From 'Crisis' to Opportunity: Migration Research Priorities in the Middle East

LIDC Migration Leadership Team
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Contents

Introduction: The Global Migration Conversations

The Beirut event was the seventh in a series of ten Global Migration Conversations that are being organised by the London International Development Centre Migration Leadership Team (LIDC-MLT) in 2018-2019. This team has been formed to develop a shared strategy for supporting migration and displacement related research by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). This conversation was organised in collaboration with the Arab Council for the Social Sciences (ACSS) and the RELIEF Centre and hosted by the American University of Beirut. The ACSS is a regional, independent, non-profit organisation dedicated to strengthening social science research and knowledge production in the Arab world. The RELIEF Centre is a collaborative project between the American University of Beirut, the Centre for Lebanese Studies and the Institute for Global Prosperity at University College London.

The Beirut Migration Conversation brought together 40 researchers, policy-makers, practitioners, representatives of migrant and refugee associations and artists/arts organisations working in the field of migration in Lebanon and across the Middle East (including Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Jordan and Qatar) to identify: priority areas for migration research; pathways to impact that have been, or are likely to be, promising; and platforms for communication and collaboration that could help to bridge research, policy, practice and public engagement in the future. The key findings of the Beirut Conversation are summarised in this report. The event took place under Chatham House rules and, as such, all references are generalized.

The observations provided in this report do not seek to be exhaustive, but rather to identify key themes from the discussion which will feed into a broader global migration research agenda of which this consultation process forms one part. The full outputs of the process will be published towards the end of 2019.

This report does not represent the views of the sponsoring organisations but rather aims to stimulate ongoing discussions among participants and to feed into future Migration Conversations. More information about the research agenda and reports from the other conversations can be found on the LIDC-MLT project website.[1]

Overview: Migration and Displacement Research in Lebanon and the Middle East

Understanding the current context for – and nature of – research in Lebanon, and the wider Middle East Region, requires a historical perspective. Participants agreed that identifying research priorities in the region, while necessarily forward-looking, also requires a similar

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[1] See: www.soas.ac.uk/lidc-mlt

sensitivity to historic issues of displacement and migration and the ways in which they continue to shape contemporary knowledge production and exchange environment.

The history of migration and displacement-related research in the Arab region is defined by 'waves' in which certain thematic priorities have come to the fore in turn. These trends have often been driven by the agendas of governments, policy makers and funders in the so-called global north. A range of other factors are also significant including the impact of conflict, development initiatives, regeneration projects and economic and geopolitical changes at the regional, national and local levels.

> *'Humanitarian needs and urgency drives research, as it should in some ways, but it is important to remember that we are still living the results of long-term displacements and forced resettlements in the region'.*
>
> - Academic researcher

The recent renaissance of Refugee Studies in and about the Arab-speaking world is rooted, it was said, in an historic tradition of studies of displacement and dispossession in the Middle East. Within the context of the Palestine-Israel conflict and annexation of land, there was a lot of global interest in displacement in the region in the 1960s and 1970s. However, there is a perception that this stalled in the period that followed. While that scholarship was seen by participants as primarily shaped by colonial and postcolonial politics, current forced migration research is often driven by a problematic 'crisis-based' mentality rooted in the exclusionary and racialized discourses and practices of policy makers and knowledge brokers located in the global north. Participants at the Beirut conversation, therefore, shared the concern raised at previous conversations that mobility is often framed by knowledge-brokers as a problem or 'crisis' rather than an opportunity. One participant commented that this was a reincarnation of the colonial influence and emphasised the need for a critical historical approach to migration and displacement research. Without this historical engagement, contemporary policy agendas that shape research will continue to frame migration in negative terms and seek to limit the mobility of those displaced by conflict and inequality and 'contain' them in the region.

There is a perception that the binary between Refugee Studies on the one hand, and Migration Studies on the other, is perpetuated by knowledge institutions in the global north, including universities and INGOs, governments and policy makers as well as media and the arts. This is hard to square with the historic and contemporary context of mobility in the Middle East. We need to start thinking 'outside of the box' and move away from the 'refugee' label. Many forms of migration in the Middle East region are interconnected and, it was stressed, people fit into different categories of migration which need to be connected. The same argument applies to the distinction that is made between 'refugee'

and 'host' communities given that borders are often externally imposed which kinship ties traverse.

The dichotomy between internal migration and international migration is also sometimes misguided, obstructing useful comparative work across time and space. Thus, one participant noted that significant research conducted on rural-urban migration in the 1970s and 1980s has since been replaced by a more recent focus on individuals who cross borders. Echoing observations made at the Nairobi Migration Conversation, participants stressed the value of framing issues not just in terms of migration, which is often depicted as a linear one-directional process, but in terms of mobility.

In the 1990s there was an increased focus on forced displacement in the Middle East with some area exceptions such as Libya. With the return of forced displacement as the migration research zeitgeist, nowadays urgency and humanitarian aid are the main drivers of research in the region. While participants were in agreement that research can and should inform policy and vice versa and that there is an important place for action-research, there was also a recognition that academic research must continue to serve a vital function in challenging and destabilising the status quo through more conceptual work that is one step removed from the day-to-day business of policy and practice. The view from scholars participating in the conversation was that not enough conceptual and empirical lessons are being learnt from previous research. Moreover, in a knowledge production context fuelled by policy-relevant, reactive research, resources to pursue critical scholarship and conceptual work are scarce and highly competitive to obtain (see more on practical research challenges later in this report).

Scholarship on migration in the Middle East as a region is also very fragmented and not as connected as it should be, commented one participant. The Middle East is at the cross-roads where Asia, Africa and Europe come together. This means that there are continuous, contiguous processes going on within the region. This makes it very difficult to say where displacement starts and ends because these processes are all interconnected. In addition, reality on the ground shifts very rapidly. Donors and funders need to be more flexible in order to cope with these rapid shifts. We must also consider the relationship between different actors in the Middle East region such as, among others, the state, migrants and the private sector.

> *'Research agendas imposed from the global north can be a self-fulfilling prophesy. If you go looking for extremism, you will find extremism.'*
> - NGO worker

Strengths of Knowledge Production and Exchange in the Region

Work on memory, heritage and preservation were identified as areas where scholars and artists in the region had excelled. Moreover, the region has a strong tradition of scholarship related to identity and belonging, often led by the arts. The conversation identified numerous projects where art has been integrated into wider projects to document and promote understanding of the identity issues surrounding migration.

Memory and history

One project showcased at the event that sought to bridge ideas from the past and present in relation to migration and identity was an exhibition of Palestinian embroidery hosted at the Palestinian Museum in Lebanon. The exhibition featured a range of items created for, and by, Palestinian women and used these to critically interrogate not just themes around mobility and belonging but also the ways in which we approach what knowledge is and how it is presented. Creating and curating art can be a way of telling stories, and yet often research seeking to understand phenomena around migration and displacement remain fixated on 2D text-based forms of knowledge production and analysis.

Another example where art was used to inform understanding of migration and displacement and its impact on politics, belonging, memory and identity was the online archive of street art and cultural media curated by the Creative Memory of the Syrian Revolution. Importantly, new technologies create new opportunities to share and disseminate these materials in the form of both historic artefacts and contemporary, living archives.

While the Beirut Conversation identified numerous examples where researchers had worked well collaboratively with museums to create new knowledge, it was also stressed that museums were often dependent, like research institutions, on funders and regimes of power including states. 'Street museums', while heralded as a new more democratic art form, also propagate certain political perspectives and must be interpreted in context by those with the relevant expertise if they are to be at the service of knowledge. This requires proper funding for the important work of cultural interpretation and translation and inter-disciplinary working (see below on the challenges and opportunities of inter-disciplinary working).

Cultural heritage and identity

Participants discussed how the arts can be used to conceptualise and tell stories about heritage which is constructed and multi-layered and changes across different generations. Whereas older generations of refugees might consider embroidery as heritage, younger generations might consider rap music as part of their heritage. In certain research outcomes, women identified themselves as keepers of heritage by, for instance, determining the decoration of the house, the vocabulary used, and the clothes worn by the family. The arts can be used as a means to express or explore the heritage of a certain population as well as communicating knowledge and research findings to specific

populations, for example, through music or comics for youths. One participant raised the fact that one out of three refugee children are not in school in Lebanon, asking how we can use art to address this and communicate knowledge? Through theatre and online apps, they are training teachers to disseminate knowledge in new ways and make learning fun.

Participants commented that research projects that seek to draw on, and work with or within, the strengths of established cultural repertoires for knowledge production and exchange in the region tend to produce better data, research and impact. Examples given included the ESRC-AHRC funded Southern Responses to Displacement project which is drawing as its starting point on localised conceptualisations of welcome and hospitality; and an ESRC-funded project on faith-based humanitarianism. Rather than imposing epistemological frames from Northern scholarship, these projects were commended for taking a bottom-up approach and working with local researchers with the aim to co-produce knowledge. Moreover, these projects were commended for digitising their outputs in a way that was accessible to wider audiences. It was noted, however, that more could be done to disseminate outputs in Arabic and other languages.

The arts

The arts, it was claimed, can help to shift narratives, fight discrimination, help raise awareness and much more. The use of visual data and arts in migration discourse has a rich tradition in the Middle East region. Topics such as history, narratives, memory and museums repeatedly came forward in the discussions. Participants agreed that there are important links between arts and migration. The arts can play a therapeutic, communication and/or storytelling role in migration research. Art is also able to contain and convey multiple truths which can be important for communicating knowledge in countries such as Lebanon which are affected by sectarian conflicts and which are home to 'multiple contested histories'.

> *'Forms of art and heritage can be uniquely important at helping us to access certain gendered conceptions of identity and belonging.'*
> - Curator

Architecture and reconstruction

There is a rich tradition of architecture and reconstruction in Middle Eastern scholarship that is being recognised internationally. Examples given was the attention given to studies of the architecture in West Bank refugee camps, and on post-war reconstruction in Lebanon.

Thematic Research Gaps

A range of topics were identified as research gaps and priorities in the Middle East region, including research on inequality (from the global to the local level), the economic contribution of migrants, and research on south-to-south migration.

Beyond Syrian 'crisis' and 'aid' migration

In recent years many Western funders have focused on knowledge related to the aid response to Syrian refugees at the expense of other displaced populations, including Palestinians. Moreover, there has been an over emphasis on 'crisis'-driven migration as opposed to longer-term migratory trends. Researchers need to acknowledge that migration in the Middle East region is not a temporary phenomenon but is protracted and geopolitically determined because of the nature of conflicts that cause most displacement.

In general, there was a perception that there should be more focus on the positive side of migration within the Middle East region. There are, for instance, many economic benefits involved that do not receive enough attention at present. Indeed, one participant said that there are entire economies in the Gulf which have been built by migrant labour. As in other parts of the world, in the Arab region there is a perception that governments often shy away from investing in such research because it is in the interest of politicians to use migrants and refugees as political 'footballs' and scapegoats for problems affecting host populations.

Social class, inequality and migration

There is a need, it was emphasised, for more research on the intersection of social class with both internal and international migration within and outside of the Arab region. There has been a shift in recent years from so-called 'crises' happening in low-income countries to middle-income countries. This potentially changes the context for Refugee Studies which academics and practitioners working in the field need to be recognise. Participants identified that there is significant focus on 'low' and/or 'high' class refugees while the experiences of the middle-class refugees are often overlooked. Many middle-class refugees are highly educated, speak multiple languages and do not register with UN agencies. Therefore, they are missing in terms of data and understanding of the refugee experience. While we know much anecdotally about how money, class, citizenship and social status affect the economic and mixed migration strategies of families in the region, unlike other regions such as the Americas and Europe, there is a dearth of robust evidence or large-scale research in this area. In other instances research that is conducted is of poor quality and statistical data are not reliable.

Labour migration

Labour migration is an emerging field but remains an under-funded topic in the region compared to displacement research. In Qatar, for example, more research is required on the situation of labour migrants and their political mobilisation. At present the economic

research agenda is largely focused on macro-economic issues. In the Gulf, where there is such a high dependency on labour migration, research is trickling through. Research and advocacy have only come closer together as a result of the World Cup in Qatar, which has driven more research interest, highlighting how some strategically important moments can fuel further interest.

Destabilising the hierarchy of knowledge exchange through comparative research

There is not enough comparative work within but also outside of the region. Participants commented they were particularly interested to see more comparative research between camps, and different types of settlements in Europe and in the Middle East. When the so-called 'Jungle camp' in Calais grew in France and other informal settlements sprang up at Europe's other borders, one participant commented, European states had no idea what to do. Rather than looking to the Middle East and other regions with contemporary experience of managing camps, they simply shut these down and left people destitute.

European states could learn from different approaches to hosting from the Middle East, including challenging binaries of formality and informality and drawing more on familial hosting networks and resources. Referring to Syria's historic tradition of welcoming refugees from Iraq and Palestine, one participant commented in relation to Europe's poorly managed response to the so-called 'refugee crisis' of 2015: 'if you want to know how to welcome a refugee, ask a Syrian!' We need to overcome the hierarchy of knowledge exchange which still sees many institutions in the global north assuming the role of 'teachers' and those in the global south as 'recipients', adopting more dialogical and circular models of knowledge exchange and mutual development.

A related yet distinct point raised by one participant was the opportunity to learn from intellectual theorization in the region, particularly in relation to concepts and theories of Exile. Said's theory of exile, and its continuing legacy in relation to key Middle Eastern intellectuals (such as Naguib Mahfouz, Mahmoud Darwish, Leila Ahmed, Nawal El Saadawi and Youssef Chahine) must be appreciated.

The 3 'E's: Education, Empowerment, Employability

One participant identified the need for migration research to adopt a social policy agenda with a focus on social rights and 'the 3E's: Education, Empowerment and Employability. The RELIEF Project was celebrated as one example of a research project that was trying to work across this gap. Another project funded by the AHRC and hosted at the University of Durham is building intercultural pedagogy in situations of conflict with researchers on the project working to foster learning and dialogue between Turkey, Colombia and Palestine.

Importantly, there was a feeling that much research in this area does not need to segregate migrants and refugees into separate research streams but can and should aim to integrate them into general studies across the population including among host groups. We must be

wary as researchers, it was said, of further entrenching categories and bureaucratic divisions of 'them and us'.

Health and psychology

Within the Middle East region, there is a lack of psychosocial focus on migration, and on mental health among refugees and migrants. The presence of psychology as a discipline is particularly lacking in migration research in the region meaning that the psychological suffering of refugees and migrants' experiences of living in contexts of pressure are not adequately addressed. Public health research is poorly funded and tends to come from outside the region, thus importing foreign understandings and meanings of health and wellbeing. Participants identified that there should be more focus on small-scale household projects aimed at both men and women that can help families to take care of themselves and others.

Moreover, more detailed anthropological research is needed to understand subjective and culturally situated conceptions of wellbeing in the Middle East. There is more of a tradition of this in the African region but less in the Middle East and there were questions raised about why this was the case. Public health studies should also include psychosocial phenomena such as racism. One example given was how this has been documented amongst the Sudanese community in Jordan.

Demography and aging

Other gaps discussed included the issue of physical disability among migrants and refugees and demography, as raised at previous Global Migration Conversations. What happens to those left behind, and how are migrants preparing for their old age?

Intercultural, religious and language studies

Participants elaborated on the importance of intercultural understanding between people thus creating a better understanding of refugees, what happens to them and how they adapt to change. How do concepts developed in other regions of mass migration such as 'superdiversity' or 'creolité' translate into the Middle East context? Importantly, what organic terminologies, new vocabularies and new cultural repertoires are emerging in the region?

We also need to think about how we incorporate understandings of theology and religion. One participant stressed that there is a growing and welcome trend to incorporate religious ideas and concepts into migration studies but often we do not consult theologians such that opportunities to learn across disciplines are lost.

Law

An urgent priority in the region concerns the poor provision of legal services to migrants and refugees. Researchers encountered this in all refugee centres. As well as being a service provision issue, this is also a question of knowledge transfer and capacity building among legal scholars in the region. Good law and good law provision come with adequate training and development among practitioners and this requires investment in law schools and courses in the region. As it is there is little incentive for talented students to go into migration law as a field because it is so underfunded and under-resourced and often led by foreign actors.

Children and youth

Within the social sciences, a more holistic perspective is needed on studying certain refugee populations. Children for instance, should all be considered under the same category, whether they are refugees or not. Basic child needs such as play areas for children in refugee camps should be a priority. At present, the focus on children stops when they leave school or when they turn 18. There is a need to provide more interventions on youth aged 12-25 particularly in relation to education and training opportunities. Ideas of childhood and children and youth are also different across regions: more research is needed to culturally situate these concepts to inform policy and practice.

Media studies, public opinion and politics

The voice of critical media studies is lacking in the region. More research is needed on how migration is framed within the media and how this interacts with politics, policy, social cohesion and lived experiences of migration and host populations. Often the Middle East is problematically seen through a frame of 'exceptionalism.' However, there is ample room for important comparative work here between global regions. At present, media studies globally are dominated by a hegemonic liberal democratic ideal which fails to capture the nuances of what is occurring in the global north, south, and across the regions. The rise of populism, and its relationship to migration, one participant pointed out, is something that cannot be understood without looking at dynamics inter-regionally. Blind reading certain negative articles about Syrian refugees, one participant pointed out, you would be hard pushed to deduce whether they had come from the UK or Lebanese media.

More, it was felt, could also be done to harvest big data from new social media. However, it is very important to be careful when using numbers and migration in the Middle East region, stressed one participant. Numbers are sometimes exaggerated to increase funding from the global community, and they can also be used in a political game. These political and policy dynamics and how they shape public opinion and democratic processes are worthy of more study.

Diaspora studies: remittances and other contributions

For Lebanon and other Middle Eastern countries, the role of remittances from the diaspora is an important issue. Around 30% of the Lebanese economy depends on remittances and there are significant questions about how these uphold sectarian politics. One participant commented that further studies on the influence of migration on politics, and the role of the diaspora in reviving political elites would be interesting. Additionally, there is a need to look at the contribution of refugees to host societies, beyond the economic scope and provide new understandings of what diaspora means. What are the other ways in which refugee movements might contribute positively to host societies and to countries of origin over time and space, for example, through the circulation of ideas and culture (see above also)? Research is also needed on how the concept of diaspora is interpreted differently across different regions and across different populations and over time, and on the Middle Eastern diaspora living elsewhere in the world.

Understanding the camp: informality and urban development

People in the region live in circumstances that are different than most people in the world, including in situations of protracted displacement. More studies are required to understand the nature of refugee camps and so-called 'informal' settlements. Further, we need to distinguish between refugees living in urban settings compared to those living in refugee camps as there are crucial differences between these groups that still need to be acknowledged. It is important to document local perceptions and lived experiences of the camp which illustrate that camps are not automatically an informality because they are different than how most people live, but rather something to be learned from. At the same time, in Lebanon, unlike Turkey and Jordan, the government has not set up formal camps such that all camps are informal settlement. "Informality" is at the core of urban development in the Middle East, while it is considered problematic in Western countries. Settlements in Europe are not learning from settlements in the Middle East. We need to be aware of these different views and contexts.

Regarding refugee camps, there is a lack of consistent policy within the Middle East region on what to do with them. There is much ambiguity surrounding the opening and closing of camps. All of this makes the critical study of housing, urban studies and geography a priority for the region. Often studies involving refugee camps produce unreliable knowledge because they fail to start from the bottom-up. This includes investment in shelters designed by outside agencies without adequate knowledge of affected people's needs which makes their utility very limited. There is a culture of foreign researchers going into refugee camps and asking pre-set questions. Indeed, one participant commented that for many refugees, researchers coming into their camp to ask them questions has become part of their local culture. They are trained to say certain things, tell the same stories, use the same terms. Researchers, it was argued, are programming the people they interview. Others have argued that some camps have been over-researched (see below also).

Researching research and humanitarian intervention

As at previous conversations, participants called for more scrutiny of the research process itself and long-term monitoring of the impact of humanitarian interventions. Sometimes the same research is done 'in house' and by external researchers and the results are different. People need to talk to people about their experience of being researched and how this affects their identity. Again, participants also stressed the need to assess different forms of research impact and how policy makers respond, and react, to different types of research across the policy making cycle and in light of geopolitical events.

> *'Once upon a time in Refugee Studies we spoke about imposing aid, now often we are imposing research!'*
>
> - NGO worker

Practical Research Gaps

A range of practical barriers to knowledge production were identified as research priorities including the need for better compilation and maintenance of statistical data and improving access to higher education opportunities for displaced populations. There are also a lack of hubs or centres for the study of migration in the region, unlike in Europe where such centres are flourishing.

Access to and archiving of data

A significant problem for migration studies in the Middle East is the loss of data due to conflict and mass displacement in the region. Across almost all disciplines, a lack of quantitative research in migration studies was identified. The main focus in the field and across the disciplines is on qualitative research but even this is often fragmented and poorly archived. Resources should therefore be allocated to rectifying these gaps.

As at previous conversations, it was stressed that often researchers and funders take archives for granted and there is a lack of investment in the building up, maintenance of and training of people to curate databases and archives where they do exist. One participant joked that although the Arab world had invented libraries, they did not have the capacity to maintain them.[2] In an attempt to address some of these issues and learn from the past, work is being done in various places to archive and disseminate existing knowledge. Most libraries in the region are nevertheless still understaffed and under-resourced which makes

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[2] Al-Qarawiyyin Library in Morocco is generally said to be the oldest library in the world.

it difficult for scholars to access basic resources required to compete for international funding alongside wealthy academic institutions which are often located in the global north.

Academic publications and language

As in other regions, the high cost of access to (certain) online journals and the expense of academic books is a barrier to knowledge exchange. There are a range of emerging and historic independent publishers in the region that publish more cheaply and play an important role in disseminating knowledge across the region. However, often these texts are in Arabic and not translated into English. While most scholars in the Middle East read English, the lack of Arabic language skills among scholars from outside the region and lack of translation into English of texts in Arabic means that important ideas may fail to reach Western scholarly audiences due to lack of depth and misinterpretation. Among other consequences, this can lead to duplication of work. One participant noted that some academics attempt to overcome this by hiring Arabic-speaking research assistants for field work. Although these opportunities to work in this new 'refugee research industry' are appreciated, there is some evidence of worrying patterns of exploitation.

Refugee scholars

While at previous Migration Conversations, such as Glasgow and London in the UK, participants identified limited but growing number of opportunities for refugees to access higher education and become researchers themselves, in the Middle East there is an endemic lack of higher education provision for, and amongst, refugees. Although a significant number of refugees do or did have aspirations of acquiring higher education, many have lost hope. Barriers such as money, access, language and culture play an important role in this as well as lack of documents which mean they cannot access educational opportunities outside of the region, even where, as was the case of one Palestinian student at the event who had studied at an UNRWA school, they qualify. This is a significant problem in the region that needs to be addressed, since much valuable knowledge and potential goes to waste. Some positive examples were given related to online courses available to refugees in camps, although these were not an adequate substitute for academic mobility and exchange.

The University of Glasgow was commended by more than one participant for its long-term work supporting scholars in Gaza. Indeed, the Islamic University of Gaza has partnerships with over 120 universities in Europe across 20 different EU countries. Despite these initiatives, scholars in Palestine nevertheless face huge challenges in travelling and disseminating their research.

'I do my work as if I am going to travel 100% even though I know it is a 1% possibility. It's a big headache: the time, money, visas, but we try...we live on hope and determination in Gaza.'

<p style="text-align: right">- Academic researcher</p>

Censorship of research

Another practical research issue identified by participants concerned the censorship of certain research findings and issues of access to displaced and labour migrant populations, although this depends significantly according to the state in question. Working in collaboration with partners in other countries can be a useful way of getting around this although it can also raise suspicion. Ironically, one participant stressed that the paywall, which means certain countries cannot access Western journals, can provide an element of protection as it makes their work less visible to hostile regimes. It is in their interest to keep their 'head down' when working inside their countries and pursue what one participant called an 'anti-impact agenda'. Qatar was raised as an especially tricky context to do work on labour migrants at the present time.

Another problem is surveillance, with several examples provided of the targeting of academics, foreign and local, while conducting community fieldwork, particularly when research focuses on politically sensitive topics such as unionisation, minority communities, gender and sexuality as they intersect with migration research.

Longitudinal research

Empirically it is difficult to do research across space and time in the Middle East region but resources need to be made available in way that allows continuity but also flexibility.

Cross-disciplinary Perspectives

Participants emphasized the importance of cross-disciplinary research in the region, not only to learn about migration and refugees, but also from each other. In turn, interdisciplinary working is not just about working together but also about drawing on the range of skills we carry within ourselves into 'the field'. The RELIEF Centre was again commended for pursuing such an agenda.

For the social sciences, development and security are usually the main drivers of research. However, the security agenda, it was felt, is becoming more important and development is

moving to the background. This is a problematic shift that requires more critical interrogation which the humanities can help deliver.

In the Middle Eastern context, certain disciplinary lines, such as between anthropology and sociology, are blurred. This can be a good thing because it can mean collaboration between the disciplines, but it can also result in overlap or challenges.

> *'Certain types of knowledge are still more valued that others. We need to do away with this hierarchy.'*
>
> - Artist

A difficulty that different disciplines experience is the lack of a shared conceptual and/or linguistic language. This is not only true across various disciplines involved in Migration Studies, but also across different regions and within the Middle East. Moreover, different disciplines in the Middle East region suffer differently from the lack of south-to-north opportunities: certain disciplines, such as architecture and development, are more likely to receive funding than others, such as the arts and social work. There is a perception that the legal, public health and social protection sectors are often highly segregated and fail to work with others to include a more human perspective. This is partly, one participant suggested, because they are led by a Western-funded development agenda.

Meanwhile, knowledge brokers in the humanities face their own challenges in delineating their roles: are they working as researchers for certain disciplines, are they therapists, are they artists? Sometimes it is difficult to know the boundaries between these. The arts have a unique role in articulating some of this fluidity but can also be stifled by lack of funding or by having to fit with funders' priorities.

Meaningful Collaborations and Partnerships

Participants highlighted that the majority of migration research in the Middle East is led by academic institutions outside of the region. Moreover, the funding also comes from donors and policy makers that are not based in the region. It is very important to establish more research collaborations and partnerships between institutions and organizations in the Middle East and the rest of the world in order to foster more meaningful collaborations and partnerships.

Being realistic: collaboration versus extraction?

Participants appeared to agree that collaboration both with the region and with other regions can lead to richer research, better data and more ethical practice. However, it is also important to recognise what is and is not possible within the constraints of the current

funding and institutional structures. Whether genuinely 'co-produced' research was possible and in what contexts was a recurrent topic of debate. As in previous migration conversations, issues of intellectual property rights, data access and sharing were raised as key challenges to collaboration between different research institutions and across different sectors. These issues become more complex when the funding is controlled by an outside country and where funders set limits on how much of the budget can be allocated to different partners inside and outside of the region.

Participants gave several examples based on their own experience where collaborations had not worked. These included situations where government, NGO or university partners – generally from the global north – imposed excessive use of logos or hijacked intellectual property leading to feelings that knowledge was being used out of context and to research participants feeling alienated from the portrayal of their own stories. This also extended to authorship and fair pay.

> *'The very idea of the research proposal in itself (around which research funding is assigned) is problematic as the implication is that the reality stays the same and that once you get to the field you will find the reality you described, but we're dealing with situations of extreme mobility and chance'.*
>
> - Academic researcher

Involvement participants across the research cycle vs. 'parachuting in'

Where possible, several participants stressed, the 'subjects' of the research should be involved across the whole research cycle to avoid such experiences. Yet funding is often not made available for such follow-up over time. Meanwhile, a context of multiple displacements in the region can make it hard practically for researchers to track down and stay in touch with research participants over time and place. Where there are not genuine incentives for working together, including financial remuneration, participants and partners may also not have the resources to feed into research in a sustained way. NGOs and community organisations, in particular, are often expected to give their time for free and serve a broker role without remuneration. One participant stressed that often it is women who do the bulk of the emotional labour of brokering relationships with little recognition.

> *'There is an important ethics to storytelling and an important care work we do as researchers. We are not just researchers, we are allies'.*
>
> - Researcher and activist

All research is taking place in conditions of extreme inequality both within and between countries. Yet, there is not much work on how mobility and displacement are shaped by wider context of inequality so that some sections of the population are protected from this while others are at the centre of it.

Participants echoed a well-documented apprehension that researchers that 'parachute in' to contexts of displacement to conduct research in an extractive way can do more harm than good. All projects should have not just an 'impact' but an 'exit strategy', one participant explained. In particular, the safeguarding of local research assistants – who might be in vulnerable positions – is important.

Translation

Often adequate time is not given to translate concepts in collaborative or comparative research. One participant gave two examples of concepts that are not well understood from a local, regional perspective: race and racialization and gender. Taking these in turn, the former is very different in a Middle Eastern context. Furthermore, the concept of 'gender equality' is not translated from English to local languages. Indeed, a colonial perspective dominates whereby differences in gender roles across the region are not appreciated.

Lebanon was identified as an interesting case for regional and international research, since it is both heavily influenced by Arab and Western cultures. Some positive examples of collaborative research going on between the Middle East and other regions include studies between Europe and the Middle East on child trafficking and on remittances between Lebanon and Sri Lanka and Ethiopia.

The level of collaboration: local, national, international?

A significant concern raised was the insufficient cooperation between international and national organizations. Moreover, international organizations often do not trust local organizations in the Middle East. This is highly problematic for carrying out high-quality research in the region. Foreign researchers and INGOs can also dominate certain resources in the local ecology such as interpreters who they can afford to pay better than local agencies.

At the other end of the spectrum, sometimes 'local' organisations or 'grass-roots' groups are fetishized and insufficiently equipped to participate equitably in research. One participant raised the question on what we mean by the term 'local'. Does this label give some sort of legitimacy to talk about certain issues? Is this always justified? Indeed, as noted by another participant the local and global are always connected. Participants stressed the importance of starting to invest in good partnership working early on in the research cycle on collaboration to better understand these local/national/international dynamics.

Different institutional priorities

One participant noted, that while public universities in the Arab region have always been part of communities with whom they have interchanging connections, new private universities were setting themselves up as 'ivory towers.'

Research institutions in the global north have their own institutional priorities, timelines and 'hoops to jump through' which often restrict their ability to be genuinely open to new ways of working with partners in the region. A difficulty in establishing good partnership between different universities, is attributable to competition. Many times, different universities have to compete over the limited resources and scarce funding that is available. The capacity of universities in the region to respond to funding calls is also limited, since most universities are configured to teach, without investing in the academic and administrative capacity to conduct research. This means they are not in a position to lead on proposals requiring a 'stronger' lead institution. Sometimes the same NGOs or partners in the Middle East are invited to contribute to more than one research proposal from the UK or Europe which is time intensive and favours the more well-known NGOs further building their profile at the expense of others. Networks, several participants repeated, are everything. Events such as this conversation were seen as critically important in providing new opportunities for stakeholders to meet potential partners 'beyond the usual suspects'.

One academic participant from Lebanon commented on the important value of independent PhD students doing research in the region: unlike large multi-stakeholder grant-funded projects, PhD students often come with language skills and the flexibility, time and willingness to embed themselves in communities in a less extractive way, thus producing more genuinely co-produced research. Equally, scholars from the region who are able to travel abroad to conduct research bring back important skills and new knowledge. As at previous migration Conversations it was stressed that knowledge exchange is a two-way process. More support is needed for early career researchers inside the region to contribute to, and benefit from, these potential exchanges.

The importance of private funding

Because of the abovementioned institutional constraints, private bodies are an important source of funding for knowledge exchange in the region, especially in relation to the arts. While there are costs associated with private funding, it can also in some cases allow organisations and individuals more freedom to try new things and work with a range of different partners. One theatre NGO explained that the very idea of art as a creative enterprise was sometimes compromised by rigid criteria set down by funders and that in this context, private funding was akin to 'freedom'.

> *'How do we find the freedom to get away from the "victim stories" the funders so often want?'*
>
> - NGO

Meaningful methodologies

Participants shared a range of views on the methodologies used in migration research, the meaning of co-creation of knowledge and qualitative/quantitative data sources.

'Participatory research' and 'co-production of knowledge' are oft-heard terms in migration research. Participants in the conversations however questioned what they actually mean, and where the method has been used robustly. A key question raised was at which phase of the research design process should participants be involved for it to be 'true' participatory research? Often, local people are not involved sufficiently in the research design, analysis or dissemination phases. Also, when talking about participatory research, we need to include not only the refugee population in our methodologies, but relevant host communities as well.

In order to get people to participate in research, participants discussed the issue of payment: if we want people to participate, do we pay them? It might work to motivate participation but also has the potential to lead to skewed or biased answers. Participatory research is also about building trust with participants and this requires local knowledge, time and funding.

It is important to train people involved in conducting research on what they need to do such as, for instance, how to hold certain conversations, how to handle different situations and deal with sensitive topics. Participants highlighted these different situations as a methodological question in general: how do we deal with sensitive research questions that we are not prepared to answer? We should perhaps, one participant commented, frame our ethics in terms of what questions we should not ask as well as those we should.

Another term that is often used in methodology is 'impact'. When talking about impact, it is important to question who it is we are exactly impacting. Are we making actual impact on the ground or are we just having 'academic' impact?

Lastly, participants identified that we often build methodologies on something that is already known, on previous knowledge. It might actually be beneficial to think outside the box and try something new. It is, however, difficult to get the freedom and funding of donors to try something new. This is a shame because it can mean we are missing out on certain opportunities.

Art can be useful for drawing attention to new ideas but concerns were expressed, as at previous Global Migration Conversations, of exploiting art for the purpose of research and 'tagging it on' to a project rather than valuing it as a form of knowledge production in and of itself with its own language and integrity.

It is very difficult to do empirical research across space and across time in the Middle East region given instability, conflict, censorship, border controls. Resources need to be made available for long term research to build teams and collaborations. Yet, the funding system currently lends itself to finite projects. For example, the research proposal itself, when you apply, the year in which you apply, all assume time is fixed and that populations are the same. Given the extreme mobility and disruptions that took place in 2011 for example, by the time a proposal was submitted in 2012, the number of Syrian refugees was around 200,000 refugees, by the time project funding was awarded, there were two million refugees, and by the time field work started, it was 5 million refugees. A key obstacle is a lack of infrastructure for this kind of sustained and long-term interests, with only 2-3 centres for migration studies in the entire region. In turn, dissemination is limited partly due to the small number of libraries. In this context, local universities have a key role to play as do global conversations such as that organized by the LIDC-MLT.

Conclusion

> *'There is an acute academic impoverishment in the Middle East in terms of resources for research and freedom of thought but not knowledge or creativity. This means that we often have to move and migrate ourselves to do our work and to be heard, even when it is about our very region!'*
>
> - Scholar

The Beirut Migration Conversation demonstrated the huge wealth of the region in terms of contribution to knowledge on migration and displacement. Yet what also emerged is that often this knowledge is unheard or is extracted in a way that, at best, fails to develop long-lasting capacity in the region and at worst, exploits and undermines it. The prevailing academic environment under many of the authoritarian regimes in the region, has impoverished free thought generally, and academic freedom required to conduct social science research within universities.

The conversation reflected that migration is a permanent feature of modernization worldwide and is not only a regional problem in the Middle East. Yet, classical approaches to migration research in terms of "push and pull", continuous and contiguous processes, are insufficient to understand migration processes. It is difficult to distinguish where

displacement starts and when it stops. In turn, despite over 30 years of knowledge and frameworks to understand trans regional migration, we have yet to understand the depths of structural causes, and historical processes which shape mobility.

Almost all participants nevertheless felt that their input into global policy discussions had been minimal, including the supposedly 'Global' Compact on Migration and the 'Global' Compact on Refugees. Where they do have a voice to feed into the global migration conversations this is still problematically brokered by institutions and funding managed and determined in the global north. Knowledge produced is poorer because of these failures of equitable and more collaborative working. This conversation highlighted that working across different sectors, disciplines and inter-regional stakeholders is key. Some attempts at cross-regional and collaborative working were raised but these still seem relatively few and far between. Moreover, the research agenda still seems imposed rather than being driven by priorities raised from the bottom-up or in ways that study the structural conditions that cause migration including geopolitics; the climate crisis; economic systems; authoritarianism and repression.

Researchers and collaborators need to be very aware of the history, complexity and diversity of the Middle East and of migration in the region: there are myriad on-going processes and the reality on the ground shifts very rapidly. Moreover, we should not simply talk about certain categories of 'refugees' or 'forced migrants' but look beyond these to adopt more holistic and grounded perspectives on migration. Many forms of migration in the region are overlapping and interconnected due to rapidly changing environments and contexts as a result of unstable politics, poor governance, natural resource dependency, and climate change impact. This must be acknowledged and understood in order to research and respond to migration processes across the region and to share learning from this to other contexts.

Migration research in the region is heavily biased towards forced migration with little attention afforded to economic or labour migration. This results in narrowly focused research. Furthermore, in current and future Migration Studies, we need to distinguish between 'older' refugee communities and 'newer' refugee communities, for example, previous Palestinian displacement vis a vis more recent Syrian displacement. It is important not to let new communities overshadow older ones. Thus, while emergency services might no longer be required by 'old' communities, they will have other needs which need attention. In general, the emphasis on emergencies in refugee and migration studies should be reconsidered. Even though providing emergency services is crucial, there are other needs that might need to be addressed and are currently neglected.

Very important for the Middle East region is the translation of certain concepts and identifying what gets lost in translation. What language do we use in migration research, not only in terms of the actual language used in fieldwork, but also in relation to terminology, vernaculars and semantics? How do we deal with cultural and conceptual differences between the different regions and within countries particularly where foreign and/or global north social scientists lack language skills? As this report has shown, this is an area where

the arts can be useful, since artists can provide an alternative manner of communication that goes beyond terminology, culture and words. The arts can also be a way of expanding communication and reaching broader audiences without the need for translation. As such it is accessible to larger groups of people than academic papers.

Finally, it is important to look at the relationship between the Middle East region and other regions in the world in the field of migration research. One needs to be aware of imbalances in geographical location with regard to donors and academic institutions in relation to power, resources and time. In addition, the dominance of certain donors in relation to the research being conducted in the region needs to be acknowledged. Given the extreme inequality of economic opportunity across the region, between and within countries, and where there is not enough literature, we need to ask what mobility and displacement mean in different contexts of precarity, disappearing resources and diminished livelihoods. Local and national institutions in the region must be valued and we should work towards more equitable partnership in conducting research between the Middle East and other regions in the world. Pressing issues within the migration studies field in the Middle East region which have to be acknowledged urgently include: poor investment in academic institutions and their research infrastructure and lack of access to higher education for refugee communities; disciplinary fragmentation and unequal allocation of resources; lack of mobility opportunities outside of the region; censorship; and the loss of data and poor archiving due to mass movement and conflict.

Programme

Tuesday 5th February 2019

9.00-9.30: Registration and Coffee

9.30-10.00: Introducing the Global Migration Conversations

This introductory session will explain the aims and purpose of the Global Migration Conversations and how they fit together. It will seek to answer the question: why have we come to Beirut to learn from the regional experience and what do we hope to learn over the course of the two days?

10.00-11.30: Panel 1: Taking Stock and Learning from Migration Research in Lebanon and the Middle East Region

In this panel discussion, we will take stock and explore the learnings from migration and displacement research in Lebanon and the Middle East region. Participants are invited to reflect on highlights of successful research projects and collaborations – on what has worked well historically and why – as well as considering the future direction of migration research in the region. Questions addressed to the panel will include the following:

(i)   What are the research strengths and what can other countries learn from the region's experience of migration knowledge production and research?
(ii)   What are the strategic priorities for migration research in the region going forwards?
(iii)   What obstacles need to be overcome to foster excellence in research and knowledge production in the region, across the region and about the region?

Each panellist will speak for 5-7 minutes. The chair will then facilitate an interactive Q&A discussion engaging the audience.

11.30-12.00: Coffee and Tea

12.00-13.00: Group Discussions 1: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives

This interactive salon discussion seeks to map the landscape of different disciplinary perspectives in migration research in the Arab region. Participants are encouraged to draw on concrete examples and discuss their own research.

Facilitated by a member of the Migration Leadership Team, the discussion will touch on questions including the following:

1. What research is taking place across different disciplines?
2. What projects do you see as exciting and cutting edge and why?
3. Are any disciplines and important topics under-funded/missing from the migration debate in the region and globally? Why do you think this is?

Each breakout group will discuss these questions for 45 minutes before coming back together to feed back as a larger group.

13.00-14.00: Lunch

14.00 – 15.30: Panel 2: De-centering Knowledge: Meaningful Collaborations and Partnerships

In past migration conversations, participants have stressed the need to decentre knowledge production from certain spaces which dominate the migration debate and foster more equitable partnerships with people working outside of these spaces. How is this being done (or not) in your experience? This panel will explore examples of meaningful partnerships and collaborations at the point of research planning, process and impact through the presentation of examples of cutting-edge projects past and present, including research funded by the ESRC and AHRC. Panellists will address questions including:

(i)   How does research in the region fit into (or not) a global, collaborative migration research and impact agenda?
(ii)   How can research address power imbalances at the global, regional and at the local level?
(iii)   Which issues and populations are commonly side-lined in research on migration and displacement and its impacts on communities and how can we raise their profile?

Each panellist will speak for 5-7 minutes. The chair will then facilitate an interactive Q&A discussion engaging the audience.

15.30-16.00: Coffee and Tea

16.00 – 17.00: Group Discussions 2: Meaningful Methodologies

This interactive salon discussion will explore best practice in terms of methodological innovations and practice in migration research. Again, participants are encouraged to draw on concrete examples and discuss their own research. Facilitated by a member of the Migration Leadership Team, the discussion will touch on questions including the following:

1. What methods have you used/have colleagues used to conduct successful migration research?
2. What does the co-creation of knowledge mean to you, versus traditional 'extractive' models of research?
3. How can we help researchers to talk to each other across qualitative/quantitative and data sources and across the arts/social sciences?

Each group will discuss these questions for 45 minutes before coming back together to feed back as a group.

17.00 – 18.30: Panel 3: Reconstruction, Heritage and Archiving

The final panel of the day will explore the role of visual data and methodologies and the arts in the production and archiving of knowledge about conflict, displacement and migration. Participants will respond to questions including:

(i)   What innovative approaches are bringing used to document the lived experiences of migrants and refugees, including in relation to integration and education e.g. play and the arts and among marginalised groups e.g. women and youth?
(ii)   What is the importance of history, and what is the role of memory and 'living history'?
(iii)   What is the role of museums as physical spaces of knowledge exhibition versus new virtual spaces such as online archives and museums?

Each panellist will speak for 5-7 minutes followed by the respondent's comments. The chair will then facilitate an interactive Q&A discussion engaging the audience.

Wednesday 6th February 2019

9.00-9.30: Registration and Coffee

9.30– 11.00: Panel Discussion 4: From Beirut to the Global

While yesterday's morning panel focused on a discussion of the migration research landscape at the local and regional level, in today's panel participants are invited to consider the role of researchers and practitioners in the region in relation to the *global* conversation on migration.

Participants will discuss global policy developments including the Global Compact on Migration and Global Compact on Refugees, and how European and American migration policy, among those of other northern states, are affecting migrants in the Middle East region. They will also explore the usefulness of global policy terms and legal categories such a 'refugee', 'IDP' and 'migrant' in accounting for the

experiences of people on the move in the region. Questions will include the following:

(i)   What are the barriers to knowledge exchange and partnerships between regions?
(ii) What research and knowledge production is not being funded and why?
(iii) How can we get the general public along with policy makers to engage with what is happening in the region, at the local and global level e.g. through alternative arts and media?

Each panellist will speak for 5-7 minutes followed by the respondent's comments. The chair will then facilitate an interactive Q&A discussion engaging the audience.

11.00-11.30: Coffee and Tea

11.30 – 12.30: Group Discussions 3: Creating a Collaborative Agenda for Migration Research

This salon will focus on how to practically address some of the challenges identified in the conversation so far to support ongoing migration and displacement research and foster future collaborations. Participants will discuss the following:

1. What are the priorities of a global research agenda going forwards? Who sets this agenda and what are the regional gaps?
2. What are the most effective ways of networking and building partnerships going forwards?
3. How can we reach new audiences with our research e.g. in private sector and policy sphere?

Each breakout group will discuss these questions for 45 minutes before coming back together to feed back as a larger group.

12.30-13.00: Closing Reflections

This closing session will bring together some preliminary conclusions from the event and reflections from a participant at previous migration conversations.