Transnational Migration Workshop
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Introduction

On Monday 9 and Tuesday 10 October 2023, colleagues from Queen Mary University of London and Cornell University convened in Malta for a workshop on migration research.

The Transnational Migration Workshop was hosted at the Queen Mary Malta campus in Gozo, with participants from the two universities also joined by migration researchers and practitioners working in Malta. The workshop builds on the 2022 strategic cooperation agreement signed by Queen Mary and Cornell which focuses on research and exchange opportunities more broadly, as well as previous meetings and collaboration on migration research. The partnership expands Cornell's Global Hubs footprint, making Queen Mary an official partner.

The aims of the workshop were to:
- Bring an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary lens to the aspects of migration research.
- Showcase existing migration research strengths across the institutions.
- Foster future research collaboration between Queen Mary and Cornell.
- Establish tangible actions and outputs for development of the partnership.

This report summarises the discussions from the workshop, illustrating the transdisciplinary work of the group, emerging research themes, and actions and ideas for taking the collaboration forward. The programme, participant information and presentation abstracts are annexed to the report.

Panel one: Topographies of migration

In the opening panel, participants explored varied topographies of migration, beginning with **Professor Eric Tagliacozzo**'s (College of Arts and Sciences, Cornell) work on migration's *longue durée* in South-East Asia. This presentation examined the ways in which migration changed the face of the region over the past two centuries. The research has catalogued various movements of labour and capital as part of colonial state-making projects, as well as the ways indigenous people resisted incorporation into these colonial projects through practicing other migrations.

Professor Kavita Datta (School of Geography, Queen Mary) presented her work on conviviality and everyday bordering practices in the UK during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research explored notions of conviviality among Somali, Indian and Brazilian diasporic communities in the UK, asking how these were challenged and changed during the pandemic, particularly around issues of food poverty. The project identified diasporic communities as first responders during the pandemic, but also interplays with surveillance and distrust.

The panel concluded with a presentation from **Professor Rachel Beatty Riedl** (Mario Einaudi Centre for International Studies, Cornell) on migration as urbanisation and the ways in which Kenyans construct ideas of "home" through dynamic urban-rural linkages. This research has focused on political behaviour and identity among those who move to Nairobi, illustrating the ways the rural and urban are mutually constitutive, albeit in different ways across generations.

For each panel, presentations were followed by group discussions to further explore certain research themes but also to identify points of similarity and synergy, and to reflect together on possibilities for future collaborative work. In this panel, **temporality** emerged as important: while migration scholarship has tended to focus on the spatial, these papers illustrated the contributions time can make to migration research. From taking a longer historical view of migration, to including life course and cross-generational dimensions to research that upend ideas of frozen or bounded communities, to exploring the different ways people practice politics of caring/othering in the everyday.

The importance of the **language** used in migration research was also discussed. Across the research themes presented, terminology used has often come from the West rather than from migrants' perspectives. It has often been economic, for example the language of "profit" in colonial histories can hide aspects of exploitation and extraction, and the concept of "remittances" and "reverse-remittances" may not adequately capture the multiple care practices between and within diasporic communities and places of origin, including emotional support and ideas around shame and responsibility. Similarly, a focus on urbanisation has often been largely economic and grounded in a rural-urban binary, which does not factor in emotional geographies around belonging and unbelonging, or the ongoing ways the rural and the urban are co-constituted.

Possible avenues for learning from and taking up language and concepts from each other's work were also identified, for example to extend ideas about "conviviality" to environmental scholarship and practicing conviviality across species. Lastly, the importance of reflecting on what language is most appropriate to communicate our research to different audiences to increase impact was identified. Language was thus noted as something to think about for future collaborations.

Thematic focus on the **construction of belonging and identity formation** was also identified as cutting across the presentations in this panel. Presentations illustrated the ways in which belonging and othering, and processes of identity formation, are dynamic and open to challenge and change over time.

Kavita's presentation showed how during the pandemic, migrants went from being perceived as productive bodies to diseased bodies, and practices of care framed different groups as deserving or undeserving. Eric's work illustrated the ways in which migrants resisted incorporation into colonial state making projects, and the importance of non-state space and mobility to analysing this resistance. Rachel's work showed how different ideas of home across urban and rural space are integral to feelings of belonging and practicing political behaviour.

This opening discussion also set a challenge for the group to reflect on throughout the workshop, namely the "**so what?**" question. In other words, how can our research clearly establish its added value, main contribution(s) to the field, and generate interest within and beyond academia. Relatedly, we also discussed how our scholarship can be disseminated more effectively, and particularly given the interdisciplinary nature of our work, what the bigger connections and questions are that we can identify to take our work forward in productive ways. One starting point suggested for this is to think about how to take interdisciplinary work into policy spaces and inform legal and political debates.

Panel two: Borders, crises and displacement

Professor Yasmin Ibrahim (School of Business and Management, Queen Mary) opened the second panel on borders, crises, and displacement with a presentation on borders and non-hominization, exploring the hostile environment and the unmaking of the human. Her research has placed the hostile environment as part of the post-colonial, framing it as a historical product of empire that recurs in the ways that bodies encountering the border are racialised and othered.

Professor Violeta Moreno-Lax (School of Law, Queen Mary) then presented her research on "crisification" as migration governance and implications for law. This research has problematised the framing of migration as crisis and explored the ways "crisification" has transformed the operation of the law. Violeta's work interrogates both the expansions of power and the contractions of legal safeguards that have re-configured the legal order in the EU, with implications for people on the move. Her main contention is that crisis and the state of exception share common traits but differ in fundamental ways. The former builds on the latter but in a selective, focused manner, targeting specifically "unwanted" migrants. It utilises the resources of legal limitations and derogations characteristic of the state of exception, diminishing human rights protection in times of (perceived or anticipated) emergency. The end result of "crisification" is that it normalises exceptions not vis-à-vis the entire population (as in catastrophes, like the COVID-19 pandemic) but only in relation to the specific segment of "unwanted" non-citizens, thus becoming a governance tool for their deterrence and control.

This was followed by a presentation from **Professor Parvati Nair** (School of Languages, Linguistics and Film, Queen Mary) on displacement, environments and photo-politics in the Mediterranean region. Parvati's research examines photo-documentary's potential for engaging with ongoing displacement in the Mediterranean, particularly examining crisis as an ongoing political process; bordering practices; questions of home; and historical breakdown as well as uncertain futures for youth and the question of hope.

Professor Esra Akcan (College of Architecture, Cornell) presented on migration and discriminatory public housing in Kreuzberg, Berlin, an area historically known for its guest worker and refugee populations. This research, responding to calls for antiracist historiographies of cities, has documented ways migrants' citizenship was used to bring legitimacy to policies and social norms in violation of human rights to housing. It

also highlighted the ways in which migrants made urban spaces, including through the appropriation of apartments, interiors and engaging in urban renewal.

Dr Maria Pisani (Department of Youth and Community Studies, University of Malta) concluded the panel with a presentation on her work with unaccompanied minors who have arrived in Malta, documenting the ways in which the state has failed its obligations around the protection of young people. The presentation explored the roles and challenges of academic-activists working with asylum seekers navigating this system in Malta, around giving voice, advocacy work, and documenting evidence. Maria presented an ethics of practice centred around a commitment to care, respect, protection, wellbeing and hope.

The discussions that followed identified several synergies between the presentations. These included the common thread of **hostility and the making of crisis** across various migration contexts. Each presentation spoke about exceptionalism, of making life unliveable and unmaking place, and the ways in which ideas of crisis around people on the move have been constructed across contexts. Importantly, they also illustrated different ways in which **agency and resistance** are present across these various contexts, albeit under constrained conditions, and how this may be documented and mobilised through research and practice. For example, through oral history, photography, and documenting and naming migrants' own voices.

This attentiveness to documenting and witnessing raised important questions around **whose gaze and whose voices count**. There are challenges across the case studies examined, but also examples that illustrate how resistance has been possible. For example Esra's case study has shown that while some architects were complicit, others practiced subversion in urban renewal work together with migrants. Ayesha's work on a project re-writing legal judgements from the perspective of migrants is another example, as are research methodologies such as oral histories that foreground migrants' voices and names, and those that are attentive to emotion in data. These examples may be useful to guide future work. A need to further reflect on the complicated role of the scholar-activist and other forms of solidarity was highlighted.

The need to shift away from viewing migration as a zero-sum game and a crisis was reiterated, including reactivating the local (rather than solely thinking in global terms) and the emotional, **normalising mobility** and researching forms of mobility that are not forced. At the same time, it is important to remain attentive to immobility, so that normalising movement is not at the expense of those who stay.

Panel three: Migration and health

In a third panel examining migration and health, **Dr Gunisha Kaur** (Human Rights Impact Lab, Weill/Cornell Medical Center) presented her research on chronic pain, deportation stress and cardiovascular risk in refugees. There is a high prevalence of experiences of chronic pain among displaced populations and this research has found pain can be worsened and cardiovascular disease risk increased as asylum seekers navigate the immigration application process in the US. This research also explored the potential for digital health care interventions, so that people can log pain digitally, particularly in contexts where they may be unable to or fearful of engaging with in-person care.

Dr Dominik Zenner (Wolfson Institute of Population Health, Queen Mary) presented his research on health and illness among Europe-bound refugees and asylum seekers. The starting point for this research was a scarcity of well-developed data on the burden of disease among displaced populations, and associated barriers to services and increased vulnerabilities to new health issues. The development of the Electronic Personal Health Record (ePHR) was presented as a case study for sharing data between healthcare workers along routes, as well as to guide policy makers.

Following from this, **Professor Oyinlola Oyebode** (Wolfson Institute of Population Health, Queen Mary) presented research conducted by PhD candidate Majel McGranahan, who could not join us in Malta, on preconception health among migrant women in England, using a cross-sectional analysis of maternity services data from 2018-19. Across several preconception indicators, inequalities exist between migrant women and non-migrants, and this research highlighted opportunities to improve preconception health for migrant women, in order to improve perinatal and neonatal outcomes overall.

Drawing from legal and health disciplines, **Hasna Sheikh** (School of Law, Queen Mary) presented her research on the impacts of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) on people seeking asylum in the UK. This research has explored the ways PTSD definitions, as well as diagnosis and documentation processes, are used within the refugee status determination process. It raised questions about the reliance on medical experts and evidence and whether this is raising the standard of proof in asylum claims.

Professor Isabelle Mareschal (School of Biological and Behavioural Sciences, Queen Mary) concluded this panel with a presentation on the effects of early adversity on mental health and socioemotional development in Syrian refugee children. This presentation was based on a collaborative study comparing Jordanian children and Syrian refugee children. This study demonstrated that while early adversity negatively impacts the mental health of refugee children, effects on interpersonal skills seem more limited, and therefore presented a potential role for protective environmental factors.

The discussions following these presentations included a collective challenge to reflect on the **unintended consequences** of our work. Participants noted that we do not necessarily control how our data is used after publication, and the potential for noxious application of data to do harm to people on the move. Related to this, there may be a tension between the focus on agency and voice discussed in the previous panel, and the need for anonymity and protection of health records.

On the other hand, it was noted that academic researchers may have more freedom to publish strong narrative arguments with their data, such as calling for certain interventions, than colleagues working in agencies. This also raises the potential for combining quantitative with qualitative data in service to developing these narrative arguments. Yet the need to grapple with the idea that more data is always good, and to ask how our research can be in better service to migrant populations, was emphasised.

Discussion also acknowledged the limitations of concepts rooted in Western medical practice in migration research. Entry points for reflecting on this in future work may include putting these Western concepts into conversation with other healing methods and approaches, and using existing medical knowledge and skills to do things differently, albeit noting the challenges posed by a very standardised medical discipline (especially in the Global North). The possibilities around using digital methods for/with migrant populations were raised, as well as exploring more **holistic approaches to wellbeing and health**.

Panel four: Migration, justice and rights

The final panel was opened by **Dr Sabrina Axster** (Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies, Cornell) who spoke about the making of migrant illegality in 1920s Germany, theorising the role of racism and capitalism from four historical case studies. Based on archival research, this presentation detailed the ways "illegality regimes" were developed through capitalism's need for exploitable and cheap labour, alongside racist exclusion of particular groups of people.

Ayesha Riaz (School of Law, Queen Mary) then presented her work on the lack of legal aid available for asylum seekers in the UK. This research situated current issues around accessing and funding legal aid within historic context, tracing the origins of legal aid in the UK, its extension to cover immigration and asylum, and more recent connections to austerity and the hostile environment. Lately this has also included the demonisation of solicitors.

The final presentation was from Dr Katrine Camilleri (Human Rights Lawyer) who shared her experiences as a lawyer with the Jesuit Refugee Service in Malta. National and regional policies in Europe around migration and refugee protection have often been born on the ground in places like Malta, making this an important closing case study for the workshop. This presentation traced recent legal and policy updates in Malta, including an erosion of access to independent legal services for asylum seekers, alongside an erosion of what these legal services are able to provide, given access constraints to detained migrant populations, and therefore the support they're able to deliver. The border is not getting higher but *wider* as demonstrated, for example, through detention spaces becoming incorporated into the border, and through increased difficulties faced by lawyers to access and represent people who are at sea in rescue cases.

Discussions following these presentations highlighted a common thread of austerity and hostile politics across case studies. While the law is commonly seen as travelling through space as apolitical, technical and bureaucratic, this panel has **politicised the law**, illustrating the often contradictory ways it is framed as part of the problem and also held up as part of the solution. The law is seen as "the maker" of boundaries as well as part of the solution, "the unmaker" of the same boundaries. There is a tension between the law as it is written, and lawyers' use of it as they contend with politics on the ground in hostile contexts. The importance of challenging, too, other elements such as policing, detention, alongside the law, was highlighted as important future work.

The discussion also picked up on threads from earlier panels, around **practices of belonging and unbelonging**. The cases examined illustrate various attempts to frame deserving and undeserving groups, and to generate conflict and inequalities between groups of people. The idea of the **wide border** also generated rich discussion. Similarities were drawn between Malta's widening borders and those in Europe's other divided cities, such as Berlin or Cyprus, noting that these wide spaces are not empty. A generative point for ongoing thinking with this widening border idea may therefore be examining the "off the radar" activities and relations that take place in these spaces, such as biodiversity.

Breakout discussions

In the final part of the workshop, participants discussed ways forward in two breakout groups - one focused on health and migration, and the other drawing together the other researchers from the workshop. This section of the report brings together these discussions around three pillars of ongoing collaboration and areas for partnership development: education, research, and service provision.

Education

Participants noted the following **opportunities for guest lecturing and education**, in-person or online, between the two institutions:

- Cornell's undergraduate course on global health and human rights offers an opportunity for Queen Mary to contribute to or speak on.

- Queen Mary's module on doing research with vulnerable communities and groups, run by the Faculty of Science and Engineering, would be an opportunity for Gunisha (Cornell) to speak about her work with torture survivors.
- The intercalated BSc in Global Medical Humanities, which Parvati (Queen Mary) is involved in, could include speakers from Cornell.
- Electives for medical students from both universities could include visits to each other's institutions or to Malta.
- Beyond a focus on health, both institutions are open to PhD and early career researcher mobility, such as visits and exchanges, training and teaching.

The idea for a **winter school on the Malta campus** was also discussed. This could be a starting point for future discussions around possible joint programmes (such as transdisciplinary, collaborative master degrees or certificate programmes). A winter school would also provide an opportunity to add on a migration conversation, to continue the wider collaborative research discussions that have begun at this workshop.

The winter school could provide an opportunity for participants to develop draft work, and would ideally have a quota for Queen Mary and Cornell students, as well as an open call for others such as students, refugees and migrants, residents and practitioners in Malta.

Queen Mary could explore applying to its distinguished visiting professorship programme to cover flight costs for academics from Cornell, and Cornell will explore if it has similar funding opportunities. The two institutions will also explore matching this funding to ensure early career researchers are included in the running of the winter school. The Cornell-Queen Mary seed grant may also be relevant for contributing funding to the event.

Research

Participants also discussed ways to take forward collaborative research. In the health group, Gunisha's (Cornell) work on an app for torture survivors to log their pain rather than visiting in-person clinics led to conversations on how apps/smartphones could also be used in therapy, for example where there is a lack of access to psychiatrists. Gunisha also has a project looking at pregnant refugee women, and there may therefore be opportunities to partner with Lola and colleagues at Queen Mary to recruit larger numbers and increase the international relevance and generalisability of this research.

Next steps include:
- Applying for a Cornell-Queen Mary seed grant to support building the collaboration.
- Writing conceptual pieces to allow colleagues to start working together on migration and health themes.
- Doing secondary data analysis and systematic reviews with each other's data.
- Involving MSc students from both institutions in this work.

The idea of organising a series of **Migration Conversations** was identified as another way to further develop the interdisciplinary research work of the two institutions. This could involve a reading group or a set of discussion prompts over a series of events, leading to a publication (special issue or edited collection) and other outputs (podcasts, research explainers, videos). It was noted that edited collections may potentially cross disciplinary borders more readily than journal publications, and Cornell Press was identified as a possible home for such an edited collection. On podcasts, Cornell Migrations Initiative has a podcast we could explore. As above, commitment to engaging with the work of early career researchers was also part of this discussion. On Queen Mary's side, both the (B)OrderS Centre at the Law School and the Centre for the Study of Migration within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences provide good platforms for this collaboration.

Noting the group's commitment to interdisciplinarity, rather than breaking migration conversations down along disciplinary lines (such as health, law, geography), participants identified the following themes to structure the conversations:

- Time.
- Crisis.
- Deservingness and un-deservingness.
- Human rights, the human and more-than-human.
- Borders and bordering.
- Wellbeing and vulnerability.
- Solidarity.

The thinking behind this was that these are themes that we can each approach differently, drawing from our disciplines but not being limited by them, and themes that we can deconstruct together in novel ways. Something to note moving forward was that while some of these themes (borders, human rights) are relatively established, the others are less so and therefore may be put to use productively but also may risk becoming too abstract. Sitting alongside these conceptual themes would be an additional theme on thinking methodologically, with a focus on the *doing* of interdisciplinary work.

To take this idea forward, participants agreed to:

- Write a one-to-two page summary of the group's current thoughts on the interdisciplinary concepts raised above, as a reference point for how we are thinking about the different concepts discussed.

Service provision

A focus on service provision was also highlighted as a productive way to focus collaborations moving forward, noting that focusing on service provision:

- Allows research into practice and practice into research.
- Creates educational opportunities for students.
- Offers opportunities to ask: what can we learn from each other's models?

Medical services for migrants and refugees at Cornell, and law services for migrants and refugees at Queen Mary's Legal Advice Centre (LAC), providing clinical training to future migration lawyers, are service provision areas that could be entry points to collaboration.

Funding

Possible funding routes to take these various ideas forward include the following:

- https://www.ukri.org/what-we-do/international-funding/our-international-offices/ukri-north-america/.
- SBE-UKRI.
- International areas of appeal for funding – migration and displacement.
- https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/place-based-approaches-to-sustainable-living/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery.
- QM funding avenues
  - Impact related funding.
  - Distinguished Visiting Professorship scheme.
  - Internal events budgets of the Centre for the Study of Migration and (B)OrderS Centre.
- Cornell seed funding.

Annex 1: Participant list

Queen Mary University of London attendees

Name	Position
Prof Frances Bowen	Vice Principal (Humanities & Social Sciences)
Prof Kavita Datta	Professor of Development Geography, Head of the School of Geography
Prof Parvati Nair	Professor of Hispanic, Cultural & Migration Studies
Dr Dominik Zenner	Clinical Reader in Infectious Disease Epidemiology
Prof Yasmin Ibrahim	Professor of Digital Economy & Culture, School of Business Management
Ayesha Riaz	PhD Candidate, School of Law
Prof Violeta Moreno-Lax	Professor of Law, School of Law
Prof Oyinlola Oyebode	Professor of Public Health, Centre Lead Public Health & Policy
Hasna Mehraj Sheikh	PhD Candidate, School of Law
Prof Isabelle Mareschal	Professor in Visual Cognition, School of Biological & Behavioural Science
Louisa Brain	PhD Candidate, School of Geography
Rachel Miles	Executive Officer (International)
Naomi McDonald	Business Development Manager, QM Malta

Cornell University attendees

Name	Position
Prof Eric Tagliacozzo	John Stambaugh Professor of History, College of Arts and Sciences
Prof Rachel Beaty Riedl	Director, Mario Einaudi Centre for International Studies
Prof Esra Akcan	Michael A. McCarthy Professor of Architectural Theory, College of Architecture
Dr Sabrina Axster	Postdoctoral Fellow, Migrations Initiative, Mario Einaudi Centre for International Studies
Dr Gunisha Kaur	Director, Human Rights Impact Lab, Weill/Cornell Medical Center, NYC

Malta attendees

Name	Position
Dr Maria Pisani	Head of Department, Youth & Community Studies, University of Malta
Dr Katrine Camilleri	Human Rights Lawyer, Country Director Jesuit Refugee Service Malta