileged way, in some respects, and this accentuates the inequality for [him/her] and or [their] students, perhaps. Living with one’s privilege is difficult, especially if one is used to being discriminated against in their own cultural context ... In terms of conducting the study, this is probably the most difficult interview for me as I would like to stop [him/her] from being so hard on [themselves].”

19 September 2023

What sticks out to me is that [s/he] has so clearly (and effectively) positioned [him/herself] in the conflict: [s/he] knows [their] role, what it cannot be, and what [s/he] cannot do. [Her/his] approach is very intentional and I think this adds to [her/his] success there. [S/he] was also able to navigate his personal identity well, in ways that other participants would not be able to do. [S/he] strongly identifies with the role of the witness, which I think will come out in other narratives as well. I also find [her/his] way of highlighting moments that seem out of place in the Palestinian context useful; this is also something that comes up in other narratives, but in such a clear way in [hers/his].

17 October 2023

This interview was interesting for a variety of reasons: it was excellent in showing the messy relationships and ties between individuals in this society that a foreigner can be sensitive to, but would never be able to master during a temporary teaching appointment. I suppose this speaker highlighted some areas that cannot be solved, but that teachers need to be prepared for. Also [her/his] conceptualisation of violence speaks to this: [s/he] gives examples of times when, although [s/he] knew about the conflict, [s/he] could never have been prepared for what [s/he] encountered due to the apparent randomness of conflict situations. [S/he] also reconfirms a strong theme: the issues that these programs bring in terms of interactions with colleagues, and how students step into this role. This teacher shows how the students, despite the administration's preoccupation, tend to be very open to guest teachers, for a variety of reasons. I also think that the piece on students being attracted to [her/him] because they saw [her/him] as foreign and perhaps more progressive is interesting…

Appendix F: Sample transcript excerpts

Transcript A

00.07.00

Respondent

… I don't know if there's anything in particular, too, that you like, you know, wanted to like, follow up on or any any kind of elements that?

00.07.20

Interviewer

Yeah. Yeah, you know, not not yet, I will probably ask you some questions about some things that you mentioned. But you know, just talking as you are now, if you have other things that you can think of, or want to say, or if there are memories of things, it is perfect. I mean, whether it's something that's inside the classroom, or something that's more related to, as you said, like navigation and space, just the whole, like experience is of interest to me. So if you have any other ideas, like I'm happy to listen, and follow up, or I can ask you some questions, if you prefer.

00.07.44

Respondent

Yeah, no, I can. As you were speaking, I was thinking about a couple of different memories, I think it is, it was also a very interesting time, you know, politically to be there to be a teacher there. Also, in terms of navigating, you know, I think one of the things we hadn't talked about in preparation for it was like navigating those kinds of conversations about more sensitive topics, like politics, religion, that a lot of students asked, and were curious about, and a lot of it being, you know, we're there to teach English, but we're also there to create, you know, cultural connections and to, and to really make it space, you know, where, where it's a safe space for those conversations to be had. And I think that that was a place where we stumbled a little bit on just coming up against questions that we weren't quite prepared for and felt like, you know, we, as also within our programme, and sort of becoming almost representative of our, you know, of [their country]. It was kind of an interesting place to, to be and to, to sort of navigate. So I think that that one of the things that wasn't as talked about as we prepared to come into this space was how to navigate those conversations in a way that is productive and is both informative, and still… Yeah, so I think that was that was kind of one of the things that came up. That you know, we did a lot on kind of teaching skills and things like that. But some of those conversations more about creating those cultural connections was something that was challenging, but really important to also creating, like, trust and connection with the students so that that learning can happen.

So, you know, I just have distinct memories of students asking, you know, about the [President/Prime Minister] and our support of the [President/Prime Minister] and different questions about our religious practices and certain certain things that, you know, we again, kind of learned on the go how to how to sort of navigate those conversations. But in the moment, it sometimes was, was challenging. So I think that more, you know, dialogue around that is, is, is hugely important. And just being really sensitive to to like the content

of what even what's in the lesson plans, and they examples being used in the scenarios and situations that you have students work through, as they're using the language skills, just being sensitive to, you know, those kinds of dynamics as well, was something that we kind of navigated, again, as we went, so it was a lot of learning on the go. But it was also really great, you know, I think we got a lot of opportunity.

Transcript B

00.03.28

Interviewer:

Alright, so if you don't mind, if I can, yeah, have you talk, if you want, about what your experience was like.

00.03.37

Respondent:

Okay

00.03.38

Interviewer:

[quickly adds] as an English language teacher in Palestine, yeah

00.03.29

Respondent:

Okay… So my experience as an English language teacher in Palestine I would say was multi-[ending of word is inaudible] um… what I mean by that is I initially showed up as, um… as part of [name of programme], like without knowing much, right, like I just came with this programme, had a little bit of orientation beforehand, that wasn't really regionally specific, um… didn't really know where I was going except like, you know, one video that I pulled up on [name of Palestinian city], um… it was, I would say it was pretty barebone, like I'm just gonna show up and see what this is about, right, I had contact with [supervisor] beforehand, but it was actually very, um pretty um… sparse like I think we exchanged maybe two emails so it wasn't like… in any kind of established thing. So when I showed up initially, my experience, my feeling I should say was very open, like I'm open to whatever this is going to be, yes I know it's West Bank, it's Palestine, it's probably gonna be a little bit different than if I went to P… [incomprehensible] or maybe not that extreme but if I went to, wherever, um… you know like Czech Republic, or something, I knew that it was probably going to have challenges, but I really didn't know what challenges. Um. Or positives. You know, I was kinda, um… So when I initially started working my first year in Palestine um… I, my experience was positive [brief pause, indicates significance]. People were friendly, the university was receptive, they didn't make a huge deal out of me but they were nice, what I mean is now that I've spent some time in [another country] like there are culturally some places that really go over the top

with um… kinda a welcoming … which is not a bad thing but sometimes with those expectations it's hard to figure out to match them or, um… I feel like in my situation at [a Palestinian university] everybody was pretty low key but at the same time formal, welcoming, like I didn't have some big ceremony but I did, you know, like first day or whatever day, second day, I got to meet the Director of the university and faculty, but it was all new, you know, you never know like I came from [a different university] before that, and [this different university] was very… like more… grand, you know more… ceremonial and more, it actually had um… somehow more structure that was recognizable to me

00.06.46

Interviewer:

Mmm… [recognising comment]

00.06.46

Respondent:

… academic structure. This [hesitates/pause] also had structure, [name of the Palestinian university], but it was newer to me and it was more subdued, you know. And [adds emphasis here] right away there was this feeling that like we're glad, I mean, it was expressed to me, and I don't know exact words, but the sentiment was we're glad [people from your country] are working with us but we are not happy with lots of things that are going on between [your country] and Palestine. And that, pretty sure it was like said that, to me [by a leadership figure] [(s)he] was very friendly, [we] had good relationship the whole time… [identifying information removed]

00.07.20

Interviewer:

Mmm hmmm… [in understanding]

00.07.21

Respondent:

But there was definitely that um exchange, also. Kinda like, um… [they] didn't want to fully acknowledge that there was [a foreign] presence, but, so that was you know right away interesting. I mean none of it bothered me, I was fine with it, but it was interesting. It was definitely noted by

00.07.49

Interviewer:

Mmm hmmm… [in understanding]

00.07.50

Respondent:

Me.

Transcript C

00.05.14

Respondent

… I started to be actually welcomed in the community. And I started like, people started to say “hi”, and were friendlier and less apprehensive of me, and then I had to leave [emphasis here of a let down]. So, that experience I felt like, you know, being in such, you know, a conflicted zone, building that trust and then having to leave so abruptly. I think that's where a lot of the challenge came in, because now I've kind of evaded that trust, because I didn't stay, um and then you know, not being able to kind of process what happened … I had so many plans that just got cut off… I’m one in millions. Not the only one. So, yeah… Let me see. Do you want to just keep talking?

00.06.29

Interviewer

Oh, yeah, what you're saying is perfect. If you feel like it, it's great what you're doing.

00.06.31

Respondent

Okay. Okay, awesome. So, with that social aspect and going into the teaching aspect. I mean, you know, I worked in [country], I worked in [country]. It's different. Obviously, it's very different working there because you, you have the privilege of resources. And it's not a matter of, can they afford it? Or can they get it? It's a matter of maybe they just don't have it because, just a lackadaisical attitude, you know, those [incomprehensible word] situations. Whereas, I felt on the Palestinian side. Obviously, there's a lack of, maybe, being able to afford it or access to resources or just difficulty. And so I just kind of rolled with the punches. Um… you know, just some bureaucracy, but you know, it's nothing that… you know, not that big of a deal that I couldn't make do with the resources that I had, um and everything. The attitude towards English, I feel that, you know, the [incomprehensible word] in the [programme] is this very soft diplomacy, you're representing the [country] and everything like that, and that whole kind of hegemonic kind of… dated, you know, mentality, doesn't really mesh well with the reality that I think is on the ground sometimes … It's political. Um, so you know, the reality is, is that a lot of Palestinians that I felt in my experience, you know, were using this English as, you know, a conduit to express themselves, I mean, they have their own beautiful native language, but I think the power of learning a foreign language, and a global language like English, is that they have that ability to express their feelings, and in a different language in a different way, to access other opportunities and resources, to connect to the outside world. I think a big deal for Palestinians is to, um.. obviously, to not just express themselves, but also as self preservation.

Transcript D

Respondent

… So, this is a lot more about my experience, do you have specific types of questions, things?

00.30.52

Interviewer

Um, honestly, my hope, it's my methodology actually and we can talk more about that when we finish the call, but it is really to hear about the experience from the teacher's voice and the idea is that, what was significant about the experience, or around the experience, will be the things you choose to talk about. So what you've said is perfect in the sense that I'm not expecting something, I'm not looking for a certain thing.

00.31.29

Respondent

Yeah, I understand.

00.31.31

Interviewer

So if you want to keep talking, that's great. If not, I can certainly ask you some questions about some of the things you've said, broadly.

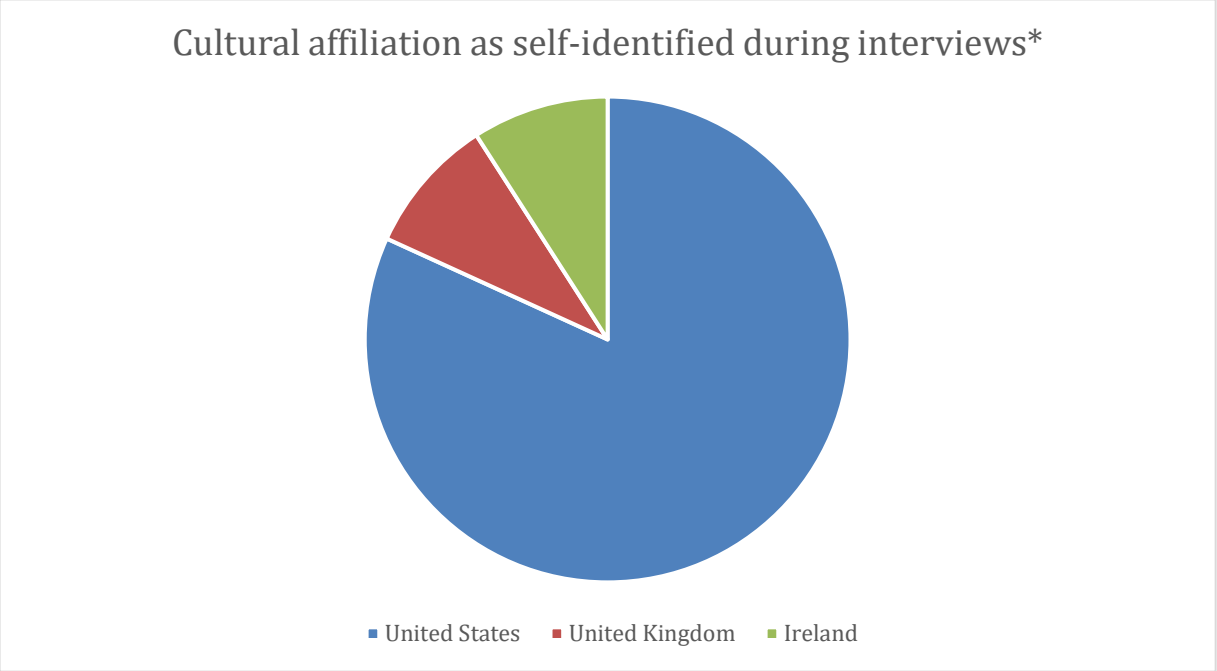
00.31.43

Respondent

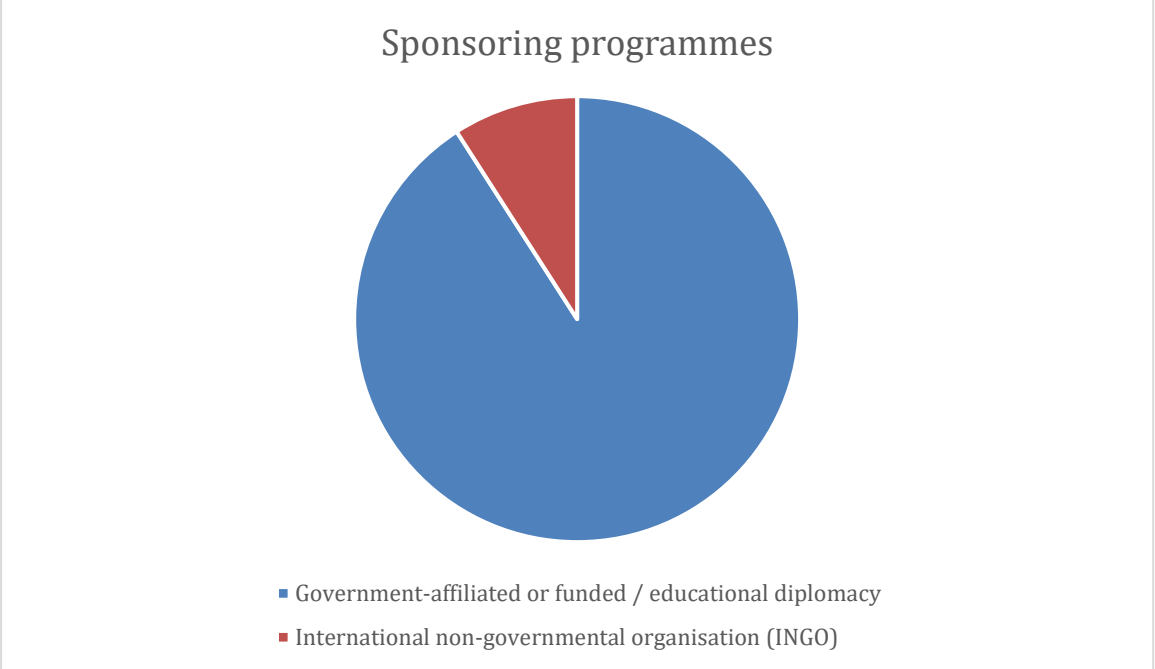
Yeah. Well there are a couple of other things that I'll mention and then I would certainly like you to ask some follow up questions. Um, let me… I'll talk about two other things and who knows where they will lead. First, one of the things that I became aware of near the end of my stay there, was something that I had not figured out, and didn't adjust to and didn't handle well. And this was, in a way that in Palestinian classrooms, when a teacher turns their back to write on the board, as they frequently will need to do, if they're writing on the board at all, let me just stop and say here, I mean there are at least, even at [Palestinian university] there were still professors that came and read from a textbook the entire time, which is not such an uncommon practice across the Arab world, according to things that I read, and students from the Arab world that I have taught. But when the professor turns and writes on the board, students begin chatting with one another in Arabic, or chatting with one another and not surprisingly it's in Arabic. Ok? This drove me bananas. I mean as [national affiliation] for me this is a sign of incredible disrespect, it just doesn't happen in the [country]. I mean there is one thing for it to be an occasional comment, it's another thing for there to just be this chatting, whispering, etc., going on. And I talked to students about this, and I talked about cultural differences, etc. It didn't make a dent. And I realised that I didn't handle that well, and it really was my responsibility to figure that out, and simply accept that about the culture, because I was

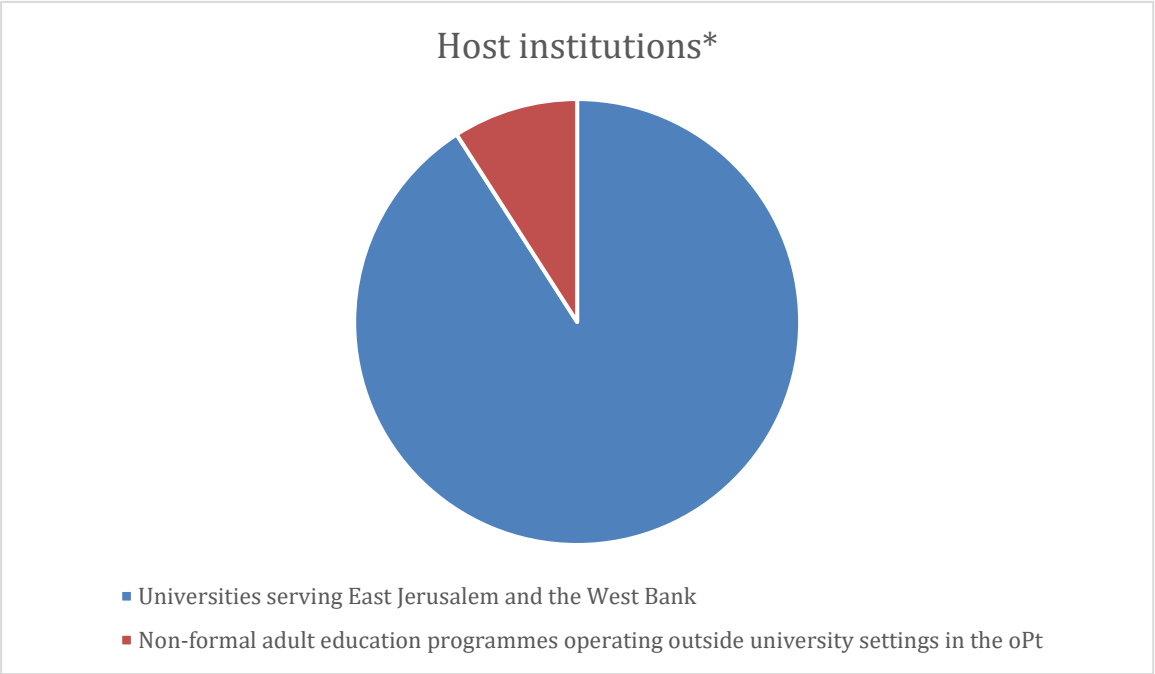
not going to change it. And so my efforts to fight that didn't help my relationship with my students. Now I will say, that aside, I think I had a very positive relationship with my students, I certainly got good feedback from them. Other faculty got good feedback about what we were doing, my colleagues seemed to think things were going pretty well in my classes. There are students, especially some of the students who I worked with in the [module], who continue to contact me for advice about scholarships applications and things like that … I think students felt they were learning a lot, they were very happy by and large to have a native speaker of English, because as we were saying earlier, access to native speakers is so limited because of rules about who can and can't be there and access to payment and things like that.

Appendix G: Supplemental demographic information



*The cultural identities of the participants were complex; some were bi/multi-cultural and bi/multi-lingual. Cultural affiliation was not collected as part of the demographic information. Thus, this dimension cannot be fully reflected in the chart. The cultural affiliations featured above are one-dimension of the teachers' identities that was voluntarily disclosed during the interviews





* Some participants were hosted by multiple sites and/or engaged in both formal and non-formal activities within a singular institution

Appendix H: Ethics committee approval

Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University

DCU

Lacie Raymond
School of Applied Language & Intercultural Studies

Prof. Jennifer Bruen
School of Applied Language & Intercultural Studies

Dr. Agnès Maillot
School of Applied Language & Intercultural Studies

9th September 2021

REC Reference: **DCUREC/2021/195**

Proposal Title: **The Lived Experiences of English Language Teachers in Conflict and Post-Conflict Settings: A Study of the Palestinian Context**

Applicant(s): **Lacie Raymond, Prof. Jennifer Bruen, Dr. Agnès Maillot**

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for your application to DCU Research Ethics Committee (REC). Further to expedited review, DCU REC are pleased to issue approval for this research proposal.

DCU REC's consideration of all ethics applications are dependent upon the information supplied by the researcher. This information is expected to be truthful and accurate. Researchers are responsible for ensuring that their research is carried out in accordance with the information provided in their ethics application.

Materials used to recruit participants should note that ethical approval for this project has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee. Should substantial modifications to the research protocol be required at a later stage, a further amendment submission should be made to the REC.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Melrona Kirrane

Dr. Melrona Kirrane
Chairperson
DCU Research Ethics Committee

DCU
Research & Innovation

Taighde & Nuálaíocht Tacaíocht
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