

# The Professional is Political: Postcolonial Impacts on Palestinian School Counselling Professional Identities

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## Abstract

*This paper explores the postcolonial impacts on Palestinian School Counselling Professional Identities (SCPI), examining how school counsellors perceive their roles and responsibilities in a settler-colonial context characterized by historical power gaps and ongoing political violence. Deploying postcolonial theories and discourse analysis, I analysed semi-structured interviews with 21 Palestinian school counsellors who work in Palestinian schools in Israel and follow the Israeli school counselling regulations. The findings revealed that Palestinian SCPIs are structured on an intersection between resistance and internalized oppression, reflecting professional attitudes and practices that may reproduce colonial oppression or empower students through counselling interventions. The results also reveal that the current Palestinian SCPIs stretch back to an ongoing history of Israeli negligence policies towards Palestinian minority and the lack of multicultural competencies in counselling trainings. Although focused on the Palestinian context, this study is relevant to mental health professions in the global south and Indigenous communities, highlighting the significant impacts of political contexts on mental health professions. The study also invites international mental health practitioners and researchers to reassess ethical roles and responsibilities in oppressive and politicized spaces and asymmetric power.*

Keywords: Professional identity || Postcolonialism || School counselling.

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## Introduction

Postcolonialism reflects new forms of power that subjugate communities through diverse social fields, replacing warfare methods with new techniques of control (Lissovoy, 2003; Said, 1978; 1994; Takayama et al., 2016). The literature of postcolonialism thus interrogates how Eurocentric power continues to rule the global south through systems of common Western (European) epistemology despite the diversity of cultures and ways of knowledge in the world (Takayama et al., 2016). Such new forms of power shape not only social disciplines such as literary (Said, 1978; 1993) education (Lissovoy, 2003), and psychology (Bhatia & Priya, 2021; Fernando, 2014) but also social relations between individuals and one's psychological state and identity (Fanon, 1952/ 2006; 1961/2007; Taylor, 1994; 2021).

Despite the available knowledge on postcolonial impacts on education and mental health (Bhatia & Priya, 2021; Fernando, 2014; Lissovoy, 2003; Takayama et al., 2017), little is known about the influences of postcolonialism on the professional identities of mental health providers. Specifically, this paper aims to investigate the postcolonial impacts on the School Counselling Professional Identities (SCPI) of Palestinian practitioners in Israel, considering contexts of ongoing political violence, asymmetric Israeli-Palestinian power, and Eurocentric hegemonic knowledge. In investigating the postcolonial impacts on Palestinian SCPI, this paper becomes a part of a greater volume of scholarly efforts to decolonize mental health disciplines and critique professionals' roles towards historically oppressed consultees (Fernando, 2014; Morrill & Comas-Diaz, 2024; Said, 1993; Sodhi, 2024; Sue et al., 2022).

The following research is vision and provocation, inviting mental health providers, members of the global majority, to rethink their professional roles and responsibilities in politicized contexts and power gaps and how global and domestic sociopolitical contexts may impact their professional identities. Subsequently, this study contributes to an incipient body of work, exploring the ontology and epistemology of mental health fields, particularly among practitioners from the periphery, and build more inclusive and contextualized counselling practices. This study also contributes to international policy making in revising curriculum and training for more inclusive and fair practices among counsellors from the global south.

## Review of the literature

School counselling (SC) is an example of colonial mental health professions (Rahal & Arar, 2025). It operates within the educational system, and aims to promote students' career, educational, and socioemotional development (ASCA, 2012; Remley & Herlihy, 2014). An official SC discipline first emerged in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century as a *vocational guidance* profession (e.g., Glosoff, 2005; Remley & Herlihy, 2014). After World War II, when the United States became the first superpower (Harvey, 2005), SC developed globally, adopting American SC theories and evolution processes (Alvarez et al., 2012; Harris, 2013). Some Middle Eastern countries, such as Iran and Turkey, have adopted the American SC structure through political alliances with the US (Köse, 2017). International SC has embraced the American SC model and its developmental process (Alvarez et al., 2012; Harris, 2013).

Paradoxically, the dominance of Western knowledge in SC misaligns with calls for contextual and multicultural responsiveness in this profession. The American SC model relies on a comprehensive systematic approach, which considers the diverse environments that impact students' wellbeing and development (ASCA, 2023; Crowel et al., 2012). By adopting the comprehensive approach, school counsellors should also understand the impacts of environmental factors on development and mental health problems (Kennedy & Arthur, 2014; Sue et al., 2022). Integral to SC practices are multiculturalism and racial/cultural competencies (Arthur & Collins, 2014; Carlson et

al., 2024; Kim et al., 2018; Sue et al., 2022). These skills refer to counsellors' abilities to understand the historical-cultural contexts, power dynamics, and sociocultural and political-economic factors that impact consultees' development and mental health challenges. Counsellors should situate the needs and challenges of their consultees in their historical-cultural contexts and understand the sociohistorical and political-economic conditions that impact their problems and wellbeing (Arthur & Collins, 2014; Carter, 2004; Sue et al., 2022; Sue & Torino, 2004). Counsellors are thus expected to empower marginalized social groups and reform their professional practices and responsibilities by adapting counselling interventions to contexts of power and oppression (Better-Budon et al., 2022; Stewart, 2014; Sue et al., 2022). Arthur and Collins (2014) argue that social justice and equity are core tenets of the counsellors' professional identities, that is, their perceived roles and responsibilities towards their consultees.

Despite the importance of context in shaping counsellors' critical performance and support of their consultees, international literature shows that SCPIs are heavily influenced by Western counselling and psychology knowledge, often detached from non-Western cultures and consultees' contextual needs and development. This contradiction makes it difficult for counsellors to practice their jobs effectively and ethically to support their diverse consultees (Al Damraki et al., 2012; Alvarez et al., 2012; Attia, 2021; Sue et al., 2022). Failing to adapt SCPI to contextual and cultural factors may further harm the consultees (Sue et al., 2022).

The misalignment between SCPI and sociopolitical and sociocultural values necessitates a careful examination of how professional identities are structured in non-Western societies, the potential impacts of colonialism and postcolonialism on SCPI, and how school counsellors understand their roles and responsibilities in contexts of social injustice.

## Research on School Counselling Professional Identity

The difficulties experienced by non-Western counsellors in practicing their professions show that SCPI cannot be separated from the context within which they work, including the realities of politics, colonization, and globalization (Fernando, 2014; Sue et al., 2022). However, SCPI researchers tend to detach professional identity from political and historical contexts. International studies frame professional identity as the lens through which professionals see their careers, differentiate themselves from other professionals, practice their roles, and make decisions (Hansen, 2009; Hendricks, 2008; Remley & Herlihy, 2014).

Consequently, much of the available knowledge about SCPI comes from studies that exclusively focus on professional components within the SC discipline, including membership in the SC association and knowledge of SC policies and philosophy (e.g., Gibson et al., 2015; Hamelin et al., 2023; Heled & Davidovitch, 2021; Maor & Hemi, 2021; Um & Li, 2025; Woo, 2013; Woo et al., 2017). Another group of studies (Brott & Meyers, 1999; Cinamon & Hellman, 2004; Gibson et al., 2010; Maurya & DeDiego, 2023; Raznaw & Gilat, 2010) has operationalized SCPI as a development process, illuminating SCPI developmental stages and professional components that contribute to its crystallization. Together, these studies reveal that school counsellors attain a cohesive SCPI through professional experience and acculturation with the school counselling profession, completely disregarding diversity and the contextual needs of consultees that may also inform the SCPI structure.

Thus, exploring SCPI by focusing solely on professional components reveals an *ontological* gap in neglecting the nature of identity and the elements that shape it. Conversely, critical philosophers in relevant fields outside the counselling domain, such as Foucault (1988) and Taylor (1994; 2021), argue that the concept of identity is formed by historical, sociocultural, and sociopolitical forces. Professional components of educational and mental health disciplines in non-Western communities are significantly impacted by Eurocentric theories and sociohistorical factors of domination and power (Clarke, 2022; Fernando, 2014; Giroux, 2022; Takayama et al., 2017). Therefore, the frameworks of SCPI should be reconceptualized.

## Reconceptualization Framework of SCPI

The reconstruction of SCPI follows two branches of postcolonial literature: Edward Said's literary critiques of imperialist epistemology and Frantz Fanon's analysis of colonial and postcolonial impacts on identity and psychology. Said (1994) argues that Western knowledge imposed on non-Western societies is rooted in colonization and perpetuates colonizers' interests, albeit in nonmilitary ways. Analysing power imbalances between the 'west' and the 'rest,' Said (1978; 1994) concludes that these asymmetries pervade social processes and produce fields of knowledge, including cultural values and ways of living. Imperial knowledge may shape not only cultures but also one's identity. Fanon (1952/2006) critically analyses the influences of the colonial values, language, norms, and cultures on the colonized personal identity, thoughts, and behaviours. However, some colonized people may resist oppression and maintain their unique identities, protected from the colonization and post-colonial influences (Fanon, 1961/2007). Other scholars such as Glen Coulthard (2014) and Charles Taylor (1994; 2021) also discuss identity formation in political and settler-colonial contexts. They argue that one's understanding of the self is formed not only by what the colonizers impose on them but also by what they exclude from the culture of the colonized.

Postcolonial theories imply that identity is constructed within the gaps between adopting the dominant colonial epistemology and resisting it. This postcolonial account of identity-formation can help illuminate the influence of American SC professional theories on non-Western counselling practices, while raising critical questions about the performance of counsellors in contexts of ongoing political violence such as that in Palestinian-Israeli region.

Thus, this study draws on the experiences of Palestinian school counsellors and citizens of Israel, whose SC training and practice are monitored by Israeli governmental offices, to analyse how school counsellors perceive their professional identities and navigate their roles and performance for social justice.

## The Study's Context: Socioeconomic and Sociopolitical Portrait of Palestinians in Israel

The Palestinian Indigenous people in Israel make approximately 20% of the Israeli population and are part of the Palestinian nation that lived in their homeland before (and during) the Zionist immigration to Palestine (Ghanem & Al-Khateeb, 2019). This minoritized group has struggled with violence and systemic oppression conducted by the Israeli state, such as Al-Nakba (Catastrophe) events in 1948, land expropriation, disadvantaged educational systems, and discrimination, leading to high rates of unemployment, poverty, crimes, incarceration, and health and mental health problems (Al-Haj, 1995; Ali, 2014; Al-Krenawi, 2005; 2019; Jamal, 2017; Manna', 2019; Rahal, 2021).

Al-Nakba's events, by mental health standards, reflect intergenerational and ongoing collective trauma, which still significantly impacts Palestinians' wellbeing and their educational, psychological, economic (Al-Krenawi, 2005), and sociopolitical conditions (Ghanem, 2001; Manna', 2016). Palestinians in Israel experience higher levels of depression and insecurity, and lower levels of life satisfaction compared to their Jewish Israeli counterparts (Rahal, 2021). This psychological harm is informed and reinforced by Israeli institutional policies, surveillance, and discriminatory practices that target their socioeconomic stability and educational practices (Al-Haj, 1995; Jamal, 2017).

The impacts of Israeli politics on the Palestinian social processes are well documented in education, socioeconomic literature, and counselling, showing that Palestinian culture and history is excluded from curriculum (Abu Saad, 2011; Al-Haj, 1995; Arar, 2012; 2013; Levy, 2005; Mar'i, 1971). The Palestinians are marginalized in all socioeconomic indicators. More than half of Palestinians in Israel live below the poverty line, compared to an average of one-fifth of other Israeli ethnic groups (Hamdan & Awad, 2009; Maayan, 2019; Swirski et al., 2018; 2020). In counselling, diverse sources show that this profession was officially formed in 1960 to serve only Israeli Jewish society and its political-economic interests. The Palestinian minority was systemically excluded from SC considerations. The Israeli government implemented SC —earlier named *vocational guidance and counselling*— in Israeli Jewish schools, targeting Jewish immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa (i.e. *Mizrahim*- Jewish

*immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa*) and aiming to help them adapt to the newly-formed Israeli state and promote its economic growth and political stability (Mar'i, 1988; Rahal & Arar, 2025; Smilanksi & Parnes, 1960). Nonetheless, this Palestinian society is known to be resilient to Israeli ongoing oppression, refusing to be detached from Palestinian history or become assimilated into the Israeli Zionist society (Ghanem & Al-Khateeb, 2019; Manna', 2019).

The Palestinian context provides rich resources for understanding SCPI structures in environments of historical power imbalances and social injustice. These contexts would illuminate the epistemology of SCPI in Palestine and the techniques of power that control the SC performance. The study addresses the following research questions: 1) What are the perceived roles and responsibilities of Palestinian school counsellors towards their students and communities? 2) How do Palestinian school counsellors perceive their students' psychosocial needs? and 3) What are the impacts of Israeli politics and postcolonialism on Palestinian SCPI?

## Methodology

To answer the current research questions about colonial and postcolonial impacts on Palestinian SCPIs, I implemented Discourse Analysis (Walshaw, 2007) as a methodology utilizing multiple methods of data collection.

### Discourse Analysis

Discourse Analysis is a problem-orientated and interdisciplinary research methodology that is concerned with unpacking a social phenomenon in its historical-cultural context. The theoretical and methodological background of this approach embraces a post-modern philosophy, which emphasizes that social phenomena are ontologically relative and epistemologically subjective and are formed by power modalities and historical-cultural values (Walshaw, 2007).

Analysing discourse expressions in relation to historical power differences are also central to this methodology, reflecting what Fanon (1952/2006) observed that "every dialect is a way of thinking" (p. 25) in postcolonial contexts. The researcher's values and subjectivity are also an integral part of the study process and of the constructed meaning in data analysis (Charmaz, 2000; Wodak, 2014) and, therefore, self-reflection on the part of the researchers is necessary in this approach (Wodak, 2014).

Hence, I bring to this study my positionality as a Palestinian school counsellor and researcher, who was born and raised in the Israeli state as a minoritized Palestinian person and worked in Palestinian schools and an Israeli postsecondary institution. I utilize my SC knowledge, linguistic skills in Hebrew, Arabic, and English, and first-hand lived experience in Palestinian and Israeli societies and workplaces to locate resources, engage with the data critically, and construct meaning from them. In line with the theoretical and methodological principles of this study, I do not attempt to detach my positionality from the research process; nor do I attempt to remain 'neutral,' as discourses are not value-free (Fernando, 2014; Freire, 1990; Giroux, 2022; Said, 1978; 1994), particularly in the Israeli/Palestinian context (Arar, 2012; Jamal, 2017; Swirski, 2002). Rather, I utilize my positionality reflectively and with critical awareness of my standpoint in relations to the study process and its findings, while I also maintain ethical performance standards and avoid biases, as I shall detail in a later section.

### Methods of Data Collection

The data collection methods integrate postcolonial philosophy and ontological perspectives on identities and SCPI, influenced by the literature about the historical sociopolitical impacts on one's identity and profession. Guided by postcolonial doctrine and the interdisciplinary aspect of discourse analysis as well as relevant literature on identity structure and SCPI, I deployed three instruments of data collection:

- A *demographic questionnaire* in Arabic consisting of 11 questions that Palestinian school counsellor participants completed at the beginning of the interviews
- *Semi-structured online interviews* in Arabic, including 16 open-ended questions generated according to the theoretical foundations of identity and SCPI development in historical, social, and political contexts. Examples of these questions: “*What are the health needs of your students?*”. The questions were written in English, then translated to Arabic and back to ensure accuracy.
- *Field notes and reflective memos* taken during and after each interview and throughout the data analysis process, helping to reflect on the process and mitigating any possible personal biases (Berger, 2013; Bhattacharya, 2017; Charmaz, 2013).

**Procedure**

After receiving human subjects Research Ethics Board (REB) approval for the interviews, I reached out to the participants through an Israeli SC Facebook webpage and recruited some participants via the “snowball” and purposeful methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). All participants received written information about the study, informed consent, and their rights; each gave their verbal consent before beginning the study.

The interviews were conducted via Zoom platform during the COVID-19 quarantine in the summer of 2020 and was audio recorded. I invited the interviewees to respond to the open-ended questions reflecting on their SCPIs and practices.

Qualitative research emphasizes the adequacy rather than the quantity of data (Creswell, 2012; Morrow 2007) and, therefore, redundancy of information often indicates that the collected data are enough (Morrow, 2007). As I noticed repetitions in the answers of the participants, I concluded that the data were sufficient for the research purposes and stopped gathering more information. All the interviews were transcribed and blinded for analysis.

**Participants**

Twenty-one Palestinian school counsellors who live in Israel took part in this study. The participants were selected based on being licensed counsellors and working in the counselling field with Palestinian students in Israeli educational settings. All the participants had counselling experience with Palestinian students during the research process. Two participants were also counselling supervisors, and one was a university faculty member in a counselling program. The participants come from diverse regions in the country and with different years of experience that range between two and 28 years. 17 participants were practicing SC in Palestinian schools in Israel during conducting the study. Two participants resigned from their jobs at school and moved to work in Israeli universities to support Palestinian students, one took unpaid leave from school to recover from stress at school, and one was already retired. All the participants studied SC in Israeli universities.

Finally, four participants considered themselves to be political activists who participated in protests against the Israeli occupation. Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the participants.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N=21)**

Pseudonym	Gender	Age Category	Religion and religiosity	Professional Qualifications	SC Experience by years
Salma	Female	41-45	Muslim Conservative	School counsellor, counselling supervisor, & counsellor educator	19

Samaher	Female	46-50	Muslim Conservative	School counsellor, counselling supervisor	15
Saleem	Male	56-60	Muslim Religious	School counsellor	28
Rayan	Female	26-30	Christian Religious	School counsellor	3
Ruba	Female	41-45	Muslim Religious	School counsellor	9
Rana	Female	31-35	Muslim Conservative-traditional	School counsellor	6
Nada	Female	31-35	Muslim Conservative-traditional	Academic counsellor and former school counsellor	4
Stefan	Male	65-70	Muslim Religious	School counsellor	22
Vivian	Female	36-40	Muslim-Not Religious	School counsellor	9
Maram	Female	36-40	Muslim Religious	School counsellor	6
Jameel	Male	36-40	Muslim Religious	School counsellor	13
Hayam	Female	31-35	Christian Not religious	School counsellor	6
Haneen	Female	46-50	Muslim Conservative-traditional	School counsellor	8
Nahla	Female	41-40	Muslim Religious	School counsellor	2
Fanan	Female	31-35	Muslim Conservative-traditional	School counsellor	3
Bayan	Female	26-30	Muslim Religious	School counsellor	2
Sina	Female	31-35	Muslim Religious	Academic counsellor and former school counsellor	4
Lana	Female	41-45	Muslim religious	School counsellor	12
Dana	Female	36-40	Muslim, not religious	School counsellor and counselling supervisor	16
Rami	Male	70-75	Muslim, conservative	Former school counsellor and former counselling superintendent	18
Sara	Female	40-45	Muslim, conservative	School counsellor, counselling supervisor, and counsellor educator	20

## Data Analysis

Thematic and discourse analysis were applied to the collected data (Charmaz, 2001; 2013; Wodak, 2015) to analyse the data's explicit meaning before moving on to its deeper implicit meaning. After reading the transcribed interviews several times to develop close familiarity with them, I took notes and memos reflecting upon the data and posing questions for interpretation. Next, for each interview, I applied a detailed thematic content analysis to data

(Bhattacharya, 2017). I began with open coding before advancing to specific coding (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998), followed by the creation of axial coding to find categories and subcategories for the codes. To bolster the meaning-making of the codes and categories, I then utilized discourse analysis to deconstruct elements of concepts such as words, statements, values, ideas, definitions, functions of definitions, and situated them in relation to power, knowledge, politics, and sociohistorical context. In line with discourse analysis principles, I situated the data in their larger context and history and connected the data to interdisciplinary theories that may explain the findings and analyse the ideologies of school counsellors. Both thematic and discourse analysis fostered the search for critical meaning from the collected data and ultimately led to the construction of major critical themes about Palestinian SCPIs.

### **Validity and Trustworthiness**

To increase the findings' validity and trustworthiness, I used four techniques: triangulation, audit trail, consultation, and reflexivity. I applied the triangulation method to verify meanings from the interviews, attempting to find overlapping data from these multiple sources (Guba, 1981). Second, in performing audit trail (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I clarified the meaning of the interviewees' statements and confirmed my interpretation with them (Bhattacharya, 2017). Third, I checked the accuracy of the analysis of all the data collection sources with three research advisors (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 1992). They come from diverse cultural backgrounds. Lastly, my reflexivity was an asset to better understand the data. Being a Palestinian school counsellor who studied in an Israeli university and got licensed from an Israeli institution for counselling (*Shefi* in Hebrew), I have adequate professional experience and knowledge of SC and context. In line with Discourse Analysis (Wodak, 2015), my positionality gives me a close and authentic understanding of the data. To mitigate personal biases, I consulted the advisors and used reflexive journals throughout the research process to facilitate self-supervision and critical self-awareness towards the possible impacts of my positionality on the research process and meaning (Berger, 2013).

## **Findings**

Thematic and discourse historical analysis revealed two major themes that demonstrate the formation of Palestinian SCPIs in a settler-colonial context. The findings illuminate modalities of power that produce Palestinian SCPIs. As the results reveal, while some school counsellors have developed deformed SCPIs that pathologize Palestinians and perpetuate colonial oppression, others embrace an emancipatory counselling philosophy that help liberate Palestinian students' consciousness.

### **Theme One: The Present Palestinian SCPI**

The following theme includes two subthemes that represent the contemporary Palestinian SCPIs: 1) the Palestinian school counsellors' philosophy, and 2) perceived psychological needs of students.

#### **Palestinian School Counsellors' Philosophy**

The SC philosophy of the participants reflects the connection between the Palestinian sociopolitical context and participants' perceived responsibilities. These responsibilities depict two SC philosophies: political and traditional.

The four participants who defined themselves as political or social activists reported that they adopt a critical perspective on SC, embracing empowerment attitudes towards Palestinian students in contexts of oppression. Saleem, for instance, saw that his responsibility was to empower his students' identities as members who live in "the complexity of this life" in Israel. In career guidance, Saleem believes that he should orient his students to career opportunities while educating them about their sociopolitical "position in this country." Refusing uncritical approaches, Saleem asserts that

*a school counsellor is not about tenderness and calming [others] down; sometimes [school counsellors] are surgeons with knives and must cut. [it is] not[a profession of] fondling.. like, "Hey my love."*

In line with Saleem's critical philosophy, Salma and Stefan saw that being a school counsellor means empowering students' national and social identity and raising their awareness of their heritage and social history. The opinions of these four participants are aligned with the philosophy of critical mental health scholars (Fanon, 1952/2007; Moane, 2003; Sodhi, 2024; Sue et al., 2022; Watts et al., 2002; Watts et al., 2003), who situate marginalized social groups in their historical-cultural context of power and oppression and aim to empower them and interrupt internalized inferiority. These perceived responsibilities of the four participants also reflect Said's (1993) and Fanon's (1961/2007) perspectives on the roles of professionals as social justice advocates in contexts of political violence and postcolonialism.

On the other hand, other participants had less tendency to connect SC to sociopolitical contexts. These interviewees perceived their roles through 'traditional' helping lenses regardless of the sociopolitical context surrounding their consultees. These participants described their supportive roles such as be a "lighthouse", "navigator", "good listener," "empathetic," and "humanistic", detaching practitioners' work from sociopolitical contexts that impact their consultees.

### **Perceived Psychosocial Needs of Students**

Most participants struggled answering the questions about the psychosocial and educational needs of students and the Palestinian community where the participants work. Initially, they focused on the academic achievement and behaviours of students without providing the wider context behind them. When I asked about social conditions such as poverty, unemployment, and crime rates and safety in their communities, some participants declared that they "did not know" enough about such information and were not trained in Israeli SC programs about these issues. These answers were reported despite that the interviewees live these issues daily in Palestinian society; however, they did not have, what Freire (1978; 1995) terms *critical consciousness* to read and name the conditions surrounding their students and impacting their wellbeing.

Pathologizing perspectives appeared when school counsellors lack adequate knowledge on students' needs, and when they embrace negative stereotypes about Palestinian society. Nada, for instance, who worked with at-risk students from a low socioeconomic status, described the students as "lamam" (lowlives)—a very humiliating word in Arabic—who were involved in violence, crimes, substance abuse, and low academic achievement. Nada tended to blame the students for their behaviours and academic achievement. These negative perspectives reflect the phenomenon of *internalized racism* that members of oppressed groups adopt, believing in the inferior position and image that their groups have (Watts-Jone, 2022; Sanders et al., 2024).

The perceived psychosocial needs of most interviewed school counsellors reflect the lack of culturally-competency and social justice lenses. Although poverty, health and mental health crises, unemployment, land expropriation, and marginalization of Palestinians are well-documented in sociopolitical and socioeconomic studies, these facts were absent from most participants' answers. The absence of this knowledge and the lack of understanding the wider context that impacts one's wellbeing construct an SCPI that may pathologize Palestinian students and make them responsible for their problems.

Conversely, few participants, most of whom are political and socially active, provided the context of the psychosocial needs of students at the beginning of their answers. Sina, who worked with at-risk students in a city with a high violence rate, reported that "one can see the real occupation in [this city]" and its impacts on students' behaviours. Saleem explained that the problems of the Palestinian society and his students, including "violence," "weapons," and "oppression," are related to Palestinian's inferior position in the Israeli state. Saleem reported that this state sees Palestinians as "enemies" and imposes "racist laws" on them, and therefore school counsellors should

help students overcome these oppressive systems.

## Theme Two: Overdependence on Western and Israeli SC Knowledge

The interview findings reveal that Palestinian society is underrepresented in SC training programs in Israeli universities, where all the participants studied counselling. Most participants reported that they have neither learned about the peculiarities of Palestinian or Arab culture, nor studied about the health, educational, or psychological needs of Palestinian students. Saleem thinks that

*these topics are absent from Israeli academia... professors don't know society. Unfortunately, the studies about Arab society are so limited. From my experience in universities, syllabi and training programs for counsellors lack so much knowledge and proficiency about the nature and problems of Arab society.*

In line with Saleem's perspective, most participants reported that SC curricula and Shefi's programs are "irrelevant to reality," do not fit with the sociocultural characteristics of Palestinian society, and rather rely on "Western theories" and represent Israeli sociopolitical needs. Haneen points out that counselling interventions are relevant to Jewish people not to Arab students. In her opinion:

*In our Arab society we don't have... eeeeh... we don't conduct research, that [says] our society needs one two three..... we take what happens in the Jewish [society]. Once, during the war on Gaza, Israel used a program of self-resilience and brought the self-resilience [program] and translated it to Arabic.. it is good, but we don't need resilience.*

This culturally incompetent counselling practice that Haneen and other participants reported may alienate school counsellors from Palestinian society and create "ethical dilemmas" as some indicated. Three interviewees mentioned that they had conflicts with student families in resolving some students' issues. Others, like Sina, Nada, and Bayan decided to quit their jobs in favour of working in Israeli educational institutions where they believe "school counsellors can professionally flourish", as Bayan reported. Such perspectives deepen the marginalization of Palestinian students in mental health support and make it difficult for school counsellors to perform their jobs effectively.

## Discussion

By investigating Palestinian SCPI through postcolonial lenses and discourse analysis, this study challenges the dominant SCPI literature that has focused on professional factors forming professional identities (Brott & Myers, 1999; Fauzan, 2019; Gibson et al., 2010; 2015; Heled & Davidovitch, 2021; Remley & Herlihy, 2014; Woo et al., 2017). This study sheds light on the politicized sphere the underlies the formation of counsellors' professional identities as well as their perceived roles and responsibilities.

This research's results are relatively novel in the field of counselling, showing that Palestinian SCPIs are inseparable from their sociopolitical contexts. SCPI is influenced by postcolonial practices and legacies of neglecting Palestinian culture, rights, and history. These findings significantly differ from previous studies that institutionalized the SCPI concept, overlooking the context in which SC functions (e.g., Brott & Mayers, 1999; Heled & Davidovitch, 2021; Gibson et al., 2015; Woo et al., 2017).

In line with postcolonial theories, the discourse analysis revealed that Palestinian SCPIs are constructed on the intersection of Israeli neocolonial dominance and the resistance of counsellors of such domination. The current professional identities of Palestinian school counsellors reflect how postcolonial practices of negligence and systemic marginalization of Palestinian society pervade the structure of Palestinian SCPIs and impact their

performance. Being trained in Israeli universities that systemically neglect Palestinian society and impose Western theories, and following Israeli policies that overlook Palestinian sociocultural needs, some school counsellors internalize oppressive systems and develop a professional identity that is detached from Palestinian society. These practitioners may reproduce injustice and marginalization. Others, however, develop awareness of these environments and form critical SCPIs that aim to empower students and transform oppressive realities.

The negligence policy and the lack of culturally responsive practices for Palestinian society is documented in diverse educational, social, and economic writing. Series of studies on Israeli politics show that the Israeli government has controlled the Palestinian educational system and its content (Al-Haj, 1995; Arar, 2012; Tibawi, 1955), leading to an ignorance policy among Palestinian people (Al-Haj, 1995), turning them into disciplined individuals (Arar, 2012; Jamal, 2017). This institutional practice holds true for SC, which was not introduced to Palestinian students until the 1970s. Even after being introduced, this profession remained separate from Palestinian context of impoverishment, land expropriation, unemployment, intergenerational trauma, and mental health problems that have characterized Palestinian society since the occupation of 1948 (Manna', 2019). This implicit exclusion represents the postcolonial tactics of what Taylor terms as 'misrecognition', depriving the colonized from their culture and shaping deformed identities

The structure of Palestinian SCPI reflect postcolonial writings on identity structures of the colonized. Fanon (1952/2006) asserts that the colonial knowledge and values produce an inferiority complex and alienation feelings amongst the colonized. Taylor (1994) also describes the impacts of misrecognition and undermining the historical-cultural knowledge of the colonized on their subjectivities. In his analysis, misrecognition, that is the absence of knowledge about one's culture or social group is a form of oppression that creates a distorted identity (Taylor, 1994). Drawing on these analytical perspectives and the lack of culturally competent SC for Palestinians, the results revealed that some Palestinian school counsellors develop deformed SCPIs that not only limit their perceived roles and responsibilities but also may pathologize their Palestinian consultees. By so doing, postcolonialism manifests itself and is maintained through SC and society elites such as school counselling professionals, supporting critical scholars' arguments about the impacts of postcolonial practices on mental health (Fernando, 2014) and professional roles (Fanon, 1961/2007; Said, 1993).

Despite the postcolonial impacts on SCPI, a few participants reformed their SCPIs through critical lenses and empowerment philosophy. The critical awareness and consciousness of such counsellors about the contexts that surround them help create SCPI that is involved in the sociopolitical context that impacts their consultees' development and the perceived responsibilities of Palestinian counsellors. These professional responsibilities are decolonial, as they create 'new souls' in the oppressed (Fanon, 1961/2007) and reflect Freire's (1990) term of *critical consciousness*, necessary in educational contexts among oppressed social groups. Critical consciousness is the awareness of sociocultural contexts and the historical conditions of current sociopolitical problems (Freire, 1990) that are needed for anti-colonial mental health practices the free consultees from internalized oppression (Moane, 2003; Sodhi, 2024).

Although this study focused on the Palestinian school counsellors' experiences, the results are relevant to international mental health practitioners, policymakers, and researchers. Relying on the findings that show how settler-colonial and postcolonial contexts shape Palestinian SCPI, I suggest that international mental health practitioners reflect upon their professions, philosophy, and responsibilities in contexts of social injustice while developing critical consciousness of factors that have constructed what they know about their professions and students' needs and what is obscured to them. Researchers in mental health identities, such as the counselling identity, may also benefit from this study by examining alternative epistemologies and ontologies of professional identities in contexts of ongoing oppression and social injustice. Given that policies are shaped by social and political values (Rallis & Carey, 2017), postcolonial societies should consider adjusting mental health policies and regulations to the values and contexts of various racial and cultural groups. For example, among Indigenous societies, counselling training and policies should reflect mental health needs of Indigenous peoples in contexts of

power asymmetry and intergenerational trauma.

Extensive research on mental health fields would enrich the existing knowledge about professional performance in diverse contexts and provide multiple alternatives to the hegemonic Western mental health frameworks and performance.

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