A critical ethnographical exploration of disability under apartheid conditions: The promising potential of Palestinian higher education institutions

Yasmin Snounu

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A Critical Ethnographical Exploration of Disability under Apartheid Conditions: The Promising Potential of Palestinian Higher Education Institutions

by

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Dissertation

Submitted to the College of Education

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January 2019

Ypsilanti, Michigan
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Feryal Snounu, and to my child, Habiba Kenda, who both continue to give me strength throughout my life. You have been the source of inspiration. This dissertation is completed in the hopes of better understanding the Palestinian voices.
Acknowledgments

This journey would not have been a success without the support of my family and friends. Those behind the stage inspired my Ph.D. journey. My mother, Feryal Snounu, who is my model, hero, and best friend, spent countless hours through Skype giving academic and personal pieces of advice and listening to me talk for hours. She has limitlessly supported me emotionally and financially, as well as shared her own experience as an educator with me. I have no words to thank you. You continue to be a source of my pride and my strength. I look up to you and love you with all my heart.

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Abstract

Utilizing a critical ethnographical methodology, this dissertation explores the experiences and practices of professors and administrators towards accommodating disabled students mainly in Palestine, but also taking into consideration the importance of the both political and disability contexts of the United States, primarily in light of critical disability studies, while also drawing from critical discourse analysis in regard to aspects of language, power hierarchies, and identity. Elements of teacher development theories are used in relation to transformational ways of thinking and the role of educators in combating stigma and promoting/adopting inclusive pedagogical practices towards accommodating disabled students in higher education. My understanding of experiences and practices of Palestinian and American faculty and administrators in higher education is derived from semi-structured interviews, observations, field notes, and pictures between October 2015 and December 2015, and September and December 2017. My findings show that disability in Palestine is associated with Israeli apartheid, creating what I call “a triple matrix of maiming Palestinians.” Such a matrix begins with targeting the Palestinian body, then continues to destroy the Palestinian infrastructure, and finally maintaining dominance. It creates internal divisions and scattered efforts towards disability services and also impacts the ability of the Palestinian Authority to serve the Palestinian people.

Secondly, the complexity of stigma in Palestine includes heroic stigma, resulting from Israeli practices, which is positive, and stigma that is associated with disability from birth, which is perceived negatively. Most importantly, my findings show that Palestinian higher education institutions are a promising arena for providing an educationally inclusive environment under apartheid conditions. My study also shows that Palestinian
faculty and administrators advocate for disabled students on campus and local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) contribute to serve disabled Palestinians, but the work of the NGOs still exhibits discrepancies. In the U.S., unclear policies for professors on how to handle accommodations for students with disabilities and lack of training on inclusion create ableism. Stigma is still salient in the academic discourse and is connected to race and social status, generating “racialization of disability.”

*Keywords*: Israeli apartheid, Palestinian higher education institutions, faculty and administrators, stigma, advocacy, community, NGOs, American higher education.
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Chapter 1: Review of Literature

During the Middle Ages in Europe, under the effect of religious teachings, disability was associated with evil; people with disabilities were exposed to death and other types of torture to get the evil spirits out of their body (Abu Fedala, 2009; Berger, 2013). Early in the nineteenth century, Austria started the first educational institution for people with mental disabilities, which was the earliest institutional attempt to include and take care of disabled individuals (Abu Fedala, 2009). Today, people with disabilities continue to be perceived with low expectations (Berger, 2013) and live on the margins of the “normative ideology” (Smith, 2004, p. 89) because of how the patriarchal White culture constructs and identifies normalcy (Smith, 2004). A normalcy ideology often creates a taxonomy of the superior group of nondisabled and the inferior group of disabled (Smith, 2004), thus disability is perceived as “whatever is different from the norm” (Smith, 2014, p. 3). Disabled individuals are generally thought to be inferior in American society (Shapiro, 1993), and what makes disability difficult and challenging for people with disabilities is the society’s myths, fear, and stereotypes (Shapiro, 1993).

Disability is indeed a social phenomenon, as Berger (2013), Smith (2015), and Siebers (2008) argued, noting that people with disabilities experience prejudice and discrimination and are a socially marginalized group associated with low expectations in society. Such expectations form a barrier of negative perceptions, which produces wrong assumptions of the capabilities of disabled individuals (World Health Organization & The World Bank, 2011). Lennard Davis (2013) described how society in general and American society in particular construct a problem out of disabled individuals: “the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the ‘problem’ of the disabled person” (p. 1). That is,
the framework of normalcy excludes people with disabilities from normal and produces behaviors of discrimination and prejudice due to ableist beliefs of superiority (Smith, 2004). Ableism is, according to Smith and Salles (2015), a system of values and ideas about disability, which maintains whatever is considered out of normative—what might be described as “the Other—is bad, evil, wrong, crazy, broken, and sick” (p. 23).

As a result, discrimination exists on levels that cannot be touched by law; people with disabilities are not generally perceived as worthy, like people without disabilities. Davis (2015) indicated that he often asks his students how many of them dated disabled individuals; the response is always no one. Hence, even though nondisabled individuals are unaware of their ableism and discriminatory practices against people with disabilities, it is done under the influence of the internalized social and cultural norms of society. Discourses and practices of exclusion against people with disabilities are generated and normalized. Thus, it is crucial to examine different factors associated with not only micro aspects of discrimination, such as cultural beliefs and their influence on inclusion and accommodations of disabled students/individuals, but also macro aspects, such as disability laws, the relationships between the countries, and how such political relationships contribute to maiming and inflicting prejudice and exclusion, like the case of Palestine in this research.

This research focuses on Palestine, with some consideration of the importance of the context of disability of the United States of America (referred to as the U.S.). The value of exploring disability in Palestine while considering that of the U.S. stems from my vision as a Palestinian researcher, looking at the impossibility of writing about disability in Palestine without delving into the political factors involved, including but not limited to the Israeli colonization and the political involvement of the U.S. in Palestine, which has implications for
disability in Palestine. Such macro factors are not only crucial to identify the relationships between different countries but can also add missing pieces to explain the phenomena of disability in Palestine, specifically, the political relationship between the U.S. and Israel.

Examining two different approaches to disability issues in Palestine and the U.S. is a complex process. Such an intricate process involves examination of tension between the two countries resulting from ideological and political power. That is, contextualizing disability in Palestine within the U.S. frame of reference is important because disability is strongly intertwined with the political involvement of the U.S. in Palestine. Such a political involvement has implications for individuals with disabilities in Palestine. Researching disability topics in Palestine inevitably draws on macro political factors that shape disability in Palestine; the relationship between the U.S. and Israel and the effects of such a relationship on disability in Palestine is a prevailing macro factor. In that, it is crucial first to understand the political and economic relations between the countries of Palestine, the U.S., and Israel within the world system. First, however, it is important to clarify my positionality to the research before discussing the relationships between the nations.

**Positionality**

In this dissertation, I alternate between the terms “disabled” and “persons with disability.” This is to emphasize diversity and different ways disabled individuals assert their choices and identity. According to Loewen and Pollard (2010) and Smith (2018), the term disabled is part of a new movement in which disabled individuals choose such a term to show pride in their identity; however, there are other groups that prefer the use of persons with disability because “such language is more respectful of the person” (Smith, 2015, p. 4).
In addition, I also draw different terms for describing Israel from my participants and the literature. I alternate between using “Israeli apartheid,” “Israeli occupation,” “Israeli colonizer,” and “Israeli colonialism,” all of which were used frequently by participants to describe the political context of disability in Palestine. This also highlights the different perspectives on terms used to describe Israel. For instance, participants such as Dr. Fadel, Shadi, and Dr. Niveau used Israeli colonizer and Israeli colonialism, and even Israeli scholars, like Ilan Pappé used terms such as “colonization,” “settler colonial paradigm,” “Zionist project” (Pappé, 2018, para. 48). Other participants in this study used “Israeli occupation” as do many other scholars in literature in general. First used by Palestinians and international activists, the term “apartheid” has also been used in this political context by Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu (Bennis, 2009, p. 46). The former U.S. President Jimmy Carter used the term apartheid to describe the policies of Israel towards the Palestinians (Bennis, 2009, pp. 46-48). Chomsky and Pappé (2015), Regan (2008), and Yiftachel (2009) are among scholars who have often compared and contrasted the separation and racialization forms and policies of apartheid that existed in South Africa with similar Israeli legislative mechanisms.

This dissertation is embedded in a political purpose in its methodology and in its critical theoretical frameworks. It mainly relies on the available scholarship and the experiences and point views of the participants as I assist their voices in being heard. Some readers may view this dissertation as a form of autoethnography, but it is not. According to Ellis and Bochner (2000), autoethnography involves “multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (p. 739). While I am an activist Palestinian, and I agree with what my participants shared, in this research, I attempted to make sure that it did
not include any of my personal viewpoints or experiences in relation to the Palestinian culture. I may refer to my experiences only while presenting self-reflexivity. This research is about my participants and their voices.

Being rooted in critical ethnography and critical disability studies as illustrated in chapters 3 and 4, the findings of my dissertation are mainly derived from verbatim data of my participants and analyzed using literature and critical theoretical frameworks.

The political relationships between Palestine, Israel, and the U.S. and their effects on disability in Palestine are an integral piece of this research. Such relations are also expanded upon using the literature. When discussing issues of disability in Palestine, it is crucial to keep in mind that political relations among Palestine, Israel, and the U.S. are macro factors that are best examined through a critical lens.

**Macro Relations Across the Globe: The U.S., Israel, and Palestine**

In his world systems analysis of the development of the capitalist world economy, Wallerstein (2004) argued that there are three categories that represent the world’s countries within the global economy: the core, the periphery, and the semi-periphery. Countries in the core are strong militarily and not dependent on other countries. These countries are powerful, allowing them to pay lower prices for raw goods and exploit cheap labor, reinforcing the unequal status between the core and countries in the periphery. For example, the United States falls in the core, as a country that is economically powerful and is focused on higher skill and capital-intensive production (Wallerstein, 2004).

On the other hand, countries in the periphery lack a strong central government and may be controlled by other states. These countries in the periphery export raw materials to the countries in the core, are dependent for capital, and have underdeveloped industry.
Countries in the periphery also have low-skill, labor-intensive production—labor is cheap—and they are commonly referred to as third-world countries. Extreme poverty affecting Gaza and the West Bank places Palestine as a country in the periphery. Between the two extremes lie the semi-peripheries, representing either core regions in decline or peripheries attempting to improve their relative position in the world economic system. They often serve as buffers between the core and the peripheries. Semi-peripheries exhibit tensions between the central government and a strong local, landed class (Wallerstein, 2004). Israel can be categorized in the semi-periphery in that sense.

These categories are crucial to understanding not only changes in the global system, but also the relationship among the countries in these categories and production of poverty and social injustices; though it should be noted that for Wallerstein, the focus must be on the system, and the relations between components in the system, not specific countries. The core dominates and exploits the periphery for labor and raw materials (Wallerstein, 2004). The countries in the periphery depend on those in the core for capital. Those in the semi-periphery share characteristics of both the core and the periphery. Wallerstein’s theory shows how modernization created inequalities on many levels—economic, political and social—as well as how it contributes to augmenting inequalities. For instance, Wallerstein (2004) argued, under the current global capitalist system, some countries benefit while others are exploited. In this respect, the foregoing theory of world systems applies to the relationship between Palestine and the U.S. through political and economic inequalities in what is now called Israel and the Palestinian territories.

The Palestinian struggle can be described as a process controlled and manipulated politically by the countries in the core and by their political relationships with semi-
peripheral Israel. The U.S. as a core country, with the largest capitalist system and one of the most powerful global economies in the world system, has overwhelmingly supported Israel and its practices against the indigenous Palestinians, and “because of the dishonest brokering of the U.S. and Europe’s impotence in International affairs, Israel continues to enjoy immunity in this process” (Chomsky & Pappé, 2015, p. 38). The relationship between Israel and the United States has caused social injustice, inequalities, and exploitation of Palestinian resources while providing privileges for Israelis. This opens up a new form of colonialism in which the peace agreements between Israel and the Palestinians keep the Palestinians dependent on Israel (Chomsky & Pappé, 2015). All of the apparent and hidden forms of Israeli control partially result from the United States’ seemingly unprecedented, unquestionable, and unlimited political support for Israel, strengthening Israeli control over the Palestinians (Chomsky & Pappé, 2015).

While some might question my characterization of support as being unlimited, the U.S. appears to support Israel to no end, and there are myriad examples of that. The first Senate bill in the U.S. in 2019 included providing Israel a $38 billion aid package as part of combatting the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement (BDS) against Israel (Wier, 2019). In fact, American administrations have fiercely promoted the Zionist project as early as 1887 when President Grover Cleveland appointed a Jewish ambassador to Turkey because of “Palestine’s importance to Zionists” (Weir, 2014, p. 5). In addition, for years, American military aid to Israel has been calculated at approximately $10.5 million per day, while the U.S. provides $0 to Palestine (If Americans Knew, n.d).

Furthermore, multiple forms of apartheid policies against the indigenous Palestinians are overwhelmingly manifested. Collins (2008) elucidated that Israel colonizes Gaza using its
technology-driven military to maintain control over Gaza using drones and the siege imposed since 2006. Israel has also promoted building an apartheid wall (Carter, 2006; Bennis, 2009, pp. 44-47); the wall is now built on 50% of the land of the West Bank (Bennis, 2009; Horowitz, Ratner, & Weiss, 2011). Justification of the forms of control Israel imposes on the Palestinians within the Israeli discourse include, but are not limited to, “self-defense” and “protecting themselves” from the Palestinians. Noam Chomsky and Ilan Pappe (2015) both agree that Israel is a settler-colonial society. As Carter (2006) and Bennis (2009) pointed out, the Oslo Agreement, which was signed between the Israelis and the Palestinians under American mediation, gave very little power to the Palestinian Authority, thus establishing a new form of control by giving the Israelis more freedom to establish complete jurisdiction over Gaza and the West Bank. Thus, the Oslo Agreement gave the Israeli army more freedom to exercise hegemony within the Occupied Palestinian Territories (Carter, 2006), which places peripheral Palestine under the mercy of both semi-peripheral Israel and the core U.S.

It is equally imperative to draw on the contexts of Palestine and the U.S. on disability issues because the West, represented by Europe and the North America and their ideology of superiority over the East, has created a system of knowledge full of stereotypes and misrepresentations about the Middle East (Said, 1979); the European false ideas of the Orient were the foundation of the American political and economic policies in the Middle East (Said, 1979). Such foundation also creates inaccurate and incomplete understandings of the Middle East (Said, 1979). The West has viewed the East in a way that distorts the actual realities of the East and Eastern culture to make the people of the Arab region look threatening, and the only way to deal with them is through violence (Said, 1979). All of this
is manifested through inaccurate descriptions in art and other fields to show the East, Arabs in particular, as barbaric, terrorists and ignorant, creating an ideal “Other” (Said, 1979). The foreign policy of the U.S. perpetuates this by asserting political differences between Israelis and Palestinians, keeping Palestine as a nation in the periphery. Said (1979) argued that Western Christian-Judaic ideologies, considering Islam, the Orient, and Arab countries as the enemy, are a result of the West’s producing false and inaccurate knowledge through fabricating images of Arabs (Shaheen, 2003), thus producing misrepresentations and stereotypes of the Orient. For example, American textbooks indicate a negative image of Arabs. As Wingfield and Bucher (1995) described it, the textbooks show “an over-portrayal of deserts, camels and nomads in the chapter on the Middle East” (p. 5), images that are threatening to the West. Shaheen (2003) and Yin (2010) concluded that Arabs and Muslims in the American media and Hollywood are vilified and depicted as subhumans. When a bombing is reported in the media, many reporters speculate that Middle Eastern Arabs and/or Muslims are behind the terrorist action (Shaheen, 2003). Similarly, when Palestinians resist the Israeli colonizer, they are described as terrorists. Such distorted internalized knowledge is highly politicized and motivated by the American relationship with Israel, and that information is used to legitimate and retain the systemic relation between the two states (Said, 1979). In fact, the relationship between the East and the West has always been based on power (Said, 1979).

Similar to Said’s approach, Grech (2009) explained that models and inferences about disability often stem from Western understandings about the situation of people with disabilities in developing countries. The socioeconomic, historical and political context in developing countries, which influence the situation of people with disabilities, are ignored
(Grech, 2009). The U.S. sends “developing countries” some funds for disability projects, and such Western interventions in developing countries to help people with disabilities are thought to be “an effective quick fix in ‘underdeveloped’ contexts” (Grech, 2009, p. 774). Yet cultural values differ from one place to another, and as Barnes and Mercer (2010) put it, what works in one country might not be a good fit for another. This turbulent relationship between Palestine and the U.S. influences disability, the history of disability, the laws of disability in Palestine, and their practices towards accommodating students with disabilities in higher education.

Therefore, this research seeks to explore the perceptions and experiences of faculty and administrators working closely with students with disabilities in higher education with the focus on Palestine while also briefly describing issues on disability in the U.S. Drawing on disability in both Palestine and the U.S. may seem unusual to some, but the political context is necessary due to the participatory role the U.S. plays in debilitating the Palestinians politically, especially through unlimited American military aid (If Americans Knew, n.d). In addition, even though the U.S has made progress on disability rights, the U.S. could still learn from the practices of Palestinian higher education, based on the findings of this research. Here, it is worth noting that although the U.S. signed the Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), it never ratified the agreement (Ribet, 2011). On the other hand, as indicated in CRPD (2016), the State of Palestine signed and ratified the CRPD in April 2014, two years after the United Nations recognized Palestine as a state. This is another aspect to the significance of including the U.S. context, particularly for those who may perceive such a brief cross-context analysis as absurd because the U.S. appears to be on the top hierarchy in achieving a democratic system that already grants rights to disabled
individuals. The purpose of the small number of interviews with U.S. participants in this study was to add texture to existing research on the U.S. context in a way that brought the experience of my Palestinian respondents into relief. The interviews in the U.S. raise provocative questions that might have remained invisible without this brief cross-context analysis.

Nevertheless, examining the two nations in regard to disability practices and beliefs focusing on higher education reveals a large continuum of political, economic, and social factors that shape the legislation of these two countries, disability laws, and the realities of disabled individuals in particular. In the case of Palestine, disability is influenced by Israeli apartheid and U.S. support of Israel. While in the U.S., many of the disability issues are connected to capitalism, where the capitalist system evaluates a person based on the individual demonstration of their capacity to be efficient, competitive, and productive to meet the standards of the market (Erevelles, 2000); the result is an ideology of “the poor are poor because they are stupid” (Erevelles, 2000, p. 28) and thus labels of disability such as “mentally retarded” are mostly attributed to poor groups and those of African ancestry (Harry, 2008). Issues of disability in the U.S. are also associated with hegemony, Western European reason and rationalism, ableism, and race, all of which are manifested in the overrepresentation of African Americans in American Special Education (Connell, 2011; Erevelles, 2011; Smith, 2004).

**Purpose of the Study: Research Questions**

The purpose of this dissertation is to identify the perceptions of professors and administrators towards accommodating students with disabilities in university, their perceptions of how support or lack of support impacts disabled students, and the challenges
disabled students face in higher education in light of disability laws and political realities. The primary focus of this dissertation is on Palestine, yet it draws on the cross-context analysis of Palestine and the U.S. on perceptions of professors and administrators towards students with disabilities. This dissertation seeks to examine different realities in higher education in Palestine and briefly in the U.S., the role existing laws play in accommodating disabled students in higher education, the pedagogical practices utilized to accommodate disabled students in higher education, and the cultural values that contribute to creating inclusive environments and/or creating barriers and segregation.

More research is needed in the area of higher education in Palestine, especially since disability in Palestine, according to Abu Fedala (2009), is connected to factors such as the Israeli occupation and its oppressive practices. As Jaffee (2016) described it, Palestinians, rendered subhuman to western audiences via racist Zionist propaganda, are only revisibilized through tropes of disabled people as vulnerable objects of pity. These portrayals function both to uphold conceptions of Palestinian resisters as subhuman and, moreover, to reify notions of disabled people as deficient, passive, and devoid of agency. (p. 125)

Extensive literature (Connor, Ferri, & Annamma, 2015; Erevelles, 2000; Erevelles, 2011; Harry, 2008; O’Neill, Markward, & French, 2012; Price, 2011; Rao, 2004; Siebers, 2008; Smith, 2004) demonstrates that disability in the U.S. is strongly connected to labeling, race, and gender. In his study, Connor (2008) highlighted the experiences of students with learning disabilities in the U.S.; he discussed the risks of labeling students learning disabled (LD), explaining that labeling extends to segregating them from regular students. Those students who were labeled LD perceived such labeling as placing them in a wrong category,
as well as believing that the label LD did not represent them, as they could not make sense of it. Smith (2015) argued that disability is socially constructed, and that the idea of disability was made up by the Western culture “by labeling people as having a disability, we assign the idea of disability to groups of people, and to individuals, within our society” (Smith, 2015, p. 163).

Palestine mostly deals with issues of physical disability due to the constant increase of this type of disability because of Israeli military practices and also because of a lack of diagnostic tools, which makes it difficult to identify those with learning disabilities or other issues connected to neurodiversity (Gumpel & Awartani, 2003). As for the U.S., there is little research on attitudes of professors on students with physical disabilities. The focus of disability research in the U.S. is on invisible disabilities (Rao, 2004; Villarreal, 2002; Wilson, Getzel, & Brown, 2000). According to Smith (2015), invisible disabilities are ones that “people are said to have, but that you cannot tell if somebody has them by just looking at them” (p. 161). Examples of invisible disabilities are “learning disabilities, psychiatric disabilities, intellectual disabilities, and Multiple sclerosis” (Smith, 2015, p. 161). Here, invisibility is an important dichotomy to examine between Palestine and the U.S.

Achieving progress in serving students with disabilities in Palestine, Nasir-Tucktuck, Baker, and Love (2017) briefly discussed the history of education in Palestine and provided suggestions on areas that need improvement, such as the need for better diagnosis of disabilities, and evidence-based practices in services offered for students with disabilities, but never delved in depth into how such political circumstances and different regimes and powers over Palestine contributed to creating barriers. Such analysis of students with disabilities in Palestine and what needs to be improved also neglects students with disabilities
in higher education in Palestine.

As for the U.S., previous research (Barnard-Brak, Lechtenberger, & Lan, 2010; Hong, 2015; Marshak, Wieren, Ferrell, Swiss, & Dugan, 2010), focused on invisible disabilities, showed that students with non-apparent disabilities were reluctant to disclose their need for classroom accommodations because of the feeling of stigma, which students internalized. Students with non-apparent disabilities face higher rates of dropping out and poor academic performance compared to non-disabled students; around 86% of students with learning disabilities in the U.S. withdraw from college (Kranke et al., 2013). They often experience forms of discrimination as people do not accept them and stigma as they internalize feelings of being rejected, which impacts their self-esteem. Hence, there is a need to examine factors that lead to current realities and experiences of ableism and discrimination among disabled students within and beyond higher education.

Moreover, disability discourses and language used on disability is another integral piece that is explored in this dissertation. The cultural perception and attitudes about disability, according to Rice (2006), are acquired in childhood through language and representation practices such as stories, myths, metaphors, and other discourses. Rice (2006) called for “unpacking the norms” (p. 25), which means examining critically all factors that contribute to creating and maintaining a specific cultural norm, such as ableism. This is done as a way of engaging in a critical pedagogy of disability through adopting an approach of resistance that will examine social forces, which maintain the power of ability (Rice, 2006). This also helps explore how disability is socially constructed, and to find alternatives to fight discrimination against people with disabilities requires an understanding of socially constructed discourses of disability. Therefore, looking at the language used in the
description of disability in laws, social interactions, media, educational documents, etc., and how such language is translated in the educational culture, as well as the society’s culture and values in both Palestine and the U.S., as D'Aspremont (2013) stressed, people can spend their entire life studying legal forms but not care about fighting for compliance with it or critically examining what the forms really entail. The following questions are examined in this dissertation:

- What and how are language, words, and terms used to describe people with disabilities in both Palestine and the U.S.?
- What role might language play towards internalizing ableism/social justice?
- What is the role of higher education in promoting negative/positive perceptions towards disabled students and accommodating them?
- What are possible pedagogical practices towards achieving inclusive educational environment in higher education?

Most significantly, the dissertation focuses on how the answers to all of these questions are embedded within the political complexities including colonizer forms in Palestine and capitalism in Palestine and the U.S.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

In this dissertation, critical disability studies (CDS) is the primary theory used in my research, while also drawing from critical discourse analysis (CDA) in regard to language, power hierarchies, and identity. Teacher development theories are also used in relation to ways of thinking and the role of educators in combating stigma and promoting/adopting inclusive pedagogical practices towards accommodating disabled students in higher education. These frameworks are used to examine how the professors’ and administrators’
system of belief may negatively impact the implementation of accommodations, leading to the exclusion of disabled students in higher education institutions. Faculty perceptions of students with disabilities may lead to practices that do/not support diversity, democracy and sustainability. Finally, this research also explores what faculty need to learn to be able to create inclusive environments and accommodate college students with disabilities in both Palestine and the U.S.

**Disability studies in connection to CDA and teacher development.** Disability studies is an activist field (Siebers, 2008) in which addressing social injustices is imperative. The first goal of disability studies is looking at disability from different angles, exploring the ideologies including values and ideas that create disability (Smith, 2015); it is not only about disability, but also about not-disability (Smith, 2015). The second goal of disability studies is looking at disability from “many different disciplines in order to unpack its complexity” (Smith, 2015, p. 29). And the third objective of disability studies is examining the power relationships and looking at resilience models of disabled individuals (Smith, 2015). In order to achieve social justice and inclusion, disabled bodyminds should be embraced as integral parts of cultural diversity, and negative perceptions and unjust practices against people with disabilities should be fought. Although body and mind are used in separate ways linguistically (Price, 2011, p. 240), they are intertwined in the term bodymind, which can be applied to all persons with mental disabilities of all kinds (Price, 2011; Smith, 2015). The disabled bodyminds are often oppressed by what the culture of normal looks like. As Siebers (2008) put it, “the most urgent issue for disability studies is the political struggle of disabled people, and the struggle requires a realistic conception of the disabled body” (p. 68). According to Jaffee (2016), CDS scholars (Connell, 2011; Connor, 2008; Erevelles, 2011;
Siebers, 2008) highlighted intersections of disability, labeling, race, gender, and class. They also underlined poverty and colonialism issues for disabled people in global contexts as well as the impact of neoliberalism and capitalism. Critical disability theory does not usually focus on curing disability (examining it through a medical model approach); rather, it examines social meanings and stigma in connection to systems of oppression and exclusion (Siebers, 2008). Thus, CDS involves examining “prejudices against physical and mental disability” (Siebers, 2008, p. 46).

The movement of CDA was developed by scholars Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, and Teun Van Dijk in the 1980s. In my research, CDA is used as a methodological and theoretical framework. As far as a theoretical CDA approach is concerned, CDA intersects with critical disability theory in its focus on analyzing prejudices; as critical disability theory focuses on ableism, a form of domination and abuse, CDA parallels it theoretically in terms of its focus on analyzing how language exhibits structures of power, discrimination and dominance between different groups in society (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). In this regard, both CDS and CDA examine discourses that are related to the cultural crisis of how we think and hierarchal ways of thinking. Our ways of speaking are socially constructed through social institutions, such as school and family. According to Fairclough (1995), schools play a pivotal role in maintaining ideological discursive formation, which takes place alongside economic and political powers. The more there is control over discourse, the more control over discursive practices is maintained (Fairclough, 1995). Fairclough (1995) explained that higher education institutions receive funds and grants from governments, and therefore they maintain the elements of marketization and the capitalist agenda, which imposes hegemony and an ideology of Whiteness as “a normative, dominating, unexamined power that underlies
the rationality of Eurocentric culture and thought” (Smith, 2004, p. 2), eliminating those who are “defined as not-White, but also those defined as not-Able” (Smith, 2004, p. 2). As a result, social relations have changed because of economic transformations, and governments have partnered with business enterprises’ primary agenda towards competitive global economy (Fairclough, 2003). There is a need to also examine factors that generate discourses in societies as there is always a source of discourse (Fairclough, 2003).

Price (2011) discussed discourse and a rhetoric of mental disabilities in academia. She pointed out the importance of looking at disability, mental disability in particular, from a rhetorical perspective. Rhetoricity is “the ability to be received as a valid human subject” (Price, 2011, p. 26), so people perceive those with mental disabilities as rhetorically disabled, thus mad or crazy, and categorize them as deviant from normal. She insisted that academic discourses in college settings create and are produced by an able-minded ideology, which ignores any understanding of students and professors with mental disabilities and creates practices of exclusion and discrimination. Price (2011) argued that CDA is an appropriate fit with disability studies because it examines ideology, rhetoric, and power relationships, and ways in which people are excluded, oppressed and stigmatized. Siebers (2008) highlighted the importance of advocating and bringing the ideology of ability to the surface; he focused especially on how little awareness people notice about its patterns, contradictions, and influence. This is essential because of existing theories, such as the enlightenment theory of rational autonomy, which entails that the view of inability to reason is due to biological inferiority. Therefore, “a minority identity” (Price, 2011, p. 13) is created in a systematic way by the dominant culture.
Both CDS and CDA can contribute to teacher development theories by placing an emphasis on how educators should question their ways of thinking and their culture that reflects on their ways of teaching. Chiapello and Fairclough (2002) refer to ways of thinking as “conditions under which processes of internalization take place” (p. 195), arguing that when discourses become functional in society, a particular knowledge is produced. Theories in teacher learning in the developmental tradition, such as Eleanor Drago-Severson (2009) and Gary Howard (2006), focus on transformational learning by teachers, in which teachers, with the right support, develop increased levels of flexibility in their cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal ways of knowing. One result of such transformational learning is a teacher’s ability to examine their own internalized assumptions and judgments about their students (Drago-Saverson, 2009). Such teacher capacities are critical in creating trusting and inclusive teaching and learning environments and in combatting ableism. In that regard, teachers can only engage their students and encourage them to learn through creating an inclusive environment and building trust. As part of adult learning, Drago-Severson (2009) and Howard (2006) suggested that teachers go through transformational learning through experiencing different ways of knowing. This dissertation does not focus on a deep review of teacher development theories; rather, it only highlights ways of knowing, transformational adult learning, and pedagogical practices in relation to providing inclusive educationally environment in higher education.

Literature Review

This section highlights the history of disability in Palestine and the U.S., the disability laws in both countries, and how such laws are translated in higher education institutions. As I discuss it, invisibility is an important dichotomy to examine between Palestine and the U.S. It
is important here to define the two types of disabilities this dissertation highlights: visible and invisible disabilities. Visible disability, as Disabled-world (2012) defines it, is a disabling condition or other health impairment that requires adaption. That includes muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, amputation, multiple sclerosis, pulmonary disease, heart disease, or other reasons (Disabled-world, 2012). Palestine deals mainly with visible disabilities due to the political context. On the other hand, according to Smith (2015), invisible disabilities are ones that “people are said to have, but that you cannot tell if somebody has them by just looking at them” (p. 161). Examples of invisible disabilities are “learning disabilities, psychiatric disabilities, intellectual disabilities, and multiple sclerosis” (Smith, 2015, p. 161). The U.S. mostly deals with invisible disabilities. Siebers (2008) defined disability as “the product of a social injustice” (p. 3); invisible disabilities in the U.S. are prevalent due to associations with capitalism, hegemonic culture, race and disability (Connor, 2008; Erevelles & Minear, 2010; Erevelles, 2011, Smith, 2008), as illustrated in the following sections.

**Disability and Palestine.** Much disability in Palestine is a result of poor pre-and postnatal care, poor nutrition, and lack of adequate medical services (Gumpel & Awartani, 2003). These are caused by the blockade that Israel imposes and the occupation in general that prevents the Palestinians from accessing health care (Jaffee, 2016; United Nations Development Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People & Fayyad, 2014). Abu Fedala (2009) and Amro (2001) argued that the crimes of the Israeli occupation increase the number of disabled people, resulting in Palestine having the highest percentage of disabled people of any country in the world (Abu Fedala, 2009). According to Jaffee (2016), Israel maintains practices of paralyzing Palestinians through the Israeli military policy of targeted shooting of the heads and legs of protestors and deliberately harming unarmed Palestinians.
Furthermore, 11.8% of diagnosed persons with disabilities in Palestine have hemipelvisectomy, 35.5% have lameness, 19.7% forequarter amputation, and 21.6% have visual and hearing impairments (Abu Fedala, 2009). Total persons with disabilities in Palestine are between 114,000 to 300,000, depending on whether a narrow or a wide definition of disability is used (World Health Organization, 2013).

Besides daily Israeli attacks on Palestinians, there have been several extensive military operations against the Palestinians that contributed to increasing the numbers of Palestinians with mobility, visual, and hearing disabilities. For instance, during the first Intifada “Uprising” in 1987, there were 80,000 injured, 5,000 of whom had permanent disabilities (Amro, 2001). In late 2008 and early 2009, around 1,400 Palestinians were killed during an extensive attack on Gaza by the Israeli army using phosphorous bombs, resulting in thousands with physical disabilities who suffered internal burns from phosphorous bombs and “focused lethality munition” (Horowitz et al., 2011, p. 144). Thousands were injured, and many have permanent disabilities.

**Disability laws and higher education in Palestine.** In light of the political situation in Palestine, the most important Palestinian disability law, On the Right of the Disabled Act (the RDA), enacted in 1999 under the leadership of then President Yasser Arafat, stipulated that persons with disabilities must be provided with an equal opportunity for enrollment in schools and universities, and they should be provided with all necessary pedagogic means and facilities (Arafat, 1999; The Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund, n.d.). The RDA was followed by the establishment of a department for disabled people under the responsibility and supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs (Amro, 2001). Although the RDA guarantees rights and entitlements for disabled people, in education in particular,
people with disabilities have never had the basic rights of living. This is because the Palestinian Authority has continuously experienced political turbulence, including American government threats to cut off American humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people, internal division between the Palestinians, and continual massive attacks from the Israeli army on Gaza that make it almost impossible to implement the RDA (Diakonia, 2015; World Health Organization, 2013). Consequently, the Palestinian Authority cannot offer more than 20% of necessary services to disabled people; local and international organizations are forced to provide 80% of such services (Amro, 2001).

As a result, the number of disabled people who are able to go to preparatory, elementary, and high school is low; only 59.2% of those with physical impairments in the West Bank, and 49.3% of those with physical impairments in Gaza are able to attend school (Abu Fedala, 2009). The inability of the Palestinian Authority to provide services and tools for disabled people creates a burden on universities to provide these assistive tools. Moreover, few universities in Gaza and the West Bank have special education programs, resulting in insufficient personnel in special education. Most special education teachers hold degrees in general education in Palestine (Gumpel & Awartani, 2003). The Palestinian educational system faces enormous challenges to be independent as the Palestinian struggle to free themselves from the “Israeli military occupation” (Bennis, 2009, p. 14) is continuous (Gumpel & Awartani, 2003).

Myriad factors affect people with disabilities and their access to education; political factors are especially salient, and people with physical disabilities in Palestine, either in Gaza or the West Bank, face a tragic political reality. Like those without disabilities, Palestinians with disabilities encounter the same Israeli checkpoints when crossing from one city to
another to attend university, yet disabled Palestinians experience these crossings in more challenging ways than nondisabled do (Abu Fedala, 2009). It is common for Israeli soldiers to neglect the medical sensitivity and conditions of those people waiting at the checkpoints and keep them waiting for hours (Abu Fedala, 2009). Many disabled students do not leave their homes at all, especially those with mobility impairments, because of the additional hardships these checkpoints create for them (Abu Fedala, 2009; Jaradat, 2010; Palestinian Independent Commission for Human Rights [ICHR], 2001). A clear example of this struggle is the difficulty of mobility in the Dabaweya area in Hebron, an area that is under Israeli control. Dabaweya is dangerous, especially for those with mobility impairments attempting to cross checkpoints (Abu Fedala, 2009; Jaradat, 2010; ICHR, 2001). Through agreements with families of students with disabilities, the Ministry of Education in Palestine provides an opportunity for K-12 students who face difficulty in crossing the Israeli checkpoints to be taught at home (Jaradat, 2010). Students’ parents teach, follow up, give exams, and report to the ministry (Jaradat, 2010).

Other obstacles faced by disabled people in Palestine include, but are not limited to, the lack of financial support for public services and rehabilitation programs; the continual increase in the numbers of people with physical impairments due to perpetual Israeli attacks; the continual Israeli attacks on the rehabilitation centers and institutions through bombing; and the Israeli invasion, destruction, and confiscation of equipment and tools inside them (Abu Fedala, 2009; Snounu, 2015). The percentage of disabled students in universities in the Gaza Strip, according to the ICHR (2001), is a mere 0.4% due to military occupation, lack of restrooms designed for disabled people, lack of elevators, lack of assistive technology and assistive tools, and high tuition. Furthermore, there are 30,000 deaf people in Gaza and the
West Bank, but only 10% of them benefit from education because of the expense of educating them in K-12 schools (ICHR, 2001). For instance, compared to $100 to $200 costs of clothing and school miscellaneous for nondisabled students, the cost of K-12 education for blind children ranges from $2000 to $2500 for every child per year (ICHR, 2001). This makes it difficult for the Palestinian government to provide resources for all children (ICHR, 2001), exacerbated by the fact that Israel controls all the Palestinian resources, especially through “consolidating Israeli control over the much more valuable land of the west Bank” (Bennis, 2009, p. 61).

Despite the unstable political situation, the Palestinian Authority (PA) – the recognized government of Palestine, remains focused on improving living conditions for disabled people in Palestine, especially because they are twice as vulnerable as those with no disabilities (Amro, 2001). In 2004, the RDA was revised by the Palestinian Legislative Council (Qure’a, 2004). The RDA stipulated that the Ministry of Education and Higher Education must provide an environment that is appropriate for the needs of persons with disabilities in schools, colleges, and universities. This can be done through modifications and accommodations including elevators, technological equipment, accessible restrooms, and fields and sports rooms appropriate for the mobility of people with disabilities (Qure’a, 2004). Nevertheless, implementing the RDA and its executive procedures of 2004 remains difficult in higher education, not only because of political and financial matters, but also because of cultural and social attitudes that do not pay attention to the capacities of individuals with disabilities. Like others, Birzeit University (2011) stated that the legal framework is insufficient, and the attitudes of Palestinian society are focused on sympathy, ignoring the fact that disabled people have specific, positive capacities, and can be more
involved. Birzeit University, in the West Bank, started accelerating efforts to support students with disabilities to combat cultural attitudes that accept current conditions and to ensure inclusion for these students. For instance, Birzeit University’s Committee for Students with Disabilities was founded in 2008 as a student organization advocating for an inclusive environment for students with disabilities. This organization is now providing tools and assistive technology and working to rehabilitate university buildings (Birzeit University, 2015).

In Palestine, there is little data on disabled students in higher education (Palestinian Women Research and Documentation Center-UNESCO and Birzeit University, 2011). Despite compassion and empathy towards disabled people, local research findings revealed that there is violence, including bullying, against them in K-12 schools (Palestinian Women Research and Documentation Center-UNESCO & Birzeit University, 2011). With such discrepancies across different settings and attitudes within the Palestinian community, higher education seems to contribute to changing negative views on disability. For example, in the West Bank, Birzeit University (2015) argued that disabled students need support, not pity. Birzeit University’s Committee for Students with Disabilities planned to conduct more workshops for faculty and students to engage disabled students in the university community. Said, a student at Birzeit University with a physical disability, noted that his success at the university was a function of cooperation with university administrative offices, as well as cooperation with the faculty (Birzeit University, 2015).

**Disability and the U.S.** While the history of disability in Palestine is surrounded by the struggle against the Israeli military occupation, American disability history also involves political struggle but in different ways. This struggle is associated with previous models of
struggle, such as the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s. According to Loewen and Pollard (2010), the disability rights movement has similar goals as the civil rights movement: equal opportunities, full participation in society, and respectful and dignified treatment. The disability rights movement challenges social structures that maintain discrimination and exclusion of disabled people (Loewen & Pollard, 2010).

**Federal disability laws and higher education in the U.S.** In 1973, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act was passed, followed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1975 (Nielsen, 2012). Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 grants all disabled people, including students with disabilities, the right to be included. It requires all educational institutions, including universities, to provide disabled students the accommodations needed to succeed in their academic life (Nielsen, 2012). Section 504 changed the history of disability rights (Davis, 2015; Shapiro, 1993). It mandates that any federal institution receiving funds from the government must not discriminate against individuals with disabilities:

> No otherwise qualified handicapped individual in the United States . . . shall, solely by reason of his handicap, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal Financial Assistance. (Davis, 2015, p. 5)

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), first introduced to Congress in 1988 following the activism of disabled people and their families, included sharing of stories of social and educational discrimination (Nielsen, 2012). The ADA is considered to be the most important disability rights act of its time (National Consortium on Leadership and Disability for Youth (NCLD/Y), 2015), although subsequent legal challenges and court decisions have
subsequently limited its scope to some degree. It guarantees the inclusion of people with disabilities in higher education, employment, and all aspects of cultural and civic life (Nielsen, 2012).

**Theoretical Framework Analysis**

Disability legislation in both Palestine and the U.S. have implementation gaps in higher education. These laws neglect political and social factors; power relations and stigma-related ideologies are often unquestioned. As a result, discourses and practices of exclusion against disabled people are generated and normalized. In this respect, it is crucial to examine how the cultural beliefs and perceptions of faculty might influence the inclusion/exclusion and accommodation of students with disabilities in both settings, Palestine and the U.S.

While CDS is primarily used as the framework in this research, elements of language, power relations, identity, and pedagogical practices are taken from CDA, and teacher development frameworks help to examine how systems of belief, and political and social factors, may negatively impact the implementation of accommodation and lead to excluding disabled students in higher education institutions. These frameworks can also illuminate beliefs that positively affect inclusion and contribute to the success of disabled students. Faculty perceptions of students with disabilities may lead to practices that do not support diversity, democracy, and sustainability. Hence, faculty need to learn to create inclusive environments and accommodate disabled college students in both Palestine and the U.S.

**Disability in light of CDS and CDA in Palestine.** Arabic-speaking Middle Eastern cultures generally still perceives disability as stigmatized (Crabtree & Williams, 2011). Surprisingly, under continuous challenges in the Palestinian context, “disability has become a promising arena for educational inclusion” (Crabtree & Williams, 2011, p. 151). Still, under
the Israeli occupation, investment in inclusive practices by Palestinian educators is problematic. Complicating this, issues of segregation and ableism in Palestinian higher education have never been examined from social and, more importantly, political perspectives, both of which are associated with obstacles and separations through the apartheid regime produced by the Israeli occupation (Bennis, 2009) and which trigger most of the issues faced by disabled students in general, and in higher education in particular.

Palestinian culture is based on collectivism (Harry, 1992). Palestinians maintain strong family ties, and families who have members with disabilities try to protect them and are concerned about sending them to school/college knowing that they might face challenges and risks related to the practices of the Israeli army, financial barriers, and cultural attitudes (Snounu, 2015). For many disabled people in Palestine, public transportation and attitudes of drivers are an obstacle to integration (Burton, Sayrafi, & Abu Srour, 2013). Obstacles do not only come from society but also from their families’ protection because families have reservations about allowing them out of the house (Burton et al., 2013).

Indeed, there are ironic and contradictory cultural perceptions of physical disability in Palestine, where in some contexts, disability is pitiable (Snounu, 2015). People with disabilities are often seen as in need of sympathy and protection. However, in other contexts, Palestinians with amputated bodies are considered heroes if the Israeli army caused the impairment (Connell, 2011). The Palestinian Women Research and Documentation Center-UNESCO and Birzeit University (2011) conducted a study on societal attitudes towards persons with disabilities. They concluded that there was insufficient data about institutions working with persons with disabilities. Despite compassionate and sympathetic attitudes towards disabled people, they found violence and stigma expressed towards them in
elementary and secondary schools by peers (Palestinian Women Research and Documentation Center-UNESCO & Birzeit University, 2011). Questions of disability in educational institutions in Palestine can be understood through analyzing the circumstances, impacts, social views, community, and individual attitudes, all of which greatly influence cultural and political values.

According to Gumpel and Awartani (2003), families in Palestine reject special education services that separate the child from their family as it is perceived as a negative outcome. Palestinian families often refuse to allow their children with disabilities go out of the home, which is a part of the normal Palestinian socialization process, in a place where traditions often oppose change (Burton et al., 2013). This is especially true for change that is understood as expressing a Western agenda, of which the Palestinians are very critical because of the political turmoil they experience in relation to the support the U.S. provides to Israel. An example of such was found in a study by Nasir-Tucktuck et al. (2017). Nasir-Tucktuck et al. (2017) referred to a project in Palestine in which 226 adults with disabilities received training that allowed them to discuss international and national disability laws in connection with their lives. Later in the project, 45 people with disabilities went to local communities and visited 1,000 service providers. They found hostility and obstruction on the part of family members who tried to prevent them from participating by tearing a ramp apart; one person with a hearing disability was not welcomed at a bank. The project team intervened, and after sending a number of letters to various communities, eventually disabled people were welcomed (Nasir-Tucktuck et al., 2017). It is crucial to explain that such a change in the people’s attitudes occurs while they were assured that their disabled children would not be used so other people could raise money; rather, it is a genuine effort that aims
at enhancing their disabled children’s living conditions. Attitudes towards people with disabilities in Palestinian culture still rely on hierarchal ways of thinking, perceiving those with physical disabilities as not capable.

According to Plumwood (2002), hierarchal ways of thinking place some groups in inferiority and others in superiority. As a result, families feel the need to protect disabled children, and some even prevent them from leaving the house, denying them basic life choices, and limiting social participation, independence and decision-making. As Shapiro (1993) pointed out, “Disabled people have been a hidden, misunderstood minority, often routinely deprived of the basic life choices that even the most disadvantaged among us take for granted” (p. 11).

However, attitudes towards people with disabilities are different in higher education. In the West Bank, according to Birzeit University (2015), Isra’, one of the identified 33 students with disabilities attending the university, reported that despite her fear and hesitation, her peers made her feel at home. She now aspires to be an influential person in the community. Said, a student with a physical disability at Birzeit University, who achieved a score of 99% on his matriculation exam in high school, was only able to enroll at the university a year after he finished high school because he lived in Hebron and needed to cross checkpoints every day. Birzeit University provided him with a wheelchair, and he lives with relatives next to Birzeit University. Said confirmed that his success at the university is a result of the cooperation of university administrators and professors (Birzeit University, 2015). As for university professors in Palestine, it seems from the few studies done there that professors in Palestine are sympathetic towards disabled students and cooperate with and extend help to disabled students (Birzeit University, 2015). The Palestinian Women Research...
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and Documentation Center-UNESCO and Birzeit University (2011) found inadequate data regarding students with disabilities in college settings. It is imperative to explore ways in which Palestinian universities and professors deal with disabled students and their needs in connection to professors’ cultural perceptions and social norms, as well as in light of political circumstances, especially regarding the RDA, which does not mandate supports and accommodations for students with disabilities in higher education.

**Disability in light of CDS and CDA in the U.S.** Regulations regarding the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 describe rights relevant to disabled students who enter higher education. Nevertheless, the main focus of the legislation is on providing equal access and preventing discrimination, rather than creating absolute entitlement to college education or guaranteeing student success in college (Oertle & Bragg, 2014; Proctor, 2001). It is important that professors supporting students with disabilities help them succeed through accommodating them under existing laws. College students with learning disabilities in the U.S. face challenges in academic performance and degree completion, as they are confronted with issues of access, unmet needs for academic support, and other stressors, including managing functional limitations (Barnard-Brak et al., 2010; Kranke et al., 2013). Partly as a result, students with learning disabilities perform poorly due to lack of inclusive environment (Hong, 2015), indicating a gap between legislation and higher education outcomes.

Broader academic factors can also impact the success of disabled students, including administrative policies, curriculum, teaching practices, student services, and peers (O’Neill, Markward, & French, 2012). Supporting college students with learning disabilities by providing accommodations (including extended test times for students with non-apparent
impairments [Kranke et al., 2013]) is crucial because it allows students to overcome these broader challenges. In fact, the ADA helped increase the number of disabled students at the college level; despite this increase, many do not successfully complete their education (Barnard-Brak et al., 2010). The most important causes of this failure are institutional barriers that include a lack of understanding by faculty regarding the needs and experiences of disabled students, as well as the stereotypes, beliefs, and attitudes of faculty and peers (Barnard-Brak et al., 2010). This results in exclusion and discriminatory practices (Price, 2011).

Students with non-apparent disabilities were reluctant to disclose their need for classroom accommodations because of internalized feeling of stigma (Barnard-Brak et al., 2010; Hong, 2015; Marshak et al., 2010). Students with invisible disabilities face higher rates of drop-out and poor academic performance compared to non-disabled students; around 86% of students with learning disabilities withdraw from college (Kranke et al., 2013). They experience discrimination because people do not accept them, and they internalize feelings of rejection, which compounds low self-esteem. When professors have negative perceptions or attitudes towards disabled students, they don’t offer alternative format tests, learning strategies, and flexibility in assignment and test dates, which are all, according to O’Neill, Markward, and French (2012), pivotal indicators for success and graduation. In a qualitative study conducted in 2015, administrators working at a disability resource center in a Midwest university in the U.S. described ways in which students with non-apparent disabilities experienced stigmatization by professors when giving faculty copies of accommodation letters (Snounu, 2015). One professor rolled her eyes at a student, which pushed the student away. Negative attitudes towards students with invisible disabilities in the U.S. higher
education leads to discrimination. Disabled people, Shapiro (1993) indicates, “all share one common experience—discrimination” (p. 24). Many perceive disabled people as less than human, thus victimizing them. In higher education, many faculty members question whether students with learning disabilities can handle the work load or should even be in college such as in the case of the study Kranke et al. (2013) conducted, which reflects an ideology of ableism, normalcy and Whiteness. Kranke et al.’s (2013) study also revealed that students with non-apparent disabilities encountered stigma from peers and professors because of a lack of campus-wide education.

Other related factors associated with the stigmatization experienced by learning disabled college students in the U.S. are strongly connected to capitalism, labeling, race, and gender within hierarchal ways of thinking. Disabled people experience prejudice and discrimination more often than people of color and are a socially marginalized group in society (Berger, 2013; Siebers, 2008). Capitalism and neoliberalism created a hegemonic culture that produces the discrimination and exclusion of disabled people. Erevelles (2011) explored how the disabled body is formed within social relationships produced by capitalism, which entails examining complex connections between disability and other categories such as race, gender, and sexuality, what Ribet (2011) calls “emergent disability” (p. 161); disability is strongly connected to poverty and social and political subordination. Political economy has much to say about the body; the history of materialism demonstrates “structural violence” (p. 17). Materiality, as Erevelles (2011) described, involves “actual social and economic conditions that impact (disabled) people’s lives, and that are concurrently mediated by the politics of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and nation” (p. 26).

This history started with the intellectual devaluation of Africans compared to their
white counterparts and resulted in body-destroying conditions, which continues to be expressed in current educational policies. Such policies continue to support the rationale for enslavement through not providing equal opportunities similar to those White Americans receive. Historically, there have been many attempts to prove that Black Americans are less intelligent than Whites, and thus are less able, and not fully human (Berry, 1977; Connor et al., 2015; Erevelles, 2011; Smith, 2008). That was the historical justification for slavery, and such racist and eugenicist beliefs perpetuate current discourses that create a system of exclusion, segregation, and overrepresentation in the American special education (Connor, 2008; Erevelles & Minear, 2010; Erevelles, 2011, Smith, 2008).

Looking at ways, especially socially, in which disability and race are intertwined, Connor, Ferri, and Annamma (2015) combined aspects of critical race theory and elements of disability studies for a new framework that they call “Dis/Crit.” Each one reinforces the other; processes of normalizing unspoken connections of race and disability are cultivated in American culture and can be exposed. A DisCrit framework theorizes ways in which race, racism, disability, and ableism are entangled and function as principle elements in educational discourse and institutions (Connor et al., 2015). When this framework is applied to higher education, students of color with learning disabilities clearly have different experiences compared with white, learning disabled students. African Americans are “more apt to be labeled as having intellectual disabilities, than white” (Smith, 2015, p. 146).

We are all raised in complex social and cultural contexts, and our individual identities are shaped by historical discursive exchanges created by different institutional and knowledge systems. We internalize what we learn as truth and contribute to cultural myths; this includes, for example, the belief that humans are superior to all other creatures, or some
groups of humans are superior to other groups in regard to race, sex, gender, and ability (Merchant, 1990; Mies & Shiva, 1993). That last belief particularly applies to people with learning disabilities, especially in the Western industrialized societies, in which “disability is widely regarded as an individual failing and a personal tragedy” (Barnes & Mercer, 2010, p. 1).

The lived experience of students with learning disabilities share a common ground with processes of environmental degradation, the abuse of women, and racial discrimination, in that all are subordinated through similar thinking, and similar logic is used to place them in a lower position and thus make them the object of abuse and oppression. Bowers (1993), Plumwood (2002), and Warren (1990) explored discourses of binarism, dichotomy, or dualism. An important Western binary is that between body and mind, giving more value to the mind. The logic of these binaries is used as a tool to justify domination of man over nature, and men over women, as well as non-disabled over disabled, which creates what Plumwood (2002) refers to as a hegemonic form of reason, produced by political, scientific and economic power. Such hierarchized ways of thinking within Western, Northern, Eurocentric culture and lifestyle is thought to be immutable and is rarely questioned by the Western, Northern, Eurocentric culture. As is the case for nature and women, people of color generally are placed at the bottom of social hierarchies, and oppression against them is justified. Learning disabled students are also categorized as outside the “normal” and thus stigmatized by educators.

CDS considers these a complex set of social narratives, values, ideas, and types of knowledge, residing in culture rather than in individual bodyminds. Drawing on social models of disability, CDS explores ways in which disability is culturally constructed rather
than inherent in individuals with disability, through what Siebers (2008) calls a “theory of complex embodiment” (p. 25), and looking at disabling cultural environments and their effects on disabled people. College students with learning disabilities fit into these categories of exclusion and power relations. Despite laws that (partially) guarantee accommodations for students with disabilities, negative attitudes and perceptions of higher education faculty and administrators are part of cultural discourses caused by hierarchies of normal and abnormal (Hong, 2015).

**Disability in light of teacher development in both Palestine and the U.S.** Higher education faculty and administrative personnel, particularly professors, can play an important role in supporting students with disabilities. Faculty members are often faced with several challenges when accommodating disabled students. These challenges may include lack of knowledge about disability legislation, lack of accommodation details in legislation and in higher education policies, lack of skills and training, and professors’ negative perceptions of disabled students. While in Palestine there are no studies on whether professors are aware of disability legislation, in the American context, Zhang et al. (2009) referred to several studies (Fuller, Bradley, & Healey, 2010; Proctor, 2001; Rao, 2004) that concluded that most faculty members are not aware of legislation regarding accommodations for students with disabilities. Without this knowledge, or specific skills and guidelines for accommodating disabled students, faculty members will not be able to help disabled students progress academically. Zhang et al. (2009) argued that knowledge of disability legislation and the needs of disabled students positively influences the perceptions and beliefs of faculty.

Second, there is inadequate and unclear disability policy direction in both Palestinian (Snounu, 2015) and American (Fuller et al., 2010; Proctor, 2001) higher education. Higher
education must examine the purposes and outcomes of the courses offered in college and “establish policies that maintain the essential components of the college curriculum” (Proctor, 2001, p. 50) in order to adequately accommodate and guarantee success for disabled students. In fact, those familiar with the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 expressed frustration about the lack of detail regarding how to accommodate students with disabilities (Zhang et al., 2009). In this regard, Scott and Gregg (2000) suggested that professors be trained through workshops, awareness sessions, and follow-up sessions. Zhang et al. (2009) emphasized that disability offices in colleges need to do a better job of providing mandatory training to faculty; training might be self-paced and online, so faculty take it at their convenience. Coaching might also be a useful approach for faculty.

From a teacher development perspective, Kee, Anderson, Dearing, Harris and Shuster (2010) proposed four pillars for achieving educational leadership: teaming, collegial inquiry, leadership roles, and mentoring. These pillars help faculty members overcome the many challenges of accommodating disabled students. For instance, teaming would enable faculty members and different departments on campus to cooperate and come up with diverse approaches about how best to fit their pedagogical practices to accommodate the needs of students with learning disabilities. As for leadership, Kee et al. (2010) suggested that higher education administrators communicate genuinely with faculty members, involve them in decisions on policies for accommodating students, and provide faculty with leadership responsibilities through training. In addition, cooperation is needed between different departments to examine possibilities for inclusion and discussion of best practices (Smith, 2010). Finally, according to Erevelles (2000), changing educational systems is not enough to enable real empowerment for students with disabilities. There must be movement towards
understanding the harsh realities within which many disabled students live, the lived experiences produced by economic and social inequalities brought on by late stage capitalism and neoliberal ideologies.

Insufficient numbers of higher education faculty in the U.S. are in favor of accommodating students with learning disabilities: “[S]ome professors have spoken out against accommodating students whose condition doesn’t warrant the special treatment, and many others have complained privately about the power and secrecy of the disabilities offices that decide whether students are to be accommodated” (Vickers, 2010, p. 3). Since the attitudes of faculty regarding the accommodation of students with learning disabilities influences the provision of those accommodations (Zhang et al., 2009), Scott and Gregg (2000) insist that university practices must promote positive faculty attitudes towards accommodating disabled students.

Teacher learning theories that focus on adult development within the context of U.S. schools can help us better understand the role that faculty members can play in creating inclusive environments and the need to immerse faculty in transformational learning processes (Drago-Severson, 2009), in order to adopt positive perceptions on accommodating disabled students. Howard (2006) suggested some transformational ways of knowing in an attempt to address the problem of diversity in K-12 classrooms: “Knowing my practices, knowing myself, and knowing my students” (Howard, 2006, p. 134). When applying this model to the accommodation of students with disabilities, knowing my practices might enable higher education faculty and administrators to examine curriculum, pedagogy, instructional design, history, human relationships, and inclusiveness. Knowing myself offers an opportunity for educators to question their assumptions. Knowing my students allows
faculty to explore relationships to and with their students, through exploring student backgrounds, their cultures, and social and economic situations, and to question labeling and ableism. This way, teachers will establish trust and care for their students instead of judgement. These types of knowing help (and require) teachers to “step outside of the comfort zone of (their) constructed reality” (Howard, 2006, p. 127). As a result, professors are able to question their assumptions about disabled students and encourage themselves to develop positive attitudes towards disabled students, including questioning the validity of disability, ending the harassment of disabled students, eliminating hostile environments for students with disabilities, and acknowledging disability identity and lived experience when students bring them accommodation letters (Scott & Gregg, 2000).

Rao (2004) pointed to ways in which knowledge of disabled students and their needs lead to the establishment of positive relationships between higher education faculty and disabled students. In order to be successful in school, students with disabilities need to know that there are people who care about them. Kee et al. (2010) recognized the importance of “committed listening” (p. 94) in order to build positive, nonjudgmental relationships with students, and to provide appropriate accommodations to students with disabilities. According to Kee et al. (2010), in committed listening, we listen in order to gain clarity about an issue, understand the needs, perceptions and emotions of the speaker, gather data for feedback, allow the speaker to refine thinking by speaking to an attentive listener, seek patterns of behavior, and lay a path for building responses and solutions. (p. 95)

Tools developed through CDS can be used by educators in both Palestine and the U.S., but perhaps especially for those in the U.S. because of the issue of stigmatization.
These tools contribute to and embrace inclusion in higher education and fight negative perceptions and hierachal ways of thinking by university personnel toward disabled students so that professors can accommodate disabled students openly and without judgement. Pedagogy is not only about teaching methods; it is also about practices and knowledge—it is rational, and it should rely on ethics, which includes having a commitment to and discussing topics of all forms of social inequalities, such as ableism. Ableism can be fought and must be responded to using practices similar to what Price (2011) calls an “ethics of care” (p. 47), in which faculty are involved in listening to their students without judging them.

**Concluding Remarks**

While the essence of Eastern cultures is focused on harmony and collectivism, the U.S. culture is more centered on values of competition and individualism than most Eastern cultures (Harry, 1992). Many students in American universities face what Rao (2004) called “attitudinal barriers” (p. 191) through negative assumptions, stigmatization, and labeling. Smith (2013) asserted that labeling and stigmatization segregate and disenfranchise disabled people, even by institutional elements designed to encourage inclusion, such as special education. Smith (2013) also explained that the culture of special education and higher education creates ableism because it creates labels that cause stigma and segregation.

Studies of students with disabilities in Palestinian higher education, and the perceptions of disability by Palestinian professors and administrators, are rare and the few studies available demonstrate that professors in Palestine show cooperation and sympathy towards students with disabilities despite hierarchal ways of thinking in some Palestinian groups. In general, Palestinian culture tends to be protective of individuals with disabilities in the midst of harmful Israeli practices and widespread Western political agenda because
families believe that disabled Palestinians are increasingly vulnerable as opposed to nondisabled Palestinians.
Chapter 2: Methodology

This dissertation examines the perceptions of professors and administrators towards students with disabilities, accommodations in higher education, and challenges disabled students face in light of political, social, economic factors, and federal disability laws. In order to do that in depth, valid responses on the study topic were attained throughout qualitative research for information collection. Qualitative researchers generally highlight the “socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 13). Hence, a qualitative method reveals a process in which inquiry is surrounded with the efforts of the researcher and the revelation of social phenomena and real-life experiences.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is a practical method that involves identifying the meanings found through lived experiences and understanding contextual influences on actions and behaviors (Schram, 2006). It is a process in which the researcher, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), is situated in natural settings, trying to interpret and make sense of social phenomena in a way that brings an understanding of how people relate and make meanings of such phenomena. A qualitative mode contributes to unveiling the world through casting its social phenomena: “Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 4). The purpose of designing qualitative research is to understand and interpret the perceptions, belief systems and experiences of individuals and/or groups in a social setting (Glesne, 2006). Thus, a qualitative approach is selected as the best fit for this study. In particular, I use an ethnographical mode.
Ethnography, as Spradley (1980) confirmed, is all about “learning from people rather than studying people” (p. 3). Therefore, I interviewed faculty members and those on the administrative level who work closely with students with disabilities in order to capture their experiences working with disabled students in higher education. The interviews were a process in which I identified the perceptions of professors and administrators on challenges facing disabled students in higher education and on accommodating students with disabilities in light of political, social, and economic factors, and federal disability laws. In a study, Amro (2001) pointed out that the realities of disabled Palestinians worsen day by day in Palestine due to political and economic factors, and other studies, such as Vickers (2010) and Scott and Gregg (2000), showed that some American professors spoke against accommodating students with disabilities. It is crucial to explore and question what appears to be going on (Schram, 2006)—that is, to examine the factors behind the different realities and challenges disabled students go through in higher education in Palestine and in the U.S.

While there is no universal way to conduct a qualitative study, different qualitative modes can be used depending on the choice of the researcher and the purpose and nature of the research. In reference to previous studies on disability (Gumpel & Awartani, 2003; Palestinian Women Research and Documentation Center-UNESCO & Birzeit University, 2011; Rao, 2004; Sabbah, 2014), a quantitative approach was used in those studies in order to examine if faculty were familiar with the legal rights of students with disability in the U.S., whether faculty members were trained to teach students with disability, and attitudes on disability in general in Palestine.

Such research leaves a gap as the quantitative approach can have depth while still leaving many questions unanswered, especially those related to the in-depth analysis of
cultural values and lived experiences. Even though some research used qualitative methods (e.g. Mayat & Amosun, 2011), the focus of such research was only on professor willingness to admit students with disability to college and accommodate them. The research also concluded that professor knowledge of disability may negatively affect accommodating students (Mayat & Amosun, 2011). The quantitative research mentioned above did not go in depth to explain and/or examine professor perceptions, the cultural values, and political power system, all of which may mediate negative effects and discrimination against students with disabilities. For the sake of a deep understanding of the cultural roots and perceptions and their effect on accommodating students with disabilities, a qualitative approach is imperative.

On the other hand, while it is crucial to explore experiences of university personnel in accommodating students with disabilities in higher education, it is also critical to examine inequalities that can often be found in ways of speaking and discourses across contexts. This can be done through looking for and analyzing connections between texts and social context, and how they shape one another, which is the purpose of critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Collin, 2016), in order to understand the practice and production of cultural meaning. It is imperative to examine ideologies and language related to disability in Palestine and the U.S. due to the power of such ideologies in creating a system of exclusion between people with disabilities and non-disabled people. Therefore, using qualitative research aims at examining language usage within different contexts and social practices reflects the values and beliefs people share, and that can be done through a blend of critical ethnography and CDA.

This research relies mainly on a critical ethnography mode but also draws from critical discourse analysis mode because the purpose of this research is to critically examine
inequalities resulting from perceptions, beliefs, and cultural discourses that impact the lives of students with disabilities. CDA focuses on analyzing language (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000) as its focus takes solely a linguistic outlook and does not focus as much on important social/macro-factors, such as colonialism, and the impact of such dimensions on the interpretations of patterns of human meanings and social actions; critical ethnography, on the other hand, complements it by unpacking such language within several contexts of political and social systems and macro levels (Glesne, 2006).

**Critical ethnography mode.** While ethnography is the task of collecting data by spending time with the participants, interviewing them, and observing them to understand how they make sense of their world, through plenty of contextual details and representations of participant voices (Hatch, 2002), critical ethnography is orientational research that is launched with clear and explicit “ideological frameworks” (Glesne, 2006, p. 16). Critical ethnography relies on interpreting findings based on specific theoretical perspectives. The purpose of critical ethnography, as Glesne (2006) explained it, is to reveal “unexamined assumptions and the ways in which people may be accepting explanations of the dominant cultural group that serve to oppress those without power” (p. 16). The concept “critical” refers to identifying beliefs and practices that restrict justice, freedom and equity, while the focus of critical ethnography is often on language. As far as disability is concerned, Price (2011) illustrated that in discourse, disorderly minds show up always, and recognizing such appearance is a process in which one should question what a normal mind means.

An ethnographic method with a political purpose, as Thomas (1993) described critical ethnography, is the best fit for this research. In critical ethnography, researchers learn to be engaged with the information and be involved in helping others: “Critical inquiries add to the
interpretivist’s task the responsibility to helping others” (Schram, 2006, p. 45). Therefore, a critical ethnographic approach enabled me to be part of a participatory process for the purpose of social justice (Schram, 2006), especially when I advocated for minority groups—disabled students—while observing classrooms and other events, and while interacting and interviewing professors and administrators on their perceptions on disability and providing accommodations.

For this study, a critical ethnography mode gives the reader an idea of what it means to be a professor or in another university personnel position working with disabled students, how these professors and administrators relate to students with disabilities, how they perceive them, and how they reflect on challenges facing disabled students. In addition, Geertz (1973) argued that understanding the relationship between culture and individuals should be based on an interpretive search for meaning such that the meaning is always located in “thick description” (p. 10), which will help understand differences or similarities between the American and the Palestinian cultures as well as the complex relationships that influence disability in Palestine. A critical ethnography mode would work to reveal such complexity.

**Critical discourse analysis.** Fairclough (2003) asserted that CDA is a form of qualitative inquiry. According to CDA scholars (Van Dijk, 2001; Wodak, 2013), the main purpose of CDA is to analyze how language exhibits structures of power, discrimination, and dominance between different groups in society (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). The term CDA comes from critical linguistics, which extends discourse analysis to examine ideology that causes relationships of power and control (Liu & Guo, 2016); CDA examines relationships between language, ideology and power.
In reference to Fairclough’s methodological dimensions of analyzing discourse, Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000) listed these dimensions as follows:

- Analysis of text, which includes grammar, vocabulary, and text structure (such as taking turns).
- Discourse as a discursive practice, that is discourse as something circulated and consumed in the society, where special attention should be paid to acts of speech, coherence of speech, and intertextuality.
- Discourse as a social practice, where a hegemonic process is articulated in the society. Discourse, ideology and discursive structures are often intertwined (Van Dijk, 2001). Ideology appears within language, which represents discourse in context construction as the interpretation of the social situation.

In this dissertation, I examine language including terms used to describe disability and disabled individuals in relation to ableism.

Furthermore, CDA explores how macro-related systems, such as capitalism, lead to social inequalities through creating discriminatory discourses. As social institutions are an integral part of discourse, Poole (2010) described Fairclough’s work in CDA as a commitment to what he stands for as a socialist; for instance, Fairclough is very critical of new trends of capitalism and the use of the terms “globalization,” “Post- or post modernity,” “knowledge economy,” and “information society” (p. 139) and how these terms serve a neoliberal political discourse, which causes a restructuring in social relations and an increase of the gap between the poor and the rich. The text is the resource for the interpretation process of social interaction and relationships. The consequence is an establishment of soft power controlling the way people think, which is a social psychological manipulation of
people to create acceptable norms towards inequalities. Hegemony, a concept developed by Gramsci, is about dominating subordinate groups and winning their consent through ideological means (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 2015; Wodak, 2013), and Van Dijk (2015) urged researchers to be critical analysts of injustice through CDA:

We need a more explicit analysis of the very notion of what it means to be ‘critical’ in CDA and more generally in scholarship—for example, in terms of legitimacy, violation of human rights, and the basic democratic norms and values of equality and justice. It is ultimately in those terms that CDA may and should act as a force against the discursive abuse of power. (p. 479)

Therefore, it is crucial to critique ideologies and discourse, as well as to be aware of their creation of systems of power and domination over subordinate groups. Critiquing ideologies and discourse that promote injustice and domination of groups over other groups eventually leads to activism and empowerment.

In that regard, there are different ways of critiquing a system that exhibits a discourse of injustice. For example, Price (2011) discussed discourse and a rhetoric of mental disabilities in academia. She points out the importance of looking at disability, mental disability in particular, from a rhetorical perspective. Rhetoricity is “the ability to be received as a valid human subject” (Price, 2011, p. 26), so people perceive those with mental disabilities as rhetorically disabled, thus mad or crazy, and categorize them as deviant from normal. Price (2011) insisted that the academic discourses in university settings create and are produced by an able-minded ideology, which ignores any understanding of students and professors with mental disabilities, and creates practices of exclusion and discrimination. Price (2011) further argued that CDA is a suitable fit to disability studies because it examines
ideology, rhetoric, and power relationships and ways in which people are excluded, oppressed, and stigmatized.

Similarly, Siebers (2008), in his Disability Theory, highlighted the importance of bringing the ideology of disability into public and noted how little awareness people have of its patterns, contradictions, and influence. Placing the ideology and discourse of disability on the table is essential because it uncovers problematic existing theories, such as the enlightenment theory of rational autonomy, a theory that argued that the inability to reason due to biological inferiority. Because of such ideologies, “a minority identity” (Siebers, 2008, p. 13) is created in a systematic way by the dominant culture, which often defines what normalcy is and excludes those with disabilities due to the beliefs that people with disabilities do not exhibit capabilities like “normal” people. This is crucial in academia as it may lead to stigma, discrimination, and exclusion of students with disabilities when professors have low expectations and see them as less smart compared to non-disabled students, and practices of elimination are in place and normalized as a result. Hence, keeping an eye and being critical of discourses that lead to injustice is a necessity.

In conclusion, a combined ethnographic approach and CDA approach examines power relations, through the analysis of language, and the production of inequalities. Both complement each other, as CDA and critical ethnography are intertwined in the analysis of social circumstances during which a text is produced and during which the different ways a text can be interpreted as well. An ethnographic approach is also a source of contextualizing data that can “remedy some of the current problems with context and interpretation in CDA” (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, p. 460). One of the most important aspects of qualitative research is meaning. As Hatch (2002) and Glesne (2006) explained, meanings stem from
contexts because perceptions and meaning are connected, and we make sense of others’ perceptions through meaning.

**Location and Sampling**

This dissertation drew from participants working at three universities in Gaza and the West Bank, and two participants working in a university in the Midwest in the United States. I interviewed and observed 15 professors and administrators from Palestine from different departments who deal with students with disabilities, and another two personnel from a university in the U.S. This study enables the reader to understand some of the similarities and differences in regard to educational accommodations provided for students with disabilities in two different settings. It also provides an understanding of cultural values on how people with disabilities are perceived in a society through perceptions of professors and administrators and the discourses used in discussing and perceiving people with disabilities. Most importantly, it highlights the political relations between the U.S. and Israel and how such a relation plays a role in disability in Palestine, and the challenges disabled Palestinians face.

**Data Collection**

Methodology often guides how we come to know what we know; it indicates assumptions about what is of importance to study, what constitutes legitimate knowledge, and what counts as evidence for making knowledge claims (Glesne, 2006, p. 6). This research uses critical discourse analysis and critical ethnography as methodology and the following tools for collecting data: interviews, naturally occurring conversations, and documents and records. As a researcher, I identified the language used in interviews, public conversations, publicly available documents including non-governmental organizations’
(NGOs) reports and websites, and the language of society in describing people with disabilities as well as the language used in the Palestinian and American disability laws.

In addition, I highlighted the work of the NGOs in Palestine through interviews with university personnel, NGOs’ publicly available reports, and projects using information on their websites. NGOs’ work details how they contribute to promoting people with disabilities, so disabled Palestinians can reach college, but at the same time, NGOs can also reflect a foreign, Western agenda that does not serve the Palestinians. Although emergent aspects in data collection can make it a difficult task for the researcher to follow a specific recipe for analyzing data (Phillips & Hardy, 2002), successful data collection and analysis depends on several collections of texts because “no aspect of social reality depends on a single text” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 86). Ethnographic records in this dissertation were collected through field notes, audio recording and pictures as methods that Spradley (1980) suggested.

**Observations and notetaking.** Used in similar ways in ethnography and discourse analysis, participant observation takes place in social situations. Locating a social situation is the first step for making observation (Spradley, 1980). In any social situation, there should be a place, actors, and activities. Each one of these elements should be relevant to the purpose of study (Spradley, 1980). The focus of this dissertation is on disabled students and higher education, challenges they may face and support they receive from the perspectives of university personnel. Thus, the places of observation were mainly higher education institutions and the Ministry of Education where events and meetings discussing issues related to disabled students were held. The individuals observed were disabled students
inside the classroom and in university offices, and professors in the classrooms and meetings on campus and outside of campus for meetings relevant to disabled students.

Spradley (1980) has also discussed the possibility of losing meaning when the ethnographer’s language differs from the language of the people who are being studied. In the Palestinian context, this did not form any limitation for me as Arabic, the language of Palestine, is my native language. On the other hand, in the American context, I have lived for more than five years in Michigan and have been interacting with Americans in academia and in other social settings, which helps me to better understand cultural cues relevant to their language.

Developing an understanding occurs while observing (Glesne, 2006). Observation is a main part of ethnography, and in this research, it was crucial to pay attention to gestural cues and body language, where observation should take place in the activities of the interviewee and the physical environment (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2003; Glesne, 2006). Observations, as Angrosino and Mays de Perez (2003) asserted, take place on a continuum. There is an outsider-observer who is unfamiliar with the settings being observed, and that of a participant-observer, who is familiar with the setting being examined (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2003). The former needs to build rapport and trust, and the second runs the risk of conducting backyard research, which involves bias (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2003). This research could be possibly categorized a backyard research due to my Palestinian identity as the researcher conducting research in my country. As a researcher, first, I would overcome this dilemma by identifying my bias, being a Palestinian, through journals and self-reflexivity (Peshkin, 1998; Watt, 2007). According to Archdivili (2002), the researcher should be able to identify “culturally conditioned interpretation biases” (p. 27) and envision alternative
assumptions and explanations. Second, in order to address my own bias as a researcher, I had to avoid taking things for granted when observing in the Palestinian setting and be critical of what I observed.

Furthermore, Spradley’s (1980) experience included familiarizing himself with the environment he was studying, and always making notes about his own observation experience and information collection, which was part of my routine while collecting data. While observing events and interactions of professors and disabled students, it was important for me as a researcher to get to know the people and the place before starting to take notes, so I could know where and when it was acceptable to take notes. Ironically, I am Palestinian, from Gaza, yet I rarely visited the West Bank due to Israeli barriers that prevent Palestinians in Gaza from visiting other parts of Palestine. I was not sure what to expect since that would be my first time spending four months in the West Bank. Sometimes, I was both an insider and outside for the people in the West Bank, and other times, I was neither an insider nor an outsider.

In terms of the duration of collecting data using an ethnographical mode, I relied on factors of my familiarity with the Palestinian culture and settings. Ben Blount (n.d.) argued that the time spent in the field in an ethnography can take weeks or months depending on several factors, one of which is familiarity of the setting as “long-term, in-depth familiarity can reduce the time substantially” (para. 1). The more the researcher is familiar with the setting being studied, the less time can be spent in the setting, as was my situation as a native Palestinian. While conducting observations for four months in Palestine, I adhered to Spradley’s (1980) stages of observation: descriptive observation, focused observation, and selective observation. “Descriptive Observation” (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2003, p. 114)
is an approach that I used as the first stage in order to socialize with participants, familiarize myself with the settings, and get a general idea of what is going on. Then, the second stage is “focused observation,” which entailed ignoring anything that is irrelevant, where I started avoiding long conversations that were irrelevant to disability, my topic. Finally, “selective observation” is when an ethnographer focuses on only the relevant activities of the research. I did that when my participants started inviting me to events on campus, and I had to choose to attend those that were relevant to students with disabilities. For instance, I attended the meeting for the Committee for Disabled Students, and the International Day for Persons with Disabilities in December. At times, when I was invited to observe classrooms, and the disabled student did not show up, I stayed a little bit before I left so as not to offend the professor. Coming from the Palestinian culture, some may feel offended when you join their lectures and leave right after the lecture starts.

**Interviews.** As part of the ethnographical mode, a second tool this research used is interviewing. Behar (1996) argued that in ethnography face-to-face connection and participation is more effective to understand people’s lives. Researchers using this framework mainly collect data through not only observation, but also interviewing. In this study, an initial interview and a follow-up interview were conducted. The interviews period was between 40 minutes to an hour for each interview using open-ended questions (see Appendix A: Tentative questions for the interviews). Interviews were recorded, transcribed, translated, and analyzed to find narrative themes. Since this study examines the attitudes and perceptions of university personnel, professors and administrators in particular, and also examines challenges that disabled students face in higher education, there were specific criteria for choosing interviewees for this study. The interviewees were all professors and
people in the administration of programs that help and/or provide services for disabled students mainly from the Palestinian setting, along with fewer participants in a counterpart university in the U.S. for the purpose of drawing brief comparisons. Since most of the participants in Palestine did not speak English, the language of the interview was in Arabic, and I translated the recorded file into English after transcribing them. Only Professor Adham (blind, Professor of Linguistics) did the interviews in English due to the fact that he mastered English. While working on identifying themes from verbatim data and thematic analysis, I was going back and forth checking the translation with the original transcriptions, as a back-translation strategy to double-check the accuracy of translation against the original Arabic text.

While interviewing professors and administrators, setting up the place and time was easy, and it occurred according to what was appropriate and comfortable for the subjects or interviewee (Glesne, 2006). I made sure to communicate with the interviewee and set up a time and place that was appropriate for them and me. Most of the interviewees in this research chose to conduct the interview on campus in their offices. So, I was able to know and connect with more professors, deans, and other university personnel by being on campuses at all times. In addition, building rapport was important to be able to obtain information I sought, and that could be done through building cultural bridges manifested in the researcher’s behavior and expectations (Glesne, 2006). As a Palestinian, it was not difficult to break any barriers because there was a common topic everyone spoke about, the Israeli occupation. I often spent an hour or so talking politics with professors and university personnel, and they often asked me about Gaza and what has been happening before we began the interview. As a result, there was a sense of rapport already established that allowed
for frank and honest interviews. Indeed, it was easy to build rapport based on the fact that what my participants thought about who I was, a Palestinian who shares the same identity with them. Yet I had to reflect on how my participants were coding my questions to them. Many of them assumed I knew what they were talking about. In those situations, I had to ask follow-up questions and explained to them that I sought their perspective and their voice, not what I knew. For instance, one participant said: “You remember when that doctor [Israeli] opened fire in the mosque in Hebron.” I asked: “Can you tell me more about that?” The participant was surprised that I asked her that follow-up question, because she assumed that I, as a Palestinian, knew the details of what she mentioned. In such instances, I had to be wide-awake and aware of what I knew as a Palestinian and asked my participants to talk about it and explain it as a way to represent and validate their voices and to monitor my positionality as well.

Collecting data was done in two stages. An earlier study was the first stage, during which I interviewed two administrators at a university in the Midwest, U.S., and I also interviewed one administrator in Gaza, Palestine. That first stage took place between October 2015 and December 2015. The early study was included in the application submitted to Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the second stage, which lasted for four months for the Palestinian setting: from September 2017 to December 2017, a period during which I observed and interviewed 14 professors and administrators in two universities in the West Bank, Palestine. Interviews and observations took place at the two universities in the West Bank at the University of Eastern Palestine and the University of Western Palestine [pseudonyms]. I observed 15 class sessions, ranging in duration between one hour and an
hour and a half, taking notes and pictures. I also observed 10 workshops, educational sessions, meetings, and ceremonies relevant to students with disabilities on campuses.

**Data Analysis**

The role of the researcher in qualitative analysis is a complex one. In my data analysis, I chose exemplary language that speaks to strong themes. Choosing exemplary language was done through a process: starting from transcribing the audio, listening repeatedly to the interviews, translating, printing out all transcriptions and their translations, color coding words and sentences, and eliminating what was not relevant to the themes identified.

When interviewing, Seidman (2006) recommended going through three steps: The first stage should focus on history; this was the reason why I asked all my participants questions on disability laws, history, and political situation. The second stage should focus on the details and what the details mean. Many of my interviewees discussed terms and language used to describe disabled individuals and what that means, and they also highlighted their role on campus and in the community to abolish stigma associated with disability. The third stage places the details in the broader context, which most of my participants elaborated on when talking about disability and challenges disabled students face in higher education. Participants mainly discussed Israeli apartheid (Bennis, 2009, p. 46) in increasing physical disabilities, creating shortage in medical services and rehabilitation services, and placing barriers on any progress.

Therefore, the first procedure of analyzing data was finding themes from verbatim data. The first theme, for instance, was connected to the historical background of the political situation in Palestine, including the American-Israeli relations, their implications for
disability in Palestine and the Israeli apartheid in Palestine as well as its ramifications for disability in Palestine. In that, the macro aspect of this dissertation is an integral part of the analysis by the participants and literature, including how the Israeli apartheid impedes the implementation of Palestinian existing laws that aim at securing inclusive environment for students with disabilities in higher education. In other words, the first section/theme examined the lines that were drawn between what the Palestinian disability laws stipulated and what was implemented on the ground. The macro analysis procedure takes into consideration Jasbir Puar’s (2017) work on disability in Palestine; she utilizes in her work the notion “right to maim” in an attempt to disrupt the category of disability through analyzing economic, social, and political factors related to social injustices inflicted against the Palestinian people. Her framework includes the analysis of the biopolitics of the Israeli militarization (Puar, 2015). From Foucault’s perspective, biopolitics explores the vulnerability and bodily health under regimes of power (Puar, 2015). Examining disability in Palestine within the U.S. context involved a critical mode of analyzing data due to the fact that there is a myriad of stereotypes about the Middle East generated by U.S. and Israeli discourses (Said, 1979). In that sense, critical ethnography involves challenging value systems, and many use it to question experiences that may have been falsified by ideology or false consciousness (Glesne, 2006).

On the other hand, analyzing language and terms related to disability was another procedure of analysis in this dissertation. Language on disability is a crucial factor in how people with disabilities are perceived and how discourses are produced, reproduced, and discursive practices are conducted and normalized towards people with disabilities. Many persons with disabilities prefer “disabled people” as an affirmative identity and their pride in
the difference (Smith, 2015). Hence, an integral strategy of my data analysis in this dissertation was examining language including terms, concepts and notions that participants described and used in Arabic, which reflected how people with disabilities sought to be addressed and identifies, how they were perceived, and thus how that was also reflected in the treatment disabled students received. When I translated the Arabic recordings, my translation decisions took into consideration different translations/meanings of the Arabic transcriptions, but I mainly adhered to literal translation of the original Arabic verbatim texts.

It is important to elaborate on my translation procedure, which was critical to the meaning and analysis of data in this dissertation. In order for me as a researcher to grasp a deep understanding of my data, I chose to transcribe and translate myself, and I confidently used my extensive experience in translation to work on translating the data of this dissertation. I presented some explanations in brackets for English readers. I also indicated some Arabic language used to describe disabled individuals and placed English transliteration of Arabic terms in brackets. For example, for people who were congenitally blind or blind from birth, I always placed the Arabic word A’ma (congenitally blind) when participants said it; this word is associated with stigma. The word A’ma (congenitally blind) was only used few times by participants. While for people who were adventitiously blind or lost sight sometime after birth, participants use the Arabic word Kafeef (adventitiously blind), plural is Makfofeen or Kafeeen. Participants used the word Kafeef most of the time, which is more acceptable in general and does not have stigma in it. The same applies to the Arabic word Som (plural of non-verbal), which refers to non-verbal and deaf individuals, and Asam (non-verbal) is singular, and that word was also used as a more acceptable word for deaf and non-verbal. Both Arabic words Bokom and Akhras refer to “dumb,” but the first is acceptable
and the second is frowned upon, and the use of *Akhras* (the mouth is shut) refers to subordinating, shaming or insulting. On another note, I also kept pronouns that the participants used exactly as they said them. I often kept the terminology that has cultural connotations in brackets, especially the repetitive ones. In many other places, I explained between brackets what the use of pronouns means such as the common use of “he” where participants refer to female and male disabled students in general, or the pronoun “they” to refer to an institution, or a body.

In connection with the language procedure of analysis, critical disability studies (CDS), critical discourse analysis (CDA), and teacher development provide a multi-theoretical framework that I used to analyze my data. For instance, Chiapello and Fairclough (2002) referred to power hierarchy as “conditions under which processes of internalization take place” (p. 195), arguing that when discourses become functional in the economy of the society, discourses are generated, and particular knowledge is produced. CDS, on the other hand, focuses on the power hierarchy intersected with factors of race and poverty (Erevelles & Minear, 2010; Harry, 2008) as it is manifested in the American society. The current educational system in the U.S. focuses on tests to measure intelligence, which creates class hierarchies within the society. The result is an ideology of “the poor are poor because they are stupid” (Erevelles, 2000, p. 28). Moreover, Erevelles and Minear (2010) argued that social race is a reality, subordination of people of color compared to the privilege of White people is prevailing in the U.S.; labels of disability such as “mentally retarded” are mostly attributed to the African race (Erevelles & Minear, 2010; Harry, 2008). This leads whites to be afraid, so they separate themselves from African Americans; segregation takes different forms residential segregation, ghettos, and state institutions (Erevelles & Minear, 2010).
The same applies in global contexts like Palestine where Zionists perceive themselves as superior to the Palestinians based on their Zionist ideologies (Jaffee, 2016). Such hierarchal ideology is an important tool of analysis while identifying themes that relate to challenges facing people with disabilities, whether on the macro or the micro levels.

Finally, teacher development theories were used to analyze the practices of professors in higher education and their pedagogical approaches towards students with disabilities. For this dissertation a prominent subset of teacher development theories are selected to explore transformational learning by professors. Theories of teacher development are drawn from the work of Drago-Saverson (2009), Howard (2006), and Kee et al. (2010) in addition to Price (2011), whose work highlights elements of both CDS and teacher development. Howard (2006) provided a model of how teachers can grow, develop, and help their students in multicultural classrooms, which can also be applied to professors who have students with disabilities in their classrooms. He focuses on his own experiences as a White person and the ways in which his own transformation occurred as a result of situational learning through his racial identity development. Helping teachers to adopt flexible mindset to different ways of knowing would enable them to examine internalized assumptions and avoid being judgmental towards their students (Drago-Saverson, 2009), which is an asset in creating inclusive environments and in combatting ableism. As part of adult learning, Drago-Severson (2009) and Howard (2006) suggest that teachers go through transformational learning through different ways of knowing.

Protection and Confidentiality

I sought approval to conduct this study from Eastern Michigan University’s Human Subjects Research Committee (UHSRC); See Appendix B: UHSRC Approval). The
participants were asked to sign a consent form, the English, and the one translated into Arabic for the Palestinian participants who did not speak English, as well as a consent form for pictures (See Appendix C: Arabic and English Consent Forms). The consent form included clear guidelines to ensure the participants are protected. The interviews were conducted and audio recorded in a private, mutually agreed upon space. The audio recordings and field notes were always kept in my possession all the time. Pseudonyms were chosen for the participants, their universities, and any other names mentioned during the interviews to protect anonymity, with the exception of public figures, which are indicated in the text. The transcriptions were locked in a password-protected file on a personal password-protected computer. The participants were also notified through the consent form that they could contact the researcher’s dissertation chair or the UHSRC regarding any concerns or questions.

Limitation of the Study: Challenges and Standards of Validity in Qualitative Research

Validity is a crucial aspect in qualitative research. Reading qualitative research imposes questions, one of which is “Why should I believe that?” (Freeman, Demarrais, Preissle, Roulston, & Pierre, 2007, p. 27). The construction of an ethnographic text, as well as elements including accuracy of data and accuracy of descriptions is what makes an ethnography valid and credible, according to Geertz (1988). All of these elements evaluate the validity of ethnographic research. That said, credibility can also be achieved through convincing readers that the researcher did enter participants’ lives. As a researcher, I sought to address three main features in my research in order to achieve validity: depth in description, ethical issues, and positionality.
**Depth in description.** Conducting qualitative research is an intellectual effort, a process in which a researcher thinks and reflects. In such a process, the researcher engages in multiple complex activities of collecting data ranging from interviewing participants, observing social settings and rituals, photographing, writing memos, writing field notes, and writing journals (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). What gives qualitative research validity is its depth, breadth, richness and complexity, and the usage of multiple methodological practices such as observing, recording, conversing, writing field notes, interviewing, and self-reflecting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

All these different activities provide “rich descriptions” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 16), what Geertz (1973) called “thick description” (p. 10). Here, studying a culture involves searching for meaning while attempting to understand the relationship and connections between individuals and culture in light of political and economic systems, and meaning can only be captured through rich description, compared to quantitative methodology, because depth is looking for meaning and value in context and not numbers: “It is not worth it, as Thoreau said, to go round the world to count the cats in Zanzibar” (Geertz, 1973, p. 16). Therefore, thick description enabled me as a researcher to avoid ambiguity and gain enough evidence of narratives and materials to back up the claims of the research.

Furthermore, any claims should be supported with sufficient data and thoughtful considerations of the limits of the study (Freeman et al., 2007). Therefore, this research relied on sufficient data from field notes, observations, interviews, pictures, and language analysis as part of discourse analysis. In sum, the quality of qualitative research exists in the decisions made by the researcher throughout the process of the research, decisions such as analysis of data, interpretation of data, representations of data and data corroboration or structural
corroboration. When evaluating an ethnography, Eisner (1991) argued that strong credibility stems from structural corroboration. That means different themes from the narratives should align with verbatim data and should connect to the literature. On the other hand, structural corroboration, as Eisner (1991) maintained, requires a researcher to be skeptical; when researchers are skeptical, they look for evidence. In that regard, I constantly checked validity of all information I was receiving through observing more and more and paying attention to my interviewees while interviewing them and observing them. The weight of evidence is crucial in achieving a credible and persuasive piece (Eisner, 1991).

Nevertheless, it is impossible for any method to ensure “an absolutely objective interpretation of an author’s work” (Bresler, 2002, p. 43) simply due to the fact that each one of us has her own historical prejudice. For this research to demonstrate validity and reliability, consensual validation (Eisner, 1991) should be salient in this research; that is, any person reading the description, verbatim data, and the analysis should be able to make sense of it and agree it is coherent. Part of achieving consensual validation is having structural corroboration; scholars may have different perspectives on the same topic, and they may exhibit differences in where they stand, yet the internal structure of a piece, including elements of description, evaluation, and thematic analysis, is what matters when it comes to validity and reliability of a research.

**Ethical issues.** Ethical issues focus on ensuring that the subjects are not exposed to risk because of their participation in the study. Ethical codes, which I followed in my research, include IRB approval, eliminating risks to participants, and getting informed consent from participants (Glesne, 2006; Seidman, 2013). As other researchers reiterated, the “ethical dimension” (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2003, p. 135) of conducting research was
taken into consideration in this research review through overview by the IRB. Thus, no harm was inflicted on participants of this study in any way. The IRB process was manageable as I made sure that all participants read, understood, and signed a consent form.

Another ethical dilemma is connected to indigenous communities. This research involved complexity as it is a cross-cultural one. Archdivili (2002) argued that international and comparative research involves many dilemmas, particularly our “underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions” (p. 20). Similarly, Bresler (2002) pointed out that research that is cross-cultural involves studying a culture that is foreign, notably in the postcolonial world with political implications, such as the Middle East in the case of this research. This did not constitute a dilemma for me as a researcher as I am very aware of the political situation in Palestine and its implications for education and other aspects of life. In this regard, I understand, as a Palestinian, that the Palestinian community is critical of the role of NGOs and work of outsiders. Similarly, Freeman, Demarrais, Preissle, Roulston, and Pierre (2007) explained that indigenous communities feel exploited by researchers. Taking that into consideration, while I used my native intuition as a Palestinian to easily relate to the indigenous Palestinians in my data collection, I also, on the other hand, used my experience and knowledge of the U.S. culture to help me relate to the few American participants I interviewed.

To conclude, dealing with such dilemmas around international research was best resolved for me through self-reflexivity. Subjectivity is generally considered a dilemma in qualitative research. Peshkin (1998) argued researchers need to stay conscious and aware of how their subjectivity might affect their inquiry and its outcomes. Similarly, Watt (2007) argued that reflexivity is essential for bridging theory and practice in qualitative research, as
it enables the researcher to be aware of her behavior and assumptions that might affect the inquiry. Watt (2007) further recommended that writing reflections often moves the research forward quickly, influences personal growth and leads to better understanding of all research methodology aspects. Throughout my interviews and observations, I had my notebook with me and jotted down my feelings of all kinds; later, at the end of the day, I would go through my notes. That provided me with an opportunity to think about my feelings in situations where I was judgmental. For instance, when a professor asked for money, so I could interview him, I felt upset and thought that other professors were the same in that university. I was discouraged and did not go to that university or schedule appointments for few days. I had to reflect on my feelings in those moments and how that could also affect moving my research forward. Most importantly, it made me better examine my emotions and how I could improve my understanding, which enhanced my personal growth as well. Indeed, reflexivity provides the audience with an opportunity to trace the researcher’s process of constructing knowledge (Bresler, 2002; Watt, 2007).

**Positionality and the role of researcher.** One should be transparent when producing claims and facts (Foley, 2002). The role of the author in giving validity to the research is immense; Geertz (1988) elaborated on validity “not as a narratological issue, a matter of how best to get an honest story honestly told, but as an epistemological one, a matter of how to prevent subjective views from coloring objective facts” (p. 9). Similarly, in reference to Gadamer’s concept of risking one’s own conceptions, Bresler (2002) explained that real understanding stems from risking our own conceptions and genuinely giving others the chance to speak. In order for me as a researcher to deal with such a dilemma of subjectivity
that might influence data, I always attempted to be conscious of my own prejudices, which is an integral part of the challenges of my authorship.

Conducting qualitative research necessitates addressing the difficulties of authorship as a researcher studies a community and phenomena. To write an ethnography is to write vulnerably because locating yourself in a text is not easy. Such a methodology is an “oxymoron” of “participant observation” (Behar, 1996, p. 5), where our role is to familiarize and play a role in the setting; we are studying but need to always remember to keep our eyes open at the same time. In order to be a good interpreter, one needs to be open to others’ experiences, and willing to risk her own prejudices, as well as be immersed in a deep dialogue with the other, what Bresler (2002) called for as working together “collaboratively in the interpretive zone” (p. 45).

**Reflecting on my journey.** In that interpretive zone, we are merely actors and “our formulation of other people’s symbol system must be actor-oriented” (Geertz, 1973, p.14), which entails the importance for the researcher to see the normality of those who are being observed and studied through spending time with them and attempting to understand their culture from a distance. This was problematic for me at the beginning in my first stage of this study. It was ironic for me as a Palestinian to feel uncomfortable when interviewing someone who was a Palestinian. The reason for this discomfort was the political identity of the university in which I was interviewing its personnel because that organization belongs to the Islamic political faction in Gaza, a political faction that caused my family to leave Gaza and injured two of my uncles who now have disabilities. I had to monitor my positionality at that time and be open to learn from these university personnel.
As a Palestinian, it was important for me to monitor my positionality. I have witnessed many Palestinian youths being physically injured or maimed due to the Israeli bombing of Gaza. Thousands of Palestinians became disabled as a result of the Israeli attacks. The political situation has always urged me to advocate for marginalized groups. I was born and raised in Gaza and visited the West Bank a few times with permits from the Israeli occupation. My parents and siblings were relocated a few years back, when they moved from Gaza to the West Bank. I have never lived in the West Bank, but I visit my parents and siblings once a year. Collecting data in the West Bank was an interesting process during which I learned a lot about the Palestinians living in the West Bank. Palestinians living in Gaza do not often interact much with Palestinians in the West Bank due to geographical separations imposed by the Israeli Occupation. My family in the West Bank connected me with universities to get their IRB approval. The universities in the West Bank all provided me their approval to collect data on their campuses within two weeks of my request. In late August 2017, I was in the West Bank after a long trip crossing checkpoints between Jordan, Israel, and the West Bank.

While gathering data, I had to reflect upon where I stand and how my personal experience might shape the way I perceived personnel from an organization I always avoided communicating with. Most importantly, I strove not to judge Palestinians based on their affiliation. My first interview with Hatem (all names are pseudonym, except for those referred to as public figures), who was the director of the disability services center at that university in Gaza, was eye-opening in the sense that even though I disagreed with the political faction with which the participant from Gaza affiliates, monitoring my subjectivity opened my eyes to an exceptional institutional academic experience in serving the students.
with disabilities and helping them to advance their academic and personal lives. As a researcher, I monitored my own subjectivity; as a result, I offer this section on positionality and self-reflection (Peshkin, 1998; Watt, 2007).

To reflect more on the perplexing feelings of being an insider and outsider at the same time, and other times the feelings of neither an outside nor an insider, I tended to criticize Palestinians during the first two weeks of my data collection due to punctuality issues. I would leave early so I was on time for my appointment, but some of the university personnel were late at times, and at other times, others never showed up. In my daily journal, Oct 16, 2017, I wrote, “Many days were wasted coming to the University of Eastern Palestine, I went for appointments with professors and for observations, but then I went home without conducting any scheduled interview or observation.” I started realizing that I became judgmental, which was essentially due to the fact that I lived for many years in the U.S. and grew accustomed to being punctual. I had to pause and identify my bias about punctuality and understand the details and the life Palestinians live in the West Bank instead of judging them. Later, I came to know many of them had to go through Israeli checkpoints before they reach campus; others were trapped trying to find transportation. At the beginning of my data collection, my family drove me to the university, the first month at least, then I started experiencing challenges when I began taking transportation because Ramallah is crowded, and transportation is very difficult to find. A final note, the reader may see times when I am imbedded in this research. This is due to an almost impossible task of separating out my own positionality from the subject of my research. I have tried to catch this, but it may be an unrealistic expectation, and I hope the reader will read with this in mind.
Reflecting on interviews and observation. I did my first interview during my first meeting on September 5, 2017, with the dean of student affairs of the University of Eastern Palestine whom I did not plan to interview the first meeting, as I was only planning to discuss how to access participants for interviews. The dean worked closely with administrators who served students with disabilities and was directly involved in organizing the disability conferences and services offered to disabled students. I did not have to pull teeth, as the dean was very willing to share his university experience in serving students with disabilities. The dean was ready with statistics on students with disabilities at University of Eastern Palestine, their majors, and a report he wrote on circumstances and challenges students with disabilities face. Likewise, I met a student affairs administrator, instructor, and social counselor, Raeda Muhhana, at the University of Western Palestine the following day. She was welcoming, and we chatted for two hours, where she introduced me to the administrator who was responsible for students with disabilities. Raeda contacted professors to check who was willing to be interviewed. She also coordinated and connected me with many professors who had disabled students in their classes and asked them to allow me to observe their classes.

In conclusion, I had easy access to academic personnel despite difficulty reaching the locations of these universities due to high demand for local transportation. I had family support, where my siblings who were studying in those universities drove me there and at times accompanied me when taking a cab from the street and showed me the locations of offices on campus. In addition, the administrators whom I met to help me find participants did not only refer me to professors, but they themselves also contacted these professors and arranged meetings for me. Meeting all participants of this study, interacting with them, and observing them on a daily basis was an eye-opening experience for me, especially in an area
of Palestine in which I have never lived. I came to learn about my fellow Palestinians in the West Bank. I thought that we, in Gaza, suffered more than those Palestinians in the West Bank. Nevertheless, spending four months in Ramallah in the West Bank allowed me to witness that the suffering of the Palestinians in the West Bank was as severe but in different forms. Resilience is pervasive in the efforts of the Palestinian educators who create ways to establish inclusive environments, as it will be presented in the next chapters.
Chapter 3: Participant Profiles

Given my focus on Palestine with some brief analysis of the context of the U.S., I interviewed a total of 17 college faculty members and administrators; a total of 15 participants in Palestine and two participants from the U.S. I interviewed two administrators at a university in Michigan, U.S., and one administrator in Gaza, Palestine, between the period of October 2015 and December 2015. I also interviewed and observed 14 administrators and university professors in two universities in the West Bank, Palestine between the period of September 2017 to December 2017.

Observations took place at the University of Eastern Palestine and the University of Western Palestine in the West Bank. All institutions and participants’ names used in this dissertation are pseudonyms, including the universities, to protect the identities of institutions and participants, with the exceptions of public figures, whom I refer to within the text. During this time, I observed 15 class sessions, taking notes and pictures, over a time period ranging in duration between one hour and an hour and a half. I also observed 10 workshops, educational sessions, meetings, and ceremonies relevant to students with disabilities on these campuses, such as completion of sign language training.

In this chapter, I introduce the interviewees from this data collection: Rony, Amy, Hatem, Dr. Said, Amany, Majed, Dr. Adel, Dr. Adham, Tala, Raeda, Rana, Dr. Niveen, Shadi, Dr. Shaban, Dr. Fadel, Dr. Suhail, Dr. Fadwa. Table 1 below lists participants’ names, titles, and affiliation.
Table 1
Participant Titles and Affiliations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rony</td>
<td>Disability Center Director</td>
<td>Michigan University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Disability Center Advisor</td>
<td>Michigan University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hatem</td>
<td>Director at service center for students with disability</td>
<td>Southern University of Gaza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Said</td>
<td>Dean of Student Affairs</td>
<td>The University of Eastern Palestine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amany</td>
<td>Lab Assistant and Supervisor at Lab for Blind Students</td>
<td>The University of Eastern Palestine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majed</td>
<td>Director of Student Affairs</td>
<td>The University of Eastern Palestine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Adel</td>
<td>Professor and Head of Architectural Engineering Department</td>
<td>The University of Western Palestine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Adham</td>
<td>Professor of Linguistics</td>
<td>The University of Western Palestine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tala</td>
<td>Sign Language Interpreter Assistant</td>
<td>The University of Eastern Palestine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raeda</td>
<td>Social Worker/Counselor and Part-time Instructor</td>
<td>The University of Western Palestine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rana</td>
<td>Assistant Officer working with students with disabilities</td>
<td>The University of Western Palestine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Niveen</td>
<td>Psychological Counselor, Academic Advisor, and Part-time Instructor</td>
<td>The University of Western Palestine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadi</td>
<td>Acting Director of Committee for Disabled Students</td>
<td>The University of Western Palestine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Fadel</td>
<td>Professor of Philosophy and Cultural Studies</td>
<td>The University of Western Palestine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Shaban</td>
<td>Professor of Sociology and Social Work</td>
<td>The University of Eastern Palestine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Suhail</td>
<td>Professor of Information Technology</td>
<td>The University of Eastern Palestine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Fadwa</td>
<td>Professor of Sociology</td>
<td>The University of Eastern Palestine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All participants shared their experiences teaching and interacting with disabled students, as well as advocating for them on and off campus. Interviewing faculty and university personnel from different departments in three different universities in Palestine and one university in the Midwest in the U.S., I realized that most of the participants had interacted and/or made friendships with disabled individuals in many ways before they
became faculty and administrators in higher education. In my view, that is an essential aspect for understanding how faculty members and administrators accept, accommodate, support and advocate for students with disabilities on campus. As a result, the necessity to divulge some of verbatim data in this chapter while introducing the participants emerges from the importance to present the strong connection between participants and their involvement in disability. It also serves to introduce the reader to themes, such as the role of the Israeli occupation and university personnel’s advocacy, which are presented in more detail in the next chapter. In this chapter, I highlight some strong verbatim data that showed involvement and advocacy of participants in disability.

**Rony**

“We do have a student advisory committee I formed in fall of 2014 because I really wanted to get the student voice to tell us about the experience on campus.”

Rony, a disability center director at Michigan University, stressed the importance of involving disabled students in decision-making processes on campus as a way to advocate for their rights through hearing their voices. Rony has extensive experience in working for and with people with disabilities; his previous work experience included a position as a rehabilitation counselor, where he worked with people who had disabilities through auto accidents and work injuries. Rony maintained that his focus was to “help them get back to work. And so [the] vocation rehabilitation center did a lot of work with employer and job modifications. . . . And we were very creative in that.” He has been working with people with disabilities for 20 years and started his current position in Michigan in January 2014, as a strong advocate for a progressive approach to how the university works with disabled
students. He asserted his advocacy approach: “So, I’m really adamant about helping Michigan University redefine how we see disability and to be more progressive in that way.”

Rony has been thinking of changing the current system of accommodation on campus. Such a system could be made inclusive if the environment on campus is shifted from serving disabled students as they seek accommodations to having a universal academic design, as he described:

How we design stuff often time doesn't accommodate people at the designing level. . . We need to think about the design. Good design is essential for achieving inclusion and full participation. And creating [a] usable equitable, sustainable, inclusive environment is a shared responsibility. So, what we really want to do is shift the impact to faculty and to get them thinking about making sure, for example, that the textbooks they choose to use are available in an alternate format, so a student can listen to it.

Amy

“It’s kind of like building one brick at a time . . . to empower faculty members; there are things that they can do and really kind of make our goal more facilitating . . . . If you're gonna give a video, have closed captioning.

Amy is an advisor at the disability center at Michigan University. She has a mobility impairment and has worked in higher education for at least 10 years. She is well aware of disability issues as a disabled person herself and knows exactly what needs to be improved on campus. She advocates through helping faculty on campus try simple, inclusive pedagogical practices, such as offering alternatives of “captioning” and “written instructions.” While doing her master’s in higher education student affairs, she served as a
graduate assistant at the disability center, at which she worked as an advisor. Her interests highlight the influence of college life for disabled students on students’ seeking and using services in college.

Amy, at Michigan University, does her best to advocate for students with disabilities on campus. Amy shared some examples of her advocacy when communicating with professors and university staff:

Sometimes I email. I call sometimes. I go in person. I've gone multiple times to professors’ office hours and talked to them. . . It’s my responsibility to make sure they [disabled students] are getting their accommodations, and I think there are some things not going the way they need to. [Addressing professors] “How can I help you guys make this doable?” So, we definitely do intervene. It’s a balancing act.

Hatem

“After the awareness programs and publications. . . We got to the stage that the lecturer knows exactly how to deal with the students with visual disability, allowing him to record and bringing the braille machine to the classroom.”

Hatem, director of the service center for students with disability at the Southern University of Gaza, was working on getting his Ph.D. at the time of the interview. His academic work focuses on service customization for students with disabilities. While he was working on a youth project funded and implemented by the American Quaker Foundation in Gaza, the idea of establishing a center to serve the students with disabilities emerged. He has been working in the service center on campus a few decades. Hatem’s relentless work to support and advocate for disabled students focused on communicating with faculty as
partners of advocacy to facilitate providing accommodations, which eventually led to more faculty cooperation as a result of continuous communication and awareness.

**Dr. Said**

“The individual differences are a blessing from God, they are a divine blessing. It is normal. And if they [differences] do not exist, humans would suffer in terms of complementing one another.”

Dr. Said is the dean of student affairs at the University of Eastern Palestine. His passion for community work and educational counseling led him to shift from studying physics to pursuing a Ph.D. in educational and psychological Counseling. While doing his Ph.D., he was involved in many trainings on disability. Through his work as a dean and as the coordinator of the master’s program in educational and psychological counseling, he always made sure to put disability matters on the table for discussion, engaging students with whom he interacted to be involved in advocating for disability topics. Dr. Said asserted, “I make time to talk to master’s students and explore their potential through the courses they take and the voluntary hours they have to fulfill, to encourage them to do these hours serving students with disabilities.”

Dr. Said is personally involved in disability issues on campus. He shared how he would follow up with a physically disabled student on daily basis:

Ra’fat’s father used to bring him on public transportation, and I would be waiting for him to arrive and help take Ra’fat from the car. I would also follow up with Ra’fat most of the day until his father came back to take him home. Ra’fat graduated with honor.
Amany

“There was a lab, but [it was] inactive; its door gets opened when delegations visit. Dust was all over the place. I started printing [braille] for students, and students realized that were achieving faster.” [In terms of academic performance].

Amany, lab assistant and supervisor at the lab for blind students for more than 7 years, at the University of Eastern Palestine, has a master’s in resources and development. Amany is adventitiously blind herself, and she knows exactly what needs to be done to help disabled students in general and blind students in particular. Before she was hired, she volunteered on campus by working at the lab, printing out braille copies for students, which eventually led disabled students to realize how important it was for them to lobby in order to hire Amany at the lab. Amany recalled how the blind students lobbied for her: “All of the [blind] students wanted me to help them, so they requested the [university] administration to keep me, so I can print out braille for them. . . I also deliver trainings on how to use the computer, how to use Word, how to use the portal of the university.” Amany is a ferocious fighter for her rights and dignity. Not only has she been an advocate for disabled students, but also a critical thinker who is vigilant and can identify stigma in small details and situations.

Majed

“I consider anyone who does not help and support them [disabled persons] a criminal, a criminal. A criminal against humanity and against himself, because anyone of us can have disabled member in the family.”

Majed has been director of student affairs at the University of Eastern Palestine for the last 15 years. Before joining higher education, he served at the Ministry of Education for
24 years. As director of student affairs, he has been working with all students and student organizations on campus, especially with disabled students; he elaborated on his work:

We have a complete coordination between us [student affairs] and the departments of the university. We also coordinate with the students council and other student organizations. We help one another in disability-related matters. . . We help more students with disabilities in terms of scholarship, registration, providing books.

Majed advocates for disabled individuals and students on campus with ferocity and considers abandoning the needs and rights of disabled individuals a crime. His support for disabled individuals extends to consulting with them by asking disabled students, who graduated but still pay him visits on campus, about their opinions in regard to students’ issues on campus. Majed recalls seeking consultations from disabled students: “There is this student. . . You do not see any disability when you interact with him. When he comes to visit me, and I have students discussing problems, I take his opinion; I ask him what he thinks.”

Dr. Adel

“I think there is a level of very high consciousness, and it is part of our architectural culture. We are already exposed to these issues, and it is also part of the academic education. Our students are usually exposed. . . The automatic question students know I will ask [while working on an architectural design] is: ‘Where are the stairs?’ But instead I ask them: ‘Where is the ramp?’”

Dr. Adel is a professor and head of the architectural engineering department at the University of Western Palestine. He has been working at the University of Western Palestine for more than 15 years. He holds a Ph.D. in architecture and urbanism from Austria, and a Master’s in engineering. It is worth mentioning that Dr. Adel is an active member of the
Committee for Disabled Students on campus. Immersed in disability culture due to his strong connection between his academic discipline and personal commitment, Dr. Adel challenges his students and exposes them to disability rights and inclusion-related matters, such as when he begins by asking about the ramp in any design on which students are working.

Dr. Adel demonstrated a strong dedication to working on advocating for disabled individuals not only in academia, but also in his community. For instance, he shared an experience where he was a member of an architect team. Dr. Adel’s team was working on designing a commercial building for an investor in downtown Ramallah. Dr. Adel stood firmly in the face of the investor and convinced the investor of his own ideas. Dr. Adel’s idea was to design a building while advocating the rights of disabled individuals and raising awareness in the community. He recalled a meeting when he advocated for disabled:

We designed an entrance exactly from the main road in Ramallah City. The entrance is a huge ramp. . . We wanted a ceremonial entrance with a little inclination to enter the building. On the side of the ramp, there will be a mural in braille, it consists of cultural writings related to society engraved with stone. . . This way, we do not only want to address the needs of people with disabilities. . . We also want the nondisabled to see that. . . He [nondisabled] needs to understand that it is part of his general space/place. . . It is part of educating the society that those people exist. . . The client [investor] and his team stopped and said, “But I think that the entrance from here will be problematic”. . . My team and I went home, and I told my team. “The battle is not over” . . . We changed the design a little bit; the change was not in the entrance, rather we gave the people another option to enter the building. They could
Dr. Adham

“When I came to the University of Western Palestine, I was very well-versed in technology; that is technology for disabled, for the handicapped, . . . I wanted to give that knowledge, convey what I know to the students here. . . So, I did establish a Committee for Disabled Students on campus here. . . I did provide for them all kinds of facilities.”

Dr. Adham is a blind accomplished professor of linguistics at the University of Western Palestine. He earned his Ph.D. from the U.S. He is the founder of the Committee for Disabled Students on campus. In addition, Dr. Adham has four master’s degrees, in education, linguistics, and language acquisition. He has been working at the University of Western Palestine for more than 10 years.

When speaking to Dr. Adham, one cannot help but embrace his enthusiasm for teaching and learning. He contributed immensely to the service of the academic community in general and disabled students in particular. Professor Adham is generous in providing his students with knowledge, services and support. Upon joining the University of Western Palestine as a professor, he started thinking about how to improve the learning process for disabled students. He never hesitated to share his experience in technology to empower students with disabilities on campus.

Establishing the Committee for Disabled Students at the University of Western Palestine was only one aspect of Dr. Adham’s advocacy and support for disabled students on campus. Dr. Adham consistently welcomed his colleagues on campus to refer disabled
students in general, and blind students in particular, to him for advice on how to study and succeed in college. He discussed such referrals as follows:

When my colleagues have a student in his/her class, they would refer the student to me, so I would help the student. . . You know they have me as a blind person, we have also another blind teacher here in the department. . . they know us and then they do not find anything unusual.

Reflecting on his Palestinian community, Professor Adham shared the support he received from the Palestinian community in which he was raised. He reiterated that although in the past 20 years or so the Palestinian educational system was not prepared to accommodate disabled students. Despite that, he still received support and alternatives that helped him excel in academia. He elaborated on his own experience:

In my days, I was in [a] special school for the blind until the sixth grade. After that, from the seventh grade onwards, I joined normal schools, school like I studied with sighted people, and I did extremely well. . . It was very easy, the students were very supportive and accepting. . . From seven grade until end of school, even including tawjih [high school], I did not have braille books to study myself. I studied with friends. They were reading to me, and I would follow. I would understand the material from the reading, so they were extremely supportive, and I had no difficulty and the school accepted my situation very well. Even every time I had a test, they asked one of the teachers [to] write the test for me, and they were very cooperative. So, I had no difficulty at all at that school. On the contrary, they were extremely supportive.
Tala

“Tala, a sign language interpreter assistant at the University of Eastern Palestine. She was engaged in community work years before she started volunteering on campus. She stated that “at the beginning, the Palestinian Red Crescent [local non-governmental organization] supported me. I used to work under projects, such as the Norwegian project, etc. I used to work under projects because I was still a student and did not have a degree to be an employee.”

Tala mastered sign language through volunteering with non-verbal individuals and students. Tala remains appreciative to those students who added to her knowledge of sign language. They empowered her as she recalled how anxious she was to work with them with minimal experience and knowledge of sign language. She recalled, “Now my level was, eh, to go and translate! I was afraid, but then I said to myself: ‘Whoever does not try, does not learn.’” Certainly, those students empowered her while she was finding her way to master sign language.

Tala’s own childhood experiences inspired her to work with disabled individuals, especially those she interacted with during summer camps. Later, her experience was more polished and defined in college. She described her involvement in disability:

From my experience when I was a sophomore, I used to take [sign language] trainings, voluntary work in schools. Since I was studying to be an elementary teacher, I used to go and work with kids, teach them and learn sign language from
them... After a while, when they [university personnel] got to know me and know what skills I have, they suggested that I work at the university [as a volunteer]. I was a junior at that time.

Consistently during the interviews, Tala reflected on her rich learning experiences working with disabled students and how much she herself learned from them. As part of the new extracurricular activities at the University of Eastern Palestine, Tala, blind students, and nondisabled students participated in a goalball [a game for athletes with visual disability]. Tala’s participation in that activity made her realize how weak she was and how capable blind students were, as she described:

Their [blind students] concentration is better than ours [nondisabled participants]. We would throw the ball, which had a bell in it. You throw it and focus on the sound of it and follow it... I felt weak honestly. I felt that I am the weak and they [blind] are the strong. I kept saying, ‘where is the ball?’... It was a fantastic experience, and many students came and attended... I said: ‘We [nondisabled] are the ones who are unable.’

This experience indicated an inclusive environment on campus, and it also reflects genuine efforts on campus to raise other students’ and university personnel’s awareness of capabilities disabled students have.

Raeda

“They [disabled students] join activities; they speak about their experiences, which are broadcast on the media... They are always motivated... The first question always I ask, is what talents do they have?”
Raeda, has a master’s in psychology, and she is a Part-time instructor and social worker/counselor at the University of Western Palestine. Raeda, also working closely with students with disabilities on campus, explained her commitment in serving “between 34 to 36 students with disabilities for whom [she is] responsible from A to Z, with everything related to their academic and the financial aspects.” She interacts with students with disabilities in class when she teaches as a part-time instructor and as a social worker.

When Raeda was speaking about disabled students on campus during my interviews with her, whether describing those she helps at the Deanship or those whom she teaches, she often spoke about them as if they were her own children. Raeda exhibits a lot of care for disabled students; her tone and words she used to describe disabled students were full of pride. She often raised her tone in a joyous way when describing them and their talents. She recalled their talents:

We have students with disabilities who play. We have others who sing; their voices are beautiful. . . .We have another student, she is a new student, she also has a very beautiful voice. She is now a member in the university musical band. . . .I have a student with visual impairment who is on the honor list. He has been on the honor list since his first semester.

**Rana**

“I said [to a university administrator]: ‘Classes started, and students started studying, and we did not print out braille books.’ I took the key, went to the lab with volunteers. . . .At that time, I was a student.”

Rana Ahmed is the assistant officer working with students with disabilities at the University of Western Palestine. She graduated from the University of Western Palestine.
with a bachelor’s degree in psychology and sociology. During her undergraduate years, she had many friends and peers with different disabilities. Two years before she was hired part-time employee working with students with disabilities, she had started volunteering there when she was a sophomore. She became an advocate for students with disabilities when she was a student on campus due to her volunteer work and interaction with disabled students.

Rana shared her commitment to help students with disabilities on campus, where she used to volunteer with and print braille copies at a time when the University of Western Palestine could not afford paying her a salary for work with students with disabilities. Although funding was not available, Rana was ready to work without even minimal rewards.

Besides volunteer work, Rana’s work with students with disabilities involves a lot of details. She explained her current work with disabled students:

Now from the first day a student with disability attends, or when he [disabled students in general] decides to join the university until the graduation day, everything that relates to him is my responsibility. . . Once the student is admitted, . . . I communicate with all of his professors. I also communicate with the student, so we can know what tools he needs: Enlarging font, braille edge, recorder, cane, wheelchair, all these details, etc.

**Dr. Niveen**

“I treat my students with disabilities in a very normal and regular way. . . We laugh together. I give them strength, and I tell them they can, but they need to look for their inside powers.”

Dr. Niveen is a professor, a psychological counselor, and academic an advisor at the University of Western Palestine who works “with all students in all their categories, and part of the categories here are people with disabilities. . . who are in need of more services. They
need us to provide services for them.” She has a Ph.D. in educational psychology. Dr. Niveen is very well orientated in disability matters due to her extensive experience, which ranges from working with community-based organizations to higher education. She described such an experience: “I worked for some time with the YMCA [Young Men’s Christian Association], almost for three years. I worked with people who had disabilities resulting from [the] Intifada [Palestinian Uprising] doing psychological counseling.”

Such community experience translates into her work with students in general and disabled students in particular at the University of Western Palestine in several ways. Dr. Niveen often described the interactions and situations between her and her disabled students and that part of her work and personal ethics. She empowers disabled students through encouraging them to look for the points of strengths within themselves and to be responsible for their own behavior and life. Moreover, she fights for disabled students so that they can study what they aspire to study. Dr. Niveen recalled how she would fight for disabled students:

I fought for a student for two years until he was accepted to study law. The student is now a successful lawyer. He is doing his master’s degree now. God bless him, he is wonderful. . . I remember how much that student and I resisted, and he insisted he wanted law. Almost every day, I would say to the head of the department: ‘let him try, and if he fails, you can dismiss him.’

Furthermore, like all participants, Dr. Niveen highlighted the Israeli colonialism and how such political agony contributes to worsening the realities faced by disabled and nondisabled Palestinians. According to Dr. Niveen,
The occupation does not want any Palestinian to be safe and sound; the occupation wants all people [Palestinians] to be always depending on others, to be always in need, and always nothing is available for them. They [Israeli occupation] put barriers, causing disabilities, and there is no medication, no alternatives. They want us to be needy, and sick. They do not want us to develop because they are occupying us. They want us weak; they want to break our spirit, our determination, and keep us always under occupation. . . The simple tools sometimes are not available. The wheelchair is not available, so how would we build our country?

**Shadi**

“Here, we do not only listen to students with disabilities, but we also think of how to reflect that [students’ voices] on the infrastructure of the university. This is our vision.

Shadi is the acting director of the Committee for Disabled Students at the University of Western Palestine. He is the coordinator of research and community outreach at the development center of the University of Western Palestine. His work focuses on community and research development. Shadi emphasized the disabled students’ voices as part of the process of changing the realities and challenges disabled students face on campus and in the community. Shadi often described how the University of Western Palestine has been an incubator and supporter of disabled individuals since it was established. It was never new for the University of Western Palestine to promote individuals with disabilities. Shadi described the history of the university in welcoming disabled Palestinians: “I know colleagues, friends from the 1980s, who had [a] visual disability studying here at the University of Western Palestine, and there was less environment accessibility at that time.”
Shadi, on the other hand, reflected on the role of the Israeli occupation in causing, creating and increasing physical disability among the Palestinians:

Look at all injuries and the bombing taking place in Gaza, and all injuries while clashing with the Israeli army [during protests]. The occupation tries to focus on causing a disability if he [the Israeli military] does not want to kill. Most of the injuries in the latest period during clashes since 2015 are focused on causing disabilities in the leg, in the spinal areas, meaning injuries that will create physical disabilities for youth.

Dr. Fadel

“I would call Student Affairs and ask how I can support these [disabled] students. At that time, I was a new professor [14 years ago]. . . So, I suggested to our department to include a statement for disability.”

Dr. Fadel has been working for 14 years as a professor of philosophy and cultural studies at the University of Western Palestine. He completed a doctorate in the field of Eastern studies and the History of the Middle East with a focus on the Palestinian literature and a post-doctorate in Germany. His research interests include, but are not limited to, visual expressions of Palestinian identity, critical thought and Arab thought, and cultural policies and translation.

While teaching, Dr. Fadel pays attention to disabled students when they are in his class. Fourteen years ago, it was not sufficient for him to advocate for disabled students in the department and make steps towards including a disability statement in syllabi, but he constantly made sure to alert those students in his classroom at the beginning of every semester, who may exhibit any other invisible disability or special needs, to come talk to
him. He often announces: “If anyone has difficulties hearing, or learning difficulties, or any type of disability or issues, I can help if you inform me.”

Dr. Fadel understands that students may have a variety of needs. He does not hesitate to acknowledge different needs and advises his students to come talk to him so that he can help find alternatives. At the beginning of each semester, he alerts his students this way:

Anyone who needs extra credit, because I also consider that special needs, . . . . anyone who has a difficult academic situation, for example a student is on academic probation or is on the honor list and wants to maintain that level, should talk to me because I can give extra credit through extra assignments.”

This way, he makes sure he supports all students and provides equal opportunities to succeed in the course. Needless to say, Dr. Fadel’s high level of awareness of disability matters and advocacy for disabled students and students with special needs did not come out of the blue. In fact, Dr. Fadel’s culture, especially the village in Jerusalem where he comes from, his disabled professors and friends who inspired him, and the Israeli colonialism all had a deep impact on how he perceives and understands disability. Hence, these factors influence his understanding of how he should empower disabled students.

Dr. Fadel described the cultural values with which his family in Palestine raised him and the friendships he made with disabled students and professors when he was a student:

I am a refugee and was raised in a rural refugee family. . . I was born in Jerusalem, and my family is Palestinian, who is living today in north-west Jerusalem. . . So, my family and my upbringing teach that [for] anyone who needs help, it must be provided appropriately. . . So, I was trying to walk with Tamer [friend], not drive him [pull him]. And at the time, I had a beautiful friendship with this young man.
Sometimes, I used to write for him, during exams when I had time. . . In the meantime, I also interacted with two of my professors [both blind].

Dr. Fadel also discussed in detail during the interview several aspects of the Israeli colonizer and its practices in connection to disability dilemmas:

There were big numbers of injuries and disabilities caused by the war Israel wages against us as Palestinians; we are not a conflict zone. We are a colonized nation; Israel practices its occupation and colonization against us and wages its wars against us every day. We have injuries in eyes, in body, and limbs. In Gaza, disabilities are even more common because of the wars on Gaza, but also in the West Bank, in Jerusalem and all of occupied Palestine since 1948.

Dr. Fadel discussed other tactics of the Israeli colonizer such as placing barriers and increasing challenges for disabled individuals. Dr. Fadel also indicated how Israel imposes divisions between Gaza and the West Bank:

We have very few students from Gaza, less than twenty students all over the university. This is unfortunate; this is another Israeli Zionist crime against the Palestinian people, cutting geographical connections and depriving people from their right to education and movement. . . Today, we have all these geographical exiles and barriers that the Zionist apartheid imposed on us.

Dr. Shaban

“I want him [the disabled student] to feel that he is not less important than others in the lecture. . . . I welcome them, and I have a desire inside me to include them and help those people.”
Shaban has been a professor of sociology and social work, at the University of Eastern Palestine for a decade, and a colleague to his own professors who taught him at the same university. At the time of the interview, he was finishing his Ph.D. from Egypt in sociology. Dr. Shaban does not spare any effort to support his disabled students. He constantly attempts to encourage them so that their self-esteem is elevated by telling them that they are as important as any other student in his class. Dr. Shaban also takes advantage of his classroom platform to advocate and raise awareness in his classroom on disability. He provided examples from his classroom:

I always tell my students: ‘When you see a person with a disability, do not have a negative view, or an exaggerated sympathy; that is the pity view, because you never know the hidden energies and capabilities in this disabled person. And we have so many examples of people with disabilities here who are in high positions. I will give you an example here in Palestine, particularly in Ramallah governorate: Dr. Mahmoud El Atshan [Public Figure], a professor of Arabic language and his sister Leila El Atshan [Public Figure] who is specialized in social science.’

Dr. Shaban is not only involved in empowering disabled individuals on campus, but he is also engaged in disability matters beyond academia, in the community. In fact, after conducting my first interview with him on campus, he invited me to join him and attend one of his meetings with the special education department at the Ministry of Education in Ramallah. Through viewing his lectures, his office hours and meetings in the community, it was evident that Dr. Shaban is a fighter for disabled individuals and students. His community experience gives him insight to the suffering of families with disabled children. He indicated, “I worked as a local board director in a Jerusalem village, and I was in a constant
communication with families of disabled individuals, all types of disabilities. At that time, I realized how much suffering there was in those families.”

Dr. Shaban, through his direct communication with the community, discussed the cultural, economic, and political burdens families and disabled Palestinians face. He has been involved in helping face such challenges. He recalled a situation when he helped a young disabled man get a wheelchair:

I personally fought to provide an electric wheelchair [to a disabled young man] . . . He [a disabled young man] went back to his village where he lives. Once he got home, he went to every street with the wheelchair. Here, you realize the need for this person to access places and to build social relationships with others.

**Dr. Suhail**

“In 2017, an employee was hired for [to translate] sign language. When I knew about it, I went to her and told her, ‘I want to organize something unique, that no one has done before.”

Dr. Suhail has been a professor in the area of information technology at the University of Eastern Palestine for a few decades. He has a Ph.D. in electronic learning and worked with non-governmental organizations for more than 15 years. Professor Suhail embraced students with disabilities, those with hearing and speech disabilities in particular due to the fact that he had them in his classroom. He always came up with initiatives to include them.

Professor Suhail organized a training on computer skills for disabled students. He considers coming up with initiatives to support disabled students a moral duty in academia. He asserted, “I consider that [doing initiatives for disabled students] a responsibility, a social responsibility. . . It reached the media, and everyone was talking about it on campus and
some wrote about it in magazines.” Professor Suhail does not only think of initiatives for disabled students, but also communicates directly with them, encouraging them to see him during his office hours. During the fall of 2017, he had a disabled student in his class and spoke about how he encouraged him. He stated,

I always tell him, ‘Come see me after lectures, come to my office.’ We met in my office two or three times so far. I encourage him and talk about assignments, telling him that instead of doing all those assignments, focus on the practical tasks in this programming course.

**Dr. Fadwa**

“I personally contributed to buying two wheelchairs for two students, because I understand their pain. I also contributed to secure wheelchairs for difficult cases from companies; those cases were [disabled students] the breadwinners for their families because the father was dead.”

Dr. Fadwa is a professor of sociology at the University of Eastern Palestine. Professor Fadwa has two masters in sociology and demographic studies and taught for four years at the University of Eastern Palestine before going to the U.S. to pursue a Ph.D. in Sociology. Professor Fadwa has been a furious fighter, advocate, and supporter of disabled individuals. Shortly after she returned to Palestine from the U.S., she visited the Palestinian General Union for Disabled Individuals and the Ministry of Social Development. Professor Fadwa sought to understand the disability realities in Palestine in more detail and to be involved in advocating for disabled individuals. She also demonstrates such support in her engagement and personal contributions, such as purchasing tools disabled individuals need to have equal opportunities in life.
Professor Fadwa has always been involved in community affairs. As the board director of Rama Institution for Child Development, whose specialty is to take care of children with learning difficulties, she organized the first conference of learning difficulties in order to spread awareness in the community about invisible disabilities. As she explained,

We are talking about hundreds of thousands of children [with learning difficulties]. So, our message in that event [conference] was to raise awareness that we can help children understand what they go through [learning difficulties], how I know [as an adult] that this child has learning difficulties, or his [adult’s] classmate, his relatives, his nephew who may have that problem, so I can help and direct them to the center. . .

So, the second goal was to raise teachers’ awareness of that in schools.

Clearly, Professor Fadwa is a strong fighter and advocate for disabled students and individuals. She understands that they are like other nondisabled students, have potential and can succeed if support is provided to them. Professor Fadwa continues to raise disability topics in her classrooms. She often educate her students that “anyone of us is exposed to becoming disabled. If not me, my father, my brother, my mother, my nephew. So, why do you deal with people with disabilities as if they come from the moon?”

The profiles of all participants, including their experiences, demonstrated a high level of engagement and involvement in disability matters. Most importantly, they all shared common themes of the role of the Israeli occupation in disability in Palestine and how higher education promotes disabled Palestinians, which are presented thoroughly in chapter 4.
Chapter 4: Themes from Participants’ Narratives

In addition to a total 32 initial and follow-up interviews, and 15 observations, I attended class sessions, ranging in duration between one hour and an hour and a half. I also attended 12 workshops, educational sessions, meetings, and ceremonies relevant to disabled students on campuses, during which I took notes and pictures. A total of 17 participants shared perspectives and experiences about disability, accommodations, and teaching disabled students. I began the interviews with statements such as “Tell me about a time when you interacted with disabled students. Tell me about your own definition of disability, the language used to describe disabled individuals and students.” I identified four prominent themes from verbatim data and observations, with subthemes as listed in Table 2.

Table 2
Themes and Subthemes

1. **Israel Apartheid and Disability in Palestine**
   - a. Intentional Maiming of Palestinians as an Israeli Practice
   - b. Destruction of Palestinian Infrastructure: Barriers and Control
   - c. Gaps between Existing Palestinian Laws and Realities of Disabled Palestinians
   - d. Corruption and Scattered Efforts on Disability Matters

2. **Language and Its Role in Internalized Stigma**
   - a. Binary Stigma in Palestine
   - b. Language, Stigma, and disability identity
   - c. Increase Level of Awareness
   - d. Cross-Context: Stigma in the U.S.

3. **Palestinian Higher Education in Abolishing Stigma**
   - a. Services in Higher Education: Institutional Support
     1. Services on Campus
     2. Hiring Disabled Faculty and Administrators
   - b. Faculty and Administrator Support
     1. Accommodations, Support, and Expectations
     2. Pedagogical Advocacy Practices
     3. Faculty’s Involvement Advocacy in Community

4. **Role of Community-Based Rehabilitations (CBRs) and NGOs in Palestine**
   - a. Rehabilitation Services and Awareness
   - b. Insufficient NGOs’ Efforts, and NGOs’ Agenda
Israeli Apartheid and Disability in Palestine

All Palestinian participants discussed in detail the role Israeli colonialism plays in disability in Palestine. All participants without any exception gave examples of the Israeli army’s use of violence and intentional practices to physically harm and cause disabilities to the Palestinian bodies. Furthermore, Israel maintains an apartheid system through dividing the areas where Palestinians live and imposes restrictions on movement. Like other participants, Dr. Fadel highlighted that the Israeli apartheid regime fragmented and isolated the Palestinians through geographical barriers. He described such a regime as follows:

We are occupied. . . . The occupation does not have a role in disability, rather the occupation is disability; meaning the Zionist colonization in 1948, . . . . impeded the creation of a nation-state in a regular manner. . . It impeded the formation of a cohesive society. . . It impeded the establishment of a state and the right of self-determination. . . Since that [Zionist colonization] happened, it hit all aspects of life; it hit the political system, hit the social order, hit the cultural system, hit our infrastructure. We became people who are discriminated against and isolated.

Intentional maiming of Palestinians as an Israeli practice. All my participants explicitly described the colonial practices of the Israeli army that cause physical disability among Palestinians. They all confirmed that such violations against the Palestinians occur while Palestinians practice their normal life or protest against the occupation. “Breaking bones is practically part of the [Israeli] colonizer’s policies,” Shadi asserted while speaking about the policies of the Israeli occupation in maiming the Palestinians people. He explained these policies:
The occupation attempts to focus on causing a disability if it does not want to kill. Most of the injuries... are focused on causing disabilities in the leg, in the spinal cord, meaning injuries that will create physical disabilities for youth. All of this is historically associated with the time of the first Intifada [Uprising]. . . The other thing is throwing tear gas, causing visual disabilities, and the loud bombs cause hearing disabilities.

“I had a student today who was shot in his arm and leg,” Professor Niveen frustratingly stated. She added, “a big portion of the disabilities here are because of the occupation... he cannot walk like before... the bullets used are prohibited internationally, the type of bullet that smashes the bones, so bones can never heal.” Similarly, Tala experienced having students shot by the Israeli army. She indicated, “I have a student who was shot in his eye from the occupation; he lost his sight. I always try to deal with them as capable persons, nothing should stop you [disabled student].”

“We are not in a conflict zone, we are a colonized nation,” Dr. Fadel reiterated. He added that Israel causes the Palestinian to have physical disabilities: “Big numbers of injuries and disabilities are caused by the war Israel wages against us as Palestinians.” Furthermore, Amany spoke about the Israeli occupation as the reason behind the increasing number of disabilities. Amany indicated, “a big percentage of disability is caused by the occupation, most of the people who lost their sight and their limbs [became disabled] because of the occupation.”

“You may be walking in the street, then a bullet from the [Israeli] occupation hits you, so the individual becomes disabled” Dr. Niveen indicated.
Dr. Niveen pointed out that any Palestinian is vulnerable and exposed to be maimed by the Israeli army. She also gave examples of how Palestinians are exposed to the Israeli violence and maiming not only by the practices of the Israeli army but also by the Israeli settlers. She described an Israeli settler, a doctor who opened fire at the Palestinians who were praying in the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron, and recalled, “Goldstein who entered the Ibrahimi mosque and started shooting the Palestinians who were praying... Many Palestinians were killed, others were caused permanent disabilities, some lost their legs, others lost their hands, some lost their eyes.”

“Israel does not only target nondisabled Palestinians but also disabled Palestinians,” Dr. Fadel said as he told stories about Israel killing disabled Palestinians. He remembered that “during the war Israel waged on Jineen in 2002, that there was a young girl with mental illness and with a hearing disability... The Israeli soldiers shot her because she did not respond to their orders.” Similarly, Dr. Adham heard stories of disabled Palestinians shot by the Israeli soldiers. He recalled, “I heard a deaf person, the soldiers were shouting at him to stop, ... and he did not hear them, so they shot him.”

Professor Fadwa also gave many examples of how maiming the Palestinians is part of the Israeli routine in Palestinian life. She narrated a story from her family:

Anyone can receive a bullet [from Israelis] while at home. I have the son of my sister’s brother-in-law. The Israeli army attacked their neighborhood. He [son] looked from the window; they [Israeli army] blew his head. They killed him. He was a university student, taking final exams as a senior that time when he was killed. So, you can become a martyr in a moment, you can become with disability in a moment.
“The Palestinian body is a target for the Israelis,” Dr. Fadel summarized. He explained that vulnerability of the Palestinians is embedded in the fact that the Palestinian body, as Dr. Fadel put it, “is permissible for them [Israelis] to do anything with it. Many people lost their eyes, their limbs, or both. People got deformed. There are permanent disabilities.” The Palestinians are indeed vulnerable and are living in unexpected living conditions on a daily basis due to the Israeli colonialism. As Professor Fadwa noted, “We, as a society, are not prepared for them. Everything here is emergent, emergent. A student on campus may be nondisabled today, the second day he becomes paralyzed, or he loses his eyes.”

**Destruction of Palestinian infrastructure: Barriers and control.** All participants further elaborated on the Israeli practices not only in terms of maiming the Palestinians, but also in terms of continual Israeli barriers that impact disabled Palestinian students in light of several aspects to the Israeli destruction of Palestinian infrastructure, such as bombing Gaza, demolishing houses and schools in the West Bank, and imposing geographical exiles.

“The barbaric bombing that hits even schools,” Dr. Said, recalled. He conjured up memories of the extensive attacks on Gaza and elaborated, “Especially now in Gaza Strip. . . All of us saw how bombing hit the UNRWA [The United Nations Relief and Works Agency] schools and international organizations.” Similarly, Shadi highlighted the injuries resulted from “the bombing taking place in Gaza,” and Dr. Shaban shared stories on how the Israeli army does its best to place barriers in front of the Palestinians and that affects the educational process as well, especially when Israel demolishes Palestinians schools. Dr. Shaban narrated a story on the Israeli demolition policy:
In our village, . . . we have been struggling and fighting with all power we had to build a school. Then, we received a demolition threat [from Israelis] more than one time, and until now the school does not have a license [from the Israelis]. The Israelis said to us, “We will demolish it, we will demolish it.” So, if I cannot provide a [safe] place to study for nondisabled children, how will I deal with children with disability?

Not only does Israel uses its army to attack and bomb the Palestinians and destroy their infrastructure, but it also imposes an apartheid system, separating Gaza and the West Bank. “Today, we have all these exiles and barriers that the Zionist apartheid imposed on us,” Dr. Fadel maintained. He described how Israel imposes barriers in front of the Palestinians that prevents Palestinians in Gaza from joining universities in the West Bank:

We have very few students from Gaza, less than twenty students all over the university . . . This is another Israeli Zionist crime against the Palestinian people: Cutting geographical connections and depriving people from their right to education and movement.

In addition, Rana mentioned a blind student from Gaza, who was living in the West Bank but not able to go visit his family in Gaza. She described the situation of that student:

I have one student from Gaza. The political situation in Gaza is difficult. It is difficult for him to go visit his parents in Gaza. It has been three years, and he has not seen his mother. . . . He was granted asylum in Sweden with a scholarship, but because he is from Gaza, they [the Israelis] did not allow him to leave [Palestine].

On the other hand, Amany spoke about how such barriers between Gaza and the West Bank imposed by Israel affects communication between the branches of the University of
Eastern Palestine. She discussed how the siege imposed on university staff in Gaza branches influence the services provided to disabled students on campus:

They [Gazans] are not able to print out [in braille]. So, I printed out once for them. . .

We [university staff] cannot go to visit the branches in Gaza. We cannot even enter Gaza. There is no way for them to come visit us to see what we offer here.

“It is an intentional policy to push Palestinians not to get an education” Dr. Shaban argued. Now the exile issue extends to not only separating Gaza from the West Bank, but it also goes further to separating the cities within the West Bank by placing checkpoints and security gates between different areas and cities. Dr. Shaban referred to such Israeli practices as intentional to prevent Palestinians from getting educated. He also explained how Israel places barriers in front of the Palestinians:

The Israelis [Israeli army] do not take any step back in interrupting the educational and academic process. It [Israeli army] disturbs [educational process] a lot. For example, it invades villages, destroys schools, causes sabotage in schools, clash with students. We have a school here [in village] that connects three villages. Most of the time, especially in the past two years, it [Israeli army] places checkpoint, stops students [heading to school] and restrains them. It [Israeli army] makes them step down from the bus, attacks them, and assaults them.

“Many villages have gates, checkpoints, the wall,” Shadi stated (see Figure 1: “Qalandya Checkpoint in the West Bank, while I was leaving Palestine to the U.S.,” and Figures 2 and 3: “Apartheid wall in the West Bank” in Appendix D: Pictures). Like other participants, Shadi also described the apartheid system in place which disables the Palestinians and makes disabled Palestinians even suffer more. He explained such barriers:
It is not easy for someone to go through these checkpoints. In fact, when you go to the main checkpoints such as the villages surrounded by the wall, for example Jerusalem, this is also restricted. The pathways the occupation built, and the structure that the colonizer constructs is eliminating structure. It eliminates the movement of the Palestinian citizen, and this elimination is double or triple for individuals with disabilities. For instance, some of the stories we heard from individuals with disabilities, ‘I was leaving my village, which is behind the wall, I needed someone to be with me.’

Likewise, Dr. Fadel shared how his students come and describe barriers that Israel imposes. He shared conversations between him and his students: “One [student] once said: ‘I come from this area, there is a checkpoint [Israeli checkpoint],’ which applies to all Palestinians in general.” In this regard, participants such as Raeda and Dr. Adham showed great concerns about disabled students crossing Israeli checkpoints. Raeda expressed her worries:

I feel afraid if a Kafeef [adventitiously blind person] crosses a checkpoint [Israeli checkpoint]. It is very dangerous, God forbid, when an Israeli soldier asks the Kafeef [adventitiously blind individual] to stop, or if the Israeli soldier points towards him with his hands, and the adventitiously blind individual will not see that. . . So, the soldier shoots at him. . . Also, [I am concerned about] persons in wheelchairs, a lot of times on [the] Qalandya checkpoint, you have to go through that machine that revolved around you. . . Ok, how will the person in [a] wheelchair go inside it? . . . Those people [Israelis] do not have the humanitarian side. All these political issues impact the disabled Palestinians.
Dr. Adham also spoke about the inhumane treatment for all Palestinians including disabled individuals: “Now they [Israelis] do not take disability into consideration. If you are at the fence or checkpoint, you are a disabled person. They [Israelis] would not really give you a special treatment, or let you go because you are disabled.”

In a nutshell, the Israeli apartheid creates what I call a “triple matrix of maiming/disabling Palestinians.” Such a matrix begins with targeting the Palestinian body, then it continues by destroying the Palestinian’s infrastructure which directly disables Palestinians and prevents them from having a viable state, and finally maintaining and increasing barriers through checkpoints, siege in Gaza, checkpoints and the apartheid wall mainly in the West Bank. Dr. Niveen further asserted that everything is controlled by Israel; she described the Israeli control as follows:

We do not have the freedom to import, we do not have a seaport. We do not have control over the land or sea. We are a nation that is occupied in everything, no [control over] land, no [control over] sea. . . We do not have any type of independency, not psychologically, not emotionally, not economically, nothing.

As a result, the Palestinians cannot do much when it comes to addressing the needs of disabled Palestinians, not medically, nor educationally. Disability in Palestine is simply, as Dr. Niveen put it, “something out of our control. We [Palestinians] are obliged to have disability, we are occupied, we are raped. Anything can be done to us, our soul, our freedom and our will can all be taken from us.”

Gaps between existing Palestinian law and realities of disabled Palestinians. Now with all the forms of the Israeli control imposed on the Palestinian people, the Palestinian Authority (PA) has been making attempts to serve the Palestinians in general, and disabled
Palestinians in particular. Yet the PA has always been facing Israeli barriers and restrictions, which makes it difficult to enforce any law. The difficulty exists on many levels, all of which are connected to the Israeli occupation: First, the Palestinians have a PA but without any authority and the increase burden on the PA due to increasing numbers of disabled Palestinians; second, the PA is unable to enforce the law through punitive procedures; and third, there is a need to revise the disability law along with the progress PA has made in serving disabled Palestinians in general.

“We do not have a state; what state is this?” Dr. Niveen expressed in an angry tone. She continued, “Some have independence, or a federal system, or confederal, but we have nothing of this. Even our president needs coordination for him to go from one place to another.” Thus, that lack of independence clearly impacts the enforcement of the laws the PA passed in the Palestinian Parliament. Furthermore, Amany affirmed the ineffectiveness of the Palestinians universal healthcare in light of the unimplemented disability law:

Every Palestinian with a disability has universal healthcare regardless of his disability percentage. But the health centers here only give free healthcare for those with 60% of disability or above. . . . The law is generally not implemented, because we do not have a state. When we have a state then the law will be enforced.

All participants shared similar descriptions of the role of the Israeli occupation in placing barriers in front of the Palestinian Authority. Such barriers impede the efforts of the PA towards enforcing the law: “The Palestinian government cannot make decisions; it is an authority without an authority.” Majed stated that the PA has no power to enforce laws due to the Israeli occupation. Dr. Fadel and Majed confirmed that the Palestinian Authority is without any authority, and so are its laws. Dr. Fadel maintained that “we do not have the
concept of a state of welfare. We do not have a state that can have infrastructure for the people to be. So, practically, all the [Palestinians] people are disabled by default.” Similarly, Majed argued, “No one can envy our government for the situation it is experiencing nowadays.” Furthermore, Dr. Shaban also associated enforcement of the disability law with independence from the Israeli occupation:

Enforcing disability law is connected with the capacity to implement it. We are still under occupation, and we are suffering from a lack of school buildings, and that’s a primary reason, and the primary cause for that is the occupation.

Dr. Fadel further elaborated that the PA is powerless because “Israeli security and intelligence plan and manage everything including health, education, everything.” Dr. Fadel elaborated, “Looking at the biopolitics [health, body and power regimes] of the occupation, besides the destroyed infrastructure, there is prejudice and colonization of the Palestinian healthcare, . . . and how the Palestinian bodies are dealt with is under the diktat of the occupation.” Tala, while looking very dismayed, expressed that Palestinians cannot make progress on disability matters because of the Israeli occupation:

We should blame Israel for everything happening to us here, because we do not have an independent country. If we had independence, we would have had this situation. They come and tell you, ‘you need to be developed.’ I say, ‘Ok, we can work hard, and we can develop, but there is something [occupation] that is always stopping us at some stage. We want to continue, it [occupation] stops us.’

“The occupation is the reason behind disabilities and barriers, and evil,” Dr. Fadel stated. Even though the Palestinian Authority, since it came in 1993, tried its best to improve the living conditions of the Palestinians, Israel’s practices always worsened the situation as Dr.
Fadel argued: “When the Palestinian Authority came, it did a recovery. . . . Until now trying to do what can be done. . . . But if you want the truth, the occupation is the reason behind disabilities and barriers, and evil.” Likewise, Professor Fadwa described the challenges the PA goes through as “the challenges here are terrifying, horrifying; we are talking about a society that is under occupation; meaning there are more emergency and emerging issues than having normal life.” Dr. Suhail also confirmed that the PA is still seeking to build a state. He stated that “it is not only the disability law, other laws are not enforced either because there are priorities, and we are still at the beginning of the road, meaning a state on its way to be built.”

Furthermore, Dr. Said also discussed how the PA’s role in helping disabled Palestinians is influenced negatively by the Israeli occupation. He described that effect:

Individuals with disability and their families are still suffering from confinements, especially [from] the occupation, and [due to] absence of the role of the government institutions because of the occupation. The government [Palestinian] is not able to perform its duties.

The inability for the PA to perform its duties is also because of the increasing burdens, as Professor Fadwa explained, “Numbers of people with disabilities increase, which constitutes a burden on the government. It is a terrifying burden.” Professor Fadwa stated that there are immense challenges imposed on the PA due to the occupation. She discussed how such an increase needs to be addressed:

Besides the disabilities from birth, we have 800 thousand injured only from the Intifadas [uprisings]. Those [disabled] people need a budget [that equals budget] of [combined] three countries to provide their needs. Add to that, the level [of service]
of our hospitals is very low, very low [meaning no medical capacity]. . . . And people do not have health care, so the situation gets worse. At the beginning, he [disabled] might walk a little bit, then due to negligence and lack of medical care, he [disabled] may have a total paralysis, and that’s another level of the disability problem here.

On the other side, the second aspect that leads to gaps between the disability law and the realities of the disabled Palestinians is that the Palestinian Authority is not only challenged by the Israeli occupation but also by lack of appropriate management for available resources, and lack of punitive procedures for those who do not apply the law of disability. As Dr. Said described, “Lack of wise management of resources whether human or financial resources, . . . the law does not stipulate any procedures of implementing it.” All participants came to the consensus that there are no punitive procedures for members of public sectors who do not abide by the disability law.

“The disability law does not stipulate any punitive procedures to those institutions or persons who do not abide by that,” Dr. Said confirmed. He insisted that there is a need for the PA to enforce the law with punitive procedures. Dr. Suhail, similarly, asserted that the law is not enforced: “There is a Palestinian law but who is implementing it? That’s the question, who applies this law?” Lack of legal enforcement was also discussed by Dr. Shaban. He elaborated on the lack of law enforcement: “There is no executive authority to enforce the law. The same applies to the disability law and employment of 5%, it is a Palestinian law.”

The Palestinian disability law stipulates that every institution’s workforce must consist of at least 5% of employees with disabilities. Rana emphasized that there would be no change as long as the law in not enforced. She argued that “if there are not punitive procedures for not employing [5%] . . . there will be no difference.” In one of the workshops
Professor Fadwa attended, she asked Ziyad Amro (Public Figure), consultant of Minister of Social Development, about the Palestinian disability law. He explained to her:

The disability law of 1999, number 4 (On the Right of the disabled-RDA) is not enforced. No one is following the law. I often put pressure on the Minister and on the Ministry [of Social Development], . . . to enforce the law. . . [Addressing the Ministry] Enforce the law and punish who does not abide by it, because that will help us [disabled] a lot.

The third aspect in gaps between the realities of disabled Palestinians and the RDA is the content of the law. Participants shared different opinions about the content of the Palestinian disability law. Some participants criticized the content and language of the law itself and advised that it needs to be revised. Shadi, for instance, perceived the law as out-of-date; he stated, “Now the [RDA] law is terrible, a law that talks about inability, and individualistic concepts. It does not give solutions for the issue.” Likewise, Raeda insisted that the content of law should be questioned. For instance, she suggested that having a specific percentage of disability employed is not just:

I say employing 5% from the disabled is not enough, not enough and unjust as well.

When we say employing at least 5%, . . . why restrict employment of disabled individuals to 5% only? . . . I am against that; whoever deserves the job should get it whether the individual is disabled or not. There should be no specific percentage.

On the other hand, there are improvements that accompanied the passage of the RDA. “Nowadays the Ministry of Education provides all schools with braille copies of class texts,” Dr. Adham stated. Professor Adham, who is disabled, perceived the Palestinian disability law as a good step for granting disability rights, but the implementation remains a challenge. He
confirmed, “The Palestinian law in fact, and [the Palestinian] constitution, . . . ha[ve] made their [disabled persons] issue really one of the most issues looked after, and one of the most issues discussed in the constitution. . . . The rules or regulations are not followed.” While Dr. Adham acknowledged the role of disability law in moving disability issues to the surface, Dr. Shaban also praised the efforts of the PA and confirmed that some personnel at the PA are doing their best to support individuals with disabilities. For instance, the governor of Ramallah strongly stands for the rights of disabled individuals. Dr. Shaban recalled the support provided by Ramallah governor:

There was a Kafeef child [adventitiously blind] who went to a school, and the school refused to accept him. But his family was determined, so his family took him and went to the governor of Ramallah, Dr. Leila Ghanam [Public Figure] . . . She embraced that child and took him along with the Minister of Education to the school that rejected him. Certainly, the child is one of the students now in the school.

Similarly, Dr. Suhail explained that the Ministry of Education has made progress in providing accommodations for disabled students and advocating for them, and as a result, disabled students are able to reach higher education. He explained such a progress: “I know very well that the Ministry of Education has made progress in facilitating taking tests. Many [disabled] people completed high school with consideration to their special cases.” Both Professor Adham and Professor Fadwa recognized the role of the PA in promoting disabled individuals. Professor Adham summarized the results of the PA efforts: “Nowadays schools are much better prepared and qualified to deal with disabled students’ needs.”

Corruption and scattered efforts on disability matters. All challenges disabled Palestinians face, as participants see it, are a result of the inability of the PA to be
independent due to the Israeli occupation. Consequently, disability has become an “issue of relief” as Shadi argued. He indicated that disability has become “[a] poverty that the official institutions created. . . The issue of disability became an issue of relief and charity, and this started forming the people’s perceptions, such as people begging in the name of their [disabled] children.” That charity and relief culture led to and is also associated with division on disability matters in Palestine. Dr. Fadel, for instance, stated that the Israeli occupation created such division and corruption:

What is on the ground is an authority that is unable to provide services, it can only provide services which the occupation agreed upon. . . This resulted in internal division, distributing proportions, internal conflicts, corruption in the organizations, resulting in treating individuals with special needs as if they are doing them a favor.

The internal division has created two totally separate authorities, one in Gaza, represented by the political Islamic faction of Hamas, and another in the West Bank, represented by the PA, *Fateh*, the liberal political faction that is part and functions within the PA. The result of such internal division is what Dr. Suhail referred as a “lack of cooperation.” He elaborated on the lack of cooperation and disability: “This fantastic category [disabled individuals] has not reached its rights and it is because of lack of institution cooperation. Unfortunately, the Ministry of Social Development works on its own. The Ministry of Education is working on its own.” Many governmental institutions work on disability in Palestine; nevertheless, they do not work in connection with each other and in unifying efforts.

Furthermore, Palestinian corruption plays a big role in divided efforts on disability: “There are people who do not want the situation to change.” Dr. Niveen, referring to corrupt Palestinian institutions, argued that there are some Palestinians who benefit from the current
situation. Professor Fadwa elaborated on the local corruption as well, which is a result of national division caused by the Israeli apartheid. She explained how the two Palestinian authorities in Gaza and the West Bank used their power to favor their own affiliates over other Palestinians who do not affiliate with those two factions: “Medical support is done through Fateh and Hamas only. People who are not members of a political faction supporting them, no one cares about them, especially those not working with the PA in any Ministry, they do not get free medical coverage.”

In sum, the political situation in Palestine has generated a Palestinian internal division between the most prevailing Palestinian political parties, Fateh and Hamas. That created divided efforts between the institutions of the two parties and also among the institutions of the PA itself. The divided efforts among the Palestinian institutions on disability matters in Palestine lead to corruption, promote a culture of pity and charity, and place disabled Palestinians in a position where they need pity and yet are described with stigma as a result.

**Language and Its Role in Internalized Stigma**

Stigma associated with disability still exists in Palestine. In some instances, stigma related to disability emerges. According to Dr. Niveen, stigma is associated with using disability terms to describe those who seek psychological counseling on campus. For instance, an individual who goes for counseling is approached by others like that: “Why have you gone there to psychological counseling? Are you crazy? Did you lose your mind? Yes, you are crazy, you lost your mind,” Dr. Niveen maintained. As a result, disabled individuals or those who seek counseling are stigmatized. Yet it is critical to understand that stigma in Palestine can also be positive, when it is a heroic stigma.
**Binary stigma in Palestine.** The participants explained two types of stigma in the Palestinian society: heroic stigma, which is associated with becoming disabled as a result of the Israeli occupation, and stigma associated with disability from birth or with learning disabilities. The former is positive, and the latter is negative. Dr. Niveen illustrated that the heroic stigma reflects pride because the disabled individual “defends his country, defends his right, his own right.” Moreover, Dr. Niveen referred to the type of stigma that is associated with disability caused by Israel as perceived differently from that disability from birth or accident. She elaborated on heroic stigma: “What decreases that negative feeling is that ‘I was a victim of an occupation. I was resisting such barbaric occupation; an occupation that still devours my land and steals my rights.’” Similarly, Professor Fadwa explained that stigma associated with disability from birth is, as she maintained, different from those who resist the occupation and get disabled because of the occupation; who are perceived with a positive perception. . . Their parents do not feel ashamed; it is the opposite, they feel proud to have a son who got disabled [from the occupation]. And they [parents] start exploring to fulfill his needs, especially if he [disabled person] is a college student or in school. But those who got disability from birth, it is an issue [how society perceives them].

While heroic stigma is positive, many participants reflected on the negative stigma associated with disability from birth or illness. Such stigma is associated with negative practices. For example, sometimes the way people extend help to the disabled in the Palestinian community may indicate stigma; inappropriate ways of holding a blind person, for instance, is a strong indicator of stigma in play. Amany described that she feels stigmatized when “someone holds [her] cane and pulls [her] or holds [her] purse and pulls
[her], this is very negative.” So, for Amany, the way people help her pulling her while holding her purse or cane is stigmatizing. Stigma is also associated with learning disabilities, not only physical disabilities.

“We are talking about 350 thousand children who are studying with learning difficulties,” Dr. Fadwa noted. It is crucial to highlight invisible disabilities, such as learning and emotional disabilities, especially because as it is clear the Palestinian society is focused more on visible disabilities due to the political situation and Israeli practices in particular. Dr. Niveen, Dr. Shaban, and Dr. Fadwa spoke about learning disabilities. They confirmed that there is more cultural stigma associated with learning disabilities than physical disabilities. Dr. Niveen discussed the stigma associated with invisible disabilities:

There are learning disabilities, but some people hide them. I have two cases here, learning difficulties, but the parents were very aware, the mother communicates continuously with me. She still reads for her son. Although he is junior in college, he sent me a medical report, and I communicated with his professors that the student needs more time to write, more time for things to be explained to him. It is not easy for him to grasp the information quickly. So, I have cases, but not all people admit it, rather they completely deny it. They say: ‘My son does not have a disability. My son is like that because the teachers are bad.’

Thus, stigma still exists in the Palestinian society. Practices such as pulling blind individuals while they are holding their cane is considered demeaning. Denying and hiding children with learning disabilities is also associated with stigma and reflects fear from family members of being stigmatized. However, here it is important to understand that part of the stigma in Palestine is again associated with the political situation. Dr. Said argued that the
inability of the PA leads Palestinian families to be trapped in shame because they have
disabled children, and as a result, families internalize and accept stigmatizing their children
due to “lack of awareness” and “insufficiency of governmental, local and private services.”
When families do not have strong knowledge to advocate for their disabled children, and the
means or governmental support to help their disabled children, according to Dr. Said, that
“pushes a lot of families to be stuck at the denial stage.” Consequently, families internalize
stigma as a society norm and do not address their children’s needs or concerns.

Dr. Shaban also explained how students with learning disabilities in schools are
viewed. They are often described as “hopeless cases” and “stupid or hard-headed.” The
reason that their families also do not advocate for them is labelling them by the society and
schools. To sum up this section, it is clear that stigma still exists in the Palestinian
community. Nevertheless, there are different types and degrees to stigma associated with
disability in Palestine: first, heroic stigma, which indicates pride when a Palestinian’s
disability is caused by the Israeli occupation, and second, stigma associated with disability
from birth and learning disabilities, which reflects negative attitudes towards those who were
born with a disability. Learning and emotional disabilities are often hidden as the focus is
more on the physical disabilities caused by the Israeli occupation.

Language, stigma, and disability identity. Most participants associated the use of
certain terms with stigma. Participants discussed that some linguistically accurate terms can
be used socially in stigmatizing ways. First, many terms reflecting stigma were discussed.
Dr. Niveen, like many other participants, explained that stigma is created and maintained by
society and culture, through language. Raeda believed that society stigmatizes specific terms
that some disabled individuals never accepts such terms as a result. Several participants
asserted that the word *disabled* is linguistically correct, but its societal usage makes it generate negative connotations. Dr. Niveen indicated that “there are [disabled] people who consider the word *disabled* problematic itself, although *disabled* is a linguistically accurate word for describing a person with disability.” Similarly, Dr. Fadel argue that the word *disabled* is “linguistically, very accurate, but socially it became very annoying.”

Amany, who is adventitiously blind, described her own experience of stigma through what people in the streets say to her, such as “*Astaghfer Allah El Azeem* [I repent to God],” or “thank God, he did not inflict what he tests others with.” In that situation, people stigmatize disabled persons when using such terms because people indicate that they do not like what they see or feel exaggerated pity that disabled people were born with a disability. These phrases that Amany listed refer to exaggerated pity and stigma at the same time.

There are many other disability terms that are used with negative connotations. Dr. Niveen gave examples of terms that people use them to reflect negative concepts:

There are people who say *حَرَام* [what a pity]. Many say *عَيْب* [shame]. . . .

So, there are terms that are negative, for example, . . . one of my students in a wheelchair, people may call him *مُكَرَّسَح* or *كَسِيق* [both mean crippled]. Oh my God, how much I am bothered with these words. . . . They do not mean insult, they are repeating what they hear, that’s it.

Apparently, terms that socially reflect stigma are often used outside of the university. Tala elaborated on such terms used outside of campus: “Outside of the university, they [people] do not say *أَصَم* [deaf], they say, *أَخْرَاسَ* [meaning the mouth is shut], *كُرْسَان* [plural of *أَخْرَاسَ*]. When I hear these terms, I get upset.”
Furthermore, Professor Fadwa mentioned terms such as, “أكعع Akta’a [one-handed], مشلول Mashlool [paralyzed], مجنون Majnoon [crazy]. They [people] say, ‘if there is good in you, God would not have created you with this body defect.’” Dr. Niveen also referred to the term used to stigmatize those with learning disabilities: “People also call them أهبل Ahbal [crazy or fool].” In that regard, Dr. Fadwa often used the term “individuals with learning difficulties” during the interviews, and she also indicated that she used the term instead of “learning disabilities” as a euphemistic term to encourage parents to send their children to the community center for remedial sessions, and for parents not to feel that their child is labeled and stigmatized by the term learning disabilities.

While smiling, Professor Adham, who is blind himself, listed terms that reflect stigma: “Sometimes they say يا هرام ya haram [what a pity]. . . . they use it to pity people, and also الله يشفيك Allah yeshfeek [may God cure you].” Whenever Professor Adham hears such terms, he responds, “Cure me of what? I am not sick. . . . I turn to them and say, ‘Well look, but I have certificates and degrees that are much better than those who can see.’” In a nutshell, although some Arabic terms are linguistically accurate, they are used socially in a negative way to shame disabled Palestinians from birth. Many of these terms indicate exaggerated pity. Nevertheless, there are continuous debates in higher education in Palestine on using such controversial terms, such as معاق Moa’q (disabled), أعمى A’mma (blind) and أصم Asam (deaf).

On campus, Dr. Adel, Raeda, and Rana often engaged in a debate while attending the meetings of Committee for Disabled Students at the University of Western Palestine. Debates occurred as the members argued over which terms should be used on campus to describe disabled students. Rana believed that using students with special needs instead of
disabled/students with disabilities is more acceptable by disabled students on campus. Dr. Adel agreed with Rana that using the terms students with disabilities or disabled may disturb disabled students on campus. He pointed out that using controversial terms “creates a negative reaction for students with disabilities, so [they] need to use a less sharp term. [He] took her side.” Similarly, Dr. Said is also against labeling. Alternatively, he “consider[s] their [disabled students’] existence as part of the individual differences that God placed in every society.” He asserted that the differences should not be stigmatized or labeled because they instead create unique differences in society.

Interestingly enough, accomplished disabled individuals showed pride in their disability, and used terms such as Moa’aq (disabled), A’ma (blind), etc. While observing interactions and interviewing, I noticed that Dr. Adham, who is blind, used the word “disabled” more often while talking. When asking Dr. Adham about terms he used such as disabled, he responded, “I prefer to choose the actual terms that describe the case of the person.” Likewise, Raeda shared the same view as Dr. Adham, she emphasized, “I prefer using the word disabled.” Her choice of the word, in her view represents the voice and identity of disabled individuals. In her experience working with disabled individuals, accomplished disabled persons often corrected her when she used “individuals with special needs,” as she narrated these stories:

In an event, I said ‘people with special needs.’ One of them [disabled] interrupted me and said: ‘We are disabled; we are not individuals with special needs.’ Another time, members of the union for disabled individuals came to my office, I used individuals with special needs; one of them corrected me and said: ‘We are not individuals with
special needs; we are disabled.’ I said to them: ‘I apologize; I know but I made a mistake calling you that.’

Majed also recalled interactions between him and a blind student who earned a master’s degree. The student corrected Majed when Majed used “special needs” to describe the student. He stated, “When I introduced him [disabled], he said: ‘Brother Majed is trying not to hurt us, so he used special needs to describe me. . . I was born congenitally A’mā [blind], it is not a shame on me.’”

It is clear here that different disabled individuals with different accomplishments use different terms. Accomplished disabled individuals, such as Dr. Adham and those Raeda met while being interviewed on TV, tend to use controversial and disputed terms and urged people to do so when describing them, whereas students tend to be under the influence of stigma and prefer what it may be considered euphemistic terms such as “with special needs.”

In the end, although stigma still exists through the practices and language used with disabled individuals in the Palestinian community, the level of awareness of disability in Palestine is increasing as participants shared based on their experience on campus and in the community.

**Increase level of awareness.** All participants affirmed that there have been ongoing efforts from the side of higher education institutions to raise awareness and to abolish stigma against disabled individuals. This section on awareness could be thought to be better categorized under the role of the Palestinian higher education; nevertheless, it is better situated here as it is strongly connected to the continuous decrease of stigma in the Palestinian culture. Many participants such as Raeda, Majed, Dr. Said, Dr. Shaban, and Tala, spoke about the increase of awareness on disability and the decrease of stigma, which is connected with the practices of the Palestinian higher education as the next paragraph will
All participants confirmed that negative perceptions on disability are changing. For example, Dr. Niveen believed that “people’s mentality and perceptions on disability are changing, . . . [and] now there is more understanding, more acceptance, and good cooperation, especially in the society of the university.”

“Nowadays, the normal situation is I see individuals with disabilities in my lectures,” Dr. Shaban happily expressed. Dr. Adel also added that in his engineering department, “there is a level of very high consciousness, and it is part of [their] architectural culture, we are already exposed to these issues, and it is also part of academic education.” Likewise, Raeda pointed out that there is a high level of awareness on campus at the University of Western Palestine: “There is awareness, deep awareness of people with disabilities here. . . . They become part of the university community, because there is no discrimination or prejudice here.” Furthermore, inside the classrooms, Tala argued that having deaf students is becoming a norm on campus and inside the classrooms. She stated, “At the university, they [nondisabled students] started getting used to more and more deaf students in lectures, they see their interpreter with them.” Similarly, Dr. Shaban described his classroom as he “welcome[s] them in [his] lectures,” and his university as it “hired an employee only for sign language, besides the lab for Makfoeen (adventitiously blind individuals), where we print out material in braille for students.” It is evident that the role of higher education is significant in raising awareness on disability. That role is manifested in paying attention to disabled students and their needs, for example, hiring sign language interpreters, and the deep
awareness of faculty about disability. In addition, higher education contributes to creating a culture of awareness through organizing workshops and involving others in these efforts.

“We always conduct workshops on changing perceptions of disability,” Raeda enthusiastically mentioned. Higher education institutions in Palestine play a critical role in contributing to raise awareness on disability matters through, according to Dr. Said, “organizing periodical workshops and trainings in collaboration with the Palestinian Red Crescent, which have a big role in raising awareness, trainings for faculty members and administrative staff.” Workshops are often conducted for disabled and nondisabled students. I myself attended and observed, while collecting data, different ceremonies of sign language workshops upon completion of such workshops. While interviewing Majed, he spoke about a sign language workshop that was completed during a day when I was observing. Majed confirmed, “That day we had 30 [nondisabled] students who completed a training on sign language, . . . this is the third training so far organized in collaboration with the Student Council.” That same day, he invited me to attend the ceremony.

Awareness of disability matters does not only exist in higher education institutions in Palestine, but also “in the media” as Dr. Fadwa indicated. She has been involved in advocating for students with learning disabilities through her community work and the media, and she also organized a conference to honor students with learning disabilities. She described the media’s role in raising awareness of disability event that she organized:

More than one channel covered the event and broadcast it live. That means awareness reaches homes. Plus, we had interviews on TV after the conference. We were on the media for almost three to four weeks, [in] interviews; I had participated in three interviews on TV, discussing the idea of the conference and its importance. . . . Many
of my friends started telling me: ‘We have children whom we think have learning difficulties according to your diagnosis and according to the definition you talk about. That means my son is not lazy, my son is not stupid.’ So, we tried to eradicate that stigma, so we encourage parents to send their children.

As a result, such a culture of awareness on campus also forced society and families to start accepting disabled individuals. As Tala asserted, “Nowadays when families realize that they have a disabled child, their care increases, and you see the trend now is that families try to help their [disabled] child to be independent, to study, and to marry.” Majed similarly confirmed that “people started shifting their perception and saying: ‘My son will not be a burden. He can go to college and get a job in the future to help himself and help us.’”

“Now the stigma is continuously decreasing,” Shadi stated. He went on: “Because there is involvement of individuals with disabilities in society’s activities, there are more institutions, individuals with disabilities became visible.” Dr. Suhail also argued that such a change occurs because disabled Palestinians became visible due to their success and achievements. Dr. Suhail thinks that “in the coming period, those [disabled] people will feel that they have got their rights. . . . [Disabled] graduates were hired in banks. That means there is acceptance from the society, and that’s the essence of it.” Professor Adham also argued that the accomplishments of disabled Palestinians functions as a tool of awareness:

Disabled persons themselves have made accomplishments that now people are talking about. . . . The other thing also now the disabled, the persons, have really paid a lot of attention to their education. They have gone to school, they are going to schools, they do very well at schools, and some of the disabled persons including myself, like get very high recognition in the society or high degrees and high grades in their learning.
For example, when I did the Tawjihi exam [high school], . . . I was the third in the kingdom, the West Bank and the East Bank of Jordan, and there was another person, a blind person, who was also among the top ten in the country.

Likewise, Majed also asserted that disability acceptance is becoming a norm in the Palestinian society, as he stated that “not all of the Palestinian society accepts disability. . . But this phenomenon is fading away or it is ending. . . . The societal perception of disabled people is no longer like ‘this person is useless.’” Professor Adham concluded, “Nowadays, there is a much better level of awareness, a much higher level of awareness let’s say in relation to disabilities, in terms of how people accept disabled persons, how the society actually treats disabled persons.” Stigma associated with disability from birth or illness in Palestine is fading away as a result of different factors. The first factor is the role of higher education in embracing disabled students and organizing workshops on disability in partnership with other community institutions. The second is the media in focusing on highlighting disability matters, along with more efforts from the community. And the third is the accomplishments of disabled Palestinians in contributing, which made them appear; many are hired in several sectors.

Cross-context: Stigma in the U.S. Unlike the case in Palestine where most of the focus is on the physical disabilities due to the Israeli practices against the Palestinians, which results in increasing numbers of physically disabled Palestinians, the American higher education focuses on a larger spectrum of disabilities, especially invisible disabilities. Amy listed some types of disabilities with which the center on campus works: “It’s really growing. I see a lot of people with depression, learning disabilities, people on the spectrum, autism spectrum, ADD [attention deficit disorder], ADHD [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder],
learning disabilities. We have a couple people with mobility type things, but it’s not as much.” With the focus on invisible disabilities with which the American higher education mostly deals, the participants in the U.S. highlighted stigma associated with all types of disabilities as the main concern in higher education.

“I think the stigma is huge,” Amy expressed. Both Rony and Amy described the American society as a society that stigmatizes people with disabilities. “Disability in our society is very stigmatizing, and so we need to be educating our faculty on campus,” Rony stated. He argued that society in the U.S. created the stigma and associated it with the disability; such stigma exists in the educational institutions through interaction between disabled students and professors. Rony recalled a situation that occurred on campus at the time of the interview:

I think they [students] do not always call it stigma, but as you get to know them, you realize what stigma looks like. I just had a student here earlier, who came to me to accommodate testing process. She is very concerned; when she provided her letter of accommodation to a faculty member, he rolled his eyes at her. And so that is really off putting to a student, and so we know that stigma is in play.

Both Rony and Amy spoke about students not coming to seek services due to stigma. Rony exclaimed, “why do students not come immediately to the Disability Center when they first enter university? . . . It’s primarily about stigma, stigma of disability and because it is highly stigmatized in our society.” Amy also associated the feeling of stigma with the students being reluctant and not seeking the services at the disability center. There is a strong connection between the feeling of stigma and avoid seeking services on campus. Disabled students in the U.S. often feel that they will be stigmatized if they seek services on campus.
Such stigma is created by the society and enforced by family as Amy gave examples of how a student’s mother refused for her daughter to be diagnosed because of the stigma:

I had a student come in one time that she really believed she had dyslexia. And I said: ‘Well, how long have you had this?’ and she said: ‘Oh for years’ . . . ‘Why weren't you formally diagnosed?’ She said: ‘My mother didn't want me to be diagnosed because of the stigma.’ So, she didn't get diagnosed or services for her disability because her mother didn't want her to get labeled as disabled.

In this regard, Amy also shared her own experience of feeling that her disability was a stigma, and that prevented her from seeking accommodations as well:

I was just kind of shy because the stigma of it all. . . Because people with disabilities, and I think this is very much still the case, want to prove that they are smart enough, that they don't need the accommodations. Cause there’s still something like, . . . if I use these accommodations, then it means I’m not smart enough to be here.

The other aspect connected to stigma in the U.S. is the disabled students’ experience of stigma in K-12: “Students don't want to have their K-12 experience follow them here.” Rony discussed that the differences in the educational systems between K-12 and college create a gap that leads to the feeling of stigma for students in the U.S. Consequently, students with disabilities join college with a mindset that they should not seek the disability offices to ask for help; otherwise they are looked down upon. Rony explained this dilemma:

Because it [disability] is highly stigmatized in our society, and so if you understand students don't want to have their K-12 experience follow them here; they don't know we don't do it the same way. But their high school often times has been one of, you
know, labeling. We don't use labels here, for example they don't know that. So, . . .

They're really trying to keep the disability identity out of who they are on campus. Likewise, Amy spoke about the transition from K-12 to higher education as a challenge for students because they do not only face stigma, but, according to Amy, they also “have to become the facilitator of accommodations, the advocate. And they have to be fluent and understanding how their disability impacts them.” To conclude, disabled students in the American higher education experience stigma in different ways; they experience stigma through interacting with professors, and they experience stigma as they carry their experiences in K-12 where they are labelled.

**Palestinian Higher Education in Abolishing Stigma**

Compared with American higher education, Palestinian higher education, in this study, revealed steady efforts to abolish stigma. Such efforts are represented in the services they offer to disabled students and several ways faculty supports disabled students.

**Higher education: Institutional support.** The three universities from which data was collected in Palestine demonstrated not only continuous willingness to provide technical and institutional support for disabled students, but they also made sure to provide a friendly and inclusive campus through taking initiatives to provide equal opportunities for disabled students, as well as equal opportunities for qualified disabled individuals through hiring disabled professors.

Support, in the Palestinian Universities that I observed, comes in different forms. Support is evident in the friendly environment provided on campus and in continuous efforts to make the physical environment accessible. While visiting the lab for students with disabilities at the University of Western Palestine, I could witness disabled students
interacting with nondisabled students (see Figure 4: “Disabled and non-disabled students interacting at Lab for Students with Disabilities at the University of Western Palestine” in Appendix D: Pictures). Here is one of my notes I took during an observation of that setting:

Around ten students were at the lab, two students with visual disability entered the lab as soon as I arrived. Three nondisabled students and the two students with total visual disabilities gathered around a table and started playing domino. They were laughing and talking about courses in the university.

“A friend sits with another friend and reading together,” Rana spoke about one of her own observations of gatherings of disabled and nondisabled students on campus. She described that event:

They [students] made the longest line of reading groups on campus. . . . What drew my attention was to see a Kafeef student [adventitiously blind] and next to him his friend reading for him. It was not planned or organized, it was spontaneous.

Supporting disabled students on campus is evident through the interactions and involvement of disabled students in the campus activities, which creates a friendly environment. Hatem, for instance, discussed how his university in Gaza made ensured a friendly campus. For instance, the university provides obligatory trainings to university employees and hires at least one employee who knows sign language in every department, so when deaf students are on campus, they can find people who know sign language on campus. Hatem elaborated on hiring disabled individuals on campus:

We hired an employee who masters the sign language in each department, and we have designed a complete training program from three levels, which must be attended by all the employees in the university. Nearly, forty employees now master the sign
language, and there are motives for them such as annual promotions for those who pass these courses. . . Moreover, we offered free courses to the students who want to learn the sign language.

Equivalently, the University of Eastern Palestine has taken the initiative to welcome students with hearing and speech impairments on campus, which was a precedent in higher education in Ramallah. As Majed asserted, “We are the first university to welcome hearing disabilities. . . [Non-verbal] students attend lecture with other [nondisabled] students, and they get [sign language] translation.” That way an inclusive environment is created as disabled students interact with others through sign language [see Figure 5: “Tala [Sign Language Interpreter Assistant] interacting with a non-verbal student who was practicing a final presentation at the University of Eastern Palestine” in Appendix D: Pictures).

Next, in terms of breaking barriers and providing equal opportunities to education, Dr. Said indicated that “the geographical distribution of the university helps students overcome the limitation of freedom of movement in the Palestinian reality.” The vision and mission of the University of Eastern Palestine are geared towards providing inclusive education and resisting the Israeli apartheid through what Dr. Said discussed as “the open education system, which offers flexibility in terms of student’s age, the student’s social and economic potentials. . . For instance, [the university addresses] the difficulty of movement between the cities and [Israeli] checkpoints.” The University of Eastern Palestine offers flexible options that help students in general and disabled students in particular. That is done through the online system, where students do not have to come to campus every day. Also, higher education has made progress to welcome disabled students via providing a friendly environment, as well as providing services and supporting students with tools.
Services on campus. There are different efforts on campus to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities; services include financial scholarships, human resources, facilities, connection with the community, and voluntary work that serves disabled students on campus. Generally, offices of student affairs are responsible for accommodating students with disabilities in the three universities. All three universities in Gaza and the West Bank offer financial scholarships for disabled students. Dr. Said highlighted the “full scholarship that pays tuition with flexible conditions,” from which every student with disability benefits.

Facilities and accessible environment are also another aspect of supporting disabled students. For example, Dr. Adel, in the engineering department, has been involved in a project that evaluates the physical environment at the University of Western Palestine. He explained how the university took procedures to make the physical environment accessible. He discussed that “when it comes to the design in the University of Western Palestine, we have taken into consideration, for example, those with visual impairments, by installing textures in the ground, so that they are able to move.”

As for facilities, the University of Eastern Palestine has labs in different branches for blind students, since the numbers of blind students is high. The main lab in Ramallah is run by Amany who is [adventitiously] blind herself, at which I conducted my interviews with Amany (see Figure 6: “Second interview in Lab for Blind Students” in Appendix D: Pictures). I observed Amany many times in her lab, training blind students on how to use the university gate, comfortably moving in the lab space, knowing where everything was. Though the lab is very small, it was her kingdom. I often had conversations with her while she was printing out Braille copies for students. Meanwhile, blind students would come and asked for her help, (see Figure 7: “Amany in her lab teaching a blind student how to access
the portal of the university from a smart phone” in Appendix D: Pictures). The services are not limited to registered disabled students on campus, but they also benefit other disabled students in the community.

Dr. Said indicated that services on campus also extend to benefiting the community. He confirmed that “those labs also provide service to any individual with visual impairment in all its degrees in the local community.” Furthermore, Dr. Said asserted that the university also welcomes “gatherings of those [blind] students, or [those] coming individually. And the university provides them with training on how to use computers, computer skills and techniques. All of this is for free, from A to Z.” Amany added that the university also contributes to providing tools for disabled individuals in the community. Amany indicated that “besides providing students and the community with braille books, we also provide canes, . . . magnifying lenses, all for free. It occurs in coordination between the university and other organizations.”

In Gaza, Hatem similarly discussed how the university works closely with the community to help fulfill their urgent and emergent needs:

After the first extensive Israeli attack on Gaza in 2008-2009, the Southern University of Gaza established a center for the rehabilitation for people with disabilities who became disabled because of the [Israeli] attack, which [the center] provides the vocational rehabilitation to make them find a source of income. Hatem spoke in detail about the services the university offers for the community and especially for those who become disabled as a result of the Israeli attacks on Gaza. He elaborated, “We have well-equipped small factories and shops where the people with disabilities can work, we also have an exhibition to show their products which is witnessing a
large turnout; the sell a lot of their products through the exhibition.” Similar steps are taken at the University of Western Palestine; Shadi explained how the university empowers disabled students through not only providing accommodations for students with disabilities, but also preparing a cadre from individuals with disabilities to be leaders of change and advocates for their own cause in the community. He elucidated on that goal:

We train a group of young male and females with disabilities in Gaza and the West Bank. . . We want to prepare a new generation to lead the union, because the union is in crisis, so we feel that there is a need for a cadre to lead the change.

The universities in Palestine involve the community in their effort to serve disabled Palestinians, which is a holistic approach in creating an inclusive environment.

A final aspect of the services offered to disabled students on campus is the voluntary programs on campuses, which promote disabled students in several ways. Participants such as Raeda, Rana, Amany, and Dr. Adham emphasized the importance of the disability voluntary work on campus towards serving and empowering disabled students. Raeda explained that once disabled students start their journey on campus, the first procedure that takes place is receiving a list of their names, their majors and their college ID numbers. Later, Raeda “post[s] on the university portal about Friends of Disabled Students [student organization], and “register[s] students [nondisabled] who would like to volunteer” working with disabled students. Next, Raeda holds a meeting, where she “bring[s] students with disabilities and volunteer students, so everyone will know what his duties are and how to help [disabled students], . . . and the volunteer student remain with them all the semester. . . . That way, there is inclusion.” Likewise, Amany described the voluntary work in her university as a work that:
involves students helping to type on Word, so text can be printed on braille. They
[volunteers] do not only provide a service to students with disabilities, but they also
educate themselves about disability issues. . . The volunteers keep coming back and
forth and meet new Makfofeen [adventitiously blind students].

Voluntary programs that support disabled students on campus are a strong form of inclusion
among all students on campus. Such programs promote acceptance and more compassion
towards students with different abilities. Voluntary programs are among many aspects to
support and inclusion in the Palestinian higher education institutions. The technical support
the universities offer, such as labs for students with disabilities and labs for adventitiously
blind students on campus and in the community, is important as well. Hiring disabled staff is
another crucial aspect to inclusion in the Palestinian higher education institutions.

_Hiring disabled faculty and university personnel._ Two participants in this study were
disabled in Palestine, Dr. Adham, who is a Linguistics Professor at the University of Western
Palestine (see Figure 8: “With Dr. Adham, at his office at the University of Western
Palestine,” and Figure 9: “Dr. Adham [Blind Linguistics professor] lecturing during a
Grammar course at the University of Western Palestine” in Appendix D: Pictures), and
Amany, who is an assistant and a supervisor at Lab for Makfofeen Students (Blind) at the
University of Eastern Palestine (see Figure 10: “Amany while printing books on Braille in
Lab for Blind Students” in Appendix D: Pictures). Dr. Adham reflected on his experience on
campus:

> The University of Western Palestine has been always a more liberal place. . . So, I
feel that blind or the disabled persons are more acceptable here. . . They found a more
comfortable environment. . . Also, the university here hires more people with
disabilities than other universities. . . The first time I worked at the University of Western Palestine was in 1979. . . I like the fact that here they respected my degree, accepted me, and also appreciated my efforts. . . We have also another blind teacher here in the department, so she is in literature.

Dr. Said also spoke about Amany, who “runs the lab for blind students, which is the best lab we have in terms of providing services, because it is run by our graduate who is with visual disability.” Similarly, the University of Western Palestine provides equal opportunities for disabled individuals to benefit from Graduate Assistantship positions on campus. Dr. Adel described how a committee in the engineering department welcomed the idea of hiring a disabled individual who stutters. He indicated that the committee “agreed that he can do it and his disability will not be a barrier, he has absolute confidence. . . . He is now working with us as a research teaching assistant.” Identically, Raeda also spoke about a colleague who was a student on campus and got hired after graduation. She noted, “We have a student who graduated, he is a colleague of ours now, he works in the financial office, he is in a wheelchair. . . . He graduated from here and immediately was hired.”

Hiring disabled faculty and university personnel is an asset and the normal procedure in any educationally inclusive environment. Here, the Palestinian higher education provides an exemplary model for welcoming a cadre of disabled intellectuals and administrators. That also builds acceptance, compassion, respect of different abilities, and most importantly it raises awareness in the community and eradicates cultural stigma associated with disability. Other participants mentioned several disabled students who work on campus, such as Hatem who indicated that the university in Gaza where he works hired disabled individuals. He stated, “We have two blind employees working in the center, . . . from the students who
graduated from the university.” Similarly, Dr. Fadel described how the University of Western Palestine is embracing and accepting. He stated that “the university is open-minded, and it is a right [for disabled to be here]. . . There are five to six [disabled] professors in the College of Arts alone.” Based on my observations and my participants’ experiences, having many disabled individuals working on campus seems to be an integral part of the university system.

Other participants reflected on their own experiences meeting and having disabled professors on campus before they became faculty or administrators. For instance, Dr. Fadel had disabled professors while he was a student on campus; he recalled those professors:

Hamed Makdessi [a blind professor], my relationship with him was closer. He was a cheerful man. We [students] would communicate with him and we were, between brackets, helping him when he asked for help to go to the classroom. . . Dr. Mansour Muhammad [another blind professor], I met him during studying the masters.

Shadi who was a student at the university of Western Palestine before he became an administrator confirmed that he had friends who were disabled on campus. He mentioned that he knew “colleagues, friends from the 80s, who had visual disabilities, studying at the University of Western Palestine.” Efforts of hiring disabled faculty and administrators in higher education in Palestine promoted a culture of support among other faculty and administrators towards disabled students. Such a culture on campus was cultivated long time ago, current professors knew and/or interacted with disabled faculty and students, which contributed to the strong support the current professors provide their disabled students.

Faculty and administrator support. Interviewing faculty and administrators leads me to realize that most of them have interacted and/or made friends with disabled persons in many different ways before they joined academia as faculty. That made them aware of issues
facing students with disabilities. This is due to their interaction with other disabled persons and their awareness of the political situation in Palestine as well. Dr. Niveen, Raeda, Dr. Fadwa, Dr. Shaban and Dr. Fadel all have disabled friends. For example, two of Dr. Fadel’s friends are university professors whom he met on campus when he was a student at the University of Western Palestine, and another was a friend he met when he was a student himself. Dr. Fadel recalled that disabled friend: “I was almost always with him [his blind friend], . . . wonderful young man who is an artist, educated, beautiful and even in terms of looking and as an energy, he is amazing.”

Support from faculty to disabled students comes in many different forms. Dr. Adel often joked with disabled students to break any barriers between him and disabled students, thus creating a friendly environment. He described how he interacted with a disabled student upon knowing he also worked at a restaurant: “I joked with him saying: ‘Oh you do not know how to make pizza, do you?’ He started explaining to me how he makes pizza. . . So from this perspective, I try to break any barrier.” Creating a friendly atmosphere is one form through which professors support their disabled students. Another form that demonstrates support is through flexible alternatives they offer to accommodate their needs in the classroom, so disabled students are given equal opportunity to succeed. All participants shared examples on how they support and advocate for disabled students, but at the same time ensuring that they communicate clear expectations for disabled students and making clear that disabled students are not exempted from any academic duties.

Accommodations, support, and expectations. Faculty and administrators, such as Amany, realize how crucial it is to provide needed accommodation for disabled students to be successful academically. All university professors and administrators interviewed showed
willingness to accommodate disabled students without a letter of accommodations. They all demonstrated a high level of accommodating students with disabilities and taking initiatives towards accommodating disabled students. They all provided several examples of actions they have taken to accommodate and make sure students know that they would accommodate any needs. For example, Dr. Fadel provided accommodations without requesting a letter from Student Affairs. He shared how he would accommodate students:

I had a student. . . . She used to ask to bring another student to come with her, and she would ask me to call the Student Affairs for that matter. I used to say to her: ‘No [no need to call Student Affairs]. I have full trust in you, you can bring anyone, I do not have any problem.’ And I used to bring two chairs in the room next to the test room, so she does not disturb her colleagues and they do not disturb her.

This is a vivid example, among others, that professors do not wait to be contacted by the office of Students Affairs, which is responsible for students with disabilities in the Palestinian higher education. Professors accommodate students based on their needs and without a letter of accommodation.

In fact, as part of the class decorum, many professors in this study often initiated and urged disabled students to communicate with them so the professor better understood what was needed to accommodate the students. Dr. Fadwa, for example, always declared in the classroom, “Any student with hearing, visual, physical or any other type of disability should come talk to me, so I can explore ways on how to accommodate him or her.” Dr. Adel also asserted that he takes into consideration the needs of disabled students. While interacting with a student who stutters, he “tries to give him more time and be patient with him.” Dr. Fadel often announced at the beginning of every semester, “If anyone has difficulties
hearing, or learning difficulties, or any type of disability or issues, I can help if you inform me.” Faculty also supported disabled students in their classrooms in different ways. For example, Dr. Fadel wanted to make sure that students with any type of disability were aware that faculty are willing to accommodate their needs. Dr. Fadel often told his students:

“Anyone who needs extra credit, I also consider that special needs. . . For example, [if] a student is on academic probation or is on the honor list and wants to maintain that level, [the student] should talk to me because I can give extra credit through extra assignments.”

In that regard, it is notable that professors do accommodate disabled students without any letters from student affairs as an ethical duty. Dr. Adel further elaborated on what he called “an ethical code” among professors in his department for accommodating students with disabilities. He explained the case of a disabled student and maintained that “professors usually give him extra time, without discussing that. It is a code, meaning agreed among professors without putting it on the table for discussion.” Professors do not only support disabled students on campus, but their support also extends to help them beyond their specific hours on academic duty. Tala shed light on her own experience being in classes as a sign language interpreter, and how professors are flexible in terms of accommodating students with disabilities outside of the time frame of their academic duties. Tala highlighted how professors go above and beyond what is expected from them:

Generally speaking, professors here are cooperative especially with students with disabilities. . . Professors sometimes give extra time of their private time. . . A lot of times, we meet the professor outside of the university. . . For example, there was a student last year, we went to Ersal area to meet a professor, and he [the professor] spent an hour explaining what she needed. So, he gave an hour out of his other job for
a deaf student. They are all good, all of them are cooperative, and I feel comfortable working with them.

“Professors go to her house to give her exams,” Raeda stated. She indicated that a student, with bullous erythroderma [a skin disease that paralyzes the body], could not come to campus, so professors would go to her house. Many Palestinian professors are willing to extend their help to hospital and home visits. Professor Fadwa spoke about her own experience going to the hospital to give her students the exam, especially those who were shot by the Israelis. She described that experience:

I personally supervised students who were injured at the hospital when we had midterms. I would leave campus and go to the hospital to give them the exam while they were receiving rehabilitation after they were shot in their legs or back. . . . So, I would go there, take the exam to them, and explain the questions for them due to their special conditions. . . . I started bringing recorders and recording their answers, I give the question verbally and I give the grade because he no longer can write.

Similarity, Dr. Suhail also provided all types of facilitations for his disabled students, to the extent that he allows them to contact him on programs such as Viber (phone App). He stated, “Honestly, they were the only [disabled] students that I permitted them to communicate with me through Viber, because of their need and to facilitate things for them.” Indeed, while professors are willing to accommodate disabled students without accommodation letters, and to go to their houses and hospitals to give them exams, they actually go beyond their academic duties in accommodating disabled students.

Second, in terms of faculty support, all faculty and administrators highlighted that supporting disabled students is best done by validating their voices. “We have different
meetings with students, and we heard from them regarding their concerns and focal issues,”
Shadi stated. In this regard, the four months I spent as a researcher while collecting data, I
was invited many times to meetings with disabled students and in one of those meetings,
there were 11 disabled students attending a periodical meeting with the members of the
Committee for Disabled Students, and the university vice president. In addition, I often
observed disabled students in the lab, interacting and talking about their participation in
meetings and in decision making on campus. During one of these observations, disabled
students prepared a birthday party for Rana (officer working with students with disabilities),
and Dr. Adham participated in that celebration (see Figure 11: “Professor Adham joined Lab
for Students with Disabilities at the University of Western Palestine to celebrate Rana’s
Birthday” in Appendix D: Pictures). Thus, the university and its staff supported students in
validating their voices.

Tala also always promoted her students to use their voices and express themselves.
One time, she encouraged a student to meet the director of the University of Eastern
Palestine, the branch in Ramallah to solve an incomplete grade for her. Tala described how
she did that: “I encouraged her to speak up for herself. . . . She communicated with the
director of the branch. . . He helped her, and instead of her taking the class again, she was
allowed to take the exam.” That is how a university administrator empowers disabled
students to advocate for themselves. Another example is the way Rana empowers disabled
students through asking people to communicate directly with disabled students. Rana
narrated a story on how she empowers disabled students’ voice: “A student from the
university talks to me [about disabled student] while a Kafeef student [adventitiously blind] is
standing with me and listening. I said [to nondisabled student]: ‘Why would you not talk to
him [Kafeef] directly?” In this situation, empowering disabled students occurred through urging others to speak to disabled students directly.

Here it is worth mentioning that not only administrators are involved in advocacy for disabled students, but faculty members are engaged as well. Professor Adham is not only teaching on campus, but he has been involved in advocating for disabled students. He pointed out his empowerment to disabled students:

I did establish a committee for disabled students on campus here. . . I did provide for them all kinds of facilities. For example, I brought for them the latest technology devices, like braille note takers, readers, talking programs, laptops, desktops, mini computers, drawing facilities.

Dr. Adham took the initiative to support disabled students on campus by establishing an entity (committee) for them to represent them and provide them with what they need. Dr. Fadel is another example of faculty who advocates for disabled students on campus. In fact, he came up with the idea of having a disability statement in his department. The statement reads:

Students with special needs, please contact the course professor, or the head of the program or the psychological and social counseling office at the Deanship of Student Affairs as soon as possible if you are a person with special needs of any kind, in order to provide the accommodations necessary to participate in the activities of the course and to overcome the course without any unfairness.

All faculty and administrators interviewed showed support to disabled students in several ways. “You cannot imagine her smile when she transferred, how much it meant for her,” Raeda described a disabled student’s feeling after she helped her transfer to a different
major. As an administrator, Raeda took actions to advocate strongly for disabled students. She intervened to support a disabled student with orofacial cleft whose father forced her to study Arabic. Raeda mentioned her work with that student: “I started working on psychological support with her, and then I helped her transfer to business administration, the major she wanted to study.” As an instructor, Raeda often encouraged her disabled students to participate. She narrated a recent situation with one her disabled students:

The student with the speech impairment came to speak to me yesterday. He does not usually participate in my class. He said to me: ‘Professor I love your class, but my voice is a little, I stutter, my voice is low, and I have issues with letters articulations; I feel shy.’ I said to him: ‘Why? it’s actually the opposite of what you just said; your voice is clear to me while you are talking to me now.’ . . . He asked: ‘Is it ok to prepare something from the class material and do a presentation tomorrow or next week?’ I said to him: ‘Sure, I want you to do the presentation.’

Supporting disabled students comes in a variety of forms; Raeda demonstrated a strong support as both an administrator and an instructor through promoting what they want to study by helping the student transfer to a different major, as well as through validating their capabilities and provide them a chance to be involved and present in the classroom.

On the other hand, Professor Fadwa does not wait for students to come to her asking for help; instead, she initiates communication with them to best support them. She maintained, “for me, I feel them, and I go to them, I do not wait for them to come to me. . . I have an excellent relationship with them, and I maintain contact with them even after they graduate.” Building relationships with disabled students is another form of support, which also involves professors to make efforts like Dr. Suhail’s initiatives of organizing and leading
training on campus for disabled students. All these types of support of disabled students, ranging from building relationships with them, organizing trainings for them, advocating for them to meet their academic goals such as helping them transfer to another major, empower, disabled students, and grants, equal opportunities for academic success. However, with all the support, professors also maintain high expectations for disabled students, and that no disabled student can get a free ride because of disability as all participants reported.

When it comes to expectations, all participants promoted the idea of encouraging disabled students to fulfill their academic duties like other students, but with some accommodations offered based on their needs. Dr. Niveen, for example, indicated that she is “against giving exemptions. As long as we treat them as normal students. There is nothing wrong in their brains, but we can give alternatives, alternative is the normal thing for anyone who needs it.” All the professors in this study do not provide any exemptions, yet they look into alternatives that will help disabled students perform the academic tasks. For instance, Dr. Fadel reiterated that the disabled student “is not exempted, but the requirements of the course should fit his needs, capabilities.” All professors were willing to accommodate disabled students but not exempt them.

From another perspective, Professor Adham associated not exempting disabled students from academic tasks with an increase of self-confidence. He asserted that he is “against exempting disabled students from anything. . . . [He is] not willing to pamper them . . . because they do not need to be pampered; they need to be more confident of themselves and of their abilities.” Disabled students are not given any free rides; they have to work hard so they can strengthen self-confidence, and that they are capable like others. Identically, Rana argued that disabled students explore their abilities and realize their potential when they
are not exempted. She shared many stories, but one was more inspiring. Rana described why it’s crucial not to exempt disabled students through a success story:

There was a student, who studied English for three years [here at the university], and then he transferred to history major, then he transferred to Geography major. He was saying to us: ‘I am a Kafeef student [adventitiously blind], pass me.’ Everyone refused, of course we refused, pass him on what basis? We said to him: ‘show us your grades, study so you can graduate, and there is no other option’ . . . He eventually transferred to Dutch language major, and this semester he was the first top student in the College of Arts.

In that case, faculty and administrators encouraged that student to explore an area at which he could excel. Thus, he excelled as he discovered his potential in the field of language, and because he was not exempted.

Dr. Said also associated exempting students from their academic duties with a lack of self-esteem. He argued that the university does not exempt them because “not exempting them has a positive reflection on them and how they perceive themselves. But this is done with facilitations so [disabled] students can perform. . . The way that fits [disabled student’s] his capabilities, in the place that fits him and the time that fits him as well.” All faculty argued that disabled students should not be exempted from any work because that will affect their self-confidence. Instead, they should be provided alternatives that will enable them to perform the academic tasks. Such alternatives are also considered pedagogical forms of advocating for disabled students.
Pedagogical advocacy practices. Professors showed different forms of pedagogical flexibility in order to advocate for disabled students. For instance, Rana described how professors supported students with disabilities in their pedagogy:

A professor told me, ‘I eliminated the writing questions for Mayes [disabled, cannot move her hands] and replaced them with circle true or false, so the writing is very little, but I did not make the questions easier, as hard as the replaced writing ones, and I did not reduce the number of questions either, just changed the style of the exams.’

Dr. Fadel also used alternatives with students with disabilities. He described his pedagogical alternatives:

When I ask students to prepare a Gramsci book that consists of 400 to 600 pages, I do not expect them [blind students] to be able to. . . . I do not expect that he finds it in braille in two days, or to find someone read it for him in two days, I do not expect that . . . In that case, I give him a link for something that can be transformed into word, or an alternative, to listen to it for example through video, meaning to listen to it via internet.

Thus, faculty use several other options to facilitate the performance of academic tasks for disabled students. That is one form of advocacy. Another pedagogical form of advocating for disabled students is discussions on disability in the classroom.

Faculty pedagogical advocacy extended to raising topics of disability during lectures. Dr. Adel advocated for disabled students in his pedagogy through architecture lectures. He insisted that having open discussions is his style in lectures, and always urged his students to think about disabled individuals when designing a building. He stated, “The automatic question students think I will ask, ‘Where are the stairs?’ but instead I ask them, ‘Where is
the ramp?’. . . Just like you assume there is someone who can take the stairs, you want to know that someone else needs to take the ramp.” Similarly, Dr. Niveen raises disability topics in her classes. She pointed out how she would include topics on disability during her lectures:

The course I am teaching now, I tell my students even the mental disabilities such as Downs Syndrome, people say that they cannot do anything. I say that they can be active and productive members, they can work. . . When I say that in my lectures, students say: ‘Yes, and they start recalling examples; oh yes we have someone in our neighborhood who works; he makes beautiful things that we buy them from him.’ So, perceptions are changing, and even through academics can change one’s idea, this one can change ten people’s minds.

As a result, the culture of compassion and acceptance is also built inside the classroom when professors raise topics of disability. Dr. Adel often required his students to “provide solutions [architectural designs] that suit everyone, and so the disability topic becomes arguable, and here culture of awareness is built.” It also gives students a chance to question the norms. Dr. Adel also urged his students to question norms that they learn in society. He summarized his approach:

I believe that the society is in need to move towards avant-gardism thinking, which places everything to be questioned, to try to hit beyond the norms that are making us get stuck to certain extent, and I was clear with the students. . . We have to question everything, and to be able to question everything, you have to be able to produce new ideas and thoughts first, and then you need to be a fighter, that you do not give up at a certain stage.
In addition, Professor Fadwa is another strong example of empowerment. Her advocacy is also translated in her classrooms and in her pedagogical practices. She often raised questions on disability in relation to social work. In one of her lectures, for instance, she asked her students if anyone knew about the radio station in Palestine that broadcasts disability topics, and when no students knew about it, she shared the action she took:

I immediately called the director of that radio station and put him on speaker [during lecture] and asked him to tell us about the radio station, its achievements, the donor, the mission/idea, whether it really gives a voice to individuals with disabilities... I asked them to keep in touch with Khaleel, the director of the station.

That is a clear example of how faculty like Professor Fadwa advocates pedagogically for disabled individuals in her classroom. She did not only raised questions about disability and the radio station that is specialized in disability matters, she also acted and called the director of that station, who spoke about the station during the lecture.

In conclusion, higher education in the Palestinian universities at which I collected my data shows a great potential in contributing to changing stigma towards disabled individuals. Faculty in the Palestinian universities in this study adhere to several pedagogical advocacy practices in their classrooms. Their pedagogy includes giving alternatives in taking tests and doing assignments, as well as raising the topic of disability in their classrooms as part of their classroom pedagogy. That advocacy is not only manifested on campus, but it also extends to the community.

**Faculty’s involvement in advocacy in community.** Many participants, such as Dr. Niveen, Raeda, Dr. Fadwa, Dr. Shaban, and Dr. Adel, have been involved in disability matters not only on campus and in their classrooms, but also in the community. Some of
them worked closely with the community to advocate and support disabled individuals. For instance, Dr. Niveen “worked with YMCA, for three years working with people with disabilities.” Faculty are aware of disability matters because of their involvement in the community.

Dr. Shaban held different positions in the community organizations where he served people with disabilities. He “worked as a local board director and was in a constant communication with families of disabled individuals, all types of disabilities. At that time, [he] realized how much those families [with disabled children] suffer.”

As part of her commitment to serving her community, Professor Fadwa contributed from her own pocket to help her disabled students and others in community activities. One of her disabled students organized a workshop but was not able to pay back the expenses of that workshops. Professor Fadwa helped her financially by giving her money, as she stated that she was able to “give her 700 dinars [US$ 986] . . . and told her: ‘Next time, I can help you with resources from which you can seek funds.”

To sum up, the faculty’s work and engagement in community on disability matters led them to be pioneers in advocating for disabled students on campus. All of them worked or/and interacted in some ways with disabled Palestinians in the community.

**Cross-context: Issues surrounding disability in the U.S. higher education.** As presented through the previous themes, Palestinians are under the Israeli occupation, with no independence or authority over resources. The Palestinian Laws are not enforced, and the Palestinians Authority is unable to fulfill the needs of its people as a result, especially the needs of disabled Palestinians whose numbers increase every day due to the Israeli practices. Consequently, disabled Palestinians who reach higher education often need of basic needs
because the PA cannot secure the basic tools for disabled Palestinians as discussed in an early section. Many participants spoke about needs related to providing tools, equipment, wheelchairs, transportation, financial scholarships, etc., as elaborated in previous sections. As a result, Palestinian higher education faces an increased burden to fulfill these needs for their disabled students once they join campus.

On the other hand, participants from the U.S. spoke about different issues as opposed to Palestine related to disability in higher education. Issues include but not limited to the federal laws that guarantee rights for disabled Americans, disability centers to support disabled students on campus, uncooperative professors, and challenges in accessibility. First, Rony maintained that federal laws in the U.S. guarantee rights for disabled Americans. Usually basic needs are often met through federal rehabilitation services before reaching higher education, as Rony referred:

> In America, the federal government provides each state with RSA dollars, so rehab service administration dollars. And so those go to the states to run and fund in part public rehab offices. In Michigan, it’s called Michigan Rehabilitation Services is now part of the Department of Human Services. Thus, when it comes to higher education in U.S., accommodations related to academic performance are more needed. Amy listed some of the services offered for disabled students:

> We offer things like extended times on assignments and exams because the time table for assignments and exams aren't reasonable for some people with disabilities. We offer note takers because the ways lectures are offered are not reasonable for people who have issues with writing.
Rony also indicated that services such as enlarging font are offered. He described services such as those needed during the test, where the disability center helps “enlarge the font of a test” or “reconstruct the test once the faculty member gives it, and the student comes in and takes extra time, because it takes little longer to manage that testing process.” In this regard, part of their work at the disability center is also to communicate with professors and help them out. Amy confirmed this: “We offer captioning because professors, when they are showing video don't think they should turn on closed captioning. It’s almost like we offer accommodations that people are not comfortable offering.” A lot of that revolves around stigma. So, Amy does her best in the disability center to support students. Amy explained how she supports disabled students:

I try to make their feelings validated because in some cases they're being stigmatized, because people can't see their disability. . . . I called the professor and said: ‘I wanted to reaffirm that this student is using these services because she needs them and it’s not appropriate for you to ask her or tell her she’s being disruptive. . . I listen to the student, acknowledge their feelings, make sure they are following are practices in terms of conduct or behavior.

Most of the concerns that participants in the U.S. discussed revolved around stigma in higher education, which matched a lot of literature (Barnard-Brak et al., 2010; Hong, 2015; Kranke et al., 2013; Marshak et al., 2010). Amy recalled a situation with a new student who came to fix a mistake when he registered. The registration department sent him to the disability center without hearing what he sought. Amy described, while dismayed, that situation when the registration office told her that they needed to send that disabled freshman to the disability center. In communicating with the registration office, she asked why to send the student to
the disability center. The officer in the administration office said to her: ‘Because he has a disability.’ Amy reflected on that situation:

I'm thinking to myself that’s how it’s framed if you have disability. You got to stick to your segregated corner and nobody else wants to touch you. It’s like you have leprosy; it’s like if you touch someone, you're gonna catch it. And I’m sitting there thinking to myself: ‘If that’s how higher education looks at disability! This is bad.’

Rony also highlighted the challenges associated with faculty being inflexible. He explained such challenges:

I think for faculty it’s often times counterintuitive, and I've had faculty tell me this: ‘then why didn't the student come at the beginning of the semester? Why am I just now getting the letter of accommodation in October or November?’ Well it’s their right to do it that way. We don't retroactively go back and say: ‘Well we gotta change things that happened already. . . But I still think back and struggle with that because there is you know we socially constructed disability in our society and it really is a social construct. We've just accepted some stuff without questioning it.

Stigma and uncooperative faculty are not the only issues facing higher education in the U.S. The physical environment and accessibility are another aspect to the challenges disabled students face in higher education in the U.S. Rony shared examples of inaccessible environment: “I have temporary employee right now that uses a chair, and we've talked about how she uses certain toilets on campus. . . . There’s not enough swing room for her chair for her to be independent.” That shows that the physical environment is still not accessible for disabled students and individuals on campus. Amy also reflected on the physical environment and how the university does not include them when making changes in
buildings. She stated, “Unfortunately when they make a lot of changes to the buildings, they don’t consult us. They just make the changes. So, where I would say the disability office needs to be consulted on these things, we’re not then we have to react after.” Here, there is a need for higher education institutions to cooperate and involve individuals with disabilities on campus when it comes to the design and construction of buildings on campus to ensure accessibility for everyone, so the environment is inclusive.

Finally, the administrative work of the disability center is in need for improvements to better serve disabled students. Rony and Amy discussed some areas in their administrative work that need to be improved, such as having a database. Rony highlighted the need for a database system:

Right now, the big problem for the office is we don't have good reliable data. . . When I asked how many students we have, we actually do a physical hand count of files; not a great place to be. . . So, we’re looking to create some software and that will take some implication time.

Amy also criticized the way the disability center in her university functions. She indicated that they “still very much hold to the way of doing things to the past encouraging documentation.” Amy continued describing what needs to be addressed: “The biggest flaw about our services it’s all about what we do. It’s not proactive, it is very reactionary.” In sum, issues the American higher education face in accommodating disabled students on campus, which need to be addressed, include ensuring a 100% accessible environment, creating a database system for disabled students so the administrative work is smoother, and most importantly engaging and raising awareness of faculty of disabled students and their needs due to the prevailing stigma and uncooperative faculty on campus as participants discussed.
Role of Community-Based Rehabilitations (CBRs) and NGOs in Palestine

This final theme may seem fragmented from the previous section, yet it is crucial to differentiate between the PA institutions in Palestine, discussed at the beginning, and the local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in Palestine to serve the Palestinian community. Local Palestinian NGOs, such as the community-based rehabilitations (CBRs), specialized to serve disabled Palestinians, often get their funds from the international NGOs. Local and international NGOs provide many services and tools to disabled Palestinians. That covers a lot of needs that the PA cannot fulfil due the political situation. However, all participants raised concerns about insufficient efforts and a level of dishonesty of the international NGOs.

Rehabilitation services and awareness. First, many participants praised the work of the local and international NGOs in Palestine in serving disabled Palestinians. Dr. Said discussed the important role local and international organizations play in supporting disabled students. He emphasized that “the local community contributed in terms of providing equipment and tools. There are also international organizations such as an Italian organization that provided the main equipment.”

Professor Fadwa also argued that the local Palestinian organizations contributed to fighting stigma against disabled individuals through serving disabled Palestinians and reaching out to them by going to their homes. This is equally important especially when families refuse to let their children go to organizations for rehabilitation, or who are living in remote areas and cannot reach organizations due to the Israeli occupation and lack of finances/transportation. Professor Fadwa explained the work of the CBRs:
Now why do we have the CBR? Instead of saying to them [families]: ‘Bring your children so we [CBR] rehabilitate them.’ They [CBR] have teams in all areas, and that’s what’s fantastic about the CBR. They have a center in every area; the community donates a place and experts, where they teach [disabled] how to read, how to do math. . . . They established small libraries, so they [disabled] can read. They also teach them computer skills and how to use computer.

Similarly, Dr. Shaban discussed how the work of local CBRs contributed to serving disabled Palestinians and eradicating the stigma associated with disability. He explained that work:

Today, the general culture has changed in Palestine, due to the establishment of local organizations in Ramallah and other governorates, which address the issues of disability. Most importantly, the CBR Program, stands for Community Based Rehabilitation, a local program that reaches disabled inside their homes.

CBRs play a vital role in reaching disabled individuals in the community and raising awareness of families on the importance of these rehabilitation services for their children. All participants had consensus that specific local NGOs were thought to be credible and honest. Like Raeda and Dr. Niveen, Rana reported, “The [Palestinians] Red Crescent has a communication school [for deaf people] . . . There are usually workshops, more than one activity, they also have something for mental health.” Raeda also praised the work of specific local Palestinian NGOs; she highly respects “the [Palestinian] YMCA [Young’s Men Christian Association] and the [Palestinian] Red Crescent” because “they provide all services for disabled individuals. . . . The YMCA opened a resources center for deaf.”

Many local Palestinian NGOs are serving disabled Palestinians as participants emphasized the positive role of the Palestinian CBRs and other local NGOs. Nevertheless, participants
mentioned only few specific local NGOs that are perceived as honest and credible. All participants voiced their concerns towards the work of the international NGOs, which they associated with a foreign agenda imposed on Palestine.

**Insufficient NGOs’ efforts, and NGOs’ agenda.** Although few participants praised the work of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who fund local Palestinians organizations, all participants criticized the international NGOs in Palestine. Concerns were related to insufficient efforts to cover the emerging needs of disability. Dr. Shaban, for instance, considered the work of the local and international NGOs as not sufficient. He provided examples:

> I am surprised that we do not have shelters for individuals with disabilities in Ramallah as a whole. We do not have real career rehabilitation centers. We are talking about very limited numbers [of centers]. . . . One organization told me that they have five hundred [disabled] persons who are on waiting list. Imagine, we are talking about a village area that has a population of 52 thousand.

Hence, the NGOs efforts are not enough. That is not the only issue here, participants also discussed that the international NGOs’ agendas impact how the funds are spent. Many participants spoke about dishonest agenda of international donors that leads to waste of money and lack impact on disability matters. For instance, Shadi asserted that the work of the international NGOs does not take into consideration the Palestinian reality, especially the political reality, because every donor has “its own agenda.” Shadi further elaborated, “It is incorrect or unacceptable to discuss disability matters within a developmental perspective without considering that we are as a Palestinian society still under colonialism [Israeli]. This point is neglected by international institutions.” Here, there are gaps in the work of the
international organizations because their work is not focused on the political factors that impact disability. So, how do we expect their role to be effective and provide a positive change on the lives of the Palestinians?

Similarity, Dr. Suhail confirmed that the work of the international NGOs should address priorities of the Palestinian nation for it to be successful. He elaborated on the current work of the international donors: “You feel like they are looking for certain things that do not focusing on priorities we have. What they work on is not focused on priorities of the Palestinian society.” With such an agenda that is not focused on the realities and needs of disabled Palestinian and Palestinian society, the work of the international NGOs is not implemented in an efficient way to address the emerging and urgent needs of the Palestinian people; rather, their work involves wasting the funds on salaries and administration expenses. Dr. Niveen provided examples of this waste:

International organizations come for their own interest, . . . they bring money and say we will do this and that. . . and say that they spend it on the Palestinians. . . For example, TIF [Treaties in Force] organization came. . . In vain, they [TIF] just took most of the houses, living in them. . . if they use that money to provide tools for people, it would have been better.

According to Dr. Suhail, who worked with local and international NGOs in Palestine for more than 20 years, the funds coming to the Palestinians do not benefit them. He explained that “the fund that comes from outside, half of it goes back to where it came from, through hiring people from that donor country with high salaries, and more money wasted at conferences, so what remains is 10 or 15% of the fund for the project.” Professor Adham also shared the same opinion as others on the role of international NGOs:
I do not think that they help, that these organizations are channeled properly to the right receivers. So, there is a lot spent on procedural matters, logistics, and so on and so forth, on sort of side issues that are not necessarily pertinent to the main issue. . . Unfortunately, some individuals have benefited from that, but it is not a collective benefit, we get a lot of money here. . . but in my opinion with no tangible impact on the lives of persons here, so that’s my own impression.

In addition, sustainability is another aspect that needs to be improved in the work of the international NGOs. Given his engagement with the community and the work of the NGOs, Dr. Shaban explained that “when international organizations work, they work based on projects, for some period of time and projects are over. This [disabled] child, you cannot work with him for four months then it’s over. There should be sustainability.” Dr. Fadwa, who is also involved in local NGOs and acquainted with NGOs programs and activities, argued that NGOs do not do their job in a comprehensive way; as she put it, “NGOs are often successful in short term projects, but sustainability is not there. For example, there was a one-day training that was conducted by an international painter.” That requires the NGOs to think outside of the box and how they should think of ways to spend the funds wisely in a way that will serve the disabled Palestinians in a way that will positively influence their lives on the long term.
Chapter 5: Thematic Analysis: A Return to the Literature

Four prominent themes along with subthemes are further analyzed in light of the literature, filling a gap in our knowledge about the experiences of Palestinian academics and administrators working with disabled students in higher education. Palestinian higher education provides a model that is particularly worth examining and is an inspiring one due to the fact that inclusion is manifested in practice in spite of the political and economic catastrophes and turmoil the Israeli apartheid inflicts on the Palestinians.

This dissertation’s findings are important in terms of the role that the Israeli apartheid plays in debilitating the Palestinian body and infrastructure, and in terms of the different types of stigmas in the Palestinian community, including that which is associated with shame and also that which is associated with pride, the “heroic stigma.” From academia perspective, the findings are powerful as well: The Palestinian higher education institutions in this study are exemplary models of accommodating, supporting and advocating for the rights of disabled students and individuals, particularly in comparison with the American model. Finally, the critical Palestinian view of the role of local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in serving disabled Palestinians is another important finding of this study.

Israeli Apartheid and Disability in Palestine

Palestine has always been under different regimes, which each had a system of power and different types of domination. All those powers placed the Palestinian indigenous population into a lower class. In Palestine, disability has become a complex phenomenon due to different factors mostly relevant to the Israeli occupation and its debilitating practices
under religious rights and self-defense discourses, and discourses of security and state rights (Feldman, 2014).

The apartheid doctrine, imbedded in Zionism and originating in religious beliefs, led Israel to the practices of their colonial system. Historically, the first practice that led to the establishment of Israel was the *Ethnic Cleansing* of Palestine (Pappé, 2006) in 1948; what Palestinians call *Al-Nkbah* (Catastrophe), during which the Israeli Haganah killed and expelled hundreds of thousands of indigenous Palestinians (Pappé, 2006). As a result, a system of exclusion took place with the establishment of a purely Jewish state, where everyone else who is a non-Jew is regarded as inferior and second-class.

This is the political ideology, and the Palestinians experience its ramifications: an ideology that produces discourses of hatred and fear, as well as reproduces and maintains internalized assumptions of religious superiority by the Israeli state over the indigenous Palestinians. Thus, “combating ableist logics which equate disability with deficiency necessitates combating the dehumanization of Palestinians that reproduces such logics” (Jaffee, 2016, p. 118). The Israeli cultural and religious discourses situate disability in a broader geographical perspective in which disability in Palestine is a production of forms of injustices through settler-colonial power, which is driven by Israeli ethnocentrism. As Jaffee (2016) indicated, “the dehumanization of Palestinians by the Israeli state has relied on discourses that reinforce dominant conceptions of disabled people as deficient, inferior, and subhuman” (p. 116). All participants in the study provided examples of apartheid practices against the Palestinians, which are often justified with a language and discourse of self-defense. In reference to critical discourse analysis (CDA), Fairclough pointed out that language and discourse represent and influence social life (as cited in Poole, 2010); the
Israeli discourse and language are not only destroying all aspects of the social Palestinian life but also misleading, and they reproduce dominance and violence against the indigenous Palestinian population.

First, it is crucial to look at how all participants were critical of the language of how the Palestinian struggle is described in the world. A lot of what is written on Palestine describes the issue in Palestine as a “conflict” (Bunton, 2013; Ross, 2010; Tessler, 2009); nevertheless, participants insisted that “we are not in a conflict zone, we are a colonized nation,” as Dr. Fadel repetitively mentioned. Dr. Niveen similarly described the oppression the Israeli colonizer inflicts on the indigenous Palestinians. She insisted, “everything is about occupation here and is about forcing us.” So, the Palestinian struggle must not be described as conflict, because a conflict is between two equal parties who have rights to the land.

All participants described in detail how the treatment of the Palestinians reflects the ideology of the Israeli colonialist policies and practices, and how every Palestinian, including those who were born with a disability or maimed by the Israelis, is a target to the Israeli’s policies of shoot to kill and shoot to maim. For example, Dr. Fadel stated, “Israel does not only target non-disabled Palestinians but also disabled Palestinians.” In April 2018, a 12-year-old deaf boy was shot by the Israeli army (If Americans Knew, 2018). In that regard, Puar (2017) highlighted the practice of biopolitics, a term by Foucault that entails the vulnerability and bodily health under regimes of power (Puar, 2015). In Palestine, biopolitics is imbedded in debilitation, in which “maiming is a sanctioned tactic of the settler colonial rule, justified in protectionist terms” (Puar, 2017, p. xix), as if the indigenous Palestinians are a threat to Israel. In fact, maiming the Palestinians is part of the Israeli practice of political power and domination. Biopolitics theory is important in understanding how the maiming
practices of the Israelis debilitate humans and infrastructure of Palestine. Biopolitics and disability are intertwined in Palestine. Using Foucault’s biopolitics theory, Puar (2015) asked, What does biopolitics look like in our current time? The answer is that disability in Palestine is an issue of maiming rather than natural illnesses. As Puar (2015) put it,

What is clear in contemporary biopolitics is that economic life can grow without the flourishing of much of human life, which means precisely that the eliminated and cordonning off of illness is no longer a hindrance to, but rather is implicated in, ‘make live.’ (p. 7)

The political power and dominance, reflected in the Israeli maiming of the Palestinian body and infrastructure, restrain the Palestinians’ lives from flourishing, maintain debilitation, and reproduces power.

**Intentional maiming of Palestinians as an Israeli practice.** Due to the empowerment and support that the U.S. grants to Israel, the crimes of the Israeli occupation have increased the percentage of people with disabilities, which makes the percentage of people with disabilities in Palestine the highest in the world (Abu Fedala, 2009; Amro, 2001). For instance, referring to the Palestinian Ministry of Social Development, there are 49,000 individuals with some type of disability in Gaza (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA], 2017). The continuous killing and maiming of the Palestinians occur on a daily basis, as my participants described. Dr. Fadwa, for instance, describing daily life of the Palestinians, claimed that “anyone can receive a bullet [from Israelis] while sitting.”

The Israeli army often targets specific parts of the body when shooting at the Palestinians (Abu Fedala, 2009). Majed described that “most of the physical disabilities are
caused by the [Israeli]occupation.” Dr. Niveen added that “the bullets used are prohibited internationally, the type of bullet that smashes the bones, so bones can never heal.” Shadi also explained that “the occupation tries to focus on causing a disability if it does not want to kill. Most of the injuries... are focused on causing disabilities in the leg, in the spinal region, meaning injuries that will create physical disabilities.” These examples from the participants illustrate what is described by medical personnel in both Gaza and the West Bank as a notable ‘shoot to cripple’ phenomenon (Puar, 2015, p. 3). This phenomenon reflects what Smith (2005) referred to, discussing ghettoizing people with intellectual disabilities, as “normalized culture” (p. 89) built on “Otherizing” (p. 89). Identically, Israel created itself as a Jewish state, while Othering/Otherizing the indigenous Palestinians; Israel here reflects “a normative ideology,” a term Smith (2005) used to describe white supremacy in creating taxonomies of superior white and persons with intellectual disabilities considered inferior. Israel in that sense falls into a normative ideology that produces behaviors of prejudice, discrimination and exclusion. Behaviors, whether by the Israeli army or Israeli settlers, are mainly represented in attacking and shooting the Palestinians to kill and to cripple, as a daily practice of the Israeli army.

Besides the daily Israeli attacks on the Palestinians, there have been several extensive military operations against the Palestinians that increased the numbers of Palestinians with mobility, visual and hearing disabilities. For instance, during the first Intifada (Uprising) in 1987, there were 80,000 injured and 15,000 of them were left with permanent disabilities (Amro, 2001). As for the second Intifada in 2000, 23,336 Palestinians were shot by the Israeli army, resulting in thousands with physical disabilities (Abu Fedala, 2009; Diakonia, 2015). Participants also spoke about the policy of breaking bones (Amro, 2001) to deter the
Palestinians from protesting during the first Intifada, as Shadi pointed out, “breaking bones is practically part of the [Israeli] colonizer’s policies.” From a CDA perspective, this Israeli discourse and practice of torturing those who protest and breaking their bones does perpetuate incursive control and power relations between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Similarly, critical disability studies (CDS) explores social meanings and power hierarchies in connection to oppression and exclusion systems (Siebers, 2008). From a CDS perspective, the Israeli practices create and reproduce social meanings related to them as the chosen people by God race (Newcomb, 2008), referring back to Abraham's race (Newcomb, 2008), and thus the exclusion of the Palestinians who are punished, by breaking their bones, shooting them to inflict physical disability or to kill them, if they resist the colonizer and its domination.

Moreover, the participants also described other extensive bombings on Gaza. Dr. Said, for example, referred to the extensive attack on Gaza that occurred in late 2008 and early 2009 as “the barbaric bombing that hits even schools.” During that attack, the Israeli army killed around 1400 Palestinians using phosphorous bombs, resulting in thousands with physical disabilities who suffered internal burns from phosphorous bombs and “focused lethality ammunition” (Horowitz et al., 2011, p. 144). Thousands were injured; many of them remained with permanent disabilities; The United Nations Development (UNDP)’s Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People and Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem (2014) confirmed that during that attack in late 2008, 9,986 were injured, mostly women and children. In 2014, Israel launched another massive 50-day attack on Gaza, which killed 2,145 and injured over 11,000 Palestinians (UNDP’s Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People & Fayyad, 2014). Similarly, Jaffee (2016) stated that Israel imposes a blockade and
prevents Palestinians from accessing health care while maintains practices of paralyzing
Palestinians as an Israeli military policy, targeting heads and legs of protestors, and
deliberately harming unarmed Palestinians. That shows the inhumane discursive practices of
domination, and while the large-scale destruction Israel inflicts on the Palestinian body and
infrastructure prevents the local and international health-care providers from addressing the
needs of the Palestinians (Puar, 2015).

The numbers of Palestinians who are maimed by Israel is increasing on a daily basis.
Participants such as Dr. Niveen, Shadi, Dr. Fadwa, Tala, Dr. Fadel, Dr. Shaban, and Dr.
Adham shared stories of Palestinians maimed or killed while at home or while heading to the
university at the Israeli checkpoints. Tala indicated she has “a student who was shot in his
eye from the occupation, he lost his sight.” Dr. Shaban also pointed out that the Israeli army
in his village in Jerusalem “stops students [heading to school] and restrains them, makes
them step down from the bus, attacks them, and assaults them.” That also applies to Gaza but
takes different forms. In mid-December 2017, upon Trump’s announcement of Jerusalem as
the capital of Israel, thousands of Palestinians demonstrated peacefully in Gaza and the West
Bank. Ibrahim Abu Thurya, a 29 years-old Palestinian, was considered the hero of these
peaceful demonstrations, especially on social media. Ibrahim had first lost his two legs
during the 2008-2009 Israeli Cast Led attack on Gaza, and the Israelis later killed him on
December 15, 2017, while he was protesting Trump’s announcement (Levy, 2019). On
March 30, 2018, thousands of Palestinians in Gaza demonstrated during Land Day at the
“Israeli” Gazan borders, and in one day, Israel killed 16 unarmed Palestinians, injured more
than 1,500 that day, and caused over a hundred to lose their legs due to lack of medical
support Cunningham and Balousha (2018). The United Nations-OCHA (2018) indicated that
“between 30 March and 31 July 2018, 164 Palestinians were killed and over 17,000 injured by Israeli forces” (p. 1). Such practices can never be accidental or collateral damage as we hear on the American and the Western media in general. Rather, the practices are the essence of discriminatory and prejudiced culture of the Israeli colonizer.

Collins (2008) illustrated the Israeli application of force, the intimidation of the army, and control of all aspects of life make the Palestinians’ lives restricted and confined; Israel tightens its control over Palestine, over Gaza in particular, through technology-driven methods, such as surveilling, bombing, assassinating, and using satellite guided weapons. All of these practices debilitate the lives of millions of Palestinians. In addition, there are myriads of examples of the Israelis atrocities, such as burning a Palestinian child in Jerusalem alive and slaying whole families in Gaza (Pappé, 2014), all of which is “still publicly licensed and approved by the president of the United States, the leaders of the European Union and Israel’s other friends in the world” (Pappé, 2014, para. 4). The Israeli’s systematic oppressive practices in maiming the indigenous Palestinians is part of a colonizer’s agenda under support of the West. The intentional maiming of the Palestinians is a result of “a normalized” system that positions the Palestinians in inferiority and worthy of harm and exclusion. Such a system relies on “self-defense” and “state rights” discourses in order to segregate and maintain an ideology of superiority.

**Destruction of the Palestinian infrastructure: Barriers and control.** Israel does not only target the Palestinian body, but it also targets anything that is Palestinian. Participants in this study have witnessed and lived several forms of the destruction of the Palestinian infrastructure, as well as having experienced the effects of increasing geographical exiles. Shadi referred to geographical exiles through describing how “many
villages have gates, checkpoints, the [apartheid] wall.” Such Israeli exiles are a clear indication of what Achille Mbembe’s referred to as a “war on life itself” (as cited in Puar, 2015, p. 4); not only maiming Palestinians, but also maiming territories. In reference to what all participants shared, there are many examples of the Israeli’s destruction of anything that is Palestinian, such as demolishing houses and schools, bombing of buildings and homes in Gaza, increasing barriers through checkpoints within the West Bank and separating Gaza from the West Bank, which all create many geographical exiles. The Israeli strategy in Gaza and the West Bank is to “ghettoize Gaza and somehow hope that the people there . . . would be dropped into eternal oblivion” (Pappé, 2014, para. 3).

Within the West Bank alone, the apartheid wall that Israel built creates many geographical exiles. According to Bennis (2009), Israeli officials insist that the wall is built to protect Israel from possible attacks. The Israeli government started building the wall in 2002; the wall is 24-feet-high cement blocks, and it is not built at the “Green line” area, which is the border between the West Bank and Israel; it is actually inside the West Bank (Bennis, 2009). The following are fatal results of that wall:

- The wall takes big swaths of the Palestinian land.
- It takes large areas of Palestinian farmlands and homes.
- It moves the Palestinian water resources to the Israeli’s side.
- Thousands of acres of Palestinian land on both sides of the wall are declared as military zones and cleared of the Palestinians’ houses and farms.
- The wall results in 90,000 Palestinians losing their houses and farms in the West Bank (Bennis, 2009).
In fact, all such barriers affect Palestinians in general, but severely affect people with disabilities and their access to education. Dr. Shaban referred to such intentional Israeli practice as “the Israelis do not take any step back in interrupting the educational and academic process. It [Israeli army] disturbs a lot; for example, it invades villages, destroys schools, causes sabotage in schools, clash with students.” Like nondisabled, Abu Fedala (2009) confirmed that people with disabilities face the same Israeli checkpoints to cross from one city to another going to college, yet they experience crossing them in more challenging ways. The Israeli soldiers do not care about the medical sensitivity and conditions of those people waiting at the checkpoints, but instead keep them waiting for long time. As a result, many students with special needs cannot leave their homes, those with mobility impairments in particular, due to the checkpoints Israel maintains between the cities in the West Bank (Abu Fedala, 2009; Jaradat, 2010; Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens’ Rights, 2001). Dr. Adham, who is a blind professor, spoke about disabled Palestinians struggling and suffering at the Israeli checkpoints. He elaborated, “Now they [Israelis] do not take disability into consideration. If you are at the fence or checkpoint, you are a disabled person. They [Israelis] would not really give you a special treatment.”

The stories and examples are numerous. The Dabaweya area in Hebron, for instance, which is under the Israeli control with many barriers, is dangerous for those with mobility to cross the checkpoints (Abu Fedala, 2009; Jaradat, 2010; Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens’ Rights, 2001). Therefore, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in Palestine provides an opportunity for those who face difficulties crossing the Israeli checkpoints; through an agreement with the family of the students with disabilities, the students’ parents teach them at home, follow up, give exams, and report to the ministry
Hatem discussed that in Gaza, many families are discouraged to send their sons and daughters to college due to concerns about transportation, especially for those with visual and hearing disabilities. Such challenges have also tremendous effect on the economic situation for disabled and nondisabled Palestinians.

The situation is worsening day after day in terms of the collapsing economy, increasing poverty and unemployment, and deteriorating of public services such as healthcare, sanitation and water (The World Bank, 2018), all of which affected the work of the PA, as participants explained. For instance, Dr. Fadel confirmed that the PA has no power because “the Israeli security and intelligence plan and manage everything including health, education, everything.” In Gaza, Israel can allow a conducive environment for economic growth in by lifting the siege and allowing trade and fishing, etc. (The World Bank, 2018). The Israeli control increases the obstacles faced by people with disabilities in Palestine include, but are not limited to, the lack of financial support to provide public services and rehabilitation programs, the constant increase of the numbers of people with physical impairments due to perpetual Israeli attacks, and the continuous Israeli attacks on the rehabilitation centers and institutions through bombing, invading, destroying, and confiscating their equipment and tools inside them (Abu Fedala, 2009). All of these create more geographical exiles such as the participants described in this study. The multitude of barriers erected by the Israelis informs what Puar (2017) refers to as a debilitation of the infrastructure, as well as analogously applies to what Smith referred to as “processes of ghettoization and segregation” (Smith, 2005, p. 89). Israel practices what I call “ghettoization of the Palestinian body and territory,” by creating disability in Palestine not only through maiming the Palestinian body but also through geographically eliminating the Palestinian
nation. The Israeli increase of confinements and geographical exiles manifest multiple forms of segregating the Palestinians.

**Gaps between existing laws and realities of disabled Palestinians.** The geographic exile that Israel imposes on the Palestinian community, as a condition imposed on the place and the people, prevents the Palestinians from having a viable state. As a result, the work of the Palestinian Authority (PA) is impeded because it does not have any control over its internationally recognized borders, Gaza and the West Bank. The PA cannot provide for its people nor can it enforce the Palestinians law. Restrictions that Israel imposes limit the work of disability rights movements and rehabilitation programs from doing their work in implementing projects and from promoting people with disabilities (Burton et al., 2013). The work of the PA is limited as well; there are especially financial limitations that restrict the PA from promoting more services and programs for people with disabilities (Burton et al., 2013). In Gaza and the West Bank, like many poor and middle-income countries, governments cannot meet all the needs and services people with disabilities need due to lack of funds. Thus, lack of accessibility is another barrier, whether in means of transportation or the built environment (World Health Organization & The World Bank, 2011). Disabled Palestinians face similar challenges disabled individuals face in the rest of the world, but with more challenges due to the Israeli occupation, especially within an authority (PA) that is without any authority.

All participants discussed the gaps between the Palestinian RDA and what is on the ground as a result of the inability of the PA to be independent and have authority. For instance, participants elaborated that the PA is the representative of the Palestinians but is without any authority to enforce laws. Majed indicated that “the Palestinian government
cannot make decisions; it is an authority without an authority.” Professor Fadwa also described the challenges the PA goes through as “terrifying, horrifying; we are talking about a society that is under occupation meaning there are more emergency and emerging issues than having normal life.” That is the main reason behind the difficulty of enforcing the Palestinian law on disability. As Carter (2006) and Bennis (2009) showed, the Oslo Agreement, which was signed between the Israelis and the Palestinians under American mediation, gave very little authority to the PA. Rather it established a new form of control in terms of giving the Israelis more freedom to establish complete jurisdiction over Gaza and the West Bank. Carter (2006) insisted that the Oslo Agreement gave the Israeli army more freedom to exercise hegemony within the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Although the Palestinians honored the international Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), ironically the PA never attained full control over its territory to fully finance and implement the procedures to guarantee equal opportunities for people with disabilities (D'Aspremont, 2013).

Many participants confirmed that the PA has been trying to improve the living conditions of disabled Palestinians and create equal opportunities for them, especially in education, since the PA arrived in Gaza and the West Bank in 1993. For instance, Dr. Adham indicated that “the Ministry of Education has made progress in facilitating taking tests. Many [disabled] people completed high school with consideration to their special cases.” Dr. Shaban also stressed the current work of the Ramallah governor in advocating for disabled students. They praised the work of the PA but indicated that implementation of any law is limited due to the barriers that the Israeli occupation imposes. The PA started working on taking control over education and improving the quality of education when it arrived in 1993,
especially for people with disabilities. In 1997, the PA established an institute for rehabilitation studies to prepare teachers to teach special education, which was a diploma of two years and later was developed to four-year degree (Abu Fedala, 2009). In the same year, the PA inaugurated the first Special Education Department in the College of Education at Al-Aqsa University in Gaza, where a degree in special education was offered.

In 1997 the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, after the Oslo Agreement of 1993, developed an educational plan (Jaradat, 2010; Nasir-Tucktuck et al., 2017). The goal of such a plan was to achieve inclusive education, which came two years before the Palestinian RDA. Efforts to ensure inclusive education in Palestine were made before any legal forms emerged. According to Jaradat (2010), the inclusive education plan by the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education started with piloting a three-year project that had 36 mentors. Those mentors were mentoring the project in different governorates in Palestine. After initial meetings with schools, 25 schools in the West Bank and five schools in Gaza were chosen to implement the project, and those schools were selected based upon their large number of students with disabilities. For a year, around 355 teachers were trained to work with students with physical disabilities and generate appropriate educational methods for those students (Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens’ Rights, 2001). In 2002, the ideas of the project were implemented in all public schools (Jaradat, 2010).

All in all, upon signing Oslo Agreement in 1993, the PA returned to Palestine from exile and began working in cooperation with local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to develop plans for inclusive education. These PA efforts began years before the Palestinian RDA was enacted in 1999. Providing education at all levels that correspond to the needs of persons with disabilities is the essence of the RDA, as stated in
Articles 6 in the RDA. In addition, article 14 in the RDA stipulate that “the Ministry of Education and Higher Education shall provide the needed environment for students with disabilities, not only in schools but also in the universities” (The Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund, n.d., p. 1). Although the RDA guarantees rights and entitlements for people with disabilities, in education in particular, people with disabilities never had the basic rights of living. The fact that the PA has always been under political turbulence makes it almost impossible to be able to implement the RDA (Diakonia, 2015; World Health Organization, 2013). Because of that, the PA cannot offer more than 20% of the needed services for people with disabilities, and the local and international organizations complement what they can cover (Amro, 2001). With that, the numbers of people with disabilities who are able to go to school is low; 59.2% of those with physical impairments in the West Bank and 49.3% of those with physical impairments in Gaza are able to attend school (Abu Fedala, 2009). Consequently, the inability of the PA to provide services and tools for people with disabilities increases the burden of providing tools (assistive tools) on the universities. Moreover, only few universities in Gaza and the West Bank have special education programs, resulting in insufficient personnel in special education. Most of the special education teachers hold degrees only in Education. Therefore, the Palestinian educational system still faces challenges due to the Palestinian political struggle, and the Palestinians first priority embedded in the focus of the Palestinians to free themselves from the Israeli military occupation (Gumpel & Awartani, 2003). Participants argued that the “Palestinians do not have a state with infrastructure for the people to be,” as Dr. Fadel confirmed. Thus, it is no easy task to establish programs of special education under the Israeli occupation.
Not being able to establish strong programs of special education creates a wide gap between the Palestinian RDA enacted in 1999, and the realities of disabled Palestinians. The disabled Palestinians have been facing more challenges and become more vulnerable to lack of services compared to those non-disabled, and lack of professional staff to deliver services to people with disabilities (World Health Organization & The World Bank, 2011). There are other barriers associated with the gaps between the existence of disability law in Palestine and not enforcing it due to political turmoil and Israeli colonialism. People with visual disabilities in particular have concerns about the environment, which is not designed to help them, and for those with physical disabilities, mobility is the main concern, as the streets are very narrow and there are no pavements designed for them; schools and higher education institutions lack the environmental designs that will enable independence and freedom, and most of these educational institutions do not have the equipment and assistive technology for people with disabilities (Abu Fedala, 2009; Amro, 2001). The PA, despite the unstable political situation, remains focused on how to improve living conditions for people with disabilities in Palestine, especially as they are as twice vulnerable as those with no disabilities because of the Israeli practices discussed in the previous section. As Halevi (1998) put it, “underlying all these manifestations of the state of emergency and of crisis management is the all-mighty power of the executive organs, their very power a direct result of the weakness and restrictions inhibiting the structuring and strengthening of democratic institutions” (p. 41), which participants such as Dr. Fadel explained as not having “the concept of the state of welfare. . . So, practically, all the people [Palestinians] are disabled by default.” It is because of the Israeli colonizer, the PA is an authority without any power to
practice its governance, but the occupation is not the only reason there are gaps between the Palestinian law on disability and the realities of the disabled Palestinians.

The RDA also needs to be revised and punitive procedures should be enforced for those who do not abide by the law. Like participants confirmed, “the law is outdated,” Shadi stated. In fact, the Palestinian law in its definition of disability focuses on impairment and neglects associations between impairment and wider environment (Burton et al., 2013). Looking at the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (2018), one can notice that the available statistics on disability are until only 2011, which means a lack of efforts to update statistics on disability. Again, like many participants discussed, the Palestinian law needs to be revised and need to include notions on social justice. Moreover, the inability of the PA to enforce the law due to the occupation led to corruption, fund mismanagement, lack of punitive procedures to those who do not abide by disability law, and divided efforts between the PA institutions, local non-governmental and international institutions.

**Corruption and scattered efforts on disability matters.** Connecting the dots, one of many consequences of the Israeli occupation and the creation of the PA, who lifts a burden on Israel as an occupation by managing the living conditions of the Palestinian people under the Israeli full control, is the division among the Palestinian organizations and institutions, as many participants argued. Dr. Fadwa, for instance, highlighted the division between the big two political factions, Fateh (associated with the PA in the West Bank) and Hamas (the Islamic faction in Gaza). She elaborated on how

The medical support is done through Fateh and Hamas only. People who do not have a political faction supporting them, no one looks at them, especially those who are not working with the PA in any ministry; they do not get full medical treatment.”
Such division is a result of how Israeli apartheid created division among the Palestinians which also led to corruption. Few Palestinian individuals and companies in power benefit from funds, and other Palestinians, including disabled Palestinians, do not receive their fair portion of the funds. The outcome is lack of unified involvement around issues of disabilities in Palestine, rather individual and divided initiatives by the community and institutions based on personal interests, as participants described. In the West Bank where the PA governs, there is not cooperation among the governmental and local institutions on disability matters. As Dr. Suhail referred, “Unfortunately, the Ministry of Social Development works on its own. The Ministry of Education working on its own.” But Gaza also has a similar situation. Referring to a report by the Palestinian Coalition for Accountability and Integrity, Abrams (2018) discussed that corruption is also pervasive in Hamas, the governing political faction in Gaza, which is divided from and against the PA governing in the West Bank. Such a division due to political factors creates scattered efforts by these divided institutions, local and international NGOs when it comes to efforts of serving disabled Palestinians.

In this regard, corruption becomes a phenomenon. Many also argued that there has been a mismanagement of funds by the Palestinian Authority (Abrams, 2018; Halevi, 1998). That is why the PA is required to prioritize their expenditures in a comprehensive way, so that disability is a priority to be addressed. That should also occur in connection and collaboration with all institutions working to serve disabled individuals. Participants confirmed that it is not the right approach to only have disabled Palestinians listed as numbers, and it is not enough to give them few hundred shekels every few months; there is a
need for a holistic approach, which looks at disability in consideration to political situation, social culture, etc., instead of medical approach to include them and address their needs.

In addition, many scholars argue that the medical model of disability must not be the focus of questions around disability and rights of people with disabilities. Rather, the focus must be on the built environment and social and cultural norms (Shapiro, 1993; Davis, 2015; Jung, 2003; Smith, 2005; Rembis, 2010; Berger, 2013), which often generate barriers connected with disability and eventually resulted in personal, social and career.

To sum up this section, people with disabilities in Palestine continue to struggle as they face increasing segregation, burdens and severe living conditions. The Israeli colonialism intentionally debilitates the Palestinian body and infrastructure, maiming more Palestinians and increasing the needs for medical services that the PA cannot address as a controlled system itself by Israel. Such a control also affected the PA’s ability to impose punitive procedures in order to enforce the disability law. Moreover, the division and mismanagement of funds by the PA in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza causes disability issues to be behind, leading to corruption due to lack accountability or mentoring to the distribution of funds that comes for people with disabilities. Due to the fact that the PA “is an authority that is unable to provide services and can only provide services that the occupation agreed upon. . . This resulted in internal division, distributing proportions, internal conflicts, corruption in the organizations,” as Dr. Fadel argued. Such a national division and corruption created scattered efforts on disability within the national institutions.

**Language and Its Role in Internalized Stigma**

The divided efforts among the Palestinian institutions on disability matters in Palestine lead to corruption, promote a culture of pity and charity, and place disabled
Palestinians in position where they need pity, and yet they are described with stigma as a result. Participants in Palestine and the U.S. described the role of language in internalizing a culture of demeaning disabled individuals which is analyzed in this section in light of critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a way “analyzing the dynamics of social construction” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 14).

It is crucial to draw attention to previous studies on disability and stigma in the Arab world. Crabtree and Williams (2011) indicated that stigmatization is still a serious issue facing the Arab region. The term “disability” itself is openly rejected as it is generally perceived demeaning (Crabtree & Williams, 2011). The topic “disability” is a sensitive topic in the Arab world, because talking about a person with disability is like talking about the whole family. Scholars conducting research on disability need to be aware of the politics in the Arab region before jumping into conclusions, in Palestine in particular. For instance, Crabtree and Williams (2011) referred to a study that compared the attitudes of Israeli teachers and Palestinian teachers towards people with disabilities, yet the study ignored the educational disruption the Palestinian teachers, families and children experience because of the Israeli violence, which impacts the findings of the study. Thus, such research can “contribute to oppressive discourses and perceptions” (p. 157) and reflect an agenda in portraying Israel as a “democracy.” In the study, the Israeli teachers did not stigmatize their disabled students, possibly suggesting that Palestinian teachers should learn from the Israeli example of inclusion. It is crucial here to carefully examine research in the context of Palestine, and to ponder on the agenda behind comparing a colonizer with a colonized nation.

**Binary stigma in Palestine.** All participants in Palestine discussed the increasing change in perceptions towards disability. It is important to draw attention to the fact that in
Palestine stigma is a complex phenomenon. This is due to the political realities revolving around the Israeli colonizer, which causes most of the physical disabilities among Palestinians, and thus disability in many cases becomes a heroic brand instead of a shame. Participants such as Dr. Niveen and Dr. Fadwa argued that a disability caused by the Israeli colonizer gives a pride to the person and not a stigma. Dr. Niveen confirmed, “The individual sees the disability as a pride because he defends his country, defends his country, defends his right.” Many Palestinians with amputated bodies are considered heroes in Palestine if the Israeli army caused that impairment. Such a social embodiment, which means the body’s interaction with the environment, is a result of the impact of colonialism and neocolonialism (Connell, 2011) but, in a positive way, a social embodiment represented in taking pride of disability caused by the Israeli occupation, and a pride that such a disability happened because of the Palestinian resilience. It is because of the practices of the Israeli occupation resulting in maiming the Palestinians that disabled Palestinians become heroes in the social Palestinian context. Many participants distinguished between stigma associated with birth or accidents and heroic stigma associated with the disabilities caused by the Israeli army; the former is perceived negatively and the later positively.

In Palestine, disability in general is perceived as “a heroic stigma” (Crabtree & Williams, 2011, p. 158) and a symbol of resistance against the Israeli occupation, as participants discussed. Similarly, Norad (2005) pointed out that heroic stigma in Palestine is due to “major factors contributing to improvements in the situation of persons with disabilities, including the increasing number of Intifada related injuries that has made disability visible, “heroic” and less stigmatized” (p. 8). Many participants in this study contributed to addressing the gap in the literature on heroic stigma in disability through
discussing the impact of the Israeli debilitation of the Palestinian body on how disability is perceived.

On the other hand, there exists a language of stigma that allows the Palestinians to internalize disability as inferior. There is still a language used, but fading away as the participants described, which indicates the deep roots of placing disabled bodies in inferiority, as well as reflects stigma. All participants did not only indicate words or phrases that indicate stigma, but they all demonstrated awareness and knowledge of implications and power hierarchy behind such language, and that just like discourses can be used for an assertion of power, they can also be used for resistance and critique (McGregor, 2004). In that, all participants in Palestine and the U.S. were critical of the use of terms that contribute to internalizing negative beliefs and assumptions. Such negative beliefs place the group of disabled individuals in inferiority compared to other groups without disability; what Smith refers to as “the normate and the freak” (Smith, 2005, p. 88). For instance in Palestine, similar to other participants, words such as, "مكرسح" mkarsah or "كسيح" kaseeh (both means crippled).” From a CDA and from a CDS perspective, language is a crucial aspect to examine when unpacking ableism in a culture because “understanding words about disability as culturally created metaphors gives us opportunities for figuring out who creates disability, where it is created, who is supported by it, who benefits from it, and how to deconstruct it” (Smith, 2018, p. 16). Such terms create a discourse where disabled are placed in a lower position in the hierarchy, are demeaned, stigmatized and segregated, which allows others to inflict oppression on disabled individuals.

**Language, stigma, and disability identity.** Ableism is an ideology that comes with a set of practices and “creates, supports, and permits the oppression, persecution, and
discrimination of people who are said to have disabilities, by people who believe they do not have disabilities (Smith & Salles, 2015, p. 23). In the process of internalizing and normalizing such taxonomies of normal and disabled, a culture of ableism becomes a practice and a behavior. When terms, language, or labels become a code of stigma in the society, shame is not only projected on the individual but on the family as a whole. Parents themselves become subject to internalize such culture of ableism and project it on their own children, as discussed by participants: “Sometimes the family abuses them, because they do not accept them as they are,” Raeda argued. Dr. Shaban similarly explained that family’s acceptance is associated with imposing acceptance to society: “if your family accepts you [as a disabled individual], it will force the society to accept you.”

In addition, Palestinian participants asserted their resistance and critique to discourses used to demean disabled individuals. From a CDA approach, fighting such hierarchies, which place disabled individuals in inferiority, is clearly a parallel idea to what McGregor (2004) called “legitimate aspect of practice” (para. 2), to be critical of the demeaning and ableist discourses. In fact, the practice of CDA is salient when participants in Palestine reflected on how they react to people who used terms that stigmatized disabled individuals. They all practiced what McGregor (2004) urged educators to do: “Ask yourself if you ever read something or listened to someone’s words and asked yourself, ‘how can they even think that way? What are they really saying? Do all people believe this? What else could have been said?’” (para. 1). For instance, Dr. Adham who is blind often responds to terms such as Haram (what a pity), Maskeen (poor guy) by challenging them and saying, “Well look, but I have certificates and degrees that are much better than those who can see.” Another example of this is Dr. Shaban who always urges his students not to have “an exaggerated sympathy
that is the pity view because you never know the hidden energies and capabilities in this disabled person.”

In that regard, Palestinian faculty demonstrated a high level of critical discourse analysis, and that contributes to creating a friendly environment on campus and a body that lobbies for disabled students. It also contributes to changing the discourse and ideology of the society that promotes ableism. An ideology that creates a culture of exclusion and also creates fear for families with disabled children results in families rejecting services, so the children and their families will not be labeled and treated differently. Dr. Niveen indicated that some parents deny that their child needs remedial classes saying, for example, “My son does not have a disability; my son is like that because the teachers are bad.” Similarly, a study in the Arab world showed that a mother of a teenager with a wheelchair denied that her son is disabled (Crabtree & Williams, 2011), which is a reflection of attempting to avoid being stigmatized.

While all participants had consensus that certain terms imbedded stigma and are deemed unacceptable such as مكرسح Mkarsah or كسيح Kaseeh (crippled), they still debated other terms used to describe disability and disabled individuals, arguing that these terms are acceptable to some of them, but not to others. Examples of these terms that are linguistically accurate, but controversial, are أعمى A’ma (blind) and معاق Mo’aq (disabled). For instance, Rana and Shadi strongly advocated for terms such as “students with special needs” as opposed to “disabled” and “students with disabilities.” Conversely, Dr. Adham and Raeda promoted the term “disabled,” and they often used that term while being interviewed. For Dr. Adham, he takes pride in his accomplishments as a blind academic, and he elaborated that his choice of using the term disabled is because he “prefer[s] to choose the actual terms that
describe the case of the person.” Similarly, Reada emphasized that many disabled individuals, accomplished ones in particular, take pride in their identity as disabled, and they correct her when she uses terms such as “with special needs.” Raeda recalled many of them telling her: “We are disabled, we are not individuals with special needs.”

In that regard, disabled individuals may be different in their preference on how they would like to be addressed and what type of linguistic terms they refer people to use. According to Brown (2018), it is important to respect the preferences of disabled individuals in identifying or describing themselves, even if their preference does not go in accordance with the preference of the majority of the community. Brown (2018) asserted that ableism is aggressive, and it spreads a culture of violence and injustice:

Ableism is not a list of bad words. Language is *one* tool of an oppressive system. Being aware of language -- for those of us who have the privilege of being able to change our language -- can help us understand how pervasive ableism is. Ableism is systematic, institutional devaluing of bodies and minds deemed deviant, abnormal, defective, subhuman, less than. Ableism is *violence* (para. 2).

From a CDS perspective, language can be used as a tool of oppression to demean disabled individuals. Smith (2015) referred to language that is used in the U.S. to disparage disabled individuals, such as “idiots, feeble-minded, crazy, mad, cripples, the disabled” (p. 4) and stated that, culturally, disabled people feel that language such as “people with disabilities, people who are deaf, unable to speak or non-verbal” (p. 4) is more respectful to them. However, many disabled people started using disability-first language, such as disabled and blind as opposed to person with visual impairment and person with disability, in order to “highlight their social identity as disabled people” (Smith, 2015, p. 5). In this study,
accomplished disabled Palestinians often showed pride and highlighted their identity as disabled individuals by using controversial language that is socially used to reflect stigma, which is also a form of fighting stigma and challenging the norms. Showing pride in disabled identity also plays a role in increasing the level of awareness on disability.

Increase level of awareness. The findings of this dissertation add an important aspect to the dearth of literature on disability in Palestine, which is the continuous decrease of stigma and increase in the level of awareness on disability in Palestine. All participants discussed in detail how stigma in Palestine is fading away, especially with the efforts of higher education. Three main areas in higher education demonstrate the continuous decrease of stigma: first, the increased numbers of disabled students on campus and high level of awareness on campus; second, the workshops the universities organize to engage others in changing perceptions towards disabled individuals; and third, the accomplishments of disabled individuals.

For example, Tala, the sign language interpreter was hired because of the increase in the number of deaf students. She explained that the other university students “started getting used to more and more deaf students in lectures; they see their interpreter with them.”

Campus is ideal for encouraging and growing awareness of disability issues, especially among faculty. Faculty awareness is a result of the political situation in Palestine, and the active role of higher education in promoting disabled students. This leads to the continuous decrease in stigma in the Palestinian community, which is located in the efforts of those in higher education through organizing workshops and training. For example, at the time of the interview with Majed, he was preparing to attend a ceremony for those students on campus who completed training in sign language. Majed indicated that during that training, they “had
30 [nondisabled] students who completed training on sign language. . . this is the third training so far organized in collaboration with Student Council.”

There have been enormous efforts to conduct workshops and awareness sessions in the Palestinian higher education institutions. In cooperation with Star Mountain Rehabilitation Center, the Special Needs Committee at Birzeit University organized a symposium on campus (BZY Community-Students, 2018), during which Professor Assaf discussed the importance of services offered to disabled students on campus and the support of the university community. The speakers also highlighted the economic and social challenges disabled Palestinians face.

In addition, participants in this study indicated that there are different activities organized on campus with participation of disabled students from elementary and high schools as well, such as the workshop on technology Dr. Suhail organized, where he had university deaf students and elementary school deaf students taking the training together. The fact that elementary students who were deaf joined a training in higher education gives the higher education community and society an idea that those disabled students from all ages are involved. Disabled students from elementary education are equally enjoying programs with higher education like others. According to Smith (2010), such collaborations and training contribute to eliminating stigma and negative perceptions about students with disabilities. He asserted that there is a need for professional training and learning opportunities because collaborations between schools and universities can enhance opportunities of learning (Smith, 2010).

Finally, the accomplishments of disabled Palestinians, especially those who have graduated, raise people’s awareness of disabled Palestinians’ capabilities. Hence, stigma
decreases as Dr. Adham explained: “They do very well at schools, and some of the disabled persons including myself, get very high recognition in the society or high degrees and high grades in their learning.” That changes the negative perceptions towards disabled individuals, and there are many examples of disabled Palestinians, whom the participants mentioned, that were hired at banks, universities, and other sectors. To conclude this section, accomplishments of disabled Palestinians, trainings in higher education and collaborations between higher education and schools, as well as the culture of deep awareness among faculty in higher education, are all indicators of a continuous decrease of stigma associated with disability from birth or illness in Palestine. Awareness of disability in Palestine is valuable to this study and needs to be further examined as the literature is rare in this area.

**Palestinian Higher Education in Abolishing Stigma in Palestine**

Stigma is still the most serious social-related phenomenon in disability across the globe. But is there any role higher education can play in contributing to abolishing the stigma? For answers, we can look at the Palestinian model in combating stigma.

**Higher education: Institutional support.** Based on their own experiences, my Palestinian participants praised all offices on campuses and indicated that they are involved in supporting disabled students. The main office responsible for disabled students though is often student affairs in all the Palestinian universities in this study. For example, the lab for students with disabilities at the University of Western Palestine is under student affairs management. Rana, an officer who works closely with students with disabilities on campus, is in constant communication with professors and disabled students. Although there is cooperation within the offices of the universities, participants explained that there are gaps between the work of universities and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in
Palestine, which led the Palestinian universities to start discussing and including students with disabilities in the strategic plans of the university. In that regard, Palestinian universities have been facing what D’Aspremont (2013) refers to as the intellectual challenges, which lay at identifying social practices and how a social practice is formed, as well as how “to make use of legal forms” (p. 14) in order to address concerns related to the realities of the disabled Palestinian students. The Palestinian universities started looking at what they could do to implement the RDA despite the lack of punitive procedures for those who do not abide by it.

Implementing the RDA and its executive procedures of 2004 remains a difficult task in higher education, not only because of political and financial matters, but also because of social attitudes that do not perceive people with disabilities as having capacities. As Birzeit University (2011) stated, the legal framework is not sufficient, because the attitudes of the society are all about sympathy, which ignores the fact that people with disabilities have specific capacities. Therefore, Birzeit University in Ramallah in the West Bank, started accelerating efforts to support students with disabilities in order to ensure inclusion for them. For instance, Birzeit University’s Students with Disabilities Committee was founded in 2008 as a student organization advocating for an inclusive environment for students with disabilities. This organization is now providing the basic tools and assistive technology and working to accomplish 100% rehabilitation of the university buildings (Birzeit University, 2015). The participants pointed out that there are continual efforts to ensure a hundred percent accessible physical environment on campuses. For instance, Shadi stated that “90 to 95% of the buildings of the university [of Western Palestine] are accessible for students with physical and visual impairment.”
My participants discussed what higher education offers disabled students and demonstrated that these universities contribute to abolishing stigma and changing negative perceptions on disability. All of these efforts also go further than what the Palestinian RDA mandates. All participants described friendly inclusive environment on campus, represented by the interactions between faculty, administrators, disabled and other students. For instance, Hatem indicated that they hired “an employee who masters the sign language in each department,” which gives deaf students equal opportunity to communicate and interact on campus. In terms of accessibility, the University of Eastern Palestine, for example, has gone beyond all geographical barriers imposed by the Israeli colonizer, and offered online learning system in order to “overcome the limitation of freedom of movement in the Palestinian reality,” Dr. Said indicated. Indeed, the Palestinian universities in this research contribute to abolishing stigma and raising awareness on disability in different forms, ranging from services offered to hiring disabled faculty and administrators. In addition, other forms of abolishing stigma and increasing awareness extend to faculty’s initiatives in accommodating and supporting disabled students, pedagogical practices in advocating for disabled students, and faculty’s involvement in community to advocate for disabled individuals. The Palestinian higher education model is one that is worth considering and that contributes to filling the gap in literature on Palestinian higher education and disability.

*Services on campus and hiring disabled faculty and administrators.* There are many examples of disabled faculty and administrators hired at the Palestinian universities from which I collected data. Two of the participants in this study were blind: Dr. Adham, a professor of Linguistics, and Amany, lab Assistant and supervisor at the lab for blind students. In fact, the University of Western Palestine has a history of hiring faculty who have
disabilities. Dr. Adham was first hired at the University of Western Palestine in 1979. Later, he worked in Qatar before he came back to it. Dr. Fadel also reiterated that currently there are “five to six [disabled] professors in the College of Arts alone.” Thus, hiring disabled faculty and administrators has been a norm in Palestinian higher education, and it contributes to not only raising awareness on disability on campus and providing services but also raising awareness in the community when students interact with disabled faculty and administrators.

Providing services is also as important, as it reflects the advocacy provided by the universities, especially that since the PA cannot fulfil the needs of disabled Palestinians. As a result, higher education accelerates efforts to help disabled students with basic needs, tools and finances. All universities in this study offer scholarships for disabled students, so disabled students do not have to worry about finances or quitting university due to financial hardships. Moreover, there are labs for disabled students, such as the Lab for Blind Students, and tools such as canes and wheelchairs. Such services are not only offered to students on campus, but they are also offered to disabled individuals in the community, as Amany mentioned, “the university provides students and local community with books in braille; we also provide canes. . . We provide magnifying lenses. . . all of that for free.”

Likewise, at the University of Southern Gaza, they do not only help students with hearing, visual, and mobility disabilities by providing assistive tools, but also help disabled graduates find jobs through cooperation with other institutions. According to Shehada (2004), at the university’s assistive technology Center (ATC), students with disabilities receive trainings on computer skills, the braille system, and other programs, but they face some barriers such as transportation, not enough space or training, and lack of proficiency in English language to be able to read in English. Some of these students got jobs with the
Ministry of Housing and Ministry of Religion, others were hired at ATC as trainers (Shehada, 2004). ATC works in partnership with other local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as Al-Noor Rehabilitation Center for Visually impaired under the UNRWA, Al Amal wel Nor School in Ministry of Education, Friends’ Society of Visually Impaired Rehabilitation, in order to ensure inclusion in all aspects for students with disabilities (Shehada, 2004).

Finally, another important means of serving disabled students on campus and decreasing stigma towards disabled students and individuals is the voluntary programs on campus. Amany discussed the significance of having voluntary programs and how nondisabled volunteers “do not only provide a service to students with disabilities, but they also educate themselves about disability issues.” That is where stigma fades away and “there is inclusion,” according to Raeda.

The Palestinian universities in this study go above and beyond the Palestinian RDA, knowing that the existence of that law is not binding. That means Palestinian higher education institutions are not penalized if they do not accommodate disabled students. With that, Palestinian higher education institutions in this study serve disabled students in exceptional ways, from including them in the academic discourse by hiring disabled faculty and administrators, providing all basic assistive tools needed by disabled students that the PA cannot cover, providing facilities such as labs, extending services to other disabled Palestinians in the community, to engaging non-disabled students on campus to help and support disabled students through voluntary work. All of these forms of Palestinian higher education institutional support build a culture of awareness and inclusion in the community and on campus in particular, which is also reflected in the different forms of faculty support
for disabled students and individuals. The combination of the academic discourse and practices in the Palestinian higher education institutions in this study is a truly exemplary model that contributes to what it means to have an inclusive campus, and what it means to educate the community and raise their awareness to fight ableism.

**Faculty and administrator support.** Research focused in the Middle East often concludes that faculty in higher education in the Middle East are not motivated towards working on the basis on high professional standards (Christina, Mehran, & Mir, 2003), arguing that it is because of large class sizes, low salaries, lack of training, lack of academic freedom, and poor research facilities and infrastructure (Christina et al., 2003). Many of these problems in the Middle East, and more, also apply to the Palestinian context due to the Israeli occupation. Nevertheless, the impact on the Palestinian faculty in how they accommodate disabled students is drastically different simply because the Palestinian faculty consider supporting disabled students as part of their national duty towards their occupied country. Dr. Fadwa asserted her service commitment: “I consider my belonging to the Palestinian human as a type of resistance and fight. . . My role makes me responsible to be with the society, and not hide from problems.” Just like Palestine experiences a diverse education for women due to the struggle for national liberation of Palestine (Christina et al., 2003), disability is an equally revolutionary experience for the Palestinians, which means that fighting for disabled Palestinians is considered a type of resisting the Israeli occupation who causes these disabilities. All professors and administrators highlighted how they accommodate disabled students in light of absence of any specific mandates or codes from the university and how they support and promote pedagogical practices they adapt in their classrooms in an attempt to advocate for disabled individuals and to support the resilience in resisting the Israeli...
occupation. In addition, participants demonstrated a sense of care through their commitment to advocate for disabled individuals not only on campus, but also off campus, through being involved with the community.

Accommodations, support, and expectations. Faculty and administrators in Palestine demonstrated willingness to accommodate disabled students without a letter of accommodation. They all demonstrated a high level of accommodating students with disabilities and even going beyond accommodating and also taking initiatives towards accommodating disabled students. They all provided several examples of actions they have taken to accommodate and make sure students know that they would accommodate any needs. The Palestinian professors not only accommodate disabled students, they also extend support to them in many ways, yet they still communicate high expectations to disabled students.

Accommodating students without a letter of accommodation is a norm among professors in the Palestinian universities. The examples vary; Dr. Fadel allows blind students to bring someone to write for them. He once said to a student: “I have full trust in you; you can bring anyone, I do not have any problem.” Professors not only accommodate disabled students on campus, they are willing to extend accommodation off campus based on the circumstances. For instance, in the case of the student with bullous erythroderma, “professors go to her house to give her exams,” Raeda stated. Similarly, Professor Fadwa went to the hospital many times to give her students exams after they were shot by the Israelis. Dr. Adel insisted that there is “an ethical code” among professors in his Engineering department that they do not even discuss accommodations, they provide them to students without any concerns. From a teacher development perspective, the practices of the Palestinian professors
show what Bowers (1993) indicated as the teachers’ consciousness of complexities of a reality. The Palestinian professors are conscious of the political situation that debilitates the Palestinians, to the extent that in any moment, one of their students may become disabled. They are conscious, and they act upon that. As a result, they adhere to the emotional aspect of their job as educators, as teaching is a job that has been described by sociologists as “emotional labor” (Price, 2011, p. 46). And to care for students, especially those with disabilities, is considered an emotional turn in academic discourse.

At the same time, all professors held high expectations for disabled students. Dr. Adham insisted that he is “against exempting disabled students from anything,” which indicates that faculty maintain a positive attitude and respect towards students with disabilities and their capabilities to succeed and excel like others. Drago-Severson (2009) suggests that clear expectations should be identified, so mutual respect and trust are built, and understanding is shared. In fact, many participants in the study argued that maintaining high expectations helps disabled students have high self-esteem and work hard. Rana, for instance, mentioned a disabled student who wanted the professors to pass him as he was not able to pass in the architecture major. University personnel kept encouraging him until he changed to study languages, and he is now on top of the honor list. Thus, instead of pitying them, professors promote them to achieve their full potential. Maintaining clear and high expectations from faculty means not exempting disabled students from assignments or tasks. Dr. Said associated exempting students from their academic duties with a lack of self-esteem. He argued, “we do not exempt them because not exempting them has a positive reflection on them and how they perceive themselves. That way, people with disabilities start rejecting pity as “the new thinking by disabled people that there is no pity or tragedy in disability, and
that it is society’s myths, fears, and stereotypes that most make disabled difficult” (Shapiro, 1993, p. 5). Faculty members in Palestinian higher education promote inclusion, equity and academic success through being deeply conscious of the needs of their students, emotionally supporting them, actively responding to their needs, and strongly reject any exemptions. Instead, faculty adapts pedagogical alternatives as a way not to exempt disabled students and as a way to advocate for them.

**Pedagogical advocacy practices.** The Palestinian professors have been able to accommodate and advocate for disabled students due to their flexible academic practices. They would not abide by any one-way rigid academic practices. Price (2011) provides examples of the one-way rigid academic practices that eliminate those with mental disabilities, for instance space, what she rhetorically calls “Kairotic spaces” (p. 60). *Kairos* is a Greek word, and *kairotic* spaces means informal locations where people exchange knowledge. Price (2011) explained that such spaces are challenging for people with mental disabilities, and how these spaces work in academia makes other ways of “making sense” excluded. Price (2011) urged educators to adopt a universal design that must be accessible to all learning styles, different personalities, and abilities, a design that should always be under revision.

Dr. Adel often urges students with hearing impairments to pull a chair and sit next to him. Dr. Adel’s practices inform what Price (2011) called for as “a way to move” (p. 87) in redesigning the kairotic space of the classroom. The Palestinian professors come up with alternatives in their pedagogy to create an inclusive environment and equal opportunities for their disabled students, whether through changing the format of the tests, or formats of questions on the tests from an essay question to multiple choice for those who cannot write,
as Rana explained, or watching and listening to a documentary instead of reading a book that is not available in Braille as Dr. Fadel does.

From a teacher development approach, it seems that the Palestinian faculty are immersed in what Drago-Severson (2009) described as a transformational learning process, where they were able to adjust and adopt alternative pedagogical practices, which also indicates the transformational ways of knowing that Howard (2006) suggested, in an attempt to embrace diversity in the classrooms: knowing my practices, knowing myself and knowing my students. When applying this model to accommodating students with disabilities, knowing my practices enables professors to examine their curriculum, pedagogy, instructional design, history, human relations, and check if they are inclusive. Knowing myself enables educators to question their assumptions, and knowing my students enables them to relate to their students through knowing their students’ backgrounds, their cultures, and their social and economic situations. As a result, immersing in different ways of knowing helps educators question labeling and ableism. All of this is in practice by the Palestinian faculty, and thus they trust, care and include their students instead of judging them.

On the other hand, faculty discussed in detail how they raise the topic of disability in the classroom and how the disability topic is part of the course content. For example, Dr. Adel always urges his students to think about disabled individuals when designing a building. The first question he asks his students is “Where is the ramp?” He lectures his students: “Just like you assume there is someone who can take the stairs, you want to know that someone else needs to take the ramp.” Professor Fadwa also raised questions on disability all the time, questions such as the location of the Palestinian Disability Union, radio stations that are focused on disability, etc. All of these practices contribute to avoiding what is culturally
taken for granted and making teaching decisions for a better education form, according to Bowers (1993). In that regard, teachers and faculty can make a change through their courses content, which will help the students relate to the of thinking to any minority groups that are being devalued; disability is one of these groups (Bowers, 1993).

**Faculty’s involvement in advocacy in community.** The support and advocacy the Palestinian faculty demonstrated in this study was not only a result of their awareness of the Israeli colonizer that debilitates the Palestinian body and infrastructure, but also a result of their involvement with community work on disability. Dr. Shaban, for example, explained how he helped secure a wheelchair for a young man in his village and, most importantly, how crucial it was to help provide a wheelchair. Socially, the young man with a disability was included as Dr. Shaban indicated: “He [the young man with disability] went to every street with the wheelchair. You here realize the need for this person to access places, and to build social relationships with others.” Faculty and administrators in the Palestinian universities in this study have been socially involved in disability matters, thus their perceptions on disability focused on the social aspect rather the medical.

Different from the medical model, the social model of disability “shifted the power to define disability from church and hospital to society and from individual bodies to social mechanisms” (Davis, 2015, p. 228; Loewen & Pollard, 2010). Disability was generated by society through placing barriers and lack of accommodations. In the case of the Palestinian community, the Israeli occupation has placed barriers in maiming the Palestinians, placing barriers through the apartheid wall and checkpoints between the cities, as well as placing barriers on restricting equipment and medicine from entering Palestine. Nevertheless, albeit surprisingly under continuous challenges of the political circumstances, “disability in the
Palestinian context has become a promising arena for educational inclusion (Crabtree & Williams, 2011, p. 151), through using inclusive educational approaches.

In addition, The Palestinian faculty support their disabled students in every possible way on campus or off campus by encouraging them to lead activities, by funding them from their own pockets, by advocating for them, validating their voices through listening to them and addressing their issues. Most importantly, faculty are also engaged on disability matters in the community. As far as CDS is concerned, Palestinian higher education institutions play an important role in shifting the idea that “suffering produces weak identities” (Siebers, 2008, p. 14), which enforces the ideology of ability and demonstrates misunderstanding of disability, to the idea that “disability is not a pathological condition, only analyzable via individual psychology, but a social location complexly embodied” (Siebers, 2008, p. 14).

**Role of Community-Based Rehabilitations (CBRs) and NGOs in Palestine**

Many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) began to be an active agent in advocating for people with disabilities in Palestine, working on community-based rehabilitation programs; these local non-governmental organizations are called CBRs. There are many local and international NGOs in Gaza and the West Bank, many of which provide assistive tools and equipment for disabled Palestinians, such as wheelchairs and other tools. Many also started providing learning sessions and remedial classes, and they expanded their services to help slow learners through extra classes after school (Peters, 2006).

Rehabilitation services and awareness. Organizations for people with disabilities were founded to help those with disabilities regardless of the political circumstances Palestine experienced. According to Nasir-Tucktuck et al. (2017), the Jerusalem Princess Basma Centre for Disabled Children (JPBCDC) was founded in 1965. The Centre focused on
children with intellectual disabilities and autism, under the supervision of Lutheran World Federation. It functioned as a home for children with physical disabilities (Nasir-Tucktuck et al., 2017). Later in 1975, Association of Care for Disabled was established as the first foundation that used to serve 5,500 children with disabilities in Gaza Strip (Abu Fedala, 2009). In 1976, the Shams Center was founded, the center served around 130 children with intellectual disabilities in Gaza; its work was reduced in 1994 due to lack of financial assistance (Abu Fedala, 2009). More efforts made by the local and international organizations took place after 1987, the time of the first uprising, especially that there was an increase in the numbers of people with disabilities under the Israeli practices, such as those of breaking bones (Amro, 2001).

During the first Intifada in 1987, there were 140 rehabilitation local centers: 40 were in Gaza and 100 were in the West Bank (Abu Fedala, 2009). There was an urgency for founding an organization to advocate for people with disabilities. As a result, The General Union of Disabled Palestinians was established in 1991 as a lobbying local organization that aims at defending the rights of persons with disabilities, lobbying for the sake of implementing the RDA, raising awareness on the rights of persons with disabilities, and improving services for persons with disabilities (Abu Fedala, 2009; Palestinian None Governmental Organizations Network [PNGO], 2016). The General Union of Disabled Palestinians was founded eight years before the enactment of the RDA in 1999, the first and only disability Palestinian law.

The Palestinian efforts towards recognizing and working to implement disability rights on the ground have accelerated since 2011, with the activation of the Higher Council for Disability and the recent launching of the National Disability Strategy on mainstreaming
disability. Efforts to promote the rights enshrined within Palestinian disability law have been supported by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the Norwegian Association of Disabled (NAD), Diakonia, The Handicap International, and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). These organizations provide training, fund projects for people with disabilities and provide resources, such as wheelchairs, equipment, etc.

The World Health Organization and the World Bank (2011) provide interventions, such as Gaza, by “effective planning to meet disability needs by humanitarian organizations before crises; assessments of the specific needs of people with disabilities; provisions of appropriate services; and referral and follow-up services where necessary” (p. 34). The Handicap International is an NGO that has been working in Gaza and the West Bank since 1996. Its main mission has been to help build the capacity of the rehabilitation centers in Gaza, provide equipment, raise awareness, and develop a referral system for people with disabilities (Handicap International, 2016).

In fact, since the PA still cannot offer more than 20% of services for people with disabilities, and the local organizations provide 80% of services for disabled Palestinians (Amro, 2001). Participants in this study indicated the significant role the local and international NGOs play in helping disabled Palestinians through providing assistive tools. For example, the CBR local program “reaches disabled inside their homes,” according to Dr. Shaban and Professor Fadwa. Due to the fact that some families reject sending their disabled children to organizations, the CBR program reaches them by sending social workers to their homes. The CBRs as a local organization in Palestine also receive funds from the international NGOs. For instance, the Norwegian Association of Disabled (NAD), in partnership with Swedish Diakonia since 1994 has provided financial and technical support
to 17 local NGOs partners that implement the CBR programs with the aim of promoting social inclusion of Palestinian children and adults with disability (Norad, 2005). Norad (2005) confirmed in their report that the CBRs in Palestine had a positive influence on self-esteem of disabled Palestinians; nevertheless, they had “limited impact on self-determination and influence, material well-being and rights” (p. 3). The local NGOs such as the CBRs are helpful and serve the Palestinians in a way that helps cover the gap of the inability of the PA to serve its people.

Nevertheless, my participants added a new perspective to the existing literature on NGOs in Palestine and their work on disability. Participants argued that only a few local NGOs are credible and trustworthy, such as “the Palestinian Red Crescent and the Palestinian Young Men’s Christian Association.” However, all participants discussed in detail the crisis of the dishonesty and foreign agenda that exist in some local and most international NGOs in Palestine.

Insufficient NGOs’ efforts, and NGOs’ agenda. My participants also add some missing pieces to the work of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Palestine. They discussed the discrepancies in the work of the NGOs. Although, the NGOs serve the Palestinians, but there are many issues that the NGOs, especially the international NGOs, on which they need to work. The participants all agreed that the work of the NGOs in general in Palestine is not sufficient. Dr. Shaban recalled, “one organization told me that they have five hundred [disabled] persons who are on waiting list.” Participants insisted that the funds are not spent the way they should be. Dr. Adham mentioned that the funds are not sent to “the right receivers,” and there is also “a lot spent on procedural matters, logistics.” That indicates a waste of money and lack of mentoring procedures in place because there is not a plan in
place in order to supervise how the funds are spent. Dr. Suhail similarly confirmed that the funds that comes from outside, a lot of it benefit the donor “through hiring people from that donor’s country with high salaries, and more money wasted at conferences, so what remains is 10 or 15% of the fund for the project.” This discrepancy of hypocrisy and dishonesty is related to the agenda of the donor, which participants associated with lack of impact on disabled Palestinians’ lives as a result. How can you make a difference and an impact when your work does not address the issues the Palestinian people face? Most apparently, the Israeli colonizer.

Shadi, for instance, questioned the work of the international NGOs by stating that “it is incorrect or unacceptable to discuss disability matters within a developmental perspective without considering that we are as a Palestinian society still under colonialism [Israeli]. This point is neglected by international institutions.” As a matter of fact, the Palestinian community seems to have lost trust in international endeavors, as their work is associated with foreign agenda based on power relationships. Here it is important to refer to the power relations within the role of neoliberalism and those organizations supporting people with disabilities. International NGOs are often constrained by neoliberal agendas; the UN is an organization of the most powerful countries such as US, Russia, China, and Germany, thus NGOs have to follow the UN’s neoliberal agendas to be able to get funds (Connell, 2011).

Hence, one needs to ponder on the role of myriads of NGOs who have been working in Palestine for years on disability issues with no tangible impact. Why do we not see a change in the situation of people with disabilities in Palestine? The Israeli Occupation and its colonial practices against the Palestinians are a main reason of increasing disability, but it is imperative to keep in mind that Israel controls the historical Palestine and what is currently
internationally recognized as the Palestinian State—Gaza and the West Bank. Thus, the NGOs will be restricted from working issues related to the liberation of Palestine in connection to disability; as referred in their websites and reports, most of these international NGOs follow the medical model of disability rather the social (Connell, 2011).

To summarize this section, the work of local non-governmental organizations such as the local CBR has a value as there are honest and credible local NGOs working to provide assistive tools and other programs in order to grant equal opportunities for disabled Palestinians. The CBRs’ work is focused on community outreach and serving people with disabilities in their homes, as well as the awareness. Nevertheless, there is more work to be done due to the increase needs of emerging issues in disability, as the Palestinian community faces a continuous increase in physically disabled Palestinians shot by the Israeli army. Furthermore, although there are myriads of international NGOs working in Palestine, they have their own agenda that neglects the priorities of the Palestinian people on the one hand, and the funds get wasted on logistics and hiring foreign people on the other hand. All of that influences the living conditions of the disabled Palestinians. In terms of the impact of the international NGOs in Palestine, if the funds are spent wisely and monitored, the impact will be immense on the living conditions and opportunities for disabled Palestinians.


While the history of disability in Palestine is surrounded by the political agenda in which the U.S. is involved, the American disability history also involves political agenda but in different forms; such an agenda is associated with previous models of struggle, for example, the Civil Rights Movement. According to Loewen and Pollard (2010), the disability rights movement has similar goals as Civil Rights Movement; to have equal opportunities, to
have full participation in the society, and to be treated with respect and dignity. The Disability Rights Movement challenges the social structures that maintain discrimination and exclusion of people with disability (Loewen & Pollard, 2010).

In 1973, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act was passed, followed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1975 (Nielsen, 2012). Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act 1973 grants all people with disabilities, including students with disabilities, the right to be included, which should require all educational institutions, including the universities, to provide students with disabilities with accommodations needed to succeed in their academic life. In 1975, Education for All Handicapped Children Act was passed by the American Congress, which was amended in 1990 in the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (Berger, 2013). The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was first introduced to the Congress in 1988 following the activism of the people with disabilities and their families that included the sharing of stories of the social and educational discrimination against them (Nielsen, 2012).

In 1990, The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was enacted. It is considered to be the most important disability rights act of its time (NCLD/Y, 2015). The ADA guarantees the inclusion of people with disabilities in higher education, employment, and all aspects of cultural and civic life (Nielsen, 2012). The ADA enactment took place upon weeks of staff-level negotiations between the White House and the Congress (Davis, 2015). What really changed the history of disability rights was section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Davis, 2015; Shapiro, 1993), which stipulates:

No otherwise qualified handicapped individual in the United States . . . shall, solely by reason of his handicap, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the
benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal Financial Assistance. (Davis, 2015, p. 5)

Students with disabilities in the U.S. represent 10% of overall students in college (Frieden, 2004). There is little done to enhance their postsecondary outcomes, which are lower than the outcomes for non-disabled peers. Challenges and barriers that students with disabilities face in college include lack of advocacy skills that enables students with disabilities to negotiate accommodations, lack of support and unsettled disagreement of accommodation requirements and lack of awareness of faculty members on disability issues, and financial expenses (Frieden, 2004).

Analyzing these acts, ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, it was mandatory for schools to provide the best public education to every child with disability (Shapiro, 1993). Rony and Amy explained that higher education institutions are mandated to provide accommodation to disabled students on campus. Rony listed services offered in the Disability Center at which he works: “Enlarge the font of a test, . . . reconstruct the test once the faculty member gives it to us and the student comes in and takes extra time because it takes little longer to manage that testing process.” Here, Jung (2003) discussed accessibility as a “legal obligation” of the educational institutions, in which opportunities are created to help students with disabilities to be involved in academic life. Thus, providing accommodations to students with disabilities is a right that students are entitled to receive while pursuing their education.

Many professors in college complain due to unclear and unspecific details and steps on accommodating students with disabilities in college (Proctor, 2001). Unlike in universities, secondary schools have clear and specific policies and procedures—according to
the ADA and section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act—that are in place for teachers and students with disabilities (Proctor, 2001). K-12 Teachers follow guidelines that are usually established through a local education agency for accommodating students with learning disabilities (Proctor, 2001).

While K-12 teachers work based on specific standards to meet standardized testing requirements and accountability measures, the assessment of students’ achievement in K-12 extends to students with disabilities (Thurlow, Lazarus, Thompson, & Morse, 2005). The situation is different in higher education; university professors are not able to accommodate students with disabilities either due to lack of legislation knowledge and lack of clear higher education policies and guidelines on students with disabilities, or due to beliefs, backgrounds and attitudes that do not promote values on accommodations for students with disabilities. Since the amendments made to the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 did not specify or provide guidelines for accommodating college students with learning disabilities (Oertle & Bragg, 2014), professors struggle to accommodate students with learning disabilities.

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, students with disabilities should not face discrimination and should be granted access to all educational institutions. Thus, as part of providing access to students, universities should provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities, especially those with learning disabilities, in order for them to overcome barriers in the academic setting. This includes challenges such as teaching practices that are exclusive, test time, peers, interpreter services and note-taking services (Vickers, 2010). Yet, not having clear guidelines at the university level, especially regarding accommodating
students with learning disabilities makes providing accommodations challenging for professors.

Because of ableism and culturally constructed perceptions about disability, clearly, there are gaps between the federal laws in the U.S., their implementations in higher education and achieving inclusion so students with disabilities can succeed academically like other students. The Disability Right Movement in the United States believes that the society must change, since the American “society automatically underestimates the capabilities of people with disabilities.” (Shapiro, 1993, p. 19). Discrimination exists on levels that cannot be touched by law; people with disabilities are not generally perceived as worthy like people with non-disabilities (Davis, 2015).

Examining the process of accommodation in place at most of the universities in the U.S., we find that such process follows the medical model of disability rather the social model, which eventually should lead to integration and inclusion. According to Loewen and Pollard (2010), the accommodation process in most disability centers in colleges is as follows:

1. Documentation of the case.
2. Letters of accommodations for faculty.
3. Providing accommodations.

This process is perceived by students with disabilities as patronizing (Loewen & Pollard, 2010), it does not support diversity and focuses more on the limitations of the individuals, which incites negative stereotypes and seems patronizing. That makes more than 75% of the disability centers in higher education in the U.S. concentrate on compliance rather than
disability as a social construct (Loewen & Pollard, 2010), so a social justice approach is not in place at higher education institutions.

**Disability and stigma in the U.S.** In global contexts, people with disabilities in developing countries still face limitations such as wars, illiteracy, lack of social services, living conditions, and poverty (Erevelles, 2011). However, in the U.S., one of the most powerful countries in the world as Erevelles (2011) noted, one out of four children with disabilities lives under the poverty line. In that, she highlighted the impact of materialism on racial oppression, which is enforced within disability as inferior biology, or what she called “the racialization of disability” (p. 150). Disability is an evidence of social violence in the U.S.

Since federal laws on disability in the U.S. exist, why do disabled people still struggle for equity and rights, especially in education and higher education? Simply, as Shapiro (1993) puts it, “laws alone cannot guarantee integration” (p. 180), because ableist and saneist oppression is so deeply entangled with Western, Northern, and Eurocentric culture that law can do little to change it; disabled people are generally perceived as far outside of social maps of normality (Smith, 1999). On the other hand, the hegemonic groups within the capitalist system in the U.S. inflicts negative consequences on the entire system of education, let alone special education (Smith, 2013). Social policies rarely consider the role of the capitalist economy in forming social difference; welfare policies seldom investigate “the economic conditions that render individuals “disabled” in relation to the market economy, based on the assumption that their exclusion from the economy is natural, inevitable, and self-induced” (Erevelles, 2011, p. 185).
Under capitalism, value equates with money and those bodyminds enabling the market; those who cannot enable the market, by definition, need rehabilitation, so people with disabilities are excluded from the market economy (Erevelles, 2000). Similarly, according to Erevelles (2000), schools look at disabled students as individuals with deficiencies, and such students are prevented from achieving the same educational gains provided to non-disabled students. The system of education, and higher education in particular, focuses on preparing individuals to compete and be successful in the market and for reproducing individualism and commodification, instead of focusing on an ethics of care pedagogy (Price, 2011). A hegemonic culture of attributing values to people in the society has been created under systems of neoliberalism and capitalism. This kind of culture justifies injustice towards minority groups including disabled people.

Factors such as race, color and poverty are often ignored when discussing disability and labeling, which is an integral aspect of ableism. Smith (2010) reiterated, with policies on disability, there is an issue of disproportionate distribution of funds across the U.S. especially disenfranchising those in diverse and high poverty areas. He argued that people on the officials who control federal funds promote structures that encourage labeling students with disabilities for the sake of getting funds (Smith, 2010). That is exactly what creates the gaps between existing federal disability laws and realities of disabled bodyminds in the U.S. Disenfranchising those in poverty also produces a culture of negative perceptions on disability, lack of inclusion and genuine integration, and failure of students with disabilities in college. Ribet (2011) summarized that social violence connected disability and the racialization of disability:
When racism is a mass disabling force and people of color are disproportionately already disabled or in a constant state of jeopardy at the hands of the state, the idea that the totality of “disability rights” can and should be the right to non-discriminatory treatment on the basis of existing disability will not be adequate in addressing the most pressing concerns of people with emergent disabilities. (p. 191)

There are many studies that examined the racialization of disability in the U.S. In his study, Connor (2008) focused on African Americans and Latinos labeled learning disabled. Through the verbatim data quotes used extensively in his book, he discussed the importance of context that includes perceptions that are socially constructed and how they affected the participants’ construction of self. Smith (2015) and Connor (2008) also argued that although those labeled with a learning disability are overrepresented in special education classrooms, they are underrepresented in research. Amy mentioned that minority groups such as African American and Latinos are often more stigmatized through disability, as she put it: “While we do have a fair number of minorities; African American, Latino students, . . . I do think the stigma is attached to them.”

Previous studies reinforced what Rony and Amy discussed in regard to the lack of cooperation of faculty and stigma students with disabilities experience in higher education: “Some professors have spoken out against accommodating students whose condition doesn’t warrant the special treatment” (Vickers, 2010, p. 3). Both Rony and Amy mentioned that they often needed to communicate with professors and convince them to accommodate students. Rony shared a situation on lack of cooperation: “For faculty, it’s often times counterintuitive, and I’ve had faculty tell me this: “Then why didn't the student come at the beginning of the semester? Why am I just now getting the letter of accommodation in
October or November?” Examining faculty inflexibility from a CDS approach, ableism and saneism should be critically examined by educators as a socially constructed phenomenon, just like sexism and racism (Smith, 2010; 2017). Because of ableism, saneism, and culturally constructed perceptions on disability, students lack opportunities for real inclusion so they can succeed academically.

Rony also pointed out that there is stigma experienced by students, as there are many of them who “often come to the disability center in the middle of the semester or at the end, because they did not want to come in the first place due to stigma.” Both Amy and Rony described how many students with disabilities experience stigmatization by their professors when giving their professors accommodation letters. Rony confirmed that “one professor rolled his eyes at the student, when she gave the professor the accommodation letter.” This demonstrates negative attitudes towards students with non-apparent disability in American higher education, which contributes to discrimination and exclusion.

Similarly, in a study conducted by Kranke et al. (2013), students with non-apparent disabilities were reluctant to disclose their needs for classroom accommodations because of the feeling of stigma they internalized, which matches the results of other studies (Hong, 2015; Marshak et al, 2010). According to Hong (2015), the biggest encounter for disabled students is their concerns of their professors’ perceptions when they seek classroom accommodations, as they do not want their professors to stigmatize them by thinking they are less capable. This literature matches what my participants in Michigan shared on stigma. For instance, the case with Amy, who was not only a staff member at the disability center but also a student with disability; she experienced stigma herself. She did not want to seek accommodations in fear that her professors would think she is not smart. Amy also
associated students’ seeking services with feelings of stigma and judgment: “If a parent frames disability not as a stigmatized identity, students are more likely to say: ‘I need services.” Studies such as Hong (2015) and Marshak, Wieren, Ferrell, Swiss, & Dugan (2010) concluded that students often do not seek accommodation due to internalized stigma and fear of being judged.

To conclude this section, in the American educational system, and in higher education in particular, stigma is still salient in academic discourse and is connected to race, social status and negative perceptions towards disabled students. Stigma is also a main reason for disabled students not to complete their education in the university (Barnard-Brak et al., 2010). The biggest cause of this failure is the institutional barriers that is embedded in the lack of understanding on the part of faculty about the needs and experiences of those students, as well as the stereotypes, beliefs, attitudes of faculty and peers, which result in exclusion and discriminatory practices against students with disabilities (Barnard-Brak et al., 2010).

To summarize this section and draw cross-context analysis with Palestine, disability in American higher education is associated with factors that range from faculty’s lack of knowledge about legislation, lack of accommodation details in legislation and policy, inadequate skills and training, and perceived negative impacts on academic integrity and teaching standards (Rao, 2002; Villarreal, 2002; Wilson, Getzel, & Brown, 2000; Zhang et al., 2009). All of these factors produce an ideology of ableism, maintain stigmatization, and play a significant role in the hierarchal, elitist system of the higher education academic discourse, all of which exclude and segregate disabled bodyminds (Price, 2011). While Both Palestine and the U.S. still face stigma as part of the social normative ideology, the issues
surrounding disability in Palestine are connected to the Israeli apartheid, financial and independence challenges. Nevertheless, Palestinian higher education institutions provide an exemplary model for increasing awareness of disability and combatting stigma, as elaborated in previous sections.
Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of this study show that the Israeli apartheid is an integral piece of disability in Palestine. When examining disability in Palestine, it is crucial to consider the macro factors of the Israeli occupation and the international relationships between countries who are involved in Palestine. Looking at the political form of disability in Palestine from a critical discourse analysis (CDA), the study findings draw associations between power, discourse, social inequality, dominance, and the position of the researcher in these relationships. The Israeli ideology and a discourse of “chosen people,” “self-defense,” “state rights,” and “conflict” have been the justification for dominant, exclusionary, and ghettoizing practices against the Palestinians, all of which continue to debilitate Palestinian life and to increase physical disabilities among the Palestinians and ghettoize the Palestinian body and territory.

The Israeli apartheid creates what I call “a triple matrix of maiming Palestinians.” Such a matrix begins with targeting the Palestinian body, then continues to destroy the Palestinian infrastructure, which directly debilitates the Palestinians, and finally maintains and increases barriers through checkpoints, siege on Gaza, security checkpoints, and the Apartheid Wall in the West Bank. Israel inflicts debilitation on the Palestinian body and infrastructure while reaping the benefits of unequivocal U.S. support, represented in weapons and Military funds, and while also enjoying immunity from the U.S. and leaders of the European Union (Pappé, 2014).

Israel continues to create geographical exiles, as Dr. Fadel described it, dividing Gaza from the West Bank and dividing the cities and villages of the West Bank through the apartheid wall and security checkpoints. It also continues to bomb Gaza, as well as impose a
blockade of all Gaza borders for more than 11 consecutive years. All of this deprives the Palestinians from accessing health care and maintains practices of maiming Palestinians as an Israeli military policy, targeting heads, legs and spines of protestors, and deliberately harming unarmed Palestinians (Puar, 2015). Through such oppressive practices, Israel attempts to subdue Palestinians’ resistance and to eliminate a culture and erase a nation (Jaffee, 2016). Clearly, the Israeli Zionist ideology is parallel to what Fairclough (1995) called a “supposed privileged truth,” which creates power and contributes to reproduce relations of power. Disability in Palestine cannot be discussed as a separate matter from the political situation because the political implications play a significant role in disability in Palestine and in the work of the Palestinian Authority (PA) who is supposed to empower and grant Palestinians basic rights, yet the PA is unable to do so due to the Israeli colonizer, as Majed and other participants in this study explained.

In the midst of the political situation in Palestine, the PA is unable to serve the Palestinian people, especially those with disabilities, and unable to enforce the Palestinian RDA. Because of the Israeli colonizer, there has emerged a national division, scattered efforts on disability, funds mismanagement, and corrupt national organizations, as reflected in the interviews. Participants in this study, such as Majed and professor Fadwa, suggested that there is a need for accountability, fairness, and also for a strong lobby group of disabled Palestinians to advocate for their rights. Moreover, Majed urged the Palestinian politicians to “take this matter seriously. . . This is the responsibility of all the Palestinian factions. . . There is favoritism, because some individuals belong to this or that faction, and that happens in Gaza and the West Bank.” The efforts of the PA should be accelerated in many directions: First, the PA should consider revising the Palestinian On the Right of the Disabled Act,
which does not include any considerations of the political factors surrounding disability in Palestine.

The second direction relates to achieving unified efforts on disability in Palestine. All participants discussed disability in Palestine in relation to divided efforts on disability in Palestine. This concern with divided efforts is in need of more research because the existing literature focuses only on the PA mismanagement of funds (Abrams, 2018). The PA needs to work more to create a system of equity and accountability in terms of its institutions. The goal of the PA should be focused to fight favoritism and institutional corruption so that disabled Palestinians can benefit from the funds in an equitable and accountable way. Most importantly, the PA should work in cooperation with all parties and institutions involved in disability matters in an effort to unify these efforts and to have a real impact on the lives of the disabled Palestinians.

The second theme in my study revolves around different types of stigma associated with disability in Palestine. Stigma associated with birth or accident is negative in Palestinian culture, and heroic stigma, associated with disability as a result of the Israeli army, is positive as it indicates resilience and defending the indigenous land. Some terms reflect stigma, and other terms are controversial. Accomplished disabled Palestinians urge others to use controversial terms such as “disabled,” “people with disabilities,” and “blind,” as a sign of pride with their identity. Although stigma still exists through the practices and language used with disabled individuals in the Palestinian community, the level of awareness on disability in Palestine is increasing. The cultural perceptions and attitudes are changing from negative to positive due the role of higher education and the accomplishments of disabled Palestinians.
Disabled participants often challenge the social power and hierarchy that create exclusion and also resist it through pride in using terms that directly reflect identity. This is parallel with what the CDA approach calls for in two senses, presenting the social status quo and contributing to transforming it (Wodak, 2013). Loewen and Pollard (2010) and Smith (2018) pointed out that the use of disabled people is a new movement, which indicates diversity in society and pride for difference.

The third theme in my study represents Palestinian higher education institutions, which contribute to creating a friendly and inclusive environment in Palestine, not only through providing services and assistive tools for their students, but also through voluntary programs on campus where nondisabled students work in partnership to help and support disabled students. In addition, hiring disabled faculty and administrators and continuing to rehabilitate the physical space are other forms of inclusion on campuses.

Furthermore, the Palestinian participants in my study, faculty and administrators, formed what Smith (2015) called a circle of support. That is demonstrated through the unlimited accommodations that Palestinian professors provide, which they consider an “ethical code” in academia, according to Dr. Adel. Faculty members in the institutions of this study do not dispute providing accommodations of any kind for disabled students. The Palestinian faculty and administrators also support disabled students on campus in many forms, through discussing disability topics in class, supporting disabled students financially from faculty’s own pockets such as Dr. Shaban and Dr. Fadwa have been doing, conducting training for them, and providing pedagogical alternatives while maintaining high expectations.

Palestinian higher education is informed by Maul and Singer’s (2009) suggestion of “moving from the tragedy metaphor to resiliency theory” (p. 155). Transforming the current
discourses of disability in Palestine is mainly led by the work of higher education institutions. This study revealed the role of Palestinian higher education institutions in raising awareness on disability and in contributing to decreased stigma and ableism against disabled students and individuals. Palestinian higher education institutions in this study manifest what Smith (2018) calls “alternative representations of the lives of disabled people” (p. 27). For example, while faculty and administrators discussed the challenges disabled students face under the Israeli occupation, they also described disabled students as students with a high potential for success.

In this study, university personnel in Palestinian higher education institutions are immersed in what Drago-Saverson (2009) calls a transformational learning process, embedded in the pedagogical alternatives in the classrooms that accommodate and fit the need of disabled students. Many of them would go to their disabled students’ homes or hospitals and rehabilitation centers to give exams or accommodate their needs without recommendation letters from the student affairs office. The Palestinian faculty in this study care about all their students. Teaching is a job that has been described by sociologists as “emotional labor” (Price, 2011, p. 46); the Palestinian faculty relate to their disabled students by encouraging them to speak up, give them time out of their office hours, and listen to them. The Palestinian faculty’s practices demonstrate a high level of “ethics of care” (Price, 2011, p. 47).

The Palestinian faculty and administrators’ strong advocacy for disabled students is embedded in the discussions on ableism in their pedagogy, which is another aspect in their pedagogy of care and fighting ableism. When professors have positive perceptions towards students with disabilities, they are willing to offer alternative format tests, learning strategies,
and flexibility in assignment and test dates, which are all, according to O’Neill, Markward, and French (2012), pivotal indicators for success and graduation. A few studies, such as Burton, Sayrafi, and Abu Srour (2013), concluded that Palestinians with disabilities witnessed progress, but never explained what that progress looks like. This study shows in detail how progress on disability issues in Palestinian higher education is represented in practice.

The final theme looks at the practices of the local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which also contribute to serve disabled Palestinians; however, there are discrepancies in the work of the international NGOs, discussed by participants like Dr. Suhail, Dr. Adham, Dr. Fadwa, Dr. Niveen, Shadi, and Dr. Shaban, including mismanagement and waste of funds that are supposed to be spent on improving the conditions of the Palestinians living under the Israeli occupation. Instead, large portions of the funds are spent of administration costs, such as salaries. In addition, this study invites further exploration of the work of local and international NGOs in Palestine. Although participants praised the role of these NGOs in providing tools and funds, they shared concerns in regard to the gap in NGOs assistance. Such concerns are represented in fund mismanagement due to lack of monitoring procedures and waste of money through high salaries and unnecessary expenditures. Participants were critical and questioned the agenda of the international donors in Palestine, as they discussed how the nature of work done does not address the priorities of the Palestinian people and does not take into consideration the political situation in Palestine. Further research is needed to explore the concerns voiced by my participants in this study.
Shifting to the U.S. context, scholars of critical disability studies (CDS) Connell (2011); Connor (2008); Erevelles (2011); and (Siebers (2008) highlight intersections of disability, labeling, race, gender, class, and capitalism. For example, disability industries create these taxonomies in order to “serve purely capitalist goals—doing so ensures that they continue to have a population to serve” (Smith, 2004, p. 89). In their discussion of the “spirit of capitalism” (p. 178), Chiapello and Fairclough (2002) pointed out that the spirit of capitalism is an ideology in which a system of beliefs, ideas and values explain a specific political order. Such an ideology justifies power hierarchies and grants legitimacy to the power structure in the society and explains why one specific group is dominant over another. Capitalist goals classify disabled individuals as less valuable because they do not meet the standards of producing under the capitalist system, thus disabled individuals are excluded (Smith, 2004).

My participants from the U.S., along with a myriad of studies (Barnard-Brak, Lechtenberger, & Lan, 2010; Hong, 2015; Marshak, Wieren, Ferrell, Swiss, & Dugan, 2010), highlighted stigma as an issue faced by disabled students in higher education. Students with disabilities represent 10% of overall students in American higher education (Frieden, 2004). Yet, there is little done to enhance their postsecondary outcomes, which are lower than the outcomes for non-disabled peers (Frieden, 2004). Challenges and barriers that students with disabilities face in college include lack of advocacy skills that enable students with disabilities to negotiate accommodations, lack of support and unsettled disagreement of accommodation requirements, along with lack of awareness of faculty members on disability issues, and financial expenses (Frieden, 2004). Hence, American higher education should
focus on training faculty and providing support, as well as granting technical assistance to programs and people with disabilities.

Furthermore, the focus in the U.S. should be on social and cultural norms along with the built environment (Shapiro, 1993; Davis, 2015; Jung, 2003; Rembis, 2010; Berger, 2013). Discrimination in the U.S. exists on levels that cannot be touched by law; people with disabilities are not generally perceived as worthy as people with non-disabilities. Smith (2010) argued that there is a need to examine the culturally constructed language that labels disabled individuals and creates systems of oppression, discrimination and stigma. Smith (2004) concluded that the “Western culture names and numbers people with intellectual disabilities in order to construct boundaries between the normate and the freak” (p. 88). Such boundaries are beyond the legal forms, and such an ableist culture should be combatted. In this study, the American participants discussed the environmental designs that exclude disabled students on campus as well as the stigma that inflicts on students. Amy, for instance, explained that “the problem is that there’s not a design implemented or inclusive practices that allow people with disabilities to participate. We’re expected at the office to deal with the student, and then everybody else just does what we tell them.” This shows exclusion in terms of both not providing an accessible environment and other campus offices not working with disabled students, but instead sending them to the Disability Center as Amy also indicated. This is another potential area for exploration in future research with a larger pool of participants from the U.S.

In sum, according to Smith (2010), achieving inclusion is at the heart of disability studies. However, inclusion was never accurately defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004). Inclusion was left to the interpretation of those
who work in the field of special education. Smith (2010) further argued that even in one of the biggest higher education institutions, where he worked as a special education professor, the type of work that would ensure inclusion for students with intellectual disabilities was not done. Classes, whether special education or non-special education classes, did not even include discussions on ableism (Smith, 2010). Ableism should be critically examined by educators in general and educators of special education as a socially constructed phenomenon, just like sexism and racism (Smith, 2010). Similarly, Frieden (2004) recommended that higher education should focus on training of faculty and support personnel and technical assistance to programs and people with disabilities. Finally, because the academic discourse expels disabled bodyminds, there is a need for changing “the ways that academic discourse is understood, taught, written and evaluated” (Price, 2011, p. 7).

From a transformational teacher development approach, professors are key in providing inclusive learning environments, and their attitudes towards students with disabilities influence the role of professors in securing an inclusive academic environment (Lynch & Gussel, 1996). This suggests a need for administrative support and specialized training for professors (Lynch & Gussel, 1996) because training dispels negative perceptions and helps professors develop positive attitudes (Smith, 2010). Additionally, students with disabilities need to advocate for themselves; the more communication they have with professors, the fewer negative attitudes the professors are likely to possess about these students.

**Limitations**

This qualitative research focused on perceptions of university personnel in higher education. Focusing on one educational setting, higher education, and a specific group of
participants, university personnel, does limit the participant pool. For example, during this research, I came to know disabled students and disability activists who sought to speak to me about their experiences, yet this research could not capture their voices due to participation selection criteria. In fact, this limitation identifies a promising area for future research because the disabled Palestinians in different settings would offer unique and more comprehensive perspectives about lived experiences. Another limitation is associated with barriers: A third university in Jerusalem, the West Bank, was supposed to participate in the study, but I was never able to reach that university due to Israeli restrictions. The roads were often closed, and I was unable to get the required permit to go to Jerusalem.

In addition, considering that this dissertation is focused on Palestine with a consideration of the importance of the U.S. context, the participant pool from the U.S. was small. I draw such brief cross-context analysis relying mostly on the plentiful research on disability in the U.S. For future studies, a larger participant pool from the U.S. would contribute to sharing the voice of participants from the U.S. on deeper levels.

Subjectivity

Self-reflexivity (Peshkin, 1998; Watt, 2007) has been an integral part of this research. Knowing where I stand politically influenced the process of this research. For instance, I had easy access to participants due to the fact that I am Palestinian. Even though I never lived in the West Bank, the participants were thrilled to be part of my study. Ironically, although my familiarity with the Palestinian setting enabled me to spend less time collecting data as part of my critical ethnography, it led me to be judgmental of my own people. I was dismayed by the fact that my participants were consistently late or did not show up. Interviewing a participant from a political faction I opposed was also personally challenging. In those
moments, I had to reflect on my own feelings and recognize the ambivalence of being an insider and an outsider at the same time. In those moments, when I started monitoring my subjectivity, my learning began to happen.

Most importantly, my interest in conducting this research stems from my background as a Palestinian. I was born and lived most of my life under the Israeli occupation in Gaza. I witnessed family members, neighbors and friends being murdered by the Israeli army. I experienced oppressions in several forms such as remembering how the Israeli army used to raid my house during the night and arrest my father in late 80s, and how I would see Palestinians who became disabled due to Israeli military practices.

This research is a back-yard research; it comes with difficulties of authorship (Behar, 1996). A process during which I was vigilant to the fact that I had easy access to my participants, and how such a shared identity between my participants and I shaped the way my participants were coding and understanding my questions. At times, my Palestinian participants assumed that I knew what they were discussing, but I realized I had to ask more follow-up questions, so their voices and experiences are clearly captured. I also practiced self-reflexivity (Peshkin, 1998; Watt, 2007); I had to think about every step in this research, from theory and methodology to data collection and data analysis. I had to pause a lot, take notes, and reflect on how I felt.

**Future Directions**

With all the efforts of Palestinian higher education in providing an inclusive environment, abolishing ableism, and raising awareness, the work is never done: “A disability studies linking global and local worlds remains a task to be undertaken, a process necessitating serious epistemological encounters with other disciplines” (Grech, 2009, p. 221)


so the gap between disability and other social, economic and political factors that affect human lives can be bridged. There are many layers involved in ableism; many factors play a role in maintaining a culture of bodymind taxonomies. In Palestine, the political situation in the Palestinian territories does not only impact disabled Palestinians, but also it impacts efforts of disabled Palestinians to form lobbying bodies. For example, Professor Fadwa visited the Palestinian General Union for Disabled Individuals in the West Bank and was shocked that the most basic rights, such as having a clean office for the union representing disabled Palestinians, do not exist. Future research on disability in Palestine should not only focus on unpacking disability in Palestine, but it should also ask questions like: What are resilient models Palestinians may demonstrate in challenging the barriers imposed by the Israeli occupation? How can disabled Palestinians form stronger lobbying groups?

The Palestinian faculty added a valuable perspective to this study by sharing their inclusive and supportive pedagogical practices, but they also shared their thoughts on future directions and improvements. Raeda, for example, urged for support of more independence for the blind students. She recommended that blind students start learning how “to use the cane, so they can be independent. They can. They can memorize and know all the university locations with the cane; in return they become independent.”

Most importantly, issues around disability need to be constantly put under a critical microscope, as “disability does not yet have the advantage of a political interpretation because the ideology of ability remains largely unquestioned” (Siebers, 2008, p. 81). While lecturing on campus, Dr. Adel urges his students, working on designing architectural buildings, to adopt “an avant-gardism,” as he believes that “moving towards avant-garde
thinking places everything to be questioned, hitting beyond the norms that are making us get stuck.”

As for research, Dr. Said highlighted the need for more research: “We need qualitative studies but conducting research in the conservative Palestinian society is not easy, not easy.” That is due to concerns of families who may not welcome others to their homes, especially when they do not know their agenda, like Dr. Shaban and Dr. Fadwa indicated. Dr. Niveen also recommended that the courses on disability and special needs she teaches on campus should extend to all majors. She asserted that “this course is not given to all majors; only for the medical majors, Introduction to Special Education, so they can know who people with disabilities are.” Dr. Said concluded that the work is not done yet; he elaborated,

More work needs to be done, because we are talking about a percentage that is not small in our Palestinian society. Those disabled need a national strategy to take care of this vulnerable group. These [disabled] individuals should be served wherever they are located; especially with the geographical divisions [by Israel]. What is called area B and C, some of these areas are not under the Palestinian Authority, they are still under the [Israeli] occupation control.

All Palestinian participants not only demonstrated a high level of awareness and advocacy for disabled students, they also fought ableism on and off campus. Faculty came to learn what needed to be improved from their experience and interactions with disabled students. Many of them were involved in working with local and international NGOs, and that also gave them experience and familiarity with the work of the NGOs, which participants argued to be insufficient and full of discrepancies. Dr. Shaban elaborated that “although there are growing numbers of organizations, but they are still inadequate, many
people are not able to reach these services. Many disabled individuals are not able to attain their rights in the society. How do we change that?” Dr. Shaban recommended a comprehensive program which starts with the family and reaches the organizations that work with individuals with special needs.

That also suggests that the PA institutions along with higher education institutions and local and international NGOs work more cooperatively on one agreed upon strategy, so the efforts are not scattered, and the funds are manageable. In any effort, project, or research on disability, one needs to keep in mind that “inclusion for people with intellectual disabilities and other disabilities is not just a best practice but a human and civil right and a moral imperative” (Smith, 2010, p. 221). More qualitative studies on Palestine are needed in order to validate their voices and to identify the experiences of disabled Palestinians and ways to improve how one should advocate for them.

Furthermore, there are efforts by local Palestinian and international NGOs, which serve the disabled Palestinians in providing needed tools. Some of the local NGOs are thought to be honest and credible. Yet, participants, such as Dr. Fadwa, Dr. Suhail, and Shadi, asserted that the International NGOs often waste money, and they worked based on their own agenda in spending more on their own salaries, and logistics costs. Future research and practices should take into consideration the urgency for sustainable projects for disabled individuals instead of just wasting the money on short-term projects and on administrative costs without an impact on the lives of the disabled Palestinians. In addition, for future research, identifying a larger pool of participants would be another goal, perhaps those who represent NGOs for another perspective, and especially groups who may not support or agree
with the findings of this study. This could help identify methods to improve the realities of life for disabled Palestinians.

As a final word, many seemed perplexed when I shared my research topic; their reaction was often, “Why are you comparing the U.S. with Palestine? There is no comparison.” What informs drawing on aspects of disability from the U.S. is the importance of the American context in connection to disability in Palestine, specifically what Said (1979) argued about Western ideologies of the Orient. The knowledge the West has about Arab countries is a result of the West’s practice of what Said (1979) called producing knowledge. The West has produced information about the Middle East that distorts the image of the Arabs and portrays them as a threat. Such information is political and highly motivated by the U.S. relationship with Israel. The Western ideology of superiority has created a system of knowledge on the Middle East full of stereotypes. In contrast, this current study serves as a mirror to an exemplary model on disability in Palestine that the U.S., as a Western culture, could learn from. Although the U.S. supplies Israel with the means to maim the Palestinians, the Palestinians could still offer a resilient model in disability. In this study, the questions are still emerging; the arena of disability in both Palestine and the U.S. is still open for additional exploration. The most significant aspect in this study, and in any study exploring disability, is the complexity of the phenomenon which cannot be ignored, especially the political factors that deepen debilitation, stereotypes, exclusion, and segregation.
References


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Appendix A: Tentative Questions for the Interviews

A- Questions for Administrators

- Tell me about yourself!

- Tell me about an experience when you interacted with students with disabilities in order to provide letters of accommodation?

- What are the types of disabilities in your university (physical, learning or both) and if only physical, why?

- How do you define disability?

- How are people with disabilities perceived in your culture/society and how does this affect or play a role in the educational context and in your university, the language and terms used in society generally to describe or talk about people with disabilities?

- How do you perceive students with disabilities in comparisons with other non-disabled students?

- How do you see other (faculty, students and administrators) at the education setting dealing with students with disabilities?

- Tell me about challenges students with disabilities face in higher education in general and in this university in particular?

- In your opinion, what are the needed services for proper inclusion of students with disabilities in college setting?

- What is available in the university you are working in and what is missing and what is the impact of the absence of those services on the academic achievement of students with disabilities? In what ways does support/or lack of support impact students with disabilities, their academic performance, and their career?
- How are the university rules, regulations and procedures supportive or undermining students with disabilities? Tell me about these rules in relation to the federal laws on disability.

- How can a teacher contribute to provide an inclusive environment in college?

**B- tentative Questions for professors**

- Tell me about yourself!

- Tell me about a time/experience when you had to provide accommodation for a student with disability!

- How do you define disability?

- What are the terms and the language used in society generally to describe or talk about people with disabilities?

- How are people with disabilities perceived in your culture/society and how does this affect or play a role in the educational context?

- How do you see other (faculty, students and administrators) at the education setting dealing with students with disabilities?

- Tell me about challenges students with disabilities face in higher education in general and in this university in particular?

- In your opinion, what are the needed services for proper inclusion of students with disabilities in college setting?

- What is available in the university you are working in and what is missing and what is the impact of the absence of those services on the academic achievement of students with disabilities? In what ways does support/or lack of support impact students with disabilities, their academic performance, and their career?
- How are the university rules, regulations and procedures supportive or undermining students with disabilities? Tell me about these rules in relation to the federal laws on disability.

- Tell me about your pedagogical approach in teaching students with disabilities and non-disabled students in the same classroom, and teaching practices? Please talk in light of physical and learning disabilities!

- How can a teacher contribute to provide an inclusive environment in college?
Appendix B: IRB Approval

RESEARCH @ EMU

UHSRC Determination: EXPEDITED INITIAL APPROVAL

Date: July 18, 2017

To: Yasmin Snoussi
Eastern Michigan University

Re: UHSRC: # S20170629-1
Category: Expedited Categories 7
Approval Date: July 18, 2017
Expiration Date: July 17, 2018

Title: Perceptions of University personnel on accommodating students with disabilities in Palestine and the U.S.

Your research project, entitled Perceptions of University personnel on accommodating students with disabilities in Palestine and the U.S. has been approved in accordance with all applicable federal regulations.

This approval includes the following:
1. Enrollment of 20 subjects to participate in the approved protocol.
2. Use of the following study measures: Interviews and Outlines
3. Use of the following stamped recruitment materials: Emails and phone calls
4. Use of the stamped: Informed consent form (English and Arabic version)

Renewals: This approval is valid for one year and expires on July 17, 2018. If you plan to continue your study beyond July 17, 2018, you must submit a Continuing Review Form by June 17, 2018 to ensure the approval does not lapse.

Modifications: All changes must be approved prior to implementation. If you plan to make any minor changes, you must submit a Minor Modification Form. For any changes that alter study design or any study instruments, you must submit a Human Subjects Approval Request Form.

Problems: All major deviations from the reviewed protocol, unanticipated problems, adverse events, subject complaints, or other problems that may increase the risk to human subjects or change the category of review must be reported to the UHSRC via an Event Report form.

Follow-up: If your Expedited research project is not completed and closed after three years, the UHSRC office requires a new Human Subjects Approval Request Form prior to approving a continuation beyond three years.

Please use the UHSRC number listed above on any forms submitted that relate to this project, or on any correspondence with the UHSRC office.

Good luck in your research. If we can be of further assistance, please contact us at 734-487-3090 or via e-mail at human.subjects@emich.edu. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

University Human Subjects Review Committee - Eastern Michigan University - 200 Boone Hall
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197
Phone: 734-487-3090
E-mail: human.subjects@emich.edu
www.emich.edu/irb (see Research Compliance)

The EMU UHSRC complies with the Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations part 46 (45 CFR 46) under FWA0000050.
Appendix C: Arabic and English Consent Forms
Dissertation Consent Agreement

I hereby declare that I am the author of the following dissertation, which I have written and am submitting for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

I have been provided with access to all necessary resources and materials to carry out the research described in this dissertation. I have followed all institutional guidelines and ethical standards set forth by the institution where I am enrolled.

I understand that any use of my personal information, including my name, address, or other identifying details, will be managed in accordance with institutional policies and regulations. I have been informed about the procedures for accessing and amending my personal information, including the right to request its removal.

I confirm that I have reviewed and understood the terms of this consent agreement and agree to abide by them.

Yasmin Snounu, Tel: 519-987-4212. Email: ysnounu@emich.edu

OR contact the Dissertation Chair

Dr. Joe Bishop, Professor in Educational Studies, Eastern Michigan University, Tel: (734)487-3185. Email: joe.bishop@emich.edu

For questions about your rights as a research subject, contact the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee at human.subjects@emich.edu or by phone at 734-487-3090.

Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee
UHSC Protocol Number: S20170629-1
Study Approval Dates: 07/18/17 - 07/17/18
**RESEARCH @ EMU**

**Informed Consent Form**

The person in charge of this study is YASMIN SNOUNU. YASMIN SNOUNU is a student at Eastern Michigan University. Her faculty adviser is JOE BISHOP. Throughout this form, this person will be referred to as the “investigator.”

**Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this research study is to identify the perceptions of professors and administrators towards accommodating students with disabilities in college, and their perceptions on how support or lack of support impact students with disabilities. The primary goal of this dissertation is to focus on Palestine, yet it will draw comparisons between Palestine and the United States of America (referred to as the U.S.), on perceptions of professors and university personnel in relation to the cultural values and perceptions towards students with disabilities.

**What will happen if I participate in this study?**

Participation in this study involves

- Two audio-taped interviews.
- Each interview will last approximately 60 minutes. The second interview will be a follow up interview.

We would like to AUDIO record you for this study. If you are AUDIO recorded, it will be possible to identify you through your VOICE. If you agree to be AUDIO recorded, sign the appropriate line at the bottom of this form.

**What are the anticipated risks for participation?**

There are no anticipated physical or psychological risks to participation. The primary risk of participation in this study is a potential loss of confidentiality. Some of the interview questions are personal in nature and may make you feel uncomfortable. You do not have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable or that you do not want to answer.

**Are there any benefits to participating?**

You will not directly benefit from participating in this research. Benefits to society including publishing a research on students with disabilities and cultural perceptions towards people with disabilities, as there are few studies on Palestine. This dissertation will provide me with data that will help me answer my research questions. The benefits to you as participant may be an opportunity to reflect on your own perceptions about and experiences of a professor or person who has been...
Protocol Title: Perceptions of University personnel on accommodating students with disabilities in Palestine and the U.S.
Principal Investigator: Yasmin Snounu

Image Use Consent Form

As part of this research study, we have made image recordings of you (photographs or video recording). With your consent, we would like to be able to use your recordings for different purposes. You are free to agree to any number of the purposes below from none to all. Agreeing to the use of your image is voluntary and will not affect your participation in the main study.

We will only use the recordings in ways that you agree to. In any use of these recordings, your name will not be identified. If you do not initial any of the spaces below, we will destroy the recordings.

Please indicate below what uses you agree to:

- The photographs/videotapes can be studied by the research team for use in the research study.
  Please initial: ______________

- The photographs/videotapes can be used for scientific publications
  Please initial: ______________

- The photographs/videotapes can be shown in classrooms to students
  Please initial: ______________

- The photographs/videotapes can be shown in public presentations to scientific and non-scientific groups
  Please initial: ______________

If at any time in the future, you change your mind about allowing us to your recordings, please notify us by calling the numbers below.

Study Contact Information

You can call us with any concerns or questions. Our telephone numbers are listed below:

Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee
UHSRC Protocol Number: S20170629
Study Approval Dates: 11/16/17 – 07/17/18
Appendix D: Pictures
Figure 1. December 27, 2017, Qalandya Checkpoint in the West Bank, while leaving Palestine to the U.S.
Figure 2. December 27, 2017, Apartheid wall in the West Bank. In the car while leaving the West Bank.
Figure 3. December 27, 2017, Apartheid wall in the West Bank.
Figure 4. December 3, 2017, disabled and non-disabled students interacting at Lab for Students with Disabilities at the University of Western Palestine.
Figure 5. December 3, 2017, Tala [Sign Language Interpreter Assistant] interacting with a non-verbal student who was practicing a final presentation at the University of Eastern Palestine.
Figure 6. November 19, 2017, Second interview with Amany [Supervisor at Lab for Adventitiously Blind Students] at the University of Eastern Palestine.
Figure 7. December 3, 2017, Amany training Mayes [freshmen blind student] how to use applications on the phone to access the portal of the university from the smartphone.
Figure 8. December 2, 2017, with Dr. Adham [Blind Linguistics Professor] at his office at the University of Western Palestine.
Figure 9. December 2, 2017, Dr. Adham [Blind Linguistics professor] lecturing during a Grammar course at the University of Western Palestine.
Figure 10. November 19, 2017, Amany while printing braille books at Lab for Blind Students.
Figure 11. December 2, 2017, Professor Adham joined Lab for Students with Disabilities at the University of Western Palestine to celebrate Rana’s Birthday [Assistant Officer at Lab].