

**Professional Development for Academics in Exile: A Case Study of Syrian
Academics in the City of Gaziantep, Turkey**

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by

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Academics in the City of Gaziantep, Turkey**

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Abstract

The war and ongoing crisis in Syria have compelled thousands of academics to flee their homeland, confronting them with severe hardships in exile. These challenges have undermined multiple aspects of their academic identity and skills, eroding the substantial human capital they represent and limiting their potential contributions to the reconstruction of higher education in Syria and the stabilisation of their communities inside and outside the country. Despite the severity and urgency of these challenges, and growing interest in Syrian academics' predicament among international scholars, there remains a shortage of studies conducted by Syrian academics themselves.

In this study, writing as an exiled Syrian academic, I offer an insider's perspective into the situation of Syrian academics in exile in Gaziantep, Turkey, a city located close to the Syrian border and home to the largest concentration of displaced Syrians in Turkey.

This qualitative research study adopts a constructivist paradigm and utilises a case study methodology, guided by Robert Stake's (1995) perspective. Insights are drawn from individual semi-structured interviews (n=24), three focus group discussions (n=23), and continuous participant observation. The findings reveal the impacts of the participants' academic journeys on their current strengths and limitations, highlighting a broad spectrum of both academic and non-academic assets and needs. Additionally, my research underscores the absence of a cohesive academic community among Syrian academics in Gaziantep and articulates their aspirations and proposals to build and nurture such a community. Furthermore, it points out the scarcity of support from the academic community in the host country and the international academic sphere, with some notable exceptions.

The study highlights the critical need for targeted initiatives that leverage the assets of Syrian academics in exile and address their specific needs, thereby preserving their intellectual capital and facilitating their ongoing contributions to academia and society. It provides essential insights for key stakeholders, including policymakers, educational organisations, and funding agencies, enabling them to make informed decisions and develop more effective support strategies. These insights are crucial not only for Syrian academics but also for addressing the broader challenges faced by academics in similar situations worldwide. Finally, I present some workshop tools and frameworks, informed directly by the findings of this research, for strategic planning and community-building with displaced or otherwise marginalised academic communities.

Keywords: Academic Development, Academic Community Development, Syrian Academics in Exile

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Chapter 1: Introduction

While academic development is a key focus within many well-resourced higher education institutions in the global North (Parkinson, et al., 2020), the situation differs dramatically in resource-scarce environments, particularly in exile contexts where numerous academics find themselves unaffiliated with any academic institution. Fostering the academic development of Syrian academics in exile is a crucial endeavour due to the significant intellectual capital they hold and the essential role they could play in reconstructing Syria's higher education landscape. Nonetheless, navigating the complexities of academic development in exile poses profound challenges.

This research sets out to provide a comprehensive exploration of the experiences of Syrian academics living in exile in Gaziantep, Turkey. It aims to identify their assets and needs, as well as the strategies they employ to maintain and advance their academic skills, knowledge, identities, and careers. Furthermore, it investigates their engagement within their academic community, exploring how these interactions can aid in their academic development endeavours. The findings of this study shed light on the unique and little-understood situations of these academics and inform the creation of tailored support strategies that both leverage their collective and individual strengths and adequately address their unique needs.

In this introductory chapter, I will provide a brief summary of the study's background, define the research problem, lay out the objectives and research questions, highlight its significance, acknowledge its limitations, and give a concise overview of the thesis structure.

1.1- Research Background

Following the Second World War, the global North experienced a significant expansion of higher education, spurred by socio-economic changes and the recognition of education's crucial role in promoting economic growth and social progress (Robbins, 1963; Trow, 1973). This period of growth in education highlighted the indispensable value of educated citizens to a society's ability to recover and progress. Robbins (1963) vividly illustrated this importance, stating:

If a series of nuclear explosions were to wipe out the material equipment of the world but the educated citizens survived, it need not be long before former standards were reconstituted; but if it destroyed the educated citizens, even though it left the buildings and machines intact, a period longer than the Dark Ages might elapse before the former position was restored (p. 205).

This assertion underscores the necessity of the academic development field, which emerged to support faculty and improve educational quality and outcomes, thereby ensuring that the fabric of society remains robust through its educated populace (Marginson, 2016; Ouellett, 2010).

Over the last five to six decades, there has been a dynamic evolution in the field of academic development, especially within countries possessing rich resources. This evolution is manifested in a diverse range of practices across educational institutions, with the extent and diversity of this field set to be explored in depth in Chapter 3. The terminology used to describe academic development varies, including phrases such as 'faculty development', 'educational development', and 'instructional development' (Parkinson et al., 2020). Prominent institutions in this field, such as the UK's Advance HE

(formerly known as the 'Higher Education Academy'), have designed their practices and outputs to suit the academic landscape of the regions they serve. They provide targeted support tailored to the distinct requirements of individuals, academic communities, and higher education institutions within these specific environments (Abdulkerim et al., 2022; Parkinson et al., 2020).

In contrast, the landscape in many global South countries is markedly different. The UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report points out that, despite improvements in primary and secondary education accessibility in these countries, tertiary education faces persistent obstacles (UNESCO, 2019), and there is a notable absence of academic development frameworks, specialised facilities, or dedicated personnel equivalent to those prevalent in resource-rich nations. The challenges intensify in regions affected by conflict and post-conflict conditions, where the redirection of financial resources and focus towards security-related endeavours often comes at the expense of essential sectors, including education. This shift in priorities can severely impact higher education, leaving it resource-starved, which in some cases leads to its decline or outright failure (Bakarat & Milton, 2015).

The circumstances surrounding Syrian academics in exile present a particularly daunting challenge for academic development efforts. The ongoing crisis in Syria, which began in 2011, has compelled millions to flee the country, seeking refuge abroad, including over 2000 academics (King, 2016). Turkey has been home to the largest number of Syrian refugees, reaching around 3.7 million by the end of 2019 (UNHCR, Turkey) . Among these refugees are (at least) many hundreds of Syrian academics who have found themselves scattered across various Turkish cities. Notably, Gaziantep,

situated near the Syrian border in Turkey's south, has emerged as a pivotal hub for these displaced scholars, prompting me to delve into their distinctive case.

1.2- Research Problem

While exiled academics hold the potential to significantly influence the reconstruction of higher education systems, thereby contributing to the stabilisation and rehabilitation of communities devastated by conflict (Millican, 2018), their professional development needs often go unaddressed. This neglect is notably critical among Syrian academics exiled in Turkey, where their unique insights and experiences have not received the attention they warrant in scholarly discourse. Parkinson et al. (2018) highlighted this oversight, stressing the scarcity of "first-hand accounts from within the Syrian academic community" (p. 4), which are invaluable for fully grasping the scope and impact of this situation.

This gap underscores the urgent necessity for specialised research spearheaded by exiled Syrian scholars themselves. Such research would illuminate the complexities of their circumstances, bring their narratives and perspectives to the forefront, assess their strengths and needs, and pave the way for more effective support programmes. Such programmes are crucial for preserving the intellectual capital of these scholars, fostering the growth and development of their skills, and empowering them to make significant contributions to their fields of study, their host communities, their countries of origin—when conditions permit—and to the broader human society.

1.3- Research Objectives and Questions

To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the case of Syrian academics in exile in Gaziantep, Turkey, I have set the following five objectives:

- 1) To explore the experiences of Syrian academics living in exile in Gaziantep, Turkey.
- 2) To examine the collective and individual strengths, needs, and academic development strategies employed by Syrian academics living in Gaziantep.
- 3) To explore the dynamics and interrelations within this specific academic community, assessing how such interactions could contribute to academic development efforts.
- 4) To evaluate the support provided by both the academic community of the host country and the wider international academic community to these scholars, identifying any existing gaps.
- 5) To propose recommendations for the Syrian academics in exile, the host country's academic community, and the international academic sphere.

To accomplish these objectives, my study is guided by the following three central questions:

- 1) How do Syrian academics in exile in Gaziantep, Turkey, develop their academic skills, careers, and expertise? What are their specific needs and assets in this context?
- 2) How do Syrian academics in Gaziantep, Turkey, foster mutual support and collaboration within their academic community?
- 3) In what ways can the international academic community and organisations focused on higher education effectively support exiled Syrian academics?

1.4- Research Significance

Drawing on my own experience as a Syrian academic in exile—which I detail in Chapter Two— I offer an emic perspective that introduces a unique and largely underexplored viewpoint, filling a conspicuous void in this area of study. My background encompasses my tenure as a lecturer at Aleppo University, actively involved in Syria's higher education sector before the 2011 conflict, alongside first-hand experience of the war's multifaceted impacts and a decade of living in exile in Gaziantep.

To more effectively harness this emic perspective, I incorporate an autoethnographic element in my research, weaving my personal narratives, emotions, experiences, perspectives, values, and beliefs into the fabric of the thesis. By doing so, I not only bring depth and authenticity to the analysis but also provide a richer, more nuanced understanding of the phenomena I study. As Adams and Herrmann (2023) argued, this method enables a deeper connection between the researcher and the subject matter, fostering insights that might otherwise remain obscured.

My extensive background has endowed me with an intimate understanding of my fellow academics' situations, and has shaped the design and execution of my research. My insider perspective ensures that the study accurately captures the essence of their experiences, amplifies their often-unheard voices, and generates rich data aimed at achieving the research objectives.

Moreover, the findings from my research have broader applicability, potentially benefiting academics in various challenging conditions worldwide. This scope could include scholars navigating conflict, post-conflict, or exile situations; academic groups facing marginalisation due to socio-political or economic hurdles; and academics under

oppressive regimes. The gleaned insights could deepen our comprehension of those complex challenges, refine stakeholder approaches, spotlight viable solutions, and ultimately contribute to devising and executing more impactful support programmes.

1-5- Research Limitations

In this qualitative research, I adopt a constructivist philosophy and utilise a 'case study' methodology informed by Robert Stake's (1995) perspective. This approach is not designed to produce statistically generalisable findings; rather, case study research offers deep insight into bounded, local contexts which may be transferable to other, comparable contexts.. Additionally, the depth of this research is one of its major strengths; however, it is designed with a broader view and, as such, does not engage with detailed analyses of particular variables, such as gender-specific or discipline-related variations, which lie outside its targeted scope.

Furthermore, due to the subjectivist nature of my research, I acknowledge both my biases as researcher and the biases of my research participants. This position has influenced the design and implementation of my research, impacting the manner in which I have approached the analysis, interpretation, and presentation of the findings (I discuss my positionality and my research paradigm in detail in Chapter 5).

My research also encounters a limitation in its primary design as a cross-sectional study, which collects data at a single point in time, primarily through interviews and focus group discussions. Despite incorporating a minor, unconventional longitudinal component via continuous participant observation and reflective analysis of the experiences of Syrian academics in Gaziantep, this approach does not facilitate the tracking of changes and trends over an extended duration. Moreover, the geographical scope of the research is

confined to Gaziantep. While the findings may mirror the experiences of Syrian academics in other parts of Turkey or in different countries, further research with a wider geographical reach would be required to substantiate or challenge these parallels.

1.6- Thesis Structure

The structure of my thesis is organised into ten chapters. Chapter One has offered an introduction to the thesis, briefly described the research background, defined the research problem, stated the research objectives and questions, highlighted the study's significance, acknowledged limitations and outlined the structure of the thesis. Chapter Two provides a thorough overview of Syria's higher education landscape before and after the 2011 crisis, drawing on both existing literature and my own experiences as a Syrian academic. It investigates the journeys of Syrian academics during these times and their subsequent experiences in exile. After effectively establishing the study's context, the chapter concludes with a conceptual framework that underpins the research. Chapter Three is the first of two literature reviews, and focuses on the domain of academic development. It discusses the historical evolution of academic development in well-resourced countries, outlines its scope and boundaries, and examines its manifestation in contexts of resource scarcity, conflict, post-conflict environments, and exile scenarios. Chapter Four explores the concept of academic development as community development, proposing it as an alternative to the traditional institution-based approaches prevalent in resource-rich, stable contexts. The chapter begins by examining foundational definitions before exploring various theories and approaches related to community development. It then transitions to an analysis of academic communities across different contexts, from stable environments to those affected by conditions of conflict and exile.

Chapter Five introduces the research methodology, structured around the 'research onion' model proposed by Saunders et al. (2023). It explains the qualitative approach of the study, grounded in constructivist philosophy and employing Robert Stake's (1995) case study strategy. The chapter further details the data collection methods, which include participant observation, interviews, and group discussions, and describes the process of data interpretation using thematic analysis. Chapters Six through Nine detail the research findings. Chapter Six delves into the academic backgrounds of the participants, exploring their narratives on how various phases of their journeys have influenced and shaped their academic trajectories. The next three chapters are each devoted to addressing a distinct research question. Each chapter concludes with an in-depth discussion section that not only interprets the findings but also aims to provide contributions to the field. Chapter Seven explores the needs, assets, and academic development practices of the participants. Chapter Eight investigates the community aspect, delving into participants' collective dynamics and how these relationships influence academic development efforts. Chapter Nine examines the support extended to Syrian academics in Gaziantep by both Turkish and international academic communities. Chapter Ten concludes the thesis, underscoring the answers to the three primary research questions and the achievement of the study's objectives. It provides a summary of the key findings, offers recommendations, highlights the contributions of the research, and acknowledges its limitations.

Chapter 2: Context

In this chapter, I will provide a comprehensive overview of the context of my study, tracing the journey of Syrian academics prior to 2011, analysing the impacts of the 2011 crisis on their personal and professional lives, and delving into their experiences in exile in Turkey. Drawing on my insider perspective, I will incorporate an autoethnographic method to augment this detailed exploration with my personal accounts and reflections. This approach will offer a nuanced depiction that deepens the understanding of the study's scope and findings. At the end of this chapter, I will introduce the conceptual framework that forms the foundation of the entire study.

2.1- Syrian Higher Education Pre-2011

In this section, I draw on my first-hand experiences as both a student and lecturer within Syria's higher education system to describe the landscape prior to 2011. Additionally, I will explore the broader literature, which is often limited and sanitised. Moreover, I will give special attention to *The State of Higher Education in Syria Pre-2011* (Dillabough et al., 2019). This report was a collaborative effort by the University of Cambridge, the Council for At-Risk Academics (Cara), the British Council, and a group of Syrian academics. It offers valuable insights into the academic conditions and challenges of that era.

I will approach this chapter through the lens of Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, which depicts the domination enforced by ruling bodies through ideological and cultural means. In his theory, Gramsci (2011) described how dictators use social and educational institutions to influence the values, beliefs, norms, and worldviews of those

whom they govern. Therefore, I will examine the impact of the Assad regime's hegemonic practices on the different aspects of Syria's higher education.

Syria was part of the Ottoman Empire until World War I, when the French and British governments agreed on the post-war division of the region through the Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916 (Lesch, 2019). This placed Syria under the French Mandate between 1920 and 1946. After independence, Syria entered a period of relative political liberty with a free parliament and presidential elections. However, the whole region was unstable, and the post-colonial powers had their influence on all the newly emerged Arab States. As a result, Syria went through a series of military coups, the last of which took place in 1970 by Hafez Al-Assad.

A new chapter in Syria's history started with the Al-Assad family, which has been governing the country for the past 50 years. Hafez Al-Assad came to power in November 1970 through a military coup; in 1971, he was 'elected' president. Since then, the country, with all its resources, has been utilised to benefit the ruling family and their supporters. There has been no law other than what this authoritarian regime dictates. Their intelligence apparatuses control all aspects of life. Anyone who dares to disagree can be detained and tortured to death without a trial. Corruption runs deep everywhere in the country. It was easier for corrupt people to get higher governmental positions. The structural conditions that support this culture of nepotism can be understood in terms of cultural hegemony, as outlined by Gramsci (2011), who argued that ruling classes could get people's consent and support by spreading ideologies, norms, and values that serve the rulers' interests. Through the power of ideology, ruling classes can formulate people's worldviews and convince them that the dictator's interests are just and legitimate.

This concept of 'cultural hegemony' explains how some political projects rule more effectively than others; they embed consent within coercion (Salem, 2021). The Al-Assad regime has realised the importance of educational institutions in getting people's tacit agreement. Therefore, to have an iron grip on society and get people's support, it has worked hard to instil its ideology and enforce its power at all levels of education. Pizzolato and Holst (2017) argued that "every relationship of 'hegemony' is necessarily an educational relationship" (p. 17).

When a six-year-old enters primary school in Syria, they will be automatically enrolled in 'Al Ba'ath Vanguard', where they learn to glorify the ruling party and its sacred leader who 'will lead forever', and to hate the West and Imperialism who are depicted as the root of evil and the source of injustice, poverty, and wars.

These programmes, such as the Al-Baath Vanguard Programme, are seen by many as a way of enshrining, through education, the importance of the central political party and government, and of maintaining, in different education sectors, the compliance of students and academics. Activities in these programmes, which had vast membership, pertained to party loyalty and linked young people's education to Syrian political aims (Dillabough et al., 2019. p.29).

Every morning, no matter how bad the weather is, children have to stand in the schoolyard and recite Al-Ba'ath Party's mottos. Curricula are designed to serve the party's ideology. No one dares even to think differently. Once, in a 'nationalism' class¹, I asked my teacher about the coup of 1970. My teacher, whose face turned red, looked at me

¹ Nationalism classes are mandatory in Syrian schools to promote the ideology of the Al-Baath Party. These classes teach the party's principles, its views on Syrian nationalism, and its broader views on the Arab world, aiming to align students' political and social outlooks with the party's ideals.

angrily and said, “It was NOT a coup”. He shouted, “Follow me!” while storming out of the classroom. I, trembling in fear, followed him to the corridor; he looked at me furiously and said, “Look, I know that you don’t mean what you have just said, and I know that you come from a well-known, respected family; but if you say such a stupid thing again, I can’t overlook it, and I can’t protect you.”

According to Gramscian interpretations of hegemony, dominant powers usually dictate cultural norms that serve to reinforce themselves, and people born into these cultures often view the normalised state of the world around them as “nature” rather than “culture”. This means that they are more likely to accept the status quo rather than try to resist it. They take these norms as what Gramsci calls “common sense” and live with it (Daldal, 2014). For instance, if a tornado or an earthquake hits an area and destroys hundreds of houses, making thousands of people suffer and causing high death tolls, people would not get angry at the tornado because it is just a manifestation of “nature” that is inevitable. The same applies to those ruled by hegemonic powers; they would embrace the ideas and values of their rulers and view the dreadful living conditions imposed on them as “nature” and would not resist them. They may even oppose any calls for freedom because those calls can tamper with the “common sense” of life.

Syria’s educational institutions—along with the other social, economic, and religious institutions in the country—played a vital role in submitting the rest of society to the dictator’s agenda. The leaders of those institutions were appointed by the Assad regime and functioned as deputies to that regime, pushing people to follow the interests of the ruling class.

Wedeen (2015) examined how the Assad regime wielded symbolic power to compel citizens into participating in rituals and public displays of loyalty, even when such displays were overtly absurd. She argued that these state-sponsored rituals—such as public speeches, rallies, and ceremonies—were designed to reinforce the regime's authority. Whether participation was voluntary or coerced, it fed into a broader system of control maintained through a combination of fear and coercion. Additionally, Wedeen explored the cult of personality surrounding Hafez al-Assad, showing how the regime employed his image and the mythologising of his persona not only for glorification but also as a strategic tool to instil fear and ensure consent and compliance among the populace.

I still remember the dozens of marches I was forced to participate in along with tens—and sometimes hundreds—of thousands of other people (students, teachers, and government employees among others) holding up pictures of the ‘immortal leader’ and banners praising his wise, exceptional, and inspiring character. The majority of people saw those practices as “common sense”. By glorifying the Assad family, people thought they defended their homeland and reinforced their own national, patriotic identity. Pizzolato and Holst (2017) discussed how individuals, by focusing on their self-interests and the advantages provided by the existing system, can unintentionally uphold cultural hegemony. Often, this leads them to sustain the status quo through their compliance with established structures.

In intermediate schools, students move automatically to the ‘Revolutionary Youth Union’ and start studying military education as an essential curriculum component. Even

the school uniform is military in colour and style. During this period, students are registered as members of the Al-Ba'ath Party, whether they like it or not.

Secondary schools follow the same procedures. After that, students start the difficult, complicated and highly competitive process of applying for universities. University admissions are also affected by a student's rank in the Al-Ba'ath Party. The effect can vary from adding extra scores to the student's GPA to having some seats or scholarships reserved for the Party. In this stage, students become members of the 'National Union of Syrian Students', also dominated by the Party and the intelligence apparatuses.

In 2000, when the 'Immortal Leader' died, I was a first-year student at Aleppo University. I was delighted and naively optimistic that our country would, at last, get rid of that dictator regime. I dared to express my happiness in front of some colleagues who got frightened and said, "Don't you know that walls have ears?" Students and university staff who were close to the regime got armed. Universities stopped functioning, and our exams were interrupted. The parliament convened and, in less than five minutes, altered the country's constitution to better suit the new 'inspiring' leader, Bashar Al-Assad, heir to the 'throne' of the Syrian Republic.

Gramsci argued that education might leave some blind spots, rendering people unaware of the options available to them. Consequently, they unknowingly consent to the dominance of prevailing powers, perpetuating the existing state of affairs (Pizzolato & Holst, 2017). Before the proliferation of the Internet and social media, Syrian students knew relatively little about the outside world. Textbooks were often outdated, and teaching styles depended mainly on rote learning and repeating the lecturers' ideas without

questioning, arguing, or debating. Syria's higher education was entirely under the control of the hegemonic ruling power. *The State of Higher Education in Syria Pre-2011* report, which took inputs from 19 displaced Syrian academics and conducted 117 interviews with academics and students in both regime- and non-regime-controlled areas, found that:

One enduring theme, perhaps the most prominent, was the role of the Syrian National Security Services in constraining HE reform and undermining transparency and fairness across the sector. There was also widespread agreement about the problems caused by ruling-party interventions in university decision-making, especially in the process of student admissions, staff appointments, and fellowship and scholarship awards. (Dillabough et al., 2019. p.7)

All institutions in Syria were designed to serve the ruling power's interests. Our universities, courts, unions, syndicates, organisations, ministries, and directorates all were controlled by the dictator and his police state.

The police grip of the new dictator was looser than his father's. However, corruption increased. Before 2001, we had only four universities in Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, and Latakia; the remaining ten governorates had none. Students of those governorates, in addition to those from rural areas all around Syria, suffered a lot to access higher education.

For the past 20 years, there have been 4 state-funded universities in Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, and Tishrin. A 5th has just been set up in Deirezzor. There are also 192 intermediate institutes² under the Vocational Education and Training

² Intermediate institutes are two-year post-baccalaureate programmes. They offer education in some fields such as engineering, commerce, tourism, agriculture, and so on.

Directorate of the Ministry of Higher Education. Of these, 34 are under the direct control of the Ministry of Higher Education, the rest are controlled by 17 different ministries (Hardy & Munns, 2007, p. 19).

Many families in other cities or remote towns and villages could not afford to send their children to study at those four universities. The situation was more challenging for female students who were forced to leave their studies or apply for an intermediate institute if there is one in their region. Another option was to choose a “theoretical” major in which attendance was not compulsory. Thousands of students visited universities only to take exams. I know many people who graduated without attending a single lecture. Hardy and Munns (2007, p. 19) stated, “humanities courses have so many students that self-study is the norm, with maybe 10 percent of students attending lectures”. In 2012, the Faculty of Arts and Humanities had about 54000 undergraduate students. I attended lectures with more than 400 students in the same auditorium and, later, had similar numbers of students at my lectures.

Each university had some student accommodation, which—despite its poor quality, low level of sanitation, and crowded rooms—was a dream to thousands of students whose families had to find the right person to bribe at the beginning of each academic year so that their sons’ and daughters’ names could appear on the approved lists.

This situation began to change a little in 2001 when the government started a set of reforms in higher education. For example, the Legislative Decree No.36 of 2001 allowed the formation of private universities.

The landscape of higher education in Syria has been transformed since the turn of this century. Up to 2001 there were only four public universities, until new

legislation paved the way for private universities and a five-fold expansion of the sector over the next decade. By 2011, 16 out of 20 licensed private universities were operational, with the establishment of the public Syrian Virtual University in 2002 and a new public university in Deir ez-Zor in 2007. (Dillabough et al., 2019. p.11)

Then, in 2006, the University Regulation Law—Legislative Decree No. 6— was introduced, which gave universities more autonomy, and the general situation of higher education tended to improve a little. Public university lecturers received a significant pay raise and were also permitted to teach at private universities concurrently. However, the corrupt practices and the control of the intelligence apparatuses continued. Anyone who applied to teach at a university needed to go through a long process of inspections carried out by those entities. Regardless of who they were, individuals could be subjected to humiliation, detention, torture, or even execution, without any trial or through a sham proceeding.

Hardy and Munns (2007) explained that “the education process [in Syria] is driven by political and not market needs.” The photos of the ‘great, exceptional, new immortal leader’ were everywhere at universities: in each office, each classroom and auditorium. Entrenched networks of corruption tightly controlled scholarships, appointments, promotions, and opportunities. Academics’ tasks were mainly focused on teaching and learning; research was not essential and “was not normally viewed as the role of academics. Separate institutions undertook research in specific areas identified by the government” (Dillabough et al., 2019. p.8).

Exams were the main, and in many cases the only, assessment tool. Levels of transparency regarding students' scores were relatively low. Students did not have any way to question their test scores which often depended on the lecturers' moods. Failing tests was widely common among university students and was encouraged by faculty administrators to keep the numbers of graduates as low as possible in order not to put more pressure on the already struggling labour market. After adopting the style of the multiple-choice questions, higher numbers of students managed to pass the exams:

Assessment is hugely difficult given the numbers. The use of multiple-choice essay questions emphasizes the difficulty— that is, there is not enough time to mark student essays. Students are allocated to subjects according to their baccalaureate marks rather than demand. Teaching is often of poor quality (Hardy & Munns, 2007, p. 19).

2.2- The Syrian Revolution of 2011

In 2011, Syria had been under martial law for about half a century—since the repressive Ba'ath regime seized power in a military coup in 1963. Syrian people, who had been deprived of their fundamental rights for decades, saw an opportunity in the anti-authoritarian uprisings that took place all over the region in the so-called Arab Spring. However, the Assad regime believed that the hegemonic power it had imposed on Syrians for years and the ideology it had instilled in the citizens' mindset would prevent them from rebelling against it. In his interview with *The Wall Street Journal* in January 2011, Bashar al-Assad admitted that many Syrians faced economic challenges, and that political reform had been slow. However, he expressed confidence that Syria would be unaffected by unrest, as his administration's resistance to the United States and Israel aligned with the

beliefs of the Syrian people, unlike the pro-Western foreign policies of leaders who had already been overthrown, which went against their citizens' sentiments. (Lesch, 2018).

However, a few weeks after that interview, the uprisings began. The revolution emerged from the grassroots, particularly among teenagers and young adults in their twenties and thirties, drawing inspiration from the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. Peaceful protesters hit the streets across the country, asking for significant reforms and more freedoms. The Assad regime responded violently with mass arrests and firing at the demonstrators (Kahf, 2013).

The Assad regime used excessive violence against demonstrators and anyone who helped them. Security forces used to attack demonstrations, kill dozens, and arrest many more. On the next day, they would attack martyrs' funerals to kill and arrest even more people. By 2012, the Free Syrian Army had been formed to protect the peaceful demonstrations and prevent the killing and arresting of protesters. Then, tens – and sometimes hundreds – of thousands of people started participating in each demonstration singing and dancing while chanting anti-regime mottos.

Large numbers of university students joined the revolution since its early days. Like other Syrians, they dreamed of a free country where they could speak up and get their human rights. They played a wide variety of crucial roles during that period. Some were leading figures who worked on organising demonstrations and mobilising crowds. They utilised various mobile apps to disseminate information about the location and timing of the upcoming demonstration to their immediate circles of acquaintances. Then the circle would get bigger and bigger to include thousands of protesters. Others filmed the protests and leaked the videos to international media channels. Some worked on documenting the

names and details of martyrs who were shot in each demonstration. Additionally, particularly those studying in medical fields, teamed up to offer health care to the injured. Basel Aslan and Mus'ab Barad, who were my students and friends at the same time, were detained along with a third friend, Hazem Batikh, by Air Force Intelligence in 2012. They were tortured and burned alive just for helping injured demonstrators. According to Amnesty International (2012):

The discovery of the charred and mutilated bodies of three young medical workers a week after their arrest in Aleppo city is yet further evidence of the Syrian government forces' appalling disregard for the sanctity of the role of medical workers, Amnesty International said today.

All three men were students at Aleppo University – Basel Aslan and Mus'ab Barad were fourth-year medical students and Hazem Batikh was a second-year English literature student and a first-aid medic.

They were part of a team of doctors, nurses and first-aiders who have been providing life-saving medical treatment in makeshift "field hospitals" set up to treat demonstrators shot by security forces and who could not therefore go to state-run hospitals for fear of being arrested, tortured or even killed.

They had been detained by Air Force Intelligence since their arrest in the city on 17 June.

"The brutal killing of these young medics who took great personal risk to rescue and treat injured protesters is yet more evidence that Syrian government forces are prepared to commit unspeakable crimes to silence dissent," said Donatella

Rovera, Amnesty International's senior crisis response adviser who recently returned from several weeks in Syria.

"As casualties from the current unrest have mounted, so President Bashar al-Assad's government has intensified its hunt for the wounded and for those who provide life-saving emergency treatment to them.

"Such violations are part of an increasingly entrenched pattern of crimes against humanity being perpetrated with impunity by Syrian government forces."

The three students' burned bodies were found in the early hours of 24 June in a burned-out car in the Neirab area of Aleppo's north-eastern outskirts.

Medical personnel who saw the bodies at the morgue told Amnesty International that Basel Aslan had a gunshot wound to the head and his hands were tied behind his back.

One leg and one arm were broken, several teeth missing and the flesh was missing from his lower legs, leaving the bone exposed. Some of his fingernails had been removed.

The bodies of the others were more heavily burned and also bore other wounds.

Amnesty International has seen images of the corpses that back up these descriptions.

The students' identity cards and university cards were found intact alongside their bodies, indicating that they had been left there after the bodies were burned.

A fourth, charred corpse found with the men has yet to be identified.

Shortly after the three students were arrested, one of their parents called their son's phone and an unidentified man reportedly answered, saying: "You don't know how to raise your son. We will teach him how to behave."

During their detention by Air Force Intelligence, their friends tried in vain to seek their release. Senior Air Force Intelligence officers – who allegedly had released detainees in exchange for bribes in the past – told their friends "to forget them" (Amnesty International, 2012).

Higher education in Syria, like all other aspects of life, endured severe hardships. As academics, we were perpetually under threat, scrutinised by the government due to our extensive networks with students and our significant potential to influence their viewpoints. Any show of support for the revolution risked detention, torture, or even death. Those among us who chose to participate in demonstrations often had to travel to remote neighbourhoods or other cities, taking care to conceal our identities to avoid being recognised.

To get to university, we needed to go through multiple checkpoints both outside and inside the campus. Shabiha (Assad-sponsored militias of thugs and gangsters) were at the main entrances and inside faculty buildings. They used to enter auditoriums and classrooms and interrupt lectures to arrest students while lecturers were completely helpless. Our students were much more courageous than us. I often felt we were cowards who could not help and let them down. Feelings of fear, wrath, frustration, and uncertainty were all mixed, and we wanted that brutal regime to collapse and leave our country at any cost.

Academics started leaving their jobs and either displaced internally or sought sanctuary in neighbouring countries and beyond. Thousands of students were either detained or wanted, so they left their studies hoping to resume them once the Assad regime was down. The few months that I thought I would spend away from my university when I left it in 2012 had extended to years of displacement and exile with no hope of a near return.

The situation kept deteriorating day after day. In January 2013, Aleppo University blasts killed more than 87 people, most of them students. Both the Assad regime and opposition factions blamed each other for the explosions. However, most university students blamed the attack on the Syrian government. A student with the pseudonym “Simon”, who was on campus at the bombing time, told CNN that he had heard a plane over head from a distance before the two blasts.

“Aleppo University is known as the university of the revolution,” Simon said. “We staged a peaceful protest last week, and this is why we were targeted. Our pro-government professors would always threaten us and say, ‘we swear we will shell this university’” (Fantz & Abdelaziz, 2013).

Two months later, more than 15 students were killed in mortar shelling at Damascus University, and the already bad security situation all over the country deteriorated more and more:

A mortar attack on the architecture school at the University of Damascus last week was the latest wound to what is left of Syrian higher education. Mortar shells slammed into the architectural school’s cafeteria, killing at least 10 students and

wounding 20. As is often the case in such attacks, the government and rebels are blaming each other (Faek, 2013).

The intensifying conflict severely crippled Syria's higher education, making it impossible for many students and academics to continue their university attendance. Some relocated internally to relatively safer towns in hopes of an improvement in conditions; others sought refuge in neighbouring countries. Meanwhile, some took extreme risks, boarding 'death boats' in search of safety in Europe and beyond.

2.3- Syrian Higher Education Post-2011

Since 2011, conditions in Syria have progressively deteriorated with each passing day. The revolution that started as peaceful demonstrations asking for fundamental human rights gradually turned into a fierce armed conflict that tore the country apart. With the first uprisings in the country, the Syrian regime started propaganda depicting the revolution as a sectarian conflict; released Jihadists from prisons—knowing that they would play a vital role in enhancing those claims; and got backup support from tens of Shiite militias coming from Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, and Afghanistan among others. Later, the most effective support came from Russia with its state-of-the-art destructive weapons and effective 'Vetoes' in the United Nations Security Council. In his article *Sectarianism and Conflict in Syria*, Christopher Phillips (2015) made it clear that the Syrian regime actively manipulated the conflict to steer it towards its current trajectory: "The greatest responsibility for sectarianising the conflict lies with the regime. Bashar al-Assad used excessive violence against the peaceful opposition seemingly to provoke them into a war that his better-armed military would probably win" (p. 369).

On the other hand, the armed opposition factions started getting financial support from different regional and international countries, and Jihadists from all corners of the world went to Syria. The international community observed carefully as that ‘mousetrap’ attracted more and more extremists who established their terrorist state, the so-called ‘Islamic State in Iraq and Sham’ (ISIS). Then the United States, with its allies, started fighting those extremists and supporting some factions mainly led by Kurds in northeast Syria. Consequently, the conflict turned into a proxy war that increased the sufferings of all Syrians—regardless of their affiliations or attitude towards the war.

Some universities, such as Al Ba’ath University in Homs and Al Furat University in Deir-ez-Zor, were completely closed for long periods due to the conflict; their students were asked to relocate and attend some of the other universities that were still running.

The Syrian conflict with its direct and indirect impacts have dismantled Syria’s higher education; eroded its infrastructure—with hundreds of facilities destroyed, looted, or turned into makeshift military bases; forced thousands of students and academics to leave their universities and either displace internally or seek refuge abroad; and left a lot of academics—like many other Syrians—dispossessed of their properties, with physical and mental disorders and difficult-to-heal psychological traumas (Milton & Barakat, 2016).

Currently, the Syrian higher education in the different parts of Syria is highly politicised, and universities are enormously impacted by the various actors controlling the different parts of the torn-out country.

Syria’s major universities (Damascus, Aleppo, Al-Ba’ath in Homs, and Tishreen in Latakia) are in the regime-controlled areas. They are still functioning despite their complicated situations. However, the already suffering teaching and learning quality has

deteriorated even more due to the continuing exodus of academic faculty, security challenges, deeper politicisation levels of higher education, economic pressures, and many other factors. Dillabough et al. (2015) highlighted:

Teaching styles after 2011 were described pejoratively as 'traditional and theoretical', and 'prosaic and poor', and while this was to a considerable extent the case prior to 2011, the drop in teaching quality has been aggravated by the loss of experienced qualified staff, the appointment of untrained newly graduated students, the need to second staff to teach subjects outside their area of specialisation, increasingly outdated curricula and texts, and the continued lack of applied opportunities (p 6).

A few public and private universities have been established in opposition-controlled areas since 2015. They, however, suffer from almost all the challenges faced by universities in the regime-controlled areas added to the lack of funding and recognition. Al-Ogla (2019) explained:

As the territory controlled by groups that oppose the Syrian government shrinks, the estimated 16,000 university students in those areas face increased financial, academic and security challenges. The chances they can finish their studies look dim. Along with having to worry that the buildings they study in may come under military attack, students find it difficult to pay for university tuition and transportation expenses. They know their degrees, if they get them, may have no official recognition.

Universities in northern Syria have different affiliations following the powers which control the regions they are located in: Free Aleppo University (affiliated to the Syrian

Interim Government - an alternative government formed by a coalition of opposition groups in 2013 and based in exile in Turkey); Idleb University (affiliated with the Syrian Salvation Government—formed late in 2017 by opposition forces in the liberated north of Syria as a civilian front to Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, which is internationally classified as a terrorist organisation); International Sham University (affiliated with the Turkish Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH)); Harran University (a Turkish public university that has opened a branch in al-Bab, north of Aleppo); Rojava University (in northeast Syria under the Kurdish-led administration); in addition to a few other private universities (Al-Ogla, 2019).

2.4- Syrians in Exile

The protracted crisis has forced millions of Syrians to leave the country and seek refuge in the neighbouring countries and beyond. According to the UNHCR Turkey, there are 5,687,133 registered Syrian refugees as of 07 Jan 2022. Most of them have lost all their possessions to the conflict, experienced multiple internal displacements, had family members and friends who were killed or detained during the war, lived under bombardment, witnessed armed clashes, and experienced various types of fear and oppression before leaving the country.

In their countries of exile, Syrian refugees face a lot of challenges such as language barriers, economic pressures, unrecognised qualifications, experiences of exclusion and discrimination in host communities, and uncertain futures. In addition, they are often deprived of the sense of belonging (İçduygu & Millet, 2016). They constantly miss their homes, cities, lost properties, fulfilling professional careers, and stable family

lives back in their countries. In his book *Reflections on Exile*, Edward Said (2000) considered being an exile as a kind of ‘orphanhood’:

Exiles look at non-exiles with resentment. *They* belong in their surroundings, you feel, whereas an exile is always out of place. What is it like to be born in a place, to stay and live there, to know that you are of it, more or less forever? (p. 143).

I have been exiled for more than eight years—which followed two years of internal displacement. Being internally displaced was very difficult, especially with the constant bombardment we experienced almost every day. Fierce, random air raids surprised us many times a day—while asleep at night, while shopping in the market, or while trying to do any type of work. There was no safe place in the whole town as military aeroplanes shelled everywhere, killing men, women, and children. Cluster bombs (big bombs that eject many smaller bomblets to kill the most significant number of people around) took the lives of many people in my neighbourhood. We never knew if we would be the target of the following raid or if we would live for another day. However, we did not feel uprooted; we were still in OUR country. When we left for Turkey, we thought it would be ‘temporary’, and we would soon go back. Deep inside, we feel lost; we are constantly waiting for something that we do not know what it is; nothing in our lives is inevitable. We encourage our children to integrate with the Turkish host community but keep reminding them that they are Syrians who have their own identity, homeland, language, culture, and heritage. Although I believe that our case is much more complicated than just ‘exile’, I find that Said’s (2000) words express part of what we feel:

Exile is never the state of being satisfied, placid, or secure. Exile, in the words of Wallace Stevens, is “a mind of winter” in which the pathos of summer and autumn

as much as the potential of spring are nearby but unobtainable. Perhaps this is another way of saying that a life of exile moves according to a different calendar, and is less seasonal and settled than life at home. Exile is life led outside habitual order. It is nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal; but no sooner does one get accustomed to it than its unsettling force erupts anew (p. 148).

More than 65% of Syrian refugees (3,736,925) are based in Turkey, where they experience multi-faceted sorts of challenges (İçduygu & Millet, 2016). They need to learn the Turkish language, get their qualifications recognised, find jobs, provide moral and financial support to their families, assist relatives who are still in Syria and face more complicated situations, keep in touch with family members who have sought refuge in different cities or countries, and integrate with the host community that does not often welcome them and sometimes consider them as a threat to the country's economy and culture. The temporary protection status³ held by many Syrians in Turkey restricts their movement and exacerbates the challenges they already face in their daily lives (İçduygu & Millet, 2016). Syrian refugees must obtain "a travel permission document from the Provincial Directorate of Migration Management if [they] wish to travel outside of [their] province of registration" (UNCHR Turkey). This makes all aspects of refugees' lives more difficult. Under the 'temporary protection', Syrian refugees in Turkey can access education and health services. However, unlike refugees in Europe, they do not get financial aid – except for vulnerable families who get some support through the 'EU-Funded

³ Temporary Protection Status (TPS) provides Syrians fleeing conflict with legal stay, protection from deportation, and access to healthcare and education. They may also apply for work permits, though there are restrictions, and must reside in the province where they are registered unless permitted otherwise. TPS grants essential rights but does not offer a pathway to permanent refugee status or citizenship (Kirişci, 2014).

Programme'. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the Turkish Red Crescent Society provide monthly assistance via debit cards—approximately €18 per person a month—to the most vulnerable refugees in Turkey under the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) programme (ReliefWeb, 2019). This means that Syrian refugees have to work hard and compete in unjust work conditions to afford the expensive living costs in Turkey and will need to assign extra time and money to learn the language and support their children and family members throughout this harsh experience.

In protracted crises⁴, like the Syrian conflict, dictators and other oppressive powers consider academics a threat; they suffocate their freedom, limit their influence, target them, or push them to leave. Boyd et al. (2009) explained that “when regimes are, or become, dictatorial, or where civil strife intensifies, those who ‘speak truth unto power’ through criticism, through pointing out alternative possibilities, or through upholding ethical standards – key academic duties – are all too likely to suffer job loss, imprisonment, torture or expulsion” (p. 53).

While there are no accurate statistics of the numbers of exiled Syrian academics, it is estimated that more than 2000 academics and a minimum of 100,000 university-qualified students have fled Syria to neighbouring countries or Europe since 2011 (Brooklings Institution, 2016). Those refugee academics face numerous challenges that include, but are not limited to, language barriers, unrecognised qualifications,

⁴ A protracted crisis is a long-lasting situation of conflict, instability, or disaster that spans years or decades, leading to persistent humanitarian needs, disrupted livelihoods, weak governance, and limited access to essential services. It involves chronic vulnerability and limited opportunities for recovery or sustainable development, often leaving affected populations in prolonged distress and dependence on aid (Crawford et al., 2022).

psychological trauma, and inability to find jobs in academia in their countries of domicile (Parkinson et al., 2020).

In his article, *'My life as a second-class human being': Experiences of a refugee academic*, Tejendra Pherali (2020) discussed the concept of 'refugee academics' with references to the struggles of Syrian scholars in exile: "In exile, their economic, social and political vulnerability constantly reminds them of their home, fulfilling professional career and stable family life back in Syria, which has been lost to the violent conflict" (p. 92). Pherali interviewed Mohammad, a Syrian academic exiled in Tuleeg (pseudonyms for the academic and the country) and drew upon his experiences as a refugee academic. Mohammad was "professionally well accomplished as a medical doctor, public health professional and academic researcher but suddenly found himself devoid of his political rights, personal freedom, professional dignity because of being a refugee." Like the majority of his refugee academics, he had never thought he would live his life as a 'second-class human being.' The 'refugee' identity overrides all other forms of identities a person might have and stigmatises them with inferiority and vulnerability. This 'refugee' label frustrates Mohammad because:

"...refugee is a downstream labelling. When you get this label, you automatically become inferior. Wherever you are, whatever you do. You are second to the counterpart. In this global system, you are put in a way that you are confronting the citizen. You are the enemy of the citizen. So, you are someone who needs assistance. It is not sort of sharing or collaborating. So, that's the problem. Academician is something second. Because it does not matter being an

academician because being a refugee already makes you a less worthy person” (Pherali, 2020, p. 94).

To Mohammad, being Syrian means that “uncertainty is a way of living”; your daily life is that of “a gladiator; you have to fight to survive” (Pherali, 2020, p. 94).

Syrian academics exiled in Turkey work hard to overcome the complex challenges and maintain their academic identity. It is never an easy task considering the complex political, legal, and social situation for Syrians in Turkey, many of whom do not have passports and lack proof of their academic qualifications. Moreover, getting their degrees qualified to the Turkish higher education system is often a lengthy and challenging process. In some cases, they can teach in the Arabic programmes of some universities like those in Mardin Artuklu University and Gaziantep University. However, if they are nominated to get Turkish citizenship, they need to either abandon their job or refuse citizenship because the moment they become Turkish citizens, they must start the complicated hiring process from the beginning.

In Gaziantep, the city where I live near the border with Syria, there is one of the largest Syrian refugee communities in Turkey. Large numbers of Syrian academics have opted to stay in this city for many reasons, one of which is that Gaziantep is home to a relatively large number of local and international humanitarian organisations, with whom they can find job opportunities and help those who are still suffering the outcomes of the conflict inside Syria. A minority have managed to find jobs in academia but still face lots of different challenges. Some work in educational institutions that lack formal accreditation, others need to teach in subject areas that are different from their own; still others who have to cross the border to Syria many times a week to teach in unrecognised

universities in opposition-controlled areas, such as Idlib University, Free Aleppo University, Ebla Private University, and International Sham University (Al-Ogla, 2019). Academics who teach there experience numerous safety and security risks. Most settings where Syrian academics in exile work, whether in Turkey or inside Syria, are poorly resourced and do not have established systems for quality control or staff development. Recruitment is often undertaken hastily, and staff are employed on insecure contracts or on an hourly basis. Many lack formal accreditation and are thus not subject to quality assurance criteria. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning is questionable. These factors have led to deterioration in the academic, professional and pedagogic knowledge and skills of Syrian academics exiled in Turkey. This has serious implications for the future of Syrian education and the prospects of future generations.

Exiled Syrian academics have plenty of assets that can play a vital role in rebuilding Syria's higher education and benefit their countries of exile and the international academic community in general. Said (2000) highlighted the importance of the unique perspectives that exile experiences can bring about: "most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that—to borrow a phrase from music—is contrapuntal" (p. 148).

Boyd et al. (2009) stressed the importance of maintaining the skills of exiled academics to rebuild their countries: "Germany was a world leader in scholarship before Hitler but never fully recovered its academic position." They also highlight the benefits that countries of exile can gain when they take care of academic refugees: "the USA,

Australia, Canada and the UK all gained immeasurably, as to a lesser extent did others” (p. 54).

Despite the strategic role that academics in exile can play in rebuilding higher education and, as a result, stabilising and promoting the recovery of conflict-affected communities (Millican, 2018), little has been done to meet the professional development needs of these academics; as noted, higher education is commonly deprioritised in conflict, and international support has largely been directed towards child education. Syrian academics feel neglected and cut off from the international academic community and “are frustrated by the lack of support they are receiving from the international community” (Parkinson et al., 2020, p. 186).

The Council for At-Risk Academics (Cara) stands out as one of the few organisations dedicated to supporting Syrian academics exiled in Turkey. Established in the UK in 1933, Cara initially dedicated its efforts to aiding academics facing persecution from the surge of Fascism. Over the years, its mission has evolved, providing assistance to at-risk scholars worldwide. Funded by international trusts and foundations, Cara develops and delivers supportive programs. Among these, the Cara Fellowship stands out, offering academics a sanctuary to further their research in secure settings (Brewer & Whiteside, 2019; Pherali, 2020). Since 2006, in response to the significant targeted attacks on academics, particularly in Iraq and subsequently Syria, Cara initiated Country Programmes. These programmes aim to support affected academics either within their native countries or in their countries of exile. Moreover, following 2015, Cara's initiatives garnered support from an expanding consortium of UK universities. Today, this network,

known as 'the Cara Scholars at Risk UK Universities Network', boasts a membership of 121 universities (Hanley, 2020). On its website, Cara asserts that:

What happens to them matters. Not just as individuals, important though that is; but because each and every one of them represents the future of higher education in their countries. Where people cannot speak, write, teach and meet, freely and without fear, education is compromised, truth is denied and lies become established. Where academics and scientists are killed or scattered to the four corners of the world, intellectual capital is lost and ruined societies cannot be rebuilt. Where higher education is destroyed, there will soon be no new teachers, no doctors, no architects, no lawyers. Young people will learn no skills. That country will suffer for generations. And the whole world will suffer with it (Cara, n.d.-a).

In response to the various challenges that exiled Syrian academics face, some organisations chose “to support academic communities in situ, in exile or in Syria. The Cara [Syria Programme] SP has focused on supporting academics exiled in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey through capacity-building activities.” (Parkinson et al., 2020, p. 186). Cara’s Syria Programme has five main work areas: English for Academic Purposes, Academic Development, Research Incubation Visits, Cara-Commissioned Research, and the Syrian Research Fellowship Scheme. These strands aim to address many academic needs on the individual and community levels.

A significant number of exiled Syrian academics engaged in Cara’s Syria Programme reside in Gaziantep, southern Turkey. This research centres on these academics, as well as other Syrian colleagues in the city who may not be part of Cara’s initiatives. With the appropriate frameworks and resources, they have the potential to

develop professionally and sustain their academic identities. My research focuses on comprehending their circumstances, evaluating their needs and assets, and exploring the strategies they use to support each other and sustain their academic community, even in the absence of institutional support. The findings of this study will enrich the international academic community and educational organisations with a deeper understanding of the complexities involved. These insights can enhance responses to similar challenges elsewhere and offer a model for academic community development under conditions of limited institutional or external assistance.

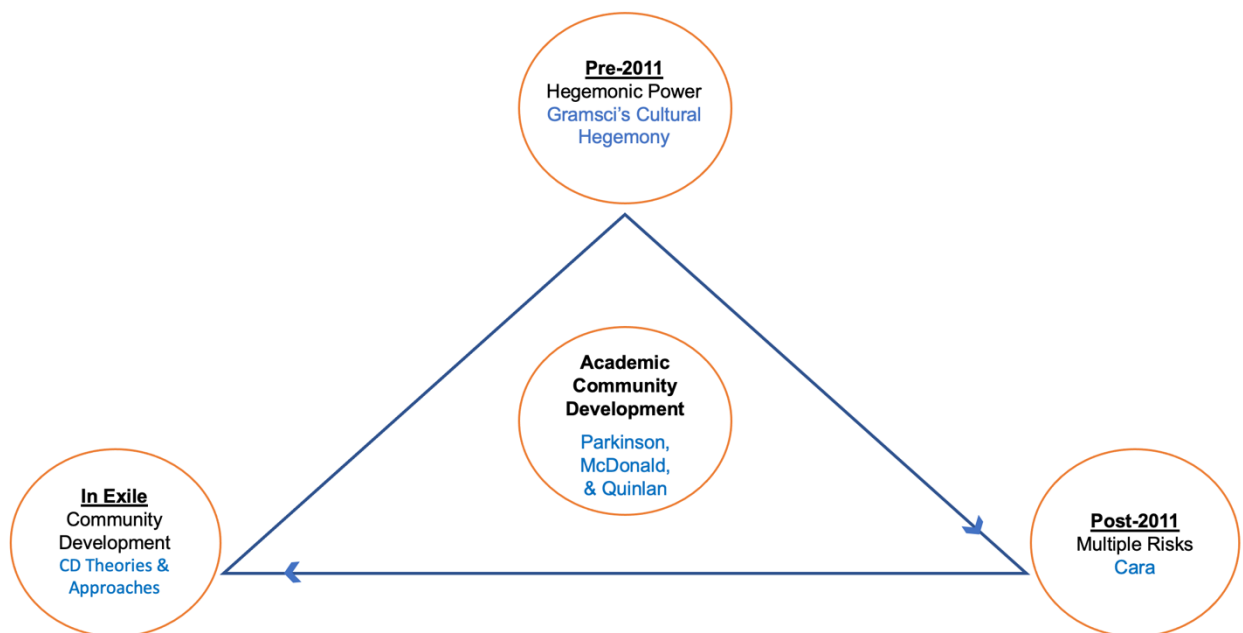
The conceptual framework guiding my research, depicted in Figure 1, aims to thoroughly understand the factors that have shaped the current situation of Syrian academics in exile in Gaziantep, Turkey. This framework examines their experiences prior to 2011 through Antonio Gramsci's (1985) concept of cultural hegemony, analysing how the authoritarian Syrian regime has affected their personal and professional lives. It further explores the onset of the 2011 crisis and its subsequent impact on their lives and academic careers. The analysis progresses chronologically, assessing their conditions in exile at both individual and community levels. The framework gives special attention to collective academic endeavours and community bonds, analysing them through the lens of various relevant theories and approaches to community development, as detailed in Chapter Four. Central to this framework is an innovative model proposed by Parkinson, McDonald, and Quinlan (2020), shown in Figure 2, which redefines academic development as a form of community development and explores viable alternatives to traditional academic advancement strategies, typically reliant on stable institutional settings. This is particularly significant for exiled Syrian academics, most of whom have

been unable to secure academic positions or maintain affiliations with formal institutions. In this context, designing professional development schemes within an academic community presents a viable alternative to conventional university-based approaches. Such community-driven strategies offer a pathway for these academics to continue their professional growth and contribute to academic discourse, despite the absence of stable organizational structures.

This comprehensive framework will underpin the entire study, serving as a crucial guide for interpreting research findings, developing proposed tools and models, and formulating targeted recommendations. It will provide a robust basis for analysing data and integrating theoretical insights with practical outcomes.

Figure 1

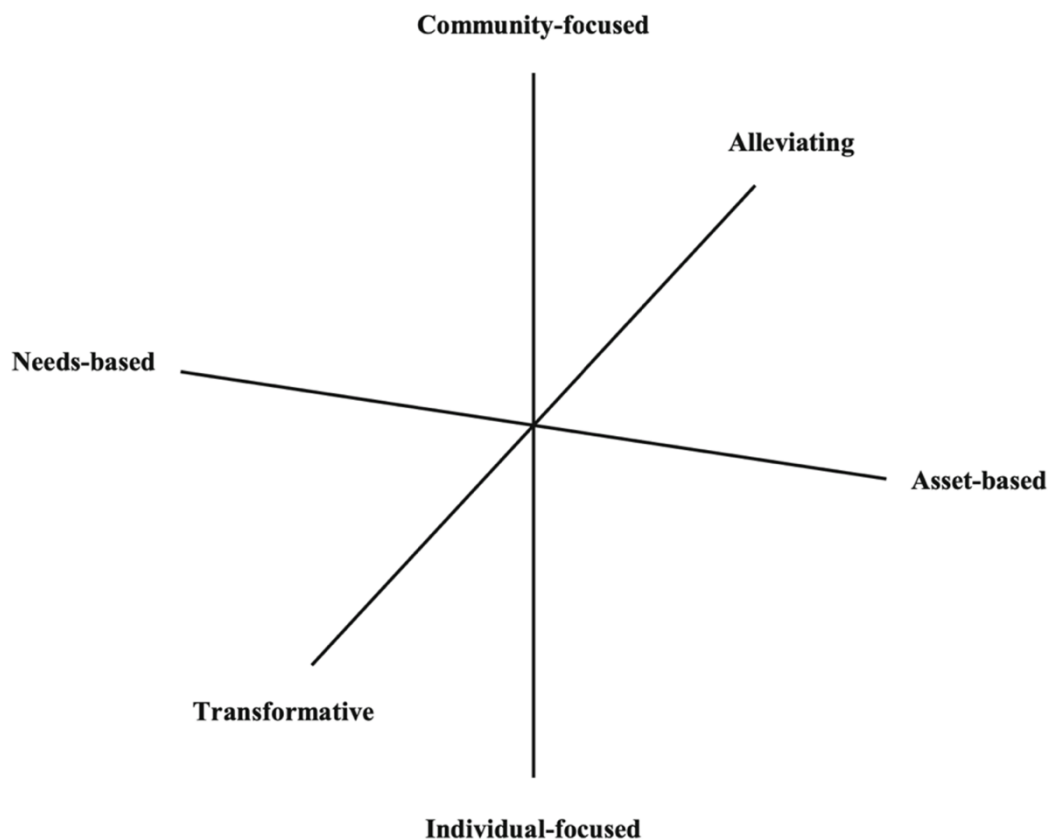
Conceptual Framework



I will dedicate the next two chapters to conducting a comprehensive literature review. Chapter 3 will explore the field of academic development, examining its history, scope, and applications across the Global North and South, as well as in conflict, post-conflict, and exile contexts. Chapter 4 will focus on reviewing the literature related to community development theories and approaches, assessing their relevance and potential applicability to the academic community of Syrian academics residing in Gaziantep, Turkey.

Figure 2

Dimensions of Academic Community Development



Note: From Parkinson, McDonald, and Quinlan (2020, p. 198).

Chapter 3: Literature Review—Academic Development

In this chapter, I embark on a comprehensive exploration of the literature centred around academic development. This encompasses its historical trajectory, its pivotal role in today's academic landscape, the value it imparts, and the potential tensions it might generate. I subsequently narrow my focus to the nuances of academic development in resource-constrained environments of the global South, shedding light on the intricate dynamics present in conflict-affected, post-conflict, and exile settings. Subsequently, I further probe the literature on community development, aiming for a profound understanding that enriches my insight into the experiences of Syrian academics living in exile in Turkey. This exploration is anchored in the conceptual framework outlined in Figure 1, ensuring a coherent interpretation and analysis of my data within the context of a comprehensive review of the relevant literature.

My introduction to academic development as a specialised field is a recent one. While working as a lecturer at Aleppo University from 2009 to 2012, I was unfamiliar with this discipline. Later, the Syrian crisis dramatically altered my path, compelling me, along with millions of other Syrians, to leave the country. In Turkey, numerous challenges faced us—Syrian academics—in our job search, including language barriers, lack of recognition for our qualifications and credentials, the constraints of living under temporary protection status, and limited vacancies in our fields of expertise. The only sector that welcomed educated Syrians in Turkey was the development sector. Humanitarian NGOs leveraged our deep contextual understanding, vast community networks, adaptability in skill development, and unwavering motivation to assist those affected by the protracted conflict, whether inside Syria or in exile. Along with many academic peers, I held onto the

belief that our time in exile was transitory, always hoping to retrace our steps back to our country, our universities, and the professional paths we had so diligently carved.

While my journey veered away from conventional academia, my enduring commitment to education led me to embrace roles in training, coaching, and organizational development within the humanitarian realm. It was comforting to realise that, even though I had drifted from my original academic persona, I remained an educator at heart. In 2019, Cara introduced me to a life-changing opportunity that took me to the University of Kent as a visiting academic on a research incubation visit. Here, I was welcomed into the Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE). Amidst an array of novel concepts and terminologies, I slowly grasped the pivotal role of this centre in fostering academic growth. The premise of academic development appealed deeply to me, seeming like a synthesis of my varied roles over the years. Though the Unit's name clearly emphasised 'learning and teaching,' I envisioned academic development as a comprehensive umbrella, encompassing teaching, research, governance, leadership, organisational culture, academic liberty, innovation, well-being, and more, reflecting the multifaceted nature of modern academia. However, as I delved into its scholarly depths, I was confronted with the intricate and ongoing discourse on defining the boundaries and essence of academic development.

3.1- Brief History of Academic Development

Examining the historical evolution of academic development reveals its emergence in response to the post-World War II transformations in the higher education landscape of the Global North. Socio-economic changes, coupled with the acknowledgment of education as a catalyst for economic advancement and social mobility, resulted in a

significant expansion of higher education. This growth transformed once-elite university systems into mass education systems, requiring universities to take on a broader range of new responsibilities and serve a much larger share of the university-age population than ever before (Martin Trow, 1973).

The major transformations in higher education prompted a re-evaluation of university functions and the roles of academic staff. Over time, a shared understanding emerged, emphasising that faculty roles should encompass more than just research, recognizing the importance of excellence in teaching and service. This shift was underscored by the human potential and student rights movements, prompting faculty members to advocate for a more encompassing definition of their responsibilities. As a result, the criteria for rewards such as tenure and promotions expanded to reflect this broader scope, highlighting the value of faculty dedicated to high-quality teaching alongside research (Marginson, 2016; Ouellett, 2010).

The myriad challenges confronting universities during that period spurred the establishment of academic development units, aimed at bolstering staff support and enhancing educational outcomes. Barrow and Grant (2012) highlighted the rise of those units in New Zealand universities in the 1960s and 1970s as a response to growing class sizes, staff shortages, and the need for teaching support.

The evolution of such units continues globally, especially in resource-rich nations, albeit under diverse names and with varying scopes. For instance, in the UK, The Dearing Report underscored the need for each higher education institution to provide professional development to its new teaching personnel, with the goal of enriching the student learning experience (Dearing, 1997; Thompson, 2019).

3.2- Scope and Boundaries of Academic Development

Academic development manifests differently across institutions, often reflecting varied terminologies such as faculty development, educational development, or instructional development (Parkinson et al., 2020). Its approaches range from formal to informal activities (Remmik et al., 2011) and may target individual or institutional enhancement (Blackmore & Blackwell, 2006). Moreover, those driving its initiatives come from diverse backgrounds, pursuing a range of objectives that differ considerably in scope and focus across institutions (Felten et al., 2007; Gosling, 2009; Green & Little, 2016; Harland & Staniforth, 2008; Stensaker, 2018; Sutherland, 2018).

These considerable variations in academic development have led many scholars to perceive a fragmentation and ambiguity surrounding the identities of academic developers (Barrow & Grant, 2012; Clegg, 2009-b; Debowski, 2014; Gibbs, 2013; Green & Little, 2016; Harland & Staniforth, 2008; Stes & Hoekstra, 2015). Highlighting this sentiment, Harland and Staniforth (2008) collated insights from 20 experienced academic developers from Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, NZ, South Africa and the UK. They concluded “that academic development has been fragmented since its inception and it remains resistant to cohesive change” (p. 669). This echoes Cryer’s survey of the UK that showed an inconsistent landscape in training and development for higher education teachers (Cryer, 1981). Harland and Staniforth (2008) further commented that “nearly 30 years later the organisation and culture of academic development remains the same. There are many ideas about its purpose, the work that should be done and who should do this. As a consequence, the field does not have widely shared values or epistemological foundations” (p. 669). Stensaker (2018) also highlighted this point,

emphasizing that the field of academic development “often faces what one might call systemic constraints—taken-for-granted assumptions about what this activity is all about, what academic developers do, the effects of their work, and how they are embedded in the institutions in which they work” (p. 274).

However, despite these drawbacks surrounding the field of academic development, a prevalent opinion among scholars is that its cornerstone lies in bolstering teaching and learning processes. They contend that the primary objective of academic development should always be to enhance the quality of instruction and to foster enriched learning experiences for students (Gillespie et al., 2010; Ling et al., 2013).

Debowski (2014) also stressed that at the heart of academic development is the enhancement of teaching and learning. She highlighted the primary objective of academic development as equipping educators to constantly advance in their teaching methods and in fostering a productive learning environment.

Still, many scholars believe that academic development extends beyond simply refining teaching techniques. Brenda Leibowitz (2014) argued that research activities should be an integral component. She maintained that academic development involves not only providing resources but also nurturing an environment that encourages both teaching and learning. Leibowitz emphasised the symbiotic relationship between teaching and learning saying that educators often learn from their own instruction. Moreover, she stressed the significance of research, especially when focused on teaching practices. For her, this interconnectedness defines the core of academic development.

In his important study exploring the identity and purpose of academic development in the UK, Gosling (2009) gathered insights from 40 higher education institutions. His aim

was to shed light on the evolution of educational development centres by examining their staffing, institutional positioning, roles, and duties. To understand the centres' responsibilities, participants indicated whether certain activities were solely their duty, a joint responsibility, a domain where they offered contributions, or outside their scope entirely.

When analysing the responsibilities most frequently cited as being either fully owned, shared, or contributed to, it was clear that the Educational Development Centres (EDCs) viewed staff professional development as their primary responsibility. Meanwhile, broader institutional roles tied to teaching and learning were often perceived as shared responsibilities. Tasks related to quality assurance and learning technologies were typically areas where EDCs felt they played a contributory role, as shown in Table 1:

Table 1

Levels of Responsibility in Descending Order of Importance

Full responsibility	Shared responsibility	Contribute
Provide teaching and learning professional development	Encourage innovation in teaching and learning	Prepare institution and departments for quality audit
Initial professional development of teaching staff	Improve teaching and learning quality	Implement quality assurance processes
Training for postgraduates who teach	Implementation of the teaching and learning strategy	Advise on/monitor quality of teaching spaces and equipment
Promote scholarship of teaching and learning (not for research assessment)	Carry out research in teaching and learning	Encourage the development of open and distance learning
	Evaluation of teaching and learning activities	

Promote use of learning technologies	Promote scholarship of teaching and learning (not for research assessment)	Provide training in the use of ICT for students and staff
New staff induction programme	Encourage the development of open and distance learning	Promote use of learning technologies
Encourage innovation in teaching and learning	Promote use of learning technologies	Carry out research in teaching and learning
Implementation of the teaching and learning strategy	Provide new staff induction programme	Evaluation of teaching and learning activities
Masters/Diploma in learning and teaching in higher education	Provide teaching and learning professional development	Promote research in teaching and learning for possible entry to RAE
Improve teaching and learning quality		Encourage equal opportunities

Note. From Gosling (2009, p. 13)

3.3- Holistic Academic Development

Academic development, at its core, is deeply interwoven with the concept of 'change' (Debowski, 2014; Handal et al., 2014; Land, 2010; Szkudlarek & Stankiewicz, 2014). This relationship manifests in two distinct ways. First, academic development serves as an agent of internal transformation within educational institutions. By introducing and refining pedagogical strategies, methodologies, and institutional policies, it seeks to amplify the efficacy and impact of educators and the overall academic environment. Secondly, academic development operates in a dynamic, ever-evolving external landscape shaped by socio-political, economic, and technological shifts. Thus, academic development must also be reactive, ensuring that institutions are not just passive bystanders but active participants, adeptly navigating and leveraging these shifts. Bjørn Stensaker (2018) noted that the idea of transformation had been a recurring theme

in many articles discussing the function, identity, and objectives of academic development over the past twenty years. He explained that while some of this transformation arose from the inherent nature of academic development, it was primarily influenced by external shifts in higher education. These shifts had resulted in the restructuring and management of universities and colleges, encompassing expanded administrative duties, increased professionalism, growing specialization, and a more managed university.

These constantly changing internal and external dynamics have led many scholars to advocate for a more comprehensive approach to academic development (Evans, 2023; Sugrue et al., 2018; Sutherland, 2018). Such an approach would cater to the diverse requirements of contemporary academia and adapt swiftly to a world deeply influenced by globalisation, technological advancements, rapid evolution of communications, and the internationalization of higher education. Linda Evans (2023) explained that she had always found it 'axiomatic' that if academic work extends beyond just teaching, then academic development should similarly extend accordingly.

Kathryn Sutherland (2018) suggested that academic development programmes should "address the whole of the academic role, the whole institution, and the whole person" (p. 265). Sutherland began by championing a comprehensive view of the academic role, emphasising that professional development programs should support academic staff across *all* their responsibilities. She argued that academics entering university positions nowadays are often anticipated to take on multiple roles throughout their careers, such as educators, researchers, managers, administrators, leaders, entrepreneurs, fundraisers, recruiters, and more. While doctoral and post-doctoral studies provide preparation for some of these responsibilities, notably research and teaching,

many academics begin their journey without substantial training in the diverse demands of academia. In contrast to professions like Law and Medicine that necessitate initial and continuous competency validation, many academics do not primarily view themselves as 'professionals' requiring continual development.

Regarding the 'whole institution' perspective, Sutherland (2018) emphasised that academic tasks are part of a multifaceted system with interrelated components and their surrounding environment. Therefore, holistic academic development should not only consider academics but also include non-academic staff and students in the development process.

The 'whole person' dimension underscores the need for holistic academic development to acknowledge the inherent tensions faced by individual academics. These tensions often stem from the “pull between teaching and research identities and expectations”, and “disciplinary affiliations and commitments”. Sutherland noted that “holistic academic development requires us to be aware of our own disciplinary backgrounds and influences, as well as those of the people with whom we work” (p.270).

The multifaceted nature of academic developers' roles, responsibilities, and identities is evident in Green and Little's (2016) study, which analysed responses from over 1000 educational developers across 38 countries spanning six continents. In their 'family portrait', they emphasised several key findings to offer a clearer perspective on the academic community (p. 148):

- 1) We are majority female (70.4%) and mostly in our 40s and 50s (60.4%).
- 2) Most of our workplaces are public institutions (86%) and most value research over teaching (68.6%).

- 3) Our employment status is divided almost equally three ways between academic, administrative, and combined academic/administrative roles, with slightly more of us on academic appointments (37.2%).
- 4) Almost all of us teach (95.6%), although only just over a third of us teaches (post) graduates and under a third teaches undergraduates – the two groups of students that our clientele teaches.
- 5) Four-fifths of us (82.3%) conduct research, although it is only contractually required of just over a half.
- 6) More than half of us (58.6%) hold a doctorate or higher, and for two-thirds of us, our highest qualification is not in education.
- 7) Despite the previous point, developers' highest qualifications are still most likely to be in professional fields (including education) (34.1%).

I believe that academic development is pivotal in higher education, acting as a bridge between traditional approaches and the ever-evolving needs of contemporary society. As the world changes rapidly, it's imperative for universities to stay ahead, integrating new technologies and global perspectives. Today's higher education students seek more than just degrees; they aim for skills and experiences that position them well in the job market and prepare them for an unpredictable future. By prioritising and constantly improving academic development practices, universities can become agile entities that empower students to thrive in today's complex world and ensures them that their investments in university degrees remain valuable and rewarding.

3.4- Academic Development in Resource-Poor Contexts

As explained in prior sections, significant academic development schemes predominantly originated in resource-rich countries in “global North environments including the UK, the USA, Australia, and Scandinavia nearly 50 years ago” (Parkinson et al., 2020). Leading academic development institutions, such as the UK's Advance HE (formerly ‘Higher Education Academy’) and its Professional Standards Framework, have been meticulously developed to cater to the academic scene in these countries, addressing the specific requirements of individuals, communities and HE institutions of those contexts (Abdulkerim et al., 2022; Parkinson et al., 2020).

While some international associations of professional academic developers are gradually integrating countries from the global South – for instance, the International Consortium for Educational Developers (ICED) now counts organisations from countries like Ethiopia and Sri Lanka among its 26 members – the core focus remains predominantly on the global North (Parkinson et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, many countries with limited resources continue to grapple with the ramifications of their colonial legacy, which impacts their academic structures, instructional languages, and curricula (de Oliveira Andreotti et al., 2015; Shahjahan & Morgan, 2016). UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report has underscored that, despite significant progress in primary and secondary education access for some global South countries, tertiary education remains a significant hurdle (UNESCO, 2019). Additionally, the World Bank highlights the increasing need to prioritize the quality of education in these nations, even as enrolment figures rise (Milton, 2017).

3.5- Academic Development in Conflict and Post-Conflict Contexts

Conflict, both during active hostilities and in its aftermath, can have a profoundly destabilizing effect on a country's higher education sector. The ramifications of such disturbances are often multifaceted, affecting infrastructure, academic resources, human capital, and educational quality (Barakat, 2021; Milton, 2017; Milton & Barakat, 2016).

However, in conflict-impacted regions, the focus tends to be on immediate relief, often neglecting the sustained efforts necessary for communities and individuals to truly recover and rebuild (Barakat et al., 2005). Thus, despite the significant potential of higher Education in reshaping post-conflict societies, it often gets overshadowed in the reconstruction plans of conflict-affected nations. Higher education is frequently seen as non-essential or even extravagant, especially when compared to the more pressing challenges these war-affected communities face (Buckland, 2006).

Milton (2017) delved into the obstacles that conflicts pose to higher education and underscored its pivotal role during the post-conflict reconstruction phase. Moreover, he emphasised the pivotal role of 'Capacity Development' strategies in revitalising higher education in conflict-affected contexts. He highlighted that these development approaches can manifest in various ways within higher education. At the institutional level, it might involve refining curricula, promoting in-house staff training, enhancing domestic postgraduate programmes, or updating teaching methods. Meanwhile, on a national scale, it can encompass governance reform, strategic schemes, and training for ministry officials. Milton continued to highlight four significant points related to this issue.

Firstly, in such contexts, curricula can become outdated, necessitating reforms to align with recent disciplinary developments. It is essential to adapt the curriculum to better

serve the socio-economic and developmental requirements of post-conflict societies. This might involve introducing subjects like governance, humanitarian action, or peacebuilding to tackle conflict-related challenges. Moreover, there should be a high emphasis on tailoring higher education to market demands, ensuring graduates' employability (Milton, 2017).

Secondly, post-conflict, many higher education institutions urgently need to reinforce their human capital, which frequently suffers due to the ravages of war and displacement. Key components of this recovery are staff hiring, competitive compensation, and retention strategies. Despite these efforts, the backdrop of a post-conflict setting might still pose challenges to the revival of higher education systems. Welcoming back exiled academics can significantly bolster the human resource pool. Enhanced security and economic conditions in some post-conflict regions can trigger the return of significant numbers of skilled professionals, leading to a 'brain gain.' To effectively reverse the prior 'brain drain' in academia, tailored policy interventions are imperative. For instance, as Milton (2017, p. 62) noted, "various higher education institutions in post-conflict contexts have implemented incentive schemes designed to attract staff back home including by raising salaries and offering tenure track positions to junior faculty".

Thirdly, beyond merely increasing staff numbers, there is a pressing need to improve their skills through specialised training programmes. Such programmes tend to focus on refining pedagogical methods in higher education, because, unfortunately, many conflict-affected countries still lean heavily towards traditional teaching approaches such as rote learning, abstract theoretical content, and teacher-centred classes. Yet, the

adoption of modern approaches can be slow, hindered by challenges like low salaries that deter professional growth, limited time due to demanding roles, and opposition to reforms perceived as externally imposed (Milton, 2017).

Fourthly, reconstructing higher education often calls for capacity building interventions at the national level. Yet, the scope and nature of these endeavours can vary significantly based on the quality of the existing educational structures. In places with well-established higher education systems, international efforts might focus on evaluating current structures, implementing quality assurance measures, and ensuring compliance with international standards. In contrast, severely affected regions might necessitate a more foundational approach to rebuild their educational capacities from scratch (Milton, 2017).

I am aligned with Sansom Milton's perspective on the fundamental role of these pillars of 'Capacity Development' in rebuilding higher education in conflict-affected countries: refining curricula, attracting and retaining top academic talent, fostering their professional growth, and setting up solid national higher education structures and frameworks. It is important to note, though, that how these foundations are applied can widely differ based on the intricacies of each situation.

3.6- Academic Development for Academics in Exile

As uprisings against dictatorial regimes begin, academics frequently become early targets due to their influential position in spreading knowledge, fostering critical thought, and contesting dominant paradigms. This makes them particularly vulnerable to such oppressive systems and forces many of them to be displaced (Boyd et al., 2009).

While academia has long celebrated travel for enriching knowledge and fostering collaboration, the forced displacement of scholars due to conflicts or political pressures starkly interrupts this valued tradition. Axyonova et al. (2022) highlighted that, although some prominent figures like Einstein and Arendt are often celebrated as icons of academic exile, the vast majority of displaced scholars face significant hardships and often remain overlooked.

Displaced scholars possess the potential to significantly enrich knowledge exchange and bolster academia in their adoptive countries. They often add value to the scientific, intellectual, and cultural spheres of their new societies, promoting internationalism and transformative practices within their host institutions (Elsner, 2017). Nonetheless, these refugee academics frequently face challenges such as nationalist backlash, marginalisation, and exclusion within their new academic settings (Pherali, 2020).

In the first chapter of this thesis, I painted a comprehensive picture of Syrian academics' journey: from their pre-2011 conditions, through the increased challenges post-2011, and into their exile. With that context in place, my focus at this point centres on their 'academic development' experiences while domiciled in Turkey. It is worth noting that there may be occasional overlaps with academic dynamics in the non-regime-controlled regions of Northwest Syria. This is because some Syrian academics living in Southern Turkey frequently cross the border to teach at newly established universities there.

Speaking from my experience as a Syrian academic in exile in Turkey, the sole academic development institution that I have come across, specifically supporting Syrian

academics, is the Council for at-Risk Academics (Cara) through its Syria Programme. Cara launched this programme in 2012 as a Fellowship scheme. However, as the Syrian crisis persisted with no resolution in sight by 2016, Cara expanded its support to aid academics in exile throughout the region (Brewer & Whiteside, 2019). In their study titled, *Supporting Syrian academics to be agents for change: The role of UK universities*, Parkinson et al. (2018a) highlighted the primary objectives of the Syria Programme. They emphasised the Programme's intent to harness the prevailing times of uncertainty, supporting the exiled Syrian academic community. This consolidation is crucial for the Syrian scholars to be instrumental in the reconstruction of Syria's higher education and research sectors when conditions permit.

In their study, *Building solidarity through comparative lived experiences of post-conflict: Reflections on two days of dialogue*, Belluigi & Parkinson (2020) observed the reactions of UK-based academics involved in the Syria Programme who were notably impacted by the stark differences in the experiences of their Syrian counterparts compared to those in affluent, peaceful, global North environments. Faced with this disparity, they questioned their adequacy in guiding impactful academic development.

They also advocated for the Syria Programme's curriculum to depart from the conventional academic frameworks that rely heavily on 'best practices' from resource-rich global North education systems, which often resonate with established educational norms and quality assurance standards:

Syrian academics in exile often lack institutional affiliation or work at the margins of the HE sector on precarious contracts. All the Syrian contributors expressed their frustrations with having to conform to the expectations of the global HE sector

that, de facto, bars or obstructs their academic participation. They cited examples which ranged from non-institutional email addresses being routinely rejected as suspicious; prohibitive expenses for submitting their research dissemination to publishing houses or when accessing journal articles; educational resources, professional membership registrations and academic social media platforms which require institutional affiliation for access and/ or inclusion; through to limited access to funding and the necessary conditions to undertake research and education for their people (p.21).

Reinforcing this perspective, Abdullateef et al. (2020) underscored the imperative of formulating a specialised 'academic development' approach, tailored to the distinct needs of Syrian academics domiciled in Turkey. They commented:

Academics in conflict and refugee contexts often work in settings that are at stark odds to those typically portrayed in academic development research, and can encounter different challenges. Normative academic development resources can therefore be inadequate, inappropriate or inaccessible to academics marginalised by conflict or displacement (p. 393).

To tackle this intricate context, the Syria programme has adopted an action research approach, centred on continuous reflection, dialogue, and community planning, and supplemented by rigorous data collection activities. Through leveraging diverse methods like large group processes, focus discussions, one-to-one interviews, and surveys, the program has continuously sought to understand and respond to the unique academic needs of over 300 Syrian scholars based in Turkey (Belluigi & Parkinson, 2020; Parkinson et al., 2018a; Parkinson et al., 2020).

Hanley (2020) explored Cara's Syria Programme, emphasising key adaptations to its foundational Fellowship scheme to address the complexities of the Syrian context. These modifications included English for Academic Purposes (EAP) support, blended learning, research incubation visits to UK universities, and academic skills workshops. The programme also introduced a Research Fellowship Scheme offering small (£3,000) and large (£15,000) grants for Syria-related research, spanning a broad range of disciplines.

Hanley's study revealed that the Syria Programme effectively enhanced participants' academic competencies, encompassing research methodologies, academic writing, teamwork, and some specialised areas like laboratory techniques and management. Moreover, participants gained a deeper understanding of international research standards and advanced their English proficiency. The Programme not only fostered greater self-efficacy and reintegration into the academic community but also reaffirmed their professional academic identity. Furthermore, it cultivated networking opportunities for participants both among themselves and with global academics, especially those based in the UK.

Although Cara has put forth significant efforts, the depth of the challenges and the magnitude of demand exceed the current programme's capacity (Pherali, 2020). To effectively address the economic, legal, and psychosocial obstacles faced by exiled academics, broader strategies are needed, involving collaboration among essential stakeholders. In the article, *Sharing the burdens of responsibility for a better future in transnational academia: Reflections of displaced Syrian academics on an atypical academic development event*, which I co-authored with Abdullateef et al., (2020), we

emphasised that, “to address the complex challenges arising from unprecedented deterioration in the social, cultural, economic, and academic status of the HE sector in Syria and its displaced communities, a broader understanding of academic development is needed that moves beyond a focus on teaching and learning and encompasses community building” (p. 395).

In their study, *Reconceptualising academic development as community development: lessons from working with Syrian academics in exile*, Parkinson et al. (2020) facilitated 29 displaced Syrian academics in Turkey to craft personal academic development plans, drawing upon five collective categories pinpointed during an immersive two-day group workshop in Istanbul. The study findings shed light on several key points:

- 1) The participants expressed a deep-rooted sense of responsibility towards Syria, the broader academic community, their dependents, and their own personal growth. Notably, broader public engagement was an unfamiliar domain, as it wasn't a common practice in Syrian universities.
- 2) The majority revealed limited opportunities in Turkey to work within their specific disciplines, leading to challenges like resource scarcity, lack of administrative support, disconnect from professional bodies, and restricted access to crucial research infrastructures, such as labs.
- 3) There was a clear desire to refine teaching techniques and methodologies pertinent to the Syrian educational landscape.
- 4) Since maintaining research activity was not mandatory at Syrian universities, many participants had not further cultivated their research portfolios. They expressed a

need to hone research capabilities, foster collaborative research initiatives, and integrate into research communities.

- 5) A shared ambition was articulated to actively participate in the international academic sphere, especially in global conferences.

The study delved deeper, proposing a novel model for academic development as outlined in Figure 2 of Chapter 2. The model was tailored to enhance the development of academic communities in exile and to extend support to marginalised academic populations at large. Framed in a three-dimensional design, each of the model's octants signifies a potential perspective on academic community development. Different combinations of these octants can result in varied interventions, tailored to the unique complexities of each situation.

The proposed model focuses on holistic community development by considering both group and individual needs. Its three core dimensions are: 1) balancing community and individual priorities; 2) distinguishing between immediate alleviations and deep-rooted transformative strategies; and 3) leveraging the inherent strengths and experiences of exiled Syrian academics for nation-building, rather than merely focusing on deficiencies.

To more effectively amplify the voices and experiences of Syrian academics in exile, I will glean insights from the conceptual framework of my study and this comprehensive literature review, integrating them with the detailed findings discussed in Chapters 6 through 9. With a forward-looking view, I aim to present actionable recommendations that can support these academics in their ongoing quest for professional growth and their commitment to the advancement of higher education both

domestically and on a global scale. I hope that my study will profoundly resonate with, and provide valuable guidance to, academic communities globally, especially those navigating the adversities of conflict or exile.

Chapter 4: Literature Review—Community and Community Development

In this chapter, I shift the focus of the literature review to community development, specifically targeting the experiences of Syrian academics living in exile in Gaziantep, Turkey. Although 'community' is a term frequently used in scholarly discourse, it encapsulates a wide range of definitions and applications that demand thorough examination (IPS & Pittman, 2014). I start by outlining the key characteristics of 'community' and then delve into a nuanced analysis of various pertinent community development approaches. My investigation into these approaches aims to deepen understanding of the unique community dynamics and developmental challenges encountered by Syrian academics in exile. This analysis will pave the way for exploring how community development principles can be seamlessly blended with academic development initiatives, offering a distinctive perspective on supporting these academics in both their professional and community engagements.

4.1- What is 'Community'?

Researchers have offered various definitions of 'community,' emphasising different aspects such as geographical proximity, shared interests, or social connections (Hillery, 1955; Mattessich & Monsey, 1997). In the modern era, technological advancements have expanded the concept of community to include virtual spaces, such as groups of “people sharing common chat rooms on the Internet, a national professional association or a labour union” (IPS & Pittman, 2014, p. 3).

Sarason (1974) highlighted the importance of mutual support and social bonds within a community, recognising these connections as key sources of assistance and reliability for its members. Similarly, Wenger et al. (2002, p. 4) introduced the concept of

'communities of practice,' defining them as "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis."

It is clear from all the different definitions—even those which focus on the geographical dimension of communities—that people and the relationships among them are the essence of any community, and without them, communities are just vacant buildings and empty streets (IPS & Pittman, 2014). Many of these dimensions are directly pertinent to the scope of my study, which focuses on the Syrian academic community in exile in Gaziantep, Turkey. This community is not only situated within the geographical confines of Gaziantep but also retains historical ties to another geographical context, Syria. Furthermore, the members share a collective set of experiences and face similar challenges. Nonetheless, the degree to which these dimensions characterise the Syrian academic community in Gaziantep remains unclear.

4.2- Community Development

IPS and Pittman (2014) noted that since the second half of the twentieth century, the civil rights and antipoverty movements have led to “the recognition of community development as a practice and emerging profession, taking form as a means to elicit change in social, economic, political and environmental aspects of communities” (p. 4). Sociology, economics, political science, planning, geography, and other academic fields have all had their influence on the evolution of community development into a recognized discipline in its own right (IPS & Pittman, 2014).

Since, as highlighted in the previous section, people and their relationships are the essence of any given community, developing stronger communities means enhancing the

social and psychological ties those people share. It entails “involvement in a process to achieve improvement in some aspects of community life where normally such action leads to the strengthening of the community’s pattern of human and institutional relationships” (Ploch, 1976, as cited in Phillips & Pittman, 2008, p. 6).

Ife (2013) looked at community development as a holistic approach that involves the collaboration of community members to engage in collective efforts that aim to address common challenges and devise effective solutions. The development process involves a wide range of endeavours that attempt to build more robust and stable societies. Ife (2013) explained that community development tries to not only tackle community problems but also facilitate the empowerment of individuals within the community, enabling them to recognise their capacity to bring about the transformation they seek. It leads to a feeling of empowerment and a sense of belonging among community members, thereby enhancing their resilience and capacity to confront possible challenges.

The circumstances for Syrian academics in Gaziantep are tough and intricate. The dearth of academic institutions available for their affiliation, and the lack of recognition for their qualifications and competencies, have put them in a precarious situation. This highlights the importance of community development aspects emphasised by Ife (2013) and others. Such measures can help exiled Syrian academics hold onto their identities as scholars, keep going, and tackle the many challenges that come their way. It concerns resilience, survival, and making a meaningful impact in their field, regardless of the barriers they face.

Gilchrist (2019) also explained that community development encompasses more than mere physical development or enhancements to infrastructure; it entails many other dimensions of community life such as social ties, cultural norms, and economic factors. Gilchrist's approach to community development prioritises the cultivation and reinforcement of interpersonal connections within communities. It posits that establishing and sustaining such connections is crucial for the well-being and vitality of a community. According to Gilchrist, " Informal networks enhance people's ability to cope with difficulties and disasters by keeping hope alive and bolstering well-being, even in the face of long-term social exclusion and sudden crises " (Gilchrist, 2019, p. 4). She believes that the fundamental elements of a strong, sustainable community are the individual connections and interactions that take place within it. Gilchrist asserted that effective communities are built on trust, which is cultivated through consistent, constructive engagements among community members. She stated that reciprocity is also significant in building and developing strong networks within communities.

As highlighted in the last chapter, Syrian academia before 2011 was characterised by pervasive paranoia and surveillance, such that high levels of mistrust can manifest among Syrian academics. However, trust can be gradually built among community members. These are areas that I seek to understand in my primary research through the interviews and group discussions with Syrian academics living in Gaziantep, Turkey.

4.2.1- Community Development Theories and Approaches

Within the multifaceted domain of community development, a diverse range of theories can provide valuable perspectives and methodologies for promoting significant and sustainable growth. Phillips and Pittman (2008) explained that there are several

community development theories which serve as a framework that enables us to comprehend, analyse, and navigate the intricacies and variations of community transformation. However, since these theories have originated from various fields including sociology, anthropology, public health, economics, and environmental studies, it can sometimes be challenging for practitioners to tackle them: “community developers need theories to help guide and frame the complexity of their work. However, the field is girded with so many theories from various disciplines that it is difficult for practitioners to sort through them.” (p. 20). As such, in order to render academic knowledge accessible and valuable to practitioners, it is necessary to synthesise theories from across disciplines to identify some common principles.

Moreover, due to the multifaceted nature of communities across the globe, it is not feasible to develop a singular, standardised theory that can effectively represent the diverse range of realities, challenges, and opportunities that these communities encounter (Christens & Perkins, 2008). Therefore, I will briefly discuss a few prominent community development theories that I find more relevant to the conceptual framework of my study and more significant for collecting my research data and analysing and discussing the findings later in this thesis.

4.2.1.1- Social Capital Theory. This theory focuses on the quality of relationships among community members and highlights the role of those embedded relationships in encouraging people to launch and participate in community initiatives (Hustedde, 2014). It values a wide range of intrinsic social assets such as trust, social networks, and cultural norms. Hustedde (2014) explained that social capital “is often correlated with confidence in public institutions, civic engagement, self-reliant economic development, and overall

community well-being and happiness.” (p. 22). This theory explains why community development endeavours can be challenging in settings where there is corruption, suspicion, and distrust. On the other hand, communities with rich positive norms such as equality and reciprocity can do much better: “a culture with high levels of reciprocity encourages more pluralistic politics and compromise which can make it easier for community development initiatives to emerge.” (Hustedde, 2014, p. 22). Moreover, Putnam (2000) explained that a well-connected community has higher chances to succeed in mobilising local and external resources and act more effectively.

The social capital theory categorises social capital into three primary forms: bonding, bridging, and linking social capital. This classification is based on the types and diversity of links within and among social networks. The concept of ‘bonding social capital’ refers to the formation of internal connections within a homogeneous group, such as people sharing the same ethnic background or similar socio-economic status (Agnitsch et al., 2006). These connections, often strong and close-knit, create a sense of solidarity and cohesion within the group. However, they can also lead to insularity, limiting exposure to different viewpoints. On the contrary, ‘bridging social capital’ involves external communication with a wider range of diverse groups, allowing for new connections (Putnam, 2000). Exposure to various perspectives can foster innovation and inclusivity, but it may also lead to conflicts because of cultural, social, or economic differences.

The third category, ‘linking social capital,’ describes building relationships among individuals or groups from different social strata or varying levels of power (Beusaert et al., 2023; Wilson et al., 2023). It can facilitate the access of marginalised groups to resources and decision-making processes. Nevertheless, it faces challenges related to

power dynamics and potential exploitation. The impact that each type of social capital can have on a community or network is determined by how well it is harnessed and balanced (Delilah Roque et al., 2020).

In my research, I will explore the dimensions of social capital among the participants, delving into how their previous experiences under the authoritarian Syrian regime and pervasive corruption have shaped their social bonds and trust levels. This investigation is critical not only for understanding the current dynamics within this academic community but also for identifying strategies to strengthen their social capital in bonding, bridging, and linking aspects. Such insights will be pivotal in fostering a more cohesive and collaborative academic environment for Syrian academics in exile.

4.2.1.2- The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA). This is a holistic methodology aimed at comprehending and enhancing the livelihoods of individuals residing in impoverished conditions. Although it is credited to the British Department for International Development (DFID), it is acknowledged that the conceptualisation of this framework can be traced back to the works of other scholars, namely Chambers and Conway (1992). The SLA places emphasis on impoverished people, highlighting the diverse assets and resources at their disposal, as well as the strategies they can utilise to generate income. The primary framework comprises five core asset categories, or types of 'capital': human, social, physical, financial, and environmental. The SLA recognises that people's access to these resources is affected by the context of their vulnerability, institutional structures, and livelihood strategies. "A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its

capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base.” (DFID, 1999).

This approach is vital in identifying solutions that can help people build resilience to and recover from shocks and stresses. It also facilitates measuring the impact of interventions and tracking progress over time. This helps practitioners understand the root causes of poverty and inequality, and develop strategies for sustainable and equitable development (Knutsson, 2006).

Some researchers explain that we cannot consider the SLA as theory, but they still approach it as an important framework for community development that shows how things ‘should’ happen and how resources can be utilised to develop people’s lives to higher levels (Mazibuko, 2013).

In my study, it is crucial to explore how Syrian academics in exile utilize and combine various forms of capital to sustain their livelihoods and continue their academic endeavours despite challenging conditions. This perspective will facilitate a more thorough analysis of the strategies they employ to navigate and surmount the complexities of displacement. Additionally, it will illuminate potential strategies that could be adopted to build and nurture a cohesive and vibrant academic community.

4.2.1.3- Community Resilience Approach. Resilience approach is a field of study that encompasses multiple disciplines, originating from the fields of ecology and psychology. It has since been implemented in a range of disciplines, including community development. This theoretical framework centres on the notion of ‘resilience,’ which denotes the ability of a given system, whether it is an individual, a forest, a city, or an economy, to effectively cope with changes and persist in its course of development. It

describes the ability to maintain perseverance, adjust accordingly, and adopt new ways of living in response to unexpected and challenging circumstances. High levels of resilience may even yield prospects for growth and create new opportunities (Adger, 2000; Folke, 2016; Hall and Lamont, 2013). Magis (2010) noted that:

A number of conclusions were drawn from the literature on resilience. First, communities that learn to live with change and uncertainty and that actively build and engage the capacity to thrive in that context become resilient. Second, communities can develop resilience strategically via planning, collective action, innovation, and learning. Third, community resilience is facilitated through developing and engaging diverse resources from throughout the community. Fourth, community members can be active agents in the development of community resilience. Finally, resilience is developed through engagement of the community's resources, that is, taking action, not simply by developing the community's capacity. The focus on capacity and resources in the literature led to the exploration of community resources, that is, community capitals (Magis, 2010, p. 406).

Furthermore, resilience approach emphasises the significance of diversity, social capital, and adaptive learning. It shows that a community which exhibits diversity in terms of skills, perspectives, and resources is more resilient as it possesses a wider range of alternatives to address changes. Aldrich and Meyer (2015) posited that social capital can serve as a catalyst for collective action, information dissemination, and mutual assistance during periods of crisis.

Amidst the severe uncertainty and continual change faced by Syrian academics in exile, it becomes imperative to investigate how they can construct and leverage the capacity to thrive and become resilient in such challenging environments. My research aims to explore how these academics can develop and mobilise diverse resources across the community and actively participate in efforts to foster community development.

4.2.1.4- Collective Impact Approach. This model was introduced by John Kania and Mark Kramer (2011). It argues that achieving significant and sustainable social change on a large scale cannot be accomplished by a single entity working in isolation. Achieving systemic social change necessitates the collaboration and coordination of multiple organisations and stakeholders across various sectors. This approach emphasises that tackling intricate societal problems usually requires collaborative endeavours spanning diverse sectors and disciplines. The Collective Impact model is founded upon a set of five conditions that, when implemented together, yield significant outcomes. Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer (2012) claim that a multitude of entities, operating in various contexts, are adopting a collective impact strategy – following those five conditions – to address large-scale societal issues, “all of these initiatives share the five key conditions that distinguish collective impact from other types of collaboration: a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and the presence of a backbone organization” (p.1). The authors provide further explanations to those conditions as follows:

- 1) Common Agenda: All participants have a shared vision for change including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions.

- 2) Shared Measurement: Collecting data and measuring results consistently across all participants ensures efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable.
- 3) Mutually Reinforcing Activities: Participant activities must be differentiated while still being coordinated through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.
- 4) Continuous Communication: Consistent and open communication is needed across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation.
- 5) Backbone Support: Creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organization(s) with staff and a specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative and coordinate participating organizations and agencies (p.1).

This theoretical framework holds particular significance within the community development field, considering the constant need to mobilise multiple sectors and different stakeholders to tackle complex challenges, including poverty, education, healthcare, and economic growth (Preskill et al., 2001).

Given the multifaceted complexities facing Syrian academics in exile, adopting this approach is crucial for effective intervention. This challenging situation demands synergistic efforts from a broad spectrum of stakeholders, encompassing both humanitarian and academic spheres. By collaboratively addressing the diverse needs of these academics, stakeholders can significantly contribute to building and nurturing a resilient and vibrant academic community. This coordinated approach can not only support the immediate needs of Syrian academics but also lay the groundwork for sustainable community development.

4.2.1.5- Systems Thinking Approach. As a problem-solving approach, systems thinking views problems as parts of an overall system rather than in isolation. Hence, an analysis of a system seeks to identify the interconnections and interdependencies among its elements. In the context of community development, this approach recognises ‘community’ as a complex system of interconnected elements – social, economic, cultural, and environmental – which can be managed and developed to achieve certain outcomes (Meadows, 2008; Midgley & Richardson, 2007; Senge & Sterman, 1992).

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact beginning of the systems thinking approach. However, it started to develop noticeably after the mid-20th century, largely in response to the increasing complexity of post-war society (Nguyen et al., 2012). Many prominent scholars—including Donella Meadows (2008), Peter Senge (1992), David Stroh (2015), and Russel Ackoff (1994)—made significant contributions to the field.

The traditional approach to problem-solving often involves breaking problems down into manageable components and focusing on each component separately. However, the complexity of the interplay between different parts of the system can be overlooked using this approach. Systems thinking, on the other hand, emphasises relationships among parts rather than the parts themselves, and thus, can be much helpful. To apply systems thinking to community development, one must consider the community as a holistic system with many interconnected elements which may include individuals, families, institutions (such as universities, unions, associations, or religious centres), governmental bodies, private companies, and so on. Any change or intervention in one of these elements will inevitably affect the others. As a result, community leaders and other decision makers can design and implement interventions that bring about long-

term, sustainable solutions instead of only treating symptoms. Moreover, this approach can encourage collaboration among different stakeholders, promoting stronger relationships and enhancing community's capacity to solve problems (Ackoff, 1994; Senge & Sterman, 1992; Stroh, 2015).

This approach is essential for comprehensively understanding the impacts of the internal connections among Syrian academics themselves, as well as their interactions with other Syrian communities and institutions within Turkey. Furthermore, it examines the influence of their external relationships with the host community, its various institutions, and the international organisations they engage with. By grasping their roles within this intricate network, we can illuminate potential efforts that could significantly contribute to the development of their community and enhance their quality of life.

4.2.1.6- Asset-based Community Development (ABCD) Approach. This approach represents a paradigm shift from conventional deficit-based approaches which concentrate on identifying and addressing a community's shortcomings and challenges. With ABCD, the first step involves evaluating the current strengths and capacities of a given community before suggesting a development strategy. Haines (2014) explained that “building on a community’s assets rather than focusing on its needs for future development is the basic approach of asset-based community development. By focusing on successes and small triumphs instead of looking at what is missing or negative about a place, a positive community outlook and vision for the future can be fostered. This approach also focuses on a sustainable approach to development” (p.38).

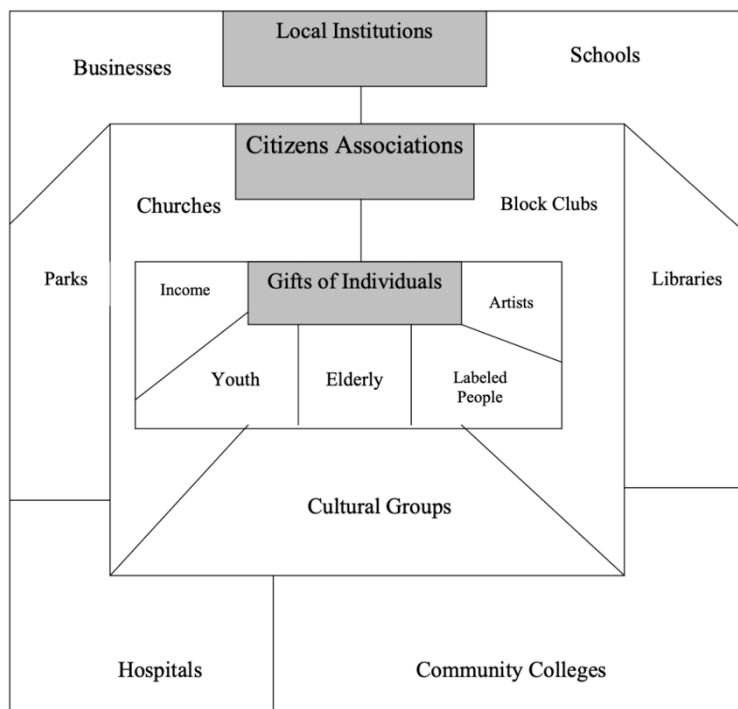
According to the ABCD approach, the key to community development is to locate all available local assets. Then, in order to multiply their power and effectiveness, we need

to connect them with one another and harness the local institutions that are not yet available for local development. Creating a new map is the first step in the entire process.

The first step to apply this bottom-up approach is to create a community asset map (see Figure 3) to community's different dormant assets, such as individual skills, associations, institutions, land and physical environment, exchange, and culture and stories (García, 2020; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993):

Figure 3

Community Asset Map



Note. From Kretzmann and McKnight (1993, p.6)

- 1) Individual capacities: this includes the gifts of the head (knowledge), hands (skills), and heart (passions) that individuals possess in a certain community.
- 2) Associations: formal or informal groups of people with shared interests, activities, or causes. The power of these associations lies in their ability to solve problems and to increase individual capacities.

- 3) Institutions: private and public organizations such as businesses, nonprofits, libraries, and hospitals that are vital to community development. Their structure is hierarchical, and they can provide resources and recognition to community members.
- 4) Physical space: lands, facilities, buildings, roads, rivers, and other natural elements in a community. When these assets are recognized and mobilized, they can be put to beneficial use.
- 5) Exchange: the local economy and money flow within a community. It is also possible to exchange goods and services without using money, such as by sharing and bartering.
- 6) Culture and stories: the cultural heritage and narratives of a certain community. Stories themselves are considered assets, as they highlight successful community building and mobilization of other assets.

After creating the community asset map, the next step is to connect and mobilise those assets. This process requires the presence of a "connector" (someone knowledgeable about other individuals, associations, or local institutions that can assist with achieving community development goals). Connectors usually focus on the gifts and talents of others, have extensive connections within the community, gain the trust of others, and emphasise the welcoming nature of their community.

When community assets are identified, mobilised and leveraged, communities are able to deal with their challenges more sustainably and holistically than when they only receive external assistance. Moreover, with this approach, community members take collective responsibility for the future of their community and become empowered to

create the positive changes they wish to see. This approach also helps to strengthen relationships within the community and foster a shared sense of ownership and pride. (García, 2020; Haines, 2014; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).

In the individual interviews and focus group discussions that I have planned, I will dedicate a significant portion to exploring the individual and collective assets of the participants. I aim to encourage participants to recognise these assets and consider how they can effectively leverage them. This can empower them to develop their community, enhance their lives, continue their academic pursuits, and fulfil their roles by contributing to academia and humanity at large.

As an exiled Syrian academic intimately familiar with the complexities Syrian academics faced both before and after the upheaval of 2011, and now in exile, I understand that fostering a cohesive and vibrant academic community in Gaziantep, Turkey, is a nuanced and challenging task. This endeavour requires a tailored framework that blends the various theories and approaches I have examined in this section. My aim is to develop this framework further in my research, after I have completed the data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the results. Through it, I aspire not only to advance scholarly discussion but also to effect tangible improvements in the lives of my fellow Syrian academics in exile.

4.3- Communities and Community Development in Exile

In this section, I briefly discuss the intricate challenges commonly encountered by exiles upon their resettlement in unfamiliar places. Moreover, I underscore the imperative of adapting community development strategies to align more effectively with the unique dynamics of exile and refugee contexts.

Exile is a profoundly complex experience, filled with emotional ups and downs, cultural shifts, traumas, and socio-political challenges. Exiles are often forced to leave their homes and homelands due to conflicts, political oppression, or natural disasters. Yet, paradoxically, they carry the essence of their homelands within their hearts and minds, which Edward Said describes as "the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home" (Said, 2000).

Camino and Krufeld (1994) also explored how different social categories intersect and shape the experiences of displaced individuals. They emphasised that refugee identity is fluid and continuously shaped by various factors, including legal status, disrupted social roles, and the need to adapt to new cultural environments. Refugees often navigate multiple, overlapping identities, balancing their past with the realities of their host society. External perceptions and stereotypes also play a role, influencing how they are seen and how they perceive themselves. Despite these challenges, many refugees demonstrate resilience and agency, actively reshaping their identities as they rebuild their lives in new contexts.

Said (2000) made a careful distinction between several groups of displaced people: exiles, refugees, expatriates, and émigrés. These terms may seem interchangeable, but, he points out, they each have their own unique implications and speak to different aspects of displacement:

Although it is true that anyone prevented from returning home is an exile, some distinctions can be made among exiles, refugees, expatriates, and émigrés. Exile originated in the age-old practice of banishment. Once banished, the exile lives an anomalous and miserable life, with the stigma of being an outsider. Refugees, on

the other hand, are a creation of the twentieth- century state. The word “refugee” has become a political one, suggesting large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance, whereas “exile” carries with it, I think, a touch of solitude and spirituality. Expatriates voluntarily live in an alien country, usually for personal or social reasons. Hemingway and Fitzgerald were not forced to live in France. Expatriates may share in the solitude and estrangement of exile, but they do not suffer under its rigid proscriptions. Émigrés enjoy an ambiguous status. Technically, an émigré is anyone who emigrates to a new country. Choice in the matter is certainly a possibility. Colonial officials, missionaries, technical experts, mercenaries, and military advisers on loan may in a sense live in exile, but they have not been banished. White settlers in Africa, parts of Asia and Australia may once have been exiles, but as pioneers and nation-builders, they lost the label ‘exile.’ (p. 144)

While 'exiles' and 'refugees' are often used synonymously in discussions around Syria, I will use the term 'exiles' in my thesis. Most of exiled Syrian academics have had a clear stance against the atrocities, injustices, and suppressive actions of the Syrian regime. Their outspoken attitude placed them in danger, essentially leaving them with no alternative but to leave their homeland. Furthermore, 'exiles' not only signifies their forced departure but also their enduring connection to their country. These individuals, despite being away, hold onto the hope of returning. Thus, the term 'exiles' encompasses both their current state of living abroad and their inherent link to Syria.

Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, born in Palestine in 1919, became an exiled academic after the Nakba in 1948 . He was an author, poet, translator, and art critic. His literary works,

both in English and Arabic, were deeply influenced by his experience of displacement after the Israeli occupation had forced hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to leave their homeland. He resettled in Iraq, where he became an important figure in Baghdad's cultural and intellectual life. In his article, *The Palestinian Exile as Writer* (1979), Jabra expressed his refusal of the label 'refugee' and describes the suitcase he took with him from Palestine to Iraq symbolising the fragments of his artistic and academic identity.

If anyone used the word "refugee" with me, I was furious. I was not seeking refuge. None of my Palestinian co-wanderers were seeking refuge. We were offering whatever talent or knowledge we had, in return for a living, for survival. We were knowledge peddlers pausing at one more stop on our seemingly endless way. When in the autumn of 1948 the customs men asked me upon arrival in Baghdad to open my luggage for inspection I offered them a battered suitcase full of books and papers, a small box full of paints and brushes, and half a dozen paintings on plywood. I was not a refugee, and I was proud as hell (Jabra, 1979, p.77).

When I delve into the writings of early exiled Palestinians, I find myself overwhelmed with emotions as I unpack my own memories and relive my personal experiences. The striking similarities between our stories are both shocking and heartbreaking, reminding me of the challenges I have faced and the draining hardships I have gone through. Jabra (1979) continued to describe the early days of his protracted journey as an exile – which highly resonates with my – and my Syrian colleagues' – stories:

We had to leave our house in Jerusalem for the invaders, the morning after they had blown up the Semiramis Hotel – almost next door to us – in the small hours of

a cold stormy night, killing so many people, some of whom I personally knew, including one of my dearest friends. Innocently, we thought we were leaving our house for a mere two or three weeks. It is amazing what five or ten miles can do to your sense of distance, when your home has been occupied and you cannot return to it. In Bethlehem, I felt as though I was ten thousand miles away from the city which I could see across the valley. The Zionist guns trained in our direction were not a mere physical barrier: they were a lethal reminder that our city, for us, was to be now no more than a memory, a dream, that we were now back to zero. Enjoy the view, if you can, in the midst of the homeless thousands. But you've been plucked out by the roots. Your books, your ideas, your visions: they're absurd indicators to a world where the absurd rules supreme. Hang on to your faith and enjoy them, if you can, when you don't know where your next loaf of bread will come from (p.78).

In their efforts to integrate and navigate their new environment, exiled communities often encounter a wide range of challenges. The language barrier is often the first hurdle, which makes it difficult to navigate healthcare systems, find jobs, and establish connections with locals. Learning a new language is a time-consuming process that can take much effort and money.

Furthermore, exile communities often experience discrimination, limited access to basic resources, and social isolation. This can have a deeply negative impact on their physical and mental health. Additionally, it can limit their opportunities for education, employment, and other economic opportunities. Thus, the journey of exile is more than just a physical relocation, but a complex adaptation process that involves significant

challenges. Hack-Polay et al. (2021) explained that “the flight of forced migrants into exile results in a loss of identity. Moreover, their arrival is often marked by uncertainties that raise questions about belonging and identity. This often leaves mental scars and sometimes physical footprints, which alter the way their life course evolves and even the manner in which they talk about themselves” (p. 3).

Therefore, community development for refugees and exiles is highly challenging and multi-layered. This endeavour necessitates a multi-layered and holistic approach that takes into account the individual as well as the collective needs of target communities. The solution to this problem goes beyond providing shelter, food, and basic needs. It needs a caring and detailed approach that also considers cultural sensitivity, legal rules, making sure people are integrated into society, and giving them the power to control their lives (Betts et al., 2017; Betts & Collier, 2017; Chimni, 2004; De Haas et al., 2019).

The community-building theories and approaches outlined in the previous section must be fine-tuned to accommodate the distinct characteristics of each refugee and exile group. For example, employing the ‘Social Capital Theory’ requires recognising the unique implications of the refugee experience on the social ties in those communities. The trauma of war, displacement, and persecution not only disrupts social networks and splits families but also erodes trust, social reciprocity, and other social norms. Consequently, many refugees and exiles may harbour profound distrust towards outsiders or authority figures (Pittaway et al., 2016; Zihnioğlu & Dalkıran, 2022). Moreover, the socio-political context of a host country can significantly influence the capacity of exiled communities to leverage their social capital. It is therefore essential to provide these individuals with support networks that can facilitate their transition into new

unfamiliar settings. By establishing such connections, they can cultivate cross-cultural relationships, gain vital information, and access resources they might not have known existed (Strang & Ager, 2010).

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach can be another example where original frameworks need to be tailored to fit the complexity of exile and refugee contexts. While ABCD emphasises leveraging a community's inherent strengths instead of concentrating on its shortcomings and deficits, the conventional ABCD framework may not fully align with the intricacies presented by situations of forced displacement where refugees' assets, talents, and qualifications might go unnoticed or unvalued (Xu & Maitland, 2017). These exiles come from certain cultural backgrounds, possessing diverse skills acquired from their countries. However, due to the complexities of their resettlement experience, their previous professional backgrounds, educational achievements, or cultural contributions can be simply overlooked. This can impact their self-esteem and integration experience, as they strive to find their place in unfamiliar settings (Ibrahima, 2017).

4.4- Academic Community

In this section, I transition from a general discussion on communities and community development to a specific exploration of 'academic' communities. I start by describing academic communities in stable contexts then move to investigating academic communities in fragile and conflict situations with special focus on academic communities in the Syrian context.

4.4.1- Academic Communities in Stable Contexts

Academic communities often thrive in stable political and social environments. In such settings, academic pursuits are generally supported by robust institutional frameworks. This leads to access to resources like funding, research facilities, and other resources which are necessary for a successful academic career.

Moreover, a stable environment usually attracts top-tier faculty and researchers, enhancing the institution's reputation and intellectual output. These positive conditions typically encourage collaboration and innovation, further driving the academic community's growth and success.

Various forms of academic communities can flourish in such helpful environments. Since universities and colleges are the most common formal academic structures, they serve as knowledge production hubs. These institutions, which often intertwine research with teaching and learning, integrate academia with diverse aspects of life. Clark (1993) explained that “marrying science to higher education, academic research has brought prestige to universities and has enabled scholars to be something more than teachers and examiners. In various fields of study, professors assumed they should produce knowledge and use the latest research results in their teaching” (p.XV). This has led to the proliferation of research groups across universities in developed countries. In addition, it has brought about the creation of “integrated academic community of practice (ACoP) models that would drive innovative endeavours among academics and community/industry partners” (Jakovljevic & Da Veiga, 2020, p. 340).

Furthermore, academic gatherings within events such as forums, conferences, symposia, seminars, and workshops often act as catalysts to generate ideas and foster

collaboration on joint disciplinary and interdisciplinary endeavours. The networks that emerge from these events significantly influence the professional lives of the participating academics. In his study that surveyed 109 academics working in Australia, New Zealand, North America, Great Britain and Ireland, Heffernan (2021) noted that these academic networks can “play a direct role in career success through employment, publication, and conference opportunities. ... [They] can also have less-direct impact such as by positioning the researcher closer to burgeoning research trends which allows them to work with the most recent data” (p.991).

Moreover, nowadays, modern online platforms can erase geographical boundaries and are used to facilitate discussions, share resources, and even strengthen existing relationships. These settings usually promote a culture of critical thinking and continuous learning (Romeu et al., 2016).

Academic communities can reach their full potential in a secure and stable environment, much like a seed planted in fertile soil and appropriate climate conditions. Barriers are removed, allowing scholars to explore their ideas and grow without hindrance. Support is also available in various forms, such as mentors for young academics and research grants for important projects. International exchange programmes are also beneficial, allowing for cultural learning and fresh perspectives. Access to top-notch research facilities and libraries is essential, as it provides the necessary tools for scholars to produce their best work. All of these elements work together to create an environment where academic communities not only survive, but thrive (Arthur, 2016; Heffernan, 2021; Romeu et al., 2016; Stadtfeld et al., 2019).

On the personal level, when I started my PhD at the University of Kent, it was like stepping into a whole new world compared to my academic days in Syria and Turkey. One thing that stood out immediately was the warmth and support of my supervisors. They were not just guiding me through my research; they were keen on understanding where I came from, both academically and personally. They created an environment where I felt free to voice my thoughts and opinions, knowing they would be met with respect. The 'academic communities' they ushered me into have been invaluable. One great example was the biweekly meetings organised at the level of the Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE). Here, colleagues at varying PhD stages, along with their supervisors, would gather for these enlightening one-hour online sessions which were like a mini-conference every two weeks. It was not just about attending; it was about belonging to a close-knit academic community. I have been both a listener, absorbing insights from my peers' presentations, and a presenter, benefitting from the constructive feedback of fellow students and supervisors alike.

Moreover, I have had the privilege of being involved in various academic circles both within and outside the University of Kent. The 'Researcher Development Programme' has been crucial in enhancing our skills and fostering meaningful interactions and collaborations with fellow researchers. I also took part in initiatives such as the 'Migration and Movement Signature Research Theme' and the 'University of Sanctuary Steering Group' at Kent, and also participated in a Summer Research School at the University of Bergen in Norway. In addition, I attended various academic conferences and symposia, which provided not only opportunities to learn but also to connect with brilliant academic colleagues.

4.4.2- Academic Communities in Conflict, Post-Conflict, and Exile Contexts

The academic scene in the Global South countries in general is not that positive due to multiple obvious reasons such as lack of resources and poor infrastructure, lack of political and economic stability, colonial histories, brain drain, and dictator regimes that stifle academic freedom (Altbach, 2003; Collyer, 2018; Heng et al., 2023). Academics in the Global North are rarely faced with the difficulties of their counterparts in the Global South. As Altbach (2003) explained:

What we do know about the conditions of the academic profession and of academic work in the developing world is not positive. Conditions of work and levels of remuneration are inadequate, involvement in institutional governance is often very limited, and the autonomy to build both an academic career and academic programs in the university is often constrained (p.1).

The situation becomes even more complex under the rule of authoritarian regimes. As explained in Chapter Two, the state of Syrian higher education was bleak even before the onset of the Syrian conflict in 2011, largely because of the repressive actions of the Syrian regime. It was difficult for Syrian academics to assemble in any academic communities – unless they served the interests of the Syrian regime. In their comprehensive examination of Syrian higher education before 2011, Dillabough et al. (2019) extensively discussed the testimonies of their research interviewees on this topic:

It is worth noting that the central role the Security Services in the HE system is seen as a defining element in both the past and the recent history of Syrian HE. [...] Similarly, Interviewee 7 summarised the political pressure to conform as follows: ‘There is no opposition in Syria. If you are not with the Al-Baath Party you

are placed in jail for having opposing ideas. [...] Political control over universities was also reported as being exercised through the National Union of Syrian Students. [...] There was a special department inside the Intelligence Service called the University Branch. In each faculty or college, there is one or more University Branch representatives (p. 29).

This oppressive and restrictive environment fostered a lack of trust among academics, deterring them from engaging in collective endeavours or establishing any form of community.

Some of them [Security Service recruits] write reports on colleagues, which may lead to their being detained or expelled from the university. This happened in our department before the crisis in 2008. (Interviewee 15) (p.30).

Reflecting on my own academic journey in Syria before 2011, I cannot recall being deeply involved in any genuine formal or institutional academic community. At the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, my interactions were limited – typically, I would leave immediately after my lectures, rarely mingling with fellow academics. Meanwhile, at the Higher Institute of Languages, our brief breaks offered moments of communication in the lecturers' room, especially with early-career colleagues keen on sharing teaching and learning insights. Yet, when senior academics were present, particularly those who got their postgraduate degrees from the UK or the USA, we often had to spend the entire break listening to their grand tales from abroad, as they persistently implied their superiority in both personal and academic fields.

From my observations, academic networking was mainly informal and largely influenced by personal ties. I often noticed that academics naturally connected with peers

from their hometown, shared ethnic or sub-cultural backgrounds, or those who had been classmates during undergraduate studies or while pursuing postgraduate scholarships abroad. Unfortunately, structured activities aimed at broadening academic networking and fostering tight-knit academic communities were somewhat scarce.

During times of conflict, the already fragile web of academic communities is further stressed and transformed. Within these volatile settings, the challenges of academic networking and community cohesion become more pronounced, intensifying pre-existing constraints (Bozalek, 2011; Milton, 2017; Milton, 2021; Milton, 2022). Targeting universities and academics, given their crucial influence on students and public opinion, undermines the many facets of academic collaboration and community engagement. Furthermore, it discourages many academics from participating in community activities that could potentially put them at risk, pushing them to prioritise survival over academic community involvement (Bernardo & Baranovich, 2014).

In the Syrian context—as detailed in Chapter 2—the conflict has had a profoundly detrimental effect on Higher Education. Sansom Milton (2019) provided an account of the state of higher education in territories held by the Syrian regime, where the majority of operational higher education institutions are located. While it has not entirely collapsed, it “is struggling to operate in a very challenging conflict-affected environment characterized by high levels of violence, mass displacement, and intense politicization” (p. 45). Consequently, it is difficult to expect any vibrant academic community endeavors.

In regions outside the control of the Syrian regime, academics confront numerous challenges, including continuous aerial bombardment, interference of military factions in academia, and lack of funding and accreditation (Abdulkerim et al., 2022; Omaish et al.,

2022; Shaban, 2020). Despite these obstacles, they have collaborated to create and sustain several higher education institutions. However, the various political affiliations of these institutions highly impacts their status, “these different alignments inevitably impact on universities’ security and vulnerability to bombardment, but also affect their access to trained academics, regulated curricula, recognised accreditation and certification and international funding” (Millican, 2020, p. 39). This intensely politicised environment influences the formation, scale, and orientation of emerging academic communities. The scarcity of resources further exacerbates the situation, driving many academics to rivalry rather than cooperation.

In exile, the situation gets even more complicated as academics often confront a multitude of challenges that not only hamper their research and teaching activities but also fundamentally challenge the core elements of their scholarly identity. These challenges can range from restricted access to research materials and limited professional networking opportunities, to a more existential crisis of questioning the value and relevance of their work in a new cultural and social environment. These challenges can make it hard for academics in exile to keep up the good work they used to do. Many feel lost, not just because they are in a new place, but also because their work and sense of purpose are affected.

In their study investigating the experience of the Indonesian academic exiles after the communist extermination in 1965, Theo and Leung (2022) described the effects of exile on the personal relationships of those academics most of whom had been studying in China or the Soviet Union when the conflict in Indonesia began, and, therefore, could not go back home. One example they discussed was that of Sarmadji, an academic who

arrived in the Netherlands in 1976 at age 45, and had previously studied child pedagogy in Beijing. In addition to age, the non-recognition of degrees from socialist countries hindered exiles like Sarmadji from finding suitable jobs in Western Europe. This instability also adversely affected their personal and family lives, as illustrated by Sarmadji's words:

I am married to books [laughs]. Well, I am not a homosexual. I am a straight man who likes women. The situation was just impossible for me to have a family. And here the culture is different and for me, it is difficult, and more, with the kind of job and hobby I have (Sarmadji, personal communication, April 20, 2016) (p. 65).

In these challenging contexts, the capacity to form valuable academic networks is heavily influenced by existing power imbalances. Exiled scholars often find themselves at a disadvantage as they try to navigate a landscape where host communities and institutions of the global North trying to support them often hold more influence, both intellectually and financially. This unequal dynamic makes it challenging for those scholars to establish professional relationships that could facilitate their research and career advancement (Axyonova et al., 2022; Kettler, 2011).

In my quest for an effective, holistic strategy for community development that can be applicable to the highly complex situation of Syrian academics in exile in Gaziantep, Turkey, I found the study of Mattessich and Monsey (1997) to be insightful. They conducted a comprehensive analysis of research literature to define the factors that contribute to the success of 'community building' — a term they preferred to use instead of 'community development'. They organised those factors into three distinct categories:

1- Characteristics of community: the social, psychological, and geographical features of a community and its residents that play a role in the success of community-building initiatives.

2- Characteristics of a community-building process: the specific elements involved in the methodology by which community-building efforts are undertaken.

3- Characteristics of Community-building organisers: the characteristics of the individuals leading the community-building endeavours, including their level of commitment, trustworthiness, understanding, and experience (Mattessich, 2008).

I believe this list of factors, along with the community development theories and approaches discussed earlier in this chapter, could be crucial in developing a framework that promotes the establishment and nurturing of a robust, cohesive academic community among Syrian academics in Gaziantep, Turkey. Mattessich (2008, pp. 53–55) outlined these key factors in Table 2 as follows:

Table 2

Twenty-Eight Factors That Influence the Success of Community Building

1- Characteristics of the community

A- Community awareness of an issue

Successful efforts more likely occur in communities where residents recognize the need for some type of initiative. A community-building effort must address an issue which is important enough to warrant attention, and which affects enough residents of a community to spark self-interest in participation. Residents must know that the problem or issue exists.

B- Motivation from within the community

Successful efforts are more likely to occur in communities where the motivation to begin a community-building process is self-imposed rather than encouraged from the outside.

C- Small geographic area

Successful efforts are more likely to occur in communities with smaller geographic areas, where planning and implementing activities are more manageable. Interaction is harder to achieve if individuals are separated from one another by a great distance.

D- Flexibility and adaptability

Successful efforts are more likely to occur in communities where organized groups and individuals exhibit flexibility and adaptability in problem solving and task accomplishment.

E- Preexisting social cohesion

The higher the existing level of social cohesion (that is, the strength of interrelationships among community residents), the more likely that a community building effort will be successful.

F- Ability to discuss, reach consensus, and cooperate

Successful efforts tend to occur more easily in communities that have a spirit of cooperation and the ability to discuss their problems and needs openly.

G- Existing identifiable leadership

Successful efforts are more likely to occur in communities with existing, identifiable leadership – that is, communities with at least some residents whom

most community members will follow and listen to – who can motivate, act as spokespersons, and assume leadership roles in a community- building initiative.

H- Prior success with community building

Communities with prior positive experience with community-building efforts are more likely to succeed with new ones.

2- Characteristics of the community-building process

A- Widespread participation

Successful efforts occur more often in communities that promote widespread participation, which is:

- Representative – it includes members of all, or most, segments of the community at any specific point in time.
- Continuous – it recruits new members over time, as some members leave for one reason or another.

B- Good system of communication

Successful efforts have well-developed systems of communication within the community itself and between the community and the rest of the world.

C- Minimal competition in pursuit of goals

Successful efforts tend to occur in communities where existing community organizations do not perceive other organizations or the leaders of a community-building initiative as competitors.

D- Development of self-understanding

Successful efforts are more likely to occur when the process includes developing a group identity, clarifying priorities, and agreeing on how to achieve goals.

E- Benefits to many residents

Successful community-building efforts occur more often when community goals, tasks, and activities have visible benefits to many people in the community.

F- Concurrent focus on product and process

Community-building initiatives are more likely to succeed when efforts to build relationships (the process focus) include tangible events and accomplishments (the product focus).

G- Linkage to organizations outside the community

Successful efforts are more likely to occur when members have ties to organizations outside the community, producing at least the following benefits: financial input; political support; source of knowledge; source of technical support.

H- Progression from simple to complex activities

Successful community-building efforts are more likely to occur when the process moves community members from simple to progressively more complex activities.

I- Systematic gathering of information and analysis of community issues

Successful community-building efforts are more likely to occur when the process includes taking careful steps to measure and analyze the needs and problems of the community.

J- Training to gain community building skills

Successful community-building efforts are more likely to occur when participants receive training to increase their community-building skills. Examples include

group facilitation, organizational skills, human relations skills, and skills in how to analyze complex community issues.

K- Early involvement and support from existing indigenous organizations

Successful community-building efforts tend to occur most often when community organizations of long tenure and solid reputation become involved early, bringing established contacts, legitimization, and access to resources.

L- Use of technical assistance

Successful community-building efforts are more likely to occur when residents use technical assistance to gain necessary skills.

M- Continual emergence of leaders, as needed

Successful community-building efforts are more likely to occur when the processes produce new leaders over time.

N- Community control over decision making

Successful community-building efforts are more likely to occur when residents have control over decisions, particularly over how funds are used.

O- The right mix of resources

Successful community building efforts occur when the process is not overwhelmed by too many resources or stifled by too few, and when there is a balance between internal and external resources.

3- Characteristics of community-building organizers

A- An understanding of the community

Successful community-building efforts are more likely to occur when organizers understand the community they serve. This includes an understanding of the community's culture, social structure, demographics, political structures, and issues.

B- Sincerity of commitment

Successful community-building efforts are more likely to occur when organized by individuals who convey a sincere commitment to the community's well-being; are interested in the community's long-term well-being; have a sustained attachment to community members; are honest; and act primarily to serve the interests of the community, not of an external group.

C- A relationship of trust

Successful community-building efforts are more likely to occur when the organizers develop trusting relationships with community residents.

D- A high level of organizing experience

Successful community-building efforts are more likely to occur when the organizers are experienced.

E- Flexibility and adaptability

Successful community building efforts are more likely to occur when organizers are flexible and able to adapt to constantly changing situations and environments.

Note. From Mattessich (2008, pp. 53–55)

Upon completing the data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the results, I plan to synthesise the insights derived from these 28 critical factors with those from the

theories and approaches discussed earlier in this chapter. This will guide me in developing a bespoke framework tailored specifically for Syrian academics in exile. I hope that this framework will effectively address their unique circumstances, enabling them to overcome challenges and foster a vibrant academic community.

To the best of my knowledge, the sole academic organisation that forms an academic umbrella for Syrian scholars in Turkey is Cara. Through its multifaceted Syria Programme, Cara provides invaluable opportunities such as English language courses, academic development workshops, and collaborative research projects facilitated by UK-based mentors. Furthermore, research incubation visits to UK universities have been pivotal in enhancing academic networking opportunities. These initiatives have played a critical role in not only forming tightly-knit professional circles but also in broadening the horizons of Syrian academics in exile, linking them with academic communities in Syria, Turkey, the UK, and beyond. Consequently, any research endeavouring to comprehend the nuances of the Syrian academic community in Turkey, and contribute to its development, must thoroughly examine how these academics engage with Cara's Syria Programme.

Parkinson et al. (2020) investigated this complex academic community that is formed through the interaction of Syrian academics with Cara's Syria Programme. They developed a comprehensive three-dimensional model for academic community development (see Figure 2). To effectively address the diverse needs of individual members while embracing the community's heterogeneity, the first dimension they suggest tackles 'community-focused and individual-focused' perspectives. The second dimension they propose is 'alleviating-transformative' which "highlights the difference

between a liberal and a more radical orientation and focuses attention on structural and cultural elements, rather than institutional elements.” (p. 197). The third dimension, ‘needs-based–asset-based’, contrasts focusing on what community lacks versus what it has and can leverage. These dimensions can intersect to construct an appropriate framework. Academic developers have the flexibility to navigate among these different strategies, adapting to the community's preferences and the unique circumstances of a given context at a particular time (Parkinson et al., 2020).

This study is central to my research, as it captures the essential elements of my inquiries regarding both the professional development practices employed by Syrian academics in exile—especially through their collaboration with Cara—and their collective and individual assets and needs. The insights gained will be instrumental in devising practical tools and strategies to support the development of a vibrant community among Syrian academics in Gaziantep. Additionally, these insights will inform the recommendations I plan to present in the conclusion of my thesis.

Having thoroughly reviewed the literature on various theories and approaches to community development, I will now proceed in the next chapter to elaborate on the specific research methodology I have employed. I will detail the research philosophy I have adopted, the approaches utilised, and the processes and tools I used for data collection and analysis. This will bridge the theoretical foundations laid in the literature review chapters with the practical aspects of my research.

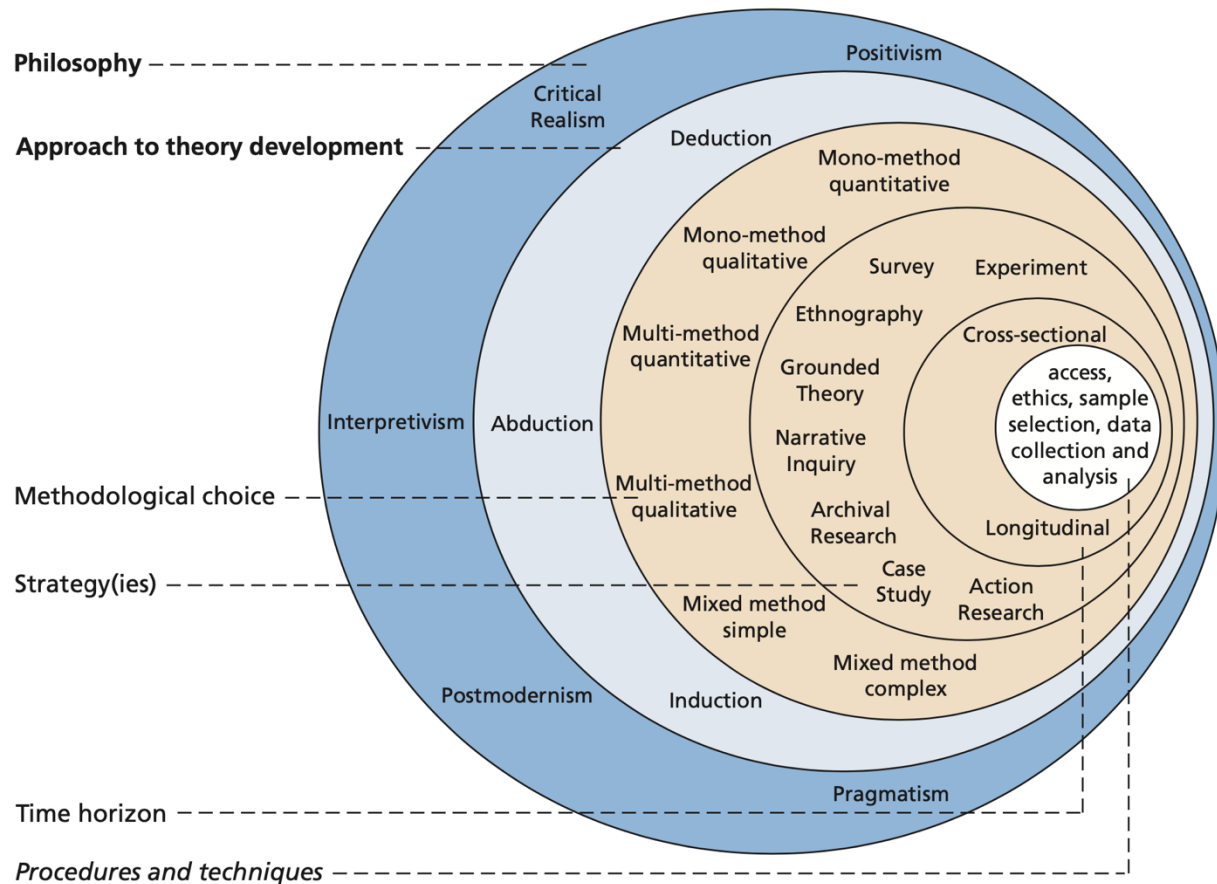
Chapter 5: Research Methodology

As I began drafting this chapter, I faced a common challenge familiar to many postgraduate students: articulating the research methodology (Holden & Lynch, 2004; Muhaise et al., 2020). While I had a profound, nuanced understanding of my topic, I found myself grappling with the inconsistent terminology prevalent in research discourse (Haydam & Steenkamp, 2020). This was further complicated by my uncertainty regarding the optimal structure for this chapter so that I can ensure clarity and effective communication of my ideas.

This dilemma was resolved when I discovered the 'research onion' model. Saunders et al. (2023) introduced this framework, which visualises research methodology as layers of an onion, as illustrated in Figure 4. This model helps in comprehending the intricate processes involved in research. The 'onion' analogy implies that research entails progressively peeling the outer layers to reach the core. The framework prompts researchers to thoroughly examine six distinct layers, thereby transitioning from overarching concepts to specific research details. The model's rationale is that a well-considered and consistent set of assumptions forms a sound research philosophy, supporting the choice of research approach, strategy, and data collection and analysis techniques. This enables researchers to design a well-integrated research project, ensuring all components of the research are congruent (Bianchi, 2021; Iovino & Tsitsianis, 2020; Saunders et al., 2023). In the subsequent sections, I will delve into the six layers of the 'onion' model, detailing how my research addresses each layer.

Figure 4

The Research Onion



Note. From Saunders et al. (2023, p. 131).

5.1- Research Philosophy

My research centres on the experiences of Syrian academics in exile, a topic that resonates deeply with me on a personal level. In an effort to authentically capture and reflect the perspectives of my participants—fellow Syrian academics—I have adopted a

constructivist stance⁵. This paradigm is particularly suitable for this type of research, as it emphasises the co-creation of knowledge between researchers and participants (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Grounded in a relativist ontology and a subjectivist, transactional epistemology (Dieronitou, 2014), this paradigm has been crucial for guiding my research methodology, the way I collected data, and how I interpreted the findings.

This perspective acknowledges that individuals from different cultural backgrounds, under different circumstances and at different times, develop their own meanings and create their own unique social ‘realities’. My research does not seek to uncover absolute, universal ‘laws’ applicable to everyone, as I believe that “rich insights into humanity are lost if such complexity is reduced entirely to a series of law-like generalisations” (Saunders et al., 2023, p. 150). My focus is on exploring how these academics personally interpret their situations, appreciating the diversity in their perceptions of their assets and needs and responses to their unique challenges. My approach seeks to capture the multifaceted and individualised realities of their experiences.

Moreover, in embracing the constructivist paradigm, I acknowledge the axiological impact on my study, recognising that my interpretation of research data is deeply influenced by my own values and beliefs (Cohen et al., 2017; Creswell, et al., 2018). This perspective leads me to view social inquiry as inherently value-driven and subjective (Silverman, 2017). During this research, I have openly recognised my biases and deeply

⁵ Although the model proposed by Saunders et al. (2023) encompasses only five primary philosophies—positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, postmodernism, and pragmatism, which the authors deem most prevalent in management and business research, I found constructivism, which shares intellectual roots with interpretivism and is occasionally used interchangeably with it (Schwandt, 1994), to be a more fitting paradigm for my study.

acknowledged participants' values. This position has guided the selection of my research topic – understanding that the experiences of Syrian academics in exile are intertwined with the broader context of their lives before and after 2011, their displacement, and exile. These values have also influenced the choice of my research perspective (an emic approach), the paradigm I have adopted (constructivism), the methods I have employed for data collection (in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations), and how I have analysed, interpreted, and reported my research findings.

5.2- Research Approach

The approach I have followed is chiefly inductive, although it incorporates certain deductive elements. These deductive aspects are manifest in my initial assumptions regarding the Syrian regime's influence on the academic experiences of exiled Syrian academics, as well as my own previous perspectives as an insider, which are subtly incorporated into my conceptual framework. Nevertheless, I conscientiously ensured these preconceived notions did not confine my exhaustive investigation of the participants' stories or impede the exploration of their distinct viewpoints. I leaned more heavily towards the inductive approach, appreciating its strength in exploring and understanding complex, nuanced phenomena through the detailed analysis of qualitative data (Creswell, et al., 2018).

My study aims to investigate the personal and professional narratives of Syrian academics, encompassing various facets of their lives in exile. A critical aspect of this study is to understand how these individuals interact with their peers within the exiled Syrian academic community and with the broader international academic community.

These interactions are pivotal in shaping their experiences and strategies for survival and growth in the academic domain.

Furthermore, the study seeks to uncover their aspirations and the innovative approaches they propose to navigate and overcome the challenges they face. This includes maintaining their academic identities, enhancing their skills, and contributing to the international academic discourse, despite the adversities of exile. The research also looks forward to their potential role in the future, particularly their visions and plans for participating in the rebuilding of Syria's higher education once the situation in the country improves.

By predominantly employing an inductive approach, which fits seamlessly with the adopted constructivist paradigm (Adom et al., 2016; Fearon et al., 2021; Willig, 2016), this study aims to capture an in-depth understanding of the participants' situations, beyond the constraints of predefined theories or hypotheses. This approach ensures that the study remains grounded in the real-life experiences of its participants, providing valuable insights that can guide academic, policy, and practical interventions relevant to the broader context of higher education in conflict and post-conflict settings.

5.3- Methodological Choice

In my study, qualitative research emerges as the most fitting method to meet my research objectives, address my research questions, and align with the conceptual framework I have developed (see Figure 1). This approach is particularly effective for an in-depth examination of the experiences of my research participants in their authentic context (Adom et al., 2016; Bhattacharya, 2017). The methodology is aimed at giving

them a voice and enabling profound, meaningful interpretations that can enhance the current understanding of their— and similar— situations.

Constructing meaning, cultivating interpretations, and comprehending the contextual nuances inherent in the studied phenomenon are fundamental tenets of the qualitative approach and integral to my research.

At this point, after making the main methodological choice, Saunders et al. (2023) discuss the purpose of research design, emphasising that a research question specifies whether the purpose is "exploratory, descriptive, explanatory or evaluative or some combination of these" (p. 179). Reflecting on this, my research primarily embraced an exploratory approach, while also integrating some descriptive elements. My focus was on exploring the lived experiences of my Syrian colleagues in Turkey, understanding the interpretations and meanings they attach to these experiences. This exploration extended to examining how they identified their skills and assets and their effectiveness in leveraging these resources. A particular interest of mine was the Syrian academic community's tendency towards collective action, or lack thereof, prompting me to investigate the community dynamics, challenges, and potential solutions. However, my role as an insider researcher, with an emic perspective, allowed me to contribute a rich descriptive layer to the study. These dual exploratory and descriptive aims were evident throughout my research.

To effectively fulfil the objectives of my research, I have designed it as a multi-method qualitative study (Saunders et al., 2023) which encompasses a combination of interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations. These techniques, which I will elaborate on in subsequent sections of this chapter, are integral to the depth

and breadth of my study, offering varied perspectives and rich insights into my research topic.

5.4- Research Strategy

The most suitable strategy for achieving my research objectives and addressing my research questions is the 'case study' strategy, particularly when viewed through the nuanced lens of Robert Stake (1995). In addition, the autoethnographic element I incorporate weaves my personal narratives, emotions, experiences, perspectives, values, and beliefs into the fabric of the thesis. This approach enriches my thesis with greater depth and authenticity, while also providing a more layered and nuanced understanding of the phenomena I examine (Adams & Herrmann, 2023).

According to Fearon et al. (2021), case study research "facilitates the in-depth, real-life exploration of complex phenomena from multiple perspectives" (p. 1). Rolf Johansson (2007) explains that a case study is expected to capture the complexity of a case, which "should be a functioning unit, be investigated in its natural context with a multitude of methods and be contemporary" (p. 2). Therefore, case study is a well-established strategy to deal with the complexities involved in the case of exiled Syrian academics. In the diverse literature concerning case studies, various authors categorise them in different ways. Some view case studies as a method, while others see them as a methodology. There are also perspectives that describe case studies as a strategy or an approach. However, these categorisations are not consistently applied across the literature (Simons, 2009). In my research, I will use the term 'strategy' to define case study, aligning with the perspective presented by Saunders et al. (2023) in their 'research onion' model.

Historically, case study research has evolved significantly since its early use in the social sciences, gaining traction across various disciplines, including history, anthropology, psychology, education, business, politics, and law (Gerring, 2017). It is a versatile strategy that adapts well to the unique demands of different fields. Two of the most notable figures who have shaped the understanding of case studies are Robert Stake and Robert Yin. Both aim to thoroughly investigate this research strategy and uncover its core essence. However, the approaches they use to achieve this are distinctly different (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Cohen et al., 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The constructivist orientation and qualitative emphasis in Stake's case study perspective align closely with the approach of my research. He clearly notes that “of all the roles the role of interpreter, and gatherer of interpretations, is central. Most contemporary qualitative researchers nourish the belief that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered” (Stake, 1995, p. 99). Stake primarily views qualitative case study researchers as interpreters and collectors of interpretations. This role necessitates that they convey their own rendition or construction of the reality or knowledge constructed through their investigative process. (Stake, 1995; Yazan, 2015). In the Stakeian view, qualitative researchers should anticipate an additional layer of reality or knowledge construction by the readers of their reports, adding to the two levels of construction previously mentioned (Yazan, 2015). This conclusion is also relevant to his argument that “there are multiple perspectives or views of [the case] that need to be represented, but there is no way to establish, beyond contention, the best view” (Stake, 1995, p. 108).

On the other hand, Robert Yin's perspective leans towards a structured, positivist approach in case study research. Although Yin does not directly specify his

epistemological position, the methodology and focal points in his work on case study and research broadly hint at an alignment with positivist traditions (Fearon et al., 2021; Silverman, 2017; Yazan, 2015). This perspective is also evident through his emphasis on empirical testing and the focus on causality. His methods, suggesting an objective reality, adhere to the scientific method and aim for replicability and objectivity, typical of positivism. Furthermore, Yin's inclination towards generalising findings reflects the positivist goal of formulating broader theories or laws (Yin, 2009). Moreover, his emphasis on validity, a core concept in positivist research, reflects a commitment to ensuring that the research accurately reflects the 'reality' it aims to investigate. He explicitly states that "case study designs need to maximize their quality through four critical conditions related to design quality: (a) construct validity, (b) internal validity, (c) external validity, and (d) reliability" (Yin, 2009, p. 24).

While definitions of case study research vary, they commonly include two central aspects: the examination of a specific real-life context with defined boundaries, and the need for thorough, holistic analysis due to its intricate nature (Fearon et al., 2021). The essence of a 'case' from a Stake's view is its specificity and the depth it offers for understanding a particular phenomenon:

We study a case when it itself is of very special interest. We look for the detail of interaction with its contexts. Case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances (Stake, 1995, xi).

To Stake (1995), attempting to define 'case' precisely is not only challenging but may also be restrictive, given the context-dependent nature of this research strategy:

The case could be a child. It could be a classroom of children or a particular mobilization of professionals to study a childhood condition. The case is one among others. In any given study, we will concentrate on the one. The time we spend concentrating on the one may be a day or a year, but while we so concentrate we are engaged in case study (p. 2).

Emphasising the importance of adaptability in research design, Stake advocates for an approach that allows significant modifications, even after the transition from the planning phase to the actual execution of the research (Yazan, 2015). However, building upon Smith's (1978) perspective, Stake describes a case as a "bounded system," a notion that treats each case as a unique, self-contained unit with its own distinct attributes and internal dynamics. This perspective encourages a focus on the individuality of each case, emphasising its specific features over its representation of broader concepts or processes. Stake further elaborates on this idea by describing a case as "a specific, a complex, functioning thing," essentially an "integrated system" with clearly defined boundaries and components:

Louis Smith, one of the first educational ethnographers, helped define the case as "a bounded system," drawing attention to it as an object rather than a process. Let us use the Greek symbol θ (theta) to represent the case, thinking about the object as a boundary and working parts. In our work in social services and human services, θ is likely to be purposive, even having a "self." The case is an integrated system. The parts do not have to be working well, the purposes may be irrational, but it is a system. Thus people and programs clearly are prospective cases (Stake, 1995, p 2).

Setting these clear 'boundaries' for the case under study is vital, irrespective of the case's level of complexity, as they provide structure to the study and guide the processes of gathering, analysing, and interpreting data (Simons, 2009). To enhance the clarity of the case 'boundaries' while maintaining the necessary flexibility in the case study, Stake proposes that the initial design should primarily focus on identifying the key 'issues' and formulating pertinent 'issue questions'. These foundational elements then guide the subsequent development of more specific research questions, allowing for a dynamic and responsive research process that can evolve as new insights and needs emerge (Stake, 1995).

Stake clarifies that 'issues' represent the broad, general areas of interest or concern that the research intends to explore (Baxter & Jack, 2008). They are the overarching themes that initiate the research endeavour:

Issues are not simple and clean, but intricately wired to political, social, historical, and especially personal contexts. All these meanings are important in studying cases. Issues draw us toward observing, even teasing out, the problems of the case, the conflictual outpourings, the complex backgrounds of human concern. Issues help us expand upon the moment, help us see the instance in a more historical light, help us recognize the pervasive problems in human interaction (Stake, 1995, p. 17).

In my study, I began with three key preliminary issues to steer my investigation: first, exploring the specific academic teaching and learning development needs of Syrian academics in exile in Turkey; second, examining the actual academic development practices employed by these academics; and third, assessing how organisations focused

on higher education, along with the international academic community, are responding to this unique situation.

Stake (1995) then progresses to elucidate the concept of 'issue questions', which emerge from the overarching issues. These questions, while still somewhat broad, are more specific and serve to direct the early stages of the study. They act as a funnel, concentrating the research's scope from wider issues to more targeted areas that warrant exploration. In my study, I bypassed this phase of developing explicit 'issue questions.' However, I continuously refined my initial issues to align more closely with my research objectives. Over time, this iterative process led to subtle yet significant modifications, ultimately crystallising my research questions in their current form. First, I decided to broaden the scope to include academic development as a whole, rather than just teaching and learning. This broader view allowed for the inclusion of research and other relevant academic skills. Second, I chose to narrow the geographical focus to academics in Gaziantep rather than the entirety of Turkey. This decision facilitated the collection of more consistent, in-depth data and helped better define the geographical boundaries of my case study. Third, I was able to more precisely articulate my interest in the 'community' aspect of the research participants, a key element of my research that initially lacked a clear definition. Consequently, I refined my initial research questions and reformulated them, as outlined in Table 3:

Table 3*Initial and Refined Research Questions*

Initial Research Questions	Refined Research Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the academic teaching and learning development needs of Syrian academics in exile in Gaziantep, Turkey? • How are Syrian academics in exile in Gaziantep, Turkey supporting each other professionally, intellectually, and emotionally? • In what ways can the international academic community, education-focused NGOs, and other organisations support Syrian academics in exile? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do Syrian academics in exile in Gaziantep, Turkey, develop their academic skills, careers, and expertise? What are their specific needs and assets in this context? • How do Syrian academics in Gaziantep, Turkey, foster mutual support and collaboration within their academic community? • In what ways can the international academic community and organisations focused on higher education effectively support exiled Syrian academics?

Through this approach, the 'boundaries' of my case study became more distinct: it focuses on a contemporary phenomenon, establishing the 'time' boundary; it is located in the city of Gaziantep, Turkey, forming the 'geographic' boundary; it centres on the experiences of exiled Syrian academics, defining the 'research actors' boundary; it examines academic development initiatives, setting the 'purpose' boundary; and it

investigates the interactions of these academics within their own community and with the broader academic community, thus creating the 'contextual' boundary.

In his classification of case studies, Stake (1995) delineates three types: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. Intrinsic case studies are chosen based on a genuine interest in the particular case itself, rather than for what it might represent or elucidate about other cases. Conversely, instrumental case studies are undertaken to gain insight into a broader question or issue through the study of a specific case. This approach is not about the case itself but about using the case as a means to an end. The selection between intrinsic and instrumental case studies depends on the specific interests and goals of the researcher. In the third type called collective case studies, multiple cases are studied together. This approach is chosen when individual intrinsic or instrumental interests in cases necessitate or benefit from a comparative or comprehensive perspective. It aims to coordinate insights from multiple individual cases to address broader research questions or themes.

My research is designed with a dual purpose, interweaving intrinsic and instrumental elements. Intrinsically, it is propelled by a deep, focused interest in the unique circumstances surrounding Syrian academics in exile in Gaziantep, Turkey. The heart of this study is to delve into their lived experiences, uncover their specific needs and assets, and to scrutinise how the international academic community acknowledges and addresses their unique situations. This exploration seeks to provide a comprehensive narrative of their individual and community-level challenges and triumphs, intending to foster a nuanced understanding of their professional journey within the context of exile.

Instrumentally, my research extends beyond the immediate scope of Syrian academics, aiming to leverage the specificity of this particular case to inform broader educational and policy frameworks. The insights from this study are intended to enhance strategies and support mechanisms for scholars in conflict-affected, post-conflict, or resource-limited areas, thus illuminating pathways for academic solidarity and development across diverse contexts and contributing to a broader educational and humanitarian cause.

In discussing data collection, Stake (1995) emphasises the crucial importance of specific skills that researchers must possess to effectively conduct qualitative research. He underscores that these skills are not just technical, but also involve a deep understanding of the subject matter, keen observational abilities, and a strong sense of empathy to truly comprehend and represent the perspectives of the subjects:

One of the principal qualifications of qualitative researchers is experience. Added to the experience of ordinary looking and thinking, the experience of the qualitative researcher is one of knowing what leads to significant understanding, recognizing good sources of data, and consciously and unconsciously testing out the veracity of their eyes and robustness of their interpretations. It requires sensitivity and skepticism (pp. 49-50).

He proceeds to propose developing a data gathering plan which should encompass “definition of case, list of research questions, identification of helpers, data sources, allocation of time, expenses, intended reporting” (p. 51).

Additionally, Stake (1995) explains the nature of the data collection process, noting that it does not have a fixed start time and can extend well before the formal commencement of the study:

There is no particular moment when data gathering begins. It begins before there is commitment to do the study: backgrounding, acquaintance with other cases, first impressions. A considerable proportion of all data is impressionistic, picked up informally as the researcher first becomes acquainted with the case. Many of these early impressions will later be refined or replaced, but the pool of data includes the earliest of observations. (p. 49).

This completely resonates with my experience, as many of my impressions, observations, and reflections on different aspects of my study predate the official start of my research.

Moreover, it is important for case study researchers, according to Skate, to gather data from a variety of sources. This approach is essential to comprehensively understand and accurately represent the complexity of the case being studied. By utilising multiple data sources, researchers can ensure a more holistic and nuanced understanding of the case, capturing its various dimensions and intricacies in full and enhancing data credibility. As explained by Baxter and Jack (2008):

Each data source is one piece of the “puzzle,” with each piece contributing to the researcher’s understanding of the whole phenomenon. This convergence adds strength to the findings as the various strands of data are braided together to promote a greater understanding of the case (p. 554).

This aspect of the case study strategy is also reflected in my research through the use of interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations to triangulate the data and provide a holistic representation of the participants' experiences and perspectives. According to Johansson (2007), "the essence of case study methodology is triangulation, the combination of different levels of techniques, methods, strategies, or theories." He asserts that "case studies develop through the mastery of such combinations" (p. 11). In the core layer of the research 'onion', which addresses various research techniques, I will explore in greater detail the processes of data collection, analysis, validation, and generalisation.

5.5- Time Horizon

My research primarily employs a cross-sectional design, utilising data collected from participants via interviews and focus group discussions at a specific point during the study. This approach facilitates efficient data collection and ensures that the findings are relevant and directly aligned with the overarching research design. However, my study also incorporates a unique longitudinal component, characterised by my continuous participant observations and ongoing reflections on the experiences of exiled Syrian academics and their professional development endeavours. This aspect of the research allows me to observe and document any changes within this context over the course of my study.

While the longitudinal component in my research diverges from the conventional approach, which typically involves the repeated collection and detailed comparison of data over an extended period, it adds a dynamic dimension to the study. This hybrid method enables me to capture a snapshot of the current state of affairs through cross-

sectional methods, while also allowing the flexibility to track and report developmental changes and trends observed among the participants throughout the research period. Additionally, it allows me to place these observations in a broader historical context, as elaborated in Chapter 2. Such an approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the immediate situation as well as its evolution, enhancing the depth and relevance of my findings. It also better aligns with my research design and objectives.

5.6- Research Procedures and Techniques

In this section, I will outline the key practices and methods I used to access data, ensure ethical standards, select the research sample, collect and analyse data, and report the findings.

5.6.1- *Strategies to Gain Access*

Although the access strategies suggested by Saunders et al. (2023) primarily target the corporate environment, I will outline the key elements from their list and reflect on how I employed similar approaches in my interactions with potential participants for my own research:

Ensuring familiarity before making contact: As a member of the Syrian academic community in Gaziantep, Turkey, I had forged connections with numerous potential research participants. Some of these connections dated back to my time at the University of Aleppo before the crisis, while others were formed through professional networks in Gaziantep—mainly my English language classes or training courses. My engagement with Cara's Syria Programme as a member and English instructor further broadened my network. Consequently, even those participants who had not known me well prior to my data collection were linked through mutual friends or acquaintances. This network greatly

facilitated the identification of participants for interviews and group discussions. Furthermore, my active role in Cara and my profession as an educator provided numerous opportunities for easy access to and collection of participant observation data.

Allowing sufficient time: When contacting potential participants for my study, I made it clear in my messages (typically sent via WhatsApp or email) and in the 'participant information sheets' attached, that they had a one-month window to respond. I also emphasised that we would schedule our meetings based on their availability, prioritising their convenience.

Using existing contacts and developing new ones: Leveraging my already extensive network, I contacted new nominees, introducing myself and concisely describing my research. I also mentioned the mutual connection who had recommended them. This strategy helped in quickly building trust, which in turn increased the likelihood of these individuals agreeing to participate in my study, rather than declining.

Providing a clear account of the purpose and type of access required: I consistently provided thorough details about the interviews and focus group discussions. This included discussing the study's objectives, emphasising the participants' rights, estimating the time commitment required for an interview or a group discussion, and offering the choice between in-person and online formats. Such detailed and clear communication was essential in setting the right expectations and ensuring a smooth, participant-friendly research process.

Overcoming concerns: Throughout my research, I have given this issue careful consideration and will further discuss these points in the forthcoming section dedicated to the ethical dimensions of research.

Identifying possible benefits: I carefully crafted both my invitation message and, more thoroughly, my participant information sheets, to include a section clearly outlining the potential benefits for research participants. These benefits included the opportunity to voice their perspectives on the challenges they face, to articulate their academic development needs as they perceive them, to propose strategies they believe are effective in utilising their intellectual assets to surmount difficulties, and to provide valuable input to influential policy and decision makers for the design of impactful academic development initiatives that address the root causes of their issues, not just the superficial symptoms. Furthermore, the research questions were framed to stimulate reflection among participants, both individually in interviews and collectively in group discussions, potentially helping them to identify unrecognised strengths and conceive new solutions or initiatives they had not previously considered.

Using suitable language: While my target group comprised mainly academics, likely familiar to a certain extent with research frameworks and data collection methods like interviews and group discussions, I consciously chose to communicate in simple Arabic, carefully clarifying any potentially unclear terms. My communication strategy aimed to not only engage their interest but also to set appropriate expectations and address any concerns they might have.

Facilitating replies: In my communication with potential participants, I primarily provided my mobile phone number, with the additional option for WhatsApp messaging, alongside my email address. This strategy was successful, as demonstrated by my outreach to 39 potential participants, resulting in 33 responses and the eventual participation of 27 individuals in the research.

5.6.2- Research Ethics

In the development of my research, I placed a strong emphasis on ethical considerations, informed by my prior involvement in similar studies and adherence to the ethical guidelines of some UK universities. My understanding of these guidelines was further deepened through an extensive review of the specific guidelines of research ethics set by the University of Kent. Such careful preparation was pivotal in ensuring my research methods were ethically robust. I did not start collecting my data until I received the formal approval from the University's Ethics Committee (see Appendix 1).

The Ethics Committee rigorously addressed all facets concerning ethical issues, employing a comprehensive framework comprising guidelines, checklists, and a detailed application form. This framework encompassed various critical aspects:

- An overview of the study.
- Specific questions for interviews and group discussions.
- Principles of respect and harm avoidance.
- Procedures for obtaining informed consent.
- Criteria for participant inclusion and exclusion.
- Time commitment required from participants.
- Identification and mitigation of potential risks and burdens to participants.
- Assurance of voluntary participation and freedom to withdraw.
- Benefits to participants arising from the research.
- Assessment of risks to researchers and the university.
- Procedures to ensure data confidentiality and participant anonymity.
- Strategies for data management and security.

- Compliance with GDPR.
- Approaches to publication and dissemination of findings.
- Responsibilities in data analysis and reporting of results.
- Special considerations for research in fragile and conflict-affected areas, in line with guidelines from UKRI and UNICEF.

This comprehensive approach not only integrated ethical considerations thoroughly into my research, safeguarding participant rights and the integrity of the study, but also ensured my consistent and meticulous adherence to these standards throughout the entire process.

5.6.3- Selecting the Research Sample

According to Simons (2009), in case study research, where the primary goal is to gain a deeper understanding or insight into the case, purposive sampling is commonly used. This involves selectively interviewing individuals who are central to the case and observing events that are most likely to offer meaningful insights about the pertinent issue. The emphasis in purposive sampling is on selecting participants and situations that are particularly informative or crucial to the research question. This targeted selection is key to achieving a deeper understanding of the specific case being studied.

Cohen et al. (2017) reinforce and extend Simons' (2009) ideas, suggesting that in such contexts, the term 'sample' is not the most accurate descriptor. Instead, they propose referring to the selected participants as a 'group' or 'individuals,' which more aptly captures the essence of the selection process in these studies. Moreover, they emphasise that the size of this group or the number of individuals chosen should be guided by their

suitability for the study's purpose. The focus is on how well the participants fit the objectives of the research, rather than adhering to predetermined sample size criteria.

In my study, as previously outlined in this chapter, I established specific boundaries for my case and consequently identified my research population as Syrian academics residing in Gaziantep, Turkey. To clarify the term 'academic,' which can be somewhat ambiguous, I utilised the definition provided by Cara: "An 'academic' is someone who has held a post as a lecturer and/or researcher in a higher education institution or equivalent" (Cara, n.d.-b). Additionally, I expanded this group to include individuals who were registered as doctoral researchers before the onset of the crisis, as they represent a segment of the higher education community whose scholarly endeavours were markedly disrupted by the conflict.

I began the process of identifying potential participants for interviews and focus group discussions by leveraging my existing network. This initial step was augmented through the application of the snowball sampling methodology (SSM). This approach enabled initial participants to suggest additional candidates who also fulfilled the research criteria (Cohen et al., 2017; Valdez and Kaplan 1999). Cohen and Arieli (2011, p. 426) describe SSM as "a distinct method of convenience sampling which has been proven to be especially useful in conducting research in marginalized societies."

In the context of Syrian academics living in Gaziantep, many of whom are under 'temporary protection status', the challenges are manifold. They struggle with unemployment in academia, unrecognised qualifications, lack of affiliation with higher education or research institutions, and the absence of unions or syndicates to manage their affairs and advocate for their rights. Consequently, it becomes challenging to compile

a comprehensive list of names or secure contact information, making the identification of the entire 'research population' and the pursuit of a 'representative' sample unattainable.

Furthermore, beyond the aspect of engaging with a hard-to-reach population (Cohen et al., 2017; Valdez and Kaplan 1999), this non-probability, purposive sampling technique is especially well-matched with my research design. The focus of my study is to explore this specific 'case' in its natural context and to gain a deep understanding of it, rather than pursuing generalisation, representativeness, or external validity (Parker et al., 2020).

In my effort to identify new potential participants, I diligently sought to encompass individuals with diverse characteristics, aiming to provide a comprehensive view of the target group. My goal was to include both male and female academics from a range of age groups and disciplines, as well as those with varied academic experiences before and after displacement. This diversity was key to capturing the multifaceted nature of the group.

5.6.4- Data Collection

In my research, I adopted a 'triangulation' approach, utilising three primary data collection methods: participant observation, interviews, and focus groups. Each method contributed a unique perspective and set of data, thereby increasing the overall comprehensiveness and depth of the research. This aligns with Baxter and Jack's (2008) viewpoint, asserting that "each data source is one piece of the 'puzzle,' with each piece contributing to the researcher's understanding of the whole phenomenon" (p. 554). This approach also enhanced the credibility of both the data and the conclusions drawn from it (Cohen et al., 2017). Furthermore, this multi-method approach is in alignment with

Stake's (1995) principles on data collection within case study research, which advocate for a diverse method approach to construct a well-rounded and reliable understanding of the case.

5.6.4.1- Participant Observation. In conducting my qualitative research, guided mainly by an inductive approach and informed by my perspective as an insider, I chose the method of 'participant observation' in a 'natural' setting (Gray, 2022; Saunders et al., 2023). This approach was deeply rooted in my experiences, with observations and reflections dating back to well before the start of my formal study. These experiences have profoundly shaped every facet of my research, from the initial idea and formation of research questions to the development of the conceptual framework and the design of the research itself. This 'personal' dimension resonates with Stake's insights into the essence of qualitative case study research:

Qualitative case study is highly personal research. Persons studied are studied in depth. Researchers are encouraged to include their own personal perspectives in the interpretation. The way the case and the researcher interact is presumed unique and not necessarily reproducible for other cases and researchers. The quality and utility of the research is not based on its reproducibility but on whether or not the meanings generated, by the researcher or the reader, are valued. Thus a personal valuing of the work is expected (Stake, 1995, p. 135).

The diversity in my first-hand experiences is crucial to the core of my research, enabling me to effectively give voice to the narratives and perspectives of my fellow Syrian academics. Prior to 2011, I was an integral part of the Syrian higher education system, where I experienced the hegemonic influence of the Syrian regime. The subsequent

internal displacement, and the dire circumstances of war—including living under bombardment and severe conditions—led to my eventual departure from Syria. This period marked a temporary disengagement from academia, but I remained steadfast in reclaiming and cultivating my academic identity, striving to maintain and develop my academic skills. Moreover, as a member of the academic community in exile, I participated in various academic development initiatives both in-person and online.

With the initiation of my PhD research, my approach to observation and reflection became more conscious and intentional. I began to systematically document relevant observations, focusing on the academic development events and practices, and the varied experiences of Syrian academics in Gaziantep, including their challenges, achievements, and setbacks. I also engaged in mindful reflection on my interactions with them, paying close attention to the narratives they shared, the perspectives they offered, and the circumstances they encountered. For documentation, I frequently wrote notes in a paper notebook or utilised the notepad feature on my mobile phone. Over time, I meticulously gathered these initial jottings into a Word document, blending entries in both Arabic and English.

5.6.4.2- Interviews. Stake (1995) emphasises that much of what is beyond our direct observation has already been, or is currently being, observed by others. He acknowledges that different individuals will perceive a case in unique ways. Qualitative researchers, he points out, should excel in identifying and conveying these diverse perspectives. Stake refers to the interview as "the main road to multiple realities" (p. 64), stressing its central role in qualitative research. He underscores the necessity for researchers to prepare thoroughly for interviews, as the goal is often not to merely gather

yes or no answers, but to elicit detailed narratives about "an episode, a linkage, [or] an explanation" (p. 65). Stake considers the ability to craft effective questions and anticipate responses that yield deep insights as a distinct and 'special art'. Furthermore, he encourages researchers to test their interview questions in a 'pilot form', or at least mentally rehearse them, to optimise their effectiveness.

In his guidelines on the techniques of conducting the actual interview, Stake (1995) places a strong emphasis on the importance of active listening by the interviewer. He suggests that the interviewer may need to take a few or many notes, depending on the situation, while maintaining control over the data collection process. Stake also mentions the occasional necessity for the interviewer to ask what might seem like a dumb question. This could be to confirm something that was stated or to clarify if the interviewee meant something that seems unlikely or unclear. This approach ensures accurate understanding and thorough data gathering during the interview process.

For my research, I conducted 24 semi-structured interviews, which were meticulously planned yet retained flexibility, allowing for a depth of insight from participants (Gray, 2022). My interview guide comprised 19 open-ended questions, organised to obtain the participants' perspectives on their academic journeys before and after 2011 and their experiences in exile, thus facilitating deep insights into the research questions (see Appendix 2). After conducting two initial pilot interviews, I changed the phrasing and the order of some questions and expanded the list by adding four more questions. To foster a comfortable and open environment, I deliberately chose a conversational style over a more formal, interrogative approach. This strategy was effective in building rapport with the interviewees, encouraging them to share their

thoughts openly and comfortably. While I used a printed copy of the questions for occasional reference during the interviews, I ensured the dialogue flowed smoothly. Often, the interviewees naturally addressed some questions in their responses before I explicitly asked them, thereby maintaining a dynamic and coherent flow of the interview. At other times, I found it essential to pose follow-up or probing questions, serving to confirm the participants' comprehension and to garner clear responses.

In section 5.6.1 of this chapter, I detailed my initial contact with potential participants, during which I distributed participant information sheets and consent forms. These documents provided comprehensive information about the research, including its voluntary nature, measures for ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and participants' rights to withdraw, skip questions, or opt out entirely. Additionally, I offered flexibility in scheduling interviews and selecting the location, including the option for online interviews on their preferred platform. I also introduced the concept of group discussions, allowing participants to choose between interviews, group discussions, both, or neither.

Out of 39 potential participants I contacted for my study, 33 agreed to participate; 5 did not respond at all; and one engaged in a phone conversation, expressed their views, but requested not to be formally included. Ultimately, 27 academics contributed to the study: 20 engaged in both interviews and group discussions, 4 only in interviews, and 3 solely in group discussions. I stopped pursuing further participation once I noticed a saturation point in the study, where no new or differing perspectives were being offered. This led me to discontinue nudging those who had initially agreed but had not scheduled a time, as well as refraining from recruiting new participants.

In the 24 interviews I conducted, the gender distribution was uneven, comprising 5 female and 19 male participants, despite my efforts to include more female voices. This disparity largely mirrors the gender ratio present in the wider research population from which these participants were selected, where males significantly outnumber females. Furthermore, the participants represented a broad age spectrum, with ages ranging from the early thirties to the late sixties. This was accompanied by a variety in their disciplinary backgrounds, contributing to diverse and multifaceted perspectives.

The interview process spanned approximately five months, beginning on 25 May 2022, and concluding on 17 October 2022. During this period, I conducted 14 face-to-face interviews in various locations, including my home, the participants' homes, our respective workplaces, as well as in cafés, restaurants, and parks. The remaining 10 interviews were conducted online via the Zoom platform. The average duration of the interviews was 63 minutes, with the longest extending to 95 minutes and the shortest being 40 minutes.

Upon obtaining informed consent from the participants, I recorded the interviews using both my mobile phone and laptop as a precaution, ensuring a backup in case one device failed. The interviews were conducted in colloquial Arabic—our everyday spoken language. Initially, I attempted to transcribe the recordings using Microsoft Word's dictation feature. However, this proved ineffective due to the discrepancy between colloquial Arabic and standard Arabic, which the software struggled to recognise accurately. Consequently, I undertook a meticulous transcription process, repeatedly listening, pausing, and replaying to capture the exact words spoken. However, I often had to refine the transcriptions to be somewhat closer to standard Arabic. This was necessary

to make the written content clearer and to facilitate more accurate translation. While aiming to precisely convey the participants' viewpoints and preserve the original meaning of their words, I translated their quotes using a language style that was consistent with the overall tone of the surrounding text. This careful approach ensured both fidelity to their expressions and coherence within the thesis. Moreover, I ensured complete pseudonymisation of all the transcripts, making it impossible to identify any of the participants. Following this, I immediately destroyed the audio recordings for further protection of participant confidentiality and privacy.

5.6.4.3- Focus Groups. In the individual interviews I conducted, the main objective was to gather insights into the participants' personal professional experiences, practices, assets, and needs. These interviews also touched on their interactions with the Syrian academic community in Gaziantep and the broader circle in Turkey. In contrast, the focus groups were specifically designed to probe into the collective experiences at the community level. The discussions aimed to understand the prevalent practices, uncover the root causes hindering active collaboration within the community, and explore potential strategies for fostering and developing this academic community.

I organised three focus group discussions (FGDs): two were conducted face-to-face at my workplace, and one was held online using the Zoom platform. These discussions involved a total of 23 participants, with 9 attending FGD1, 6 in FGD2, and 8 in FGD3. The gender distribution included three females and twenty males, and the sessions lasted 105, 114, and 130 minutes, respectively. The two in-person gatherings began with a casual Syrian breakfast, fostering a relaxed atmosphere with friendly conversations before the formal discussion commenced. Overall, the environment during

all three sessions was positive, with participants engaging smoothly and openly sharing their views.

In managing the discussions, I employed subtle facilitation techniques. For instance, when a participant tended to speak at length, I gently reduced eye contact with them and encouraged others to contribute by directing my gaze or gestures towards them during face-to-face meetings. In the online session, I steered the conversation back to the main topic and engaged other participants by tactfully introducing a relevant point and addressing another participant. Additionally, when I observed someone not actively participating, I expressed interest in their viewpoint and encouraged them to join the discussion, ensuring everyone had the opportunity to contribute.

5.6.5- Data analysis

According to Stake (1995), data analysis does not have a specific starting point. Instead, it is an ongoing process of interpreting and giving significance to both initial impressions and complex final findings. Echoing this perspective, Saunders et al. (2023) highlight a crucial distinction between qualitative and quantitative research. They emphasise that qualitative research typically involves a simultaneous process of collecting, analysing, and interpreting data, which underscores its iterative and integrative nature.

Simons (2009) highlights that data analysis techniques employed in qualitative case study research involve a range of aspects, including “sorting, refining, refocusing, interpreting, making analytical notes, and finding themes in the data” (p. 119). Meanwhile, Saunders et al. (2023) highlight the complexity of choosing an appropriate qualitative analysis technique. They argue that the choice is not a straightforward dichotomy of 'right'

or 'wrong'. Instead, researchers are often confronted with multiple, viable alternatives for analysing their qualitative data.

Stake acknowledges the use of analysis protocols in aiding researchers to "draw systematically from previous knowledge and cut down on misperception" (p. 72). However, he prioritises 'intuition' and 'impression' over strict adherence to these protocols. Advocating for a holistic view, Stake encourages looking at the entire case, understanding the interrelation of all its elements, rather than examining individual aspects in isolation. He introduces 'categorical aggregation' and 'direct interpretation' as two general strategies for analysing case study data. Nonetheless, he believes in the individuality of the research process, asserting that "each researcher needs, through experience and reflection, to find the forms of analysis that work for him or her" (Stake, 1995, p. 77).

Drawing from my research questions and objectives, thematic analysis has emerged as the most suitable technique for my study. Saunders et al. (2023) describe thematic analysis as a method that provides a "systematic yet flexible and accessible approach" to the examination of qualitative data. It is praised for being systematic, as it "provides an orderly and logical way to analyse qualitative data, leading to rich descriptions, explanations and theorising" (p. 664). Moreover, its flexibility allows it to be employed across "a wide range of theoretical and epistemological frameworks," making it suitable for "a wide range of study questions, designs, and sample sizes" (Kiger & Varpio, 2020, p. 847).

While unrestricted by singular theoretical frameworks, thematic analysis can be particularly adept for use within constructivist research (Joffe, 2011). It excels in highlighting the ways in which social, cultural, and structural contexts shape individual

narratives, thereby fostering a collaborative knowledge-building process between researcher and participants. It enables the exploration of how meanings are crafted and understood within their social fabric. When applied through a constructivist lens, thematic analysis delves beyond the superficial layers of data, seeking to uncover the latent themes that reveal the evolution and character of social constructs (Kiger & Varpio, 2020, p. 847).

To effectively conduct thematic analysis, I adhered to the six stages outlined by Saunders et al. (2023), which include: “data familiarisation; data coding; initial theme generation; theme development and review; theme refining, defining, and naming; [and] (writing up)” (p. 665). Throughout the entire research process, I maintained a consistent and in-depth engagement with the data. My approach involved not only reflecting on initial observations and the data gathered but also delving deeper through the transcription phase. The iterative process of reading and re-reading the data further enriched my comprehension and insight into the core content of the study.

To code my data, I created a two-column table in a Word document of each transcript: a broader column for the original text and a narrower one for coding. I began by assigning a code to each data segment, using either a single word or a short phrase that encapsulated the essence of the excerpt. This approach facilitated the grouping of similar data units, which ranged from entire paragraphs to brief phrases or individual sentences. After coding the first five transcripts, I transferred all the codes to a new file, organising them in a five-column table. This helped me compare, refine, and standardise the phrasing of similar codes. For subsequent transcripts, I applied the established codes, introducing new ones as needed to accommodate emerging ideas.

Following an extensive and iterative process of meticulously reading and re-reading the transcripts of interviews and focus groups along with the observation and reflection notes, I proceeded with the systematic arrangement of the codes into distinct themes. Saunders et al. (2023, p. 671) describe a theme as a “broad category incorporating several codes that appear to be related and indicate an idea that is important to the research.” In the process of correlating codes and grouping them into themes, I relied on my intuitive understanding, bolstered by a comprehensive grasp of the research data and its key objectives. While a minor deductive aspect of my study guided the initial formation of codes and the anticipation of emerging themes, the predominantly inductive essence of my research encouraged a vigilant and open-minded approach, enabling the exploration of both explicit and implicit themes across the various data segments.

Subsequently, I developed an MS Excel file, laying out the 24 interviews, the 3 FGDs, and observations in the first vertical column, with the research questions, main categories, and themes systematically aligned horizontally in the top three rows. Following this, I carefully transferred all data units from their original transcripts into this matrix. This layout provided a unified, orderly view of all the data, greatly enhancing my ability to engage in deeper reflection, effectively extract quotes, and accurately report the research findings.

This thorough and systematic analysis process enabled me to delve deeply into the participants' experiences. I strove to faithfully capture their perspectives, attentively listen to their voices, and fully understand the dynamics of their situations.

After that, I structured my research findings into four chapters. The first chapter was dedicated to the participants' academic backgrounds, outlining their experiences and development practices before 2011 and the impact of the conflict on their educational trajectories. This set a thorough context for understanding the evolution of their academic skills. The next three chapters were each aimed at addressing a separate research question. At the conclusion of each chapter, I integrated a discussion section to interpret the findings through the lens of my conceptual framework, linking these insights with the literature I had reviewed. This contributed nuanced perspectives and evidence-based support to the broader academic discourse.

In this chapter, I have provided a comprehensive examination of the research methodology, detailing the decisions and processes that guided my study. I have carefully considered each step to ensure a solid foundation for the research. With these processes in place, I will now turn to the next chapter, where I present and interpret the first part of the research findings.

Chapter 6: Research Findings—Part 1

In examining the narratives shared by participants during individual interviews and group discussions, I discovered that their accounts of their academic paths prior to 2011, coupled with their insights on the crisis's influence on their trajectories, were profoundly compelling. These stories warrant a dedicated chapter to offer a thorough background overview. This chapter will not only introduce most participants but also elaborate on their academic journeys, providing an in-depth analysis of how these experiences have forged their academic strengths and identified their limitations.

However, I find it imperative to emphasise that exiled Syrian academics are in no way inferior to their global counterparts. The stories they shared vividly illustrated their resilience. Despite daunting challenges, many of them tirelessly strive to sustain and enhance their scholarly abilities. With unwavering commitment, they endeavour to make meaningful contributions to their academic fields, to society, and to the broader tapestry of humanity. Their stories are not just tales of survival but are testaments to their steadfast will to push the boundaries of knowledge and cultivate insight, even in the face of overwhelming obstacles.

This chapter explores two main topics, each featuring key themes: the impact of the pre-2011 context on Syria's academic landscape, and the impact of the 2011 crisis on Syria's academic landscape.

6.1- The Impact of the Pre-2011 Context on Syria's Academic Landscape

To fully grasp the situation of Syrian academics in exile, including their educational backgrounds, skills, strengths, weaknesses, and the challenges they confront, my interview questions commenced with a detailed examination of their academic

experiences prior to 2011. This investigation aimed to capture the participants' perspectives and stories about the higher education system in Syria at that time. Reflecting on this aspect of their history can enable exiled Syrian academics to extract valuable lessons and forge stronger strategies to surmount their obstacles and continue their scholarly pursuits. Furthermore, this reflection can greatly aid non-Syrians in understanding the true circumstances of these individuals. Consequently, both the hosting academic community and the international academic community could then craft more impactful initiatives to support these academics, safeguarding and nurturing the intellectual capital they embody.

6.1.1- Challenges in Syria's Pre-2011 Higher Education and Their Effect on Academic Development

The responses I gathered vividly illustrated that Syria's higher education system before 2011 was distinguished by dedicated academics and students. Academics enjoyed a high status within Syrian society, and many graduates achieved notable success when they ventured abroad for further education or employment. Despite these positives, the higher education sector faced several challenges that adversely impacted its overall landscape. These challenges were intrinsically connected to the hegemonic environment under the Syrian regime, influenced by its characteristics, orientations, and practices. My participants' stories deeply resonated with my own reflections in Chapter 2. Their experiences are presented below under themes that emerged in analysis.

6.1.1.1- Hegemony of the Syrian Regime. As discussed in Chapter 2, the Syrian regime's extensive control has dominated all aspects of life in Syria over the past six decades, with academia being no exception. The participants' stories highlighted the deep

effects of the regime's tight grip on the academic sphere in Syria. Yahya, who has long experience in the Syrian higher education sector, addressed this issue, emphasising that significant influence in shaping strategic decisions within Syria's higher education sphere.

He pointed out that:

The eastern part of Syria, which includes the large governorates of Deir-Ez-Zor, Hasaka, and Raqqqa, is abundant in resources like oil, gas, crops, and water. Yet, remarkably, it had no universities until 2007. There were initial plans to establish a university in Deir-Ez-Zor during the early 1980s. However, the regime chose to redirect the funding to Tishreen University in Lattakia. This decision effectively denied access to higher education for millions of Syrians in those eastern regions. As a result, students from these areas had to undertake arduous journeys of hundreds of kilometres to attend universities in Aleppo, Damascus, Lattakia, or Homs. This lack of local higher education institutions adversely impacted various developmental aspects in those eastern Syrian governorates.

Yahya explained that the regime strategically maintained underdevelopment in vast regions of Syria, focusing resources and development efforts primarily on other governorates such as Lattakia. This area, being the birthplace of Hafez Al-Assad and a stronghold of his support base, was favoured in the allocation of support and development.

Yahya went on to say that "every significant role in higher education, from university presidents to faculty deans and department chairs, was assigned directly by the regime." This left higher education institutions with no autonomy for internal decision-making, and there were no established criteria or guidelines for their governance.

Decisions regarding inclusion or exclusion in academic circles were at the discretion of the Ba'ath Party and security apparatuses. Yahya further elaborated, "academics, irrespective of their rank, were compelled to exhibit loyalty and obedience to the regime."

Zaher, who pursued his master's and PhD in Egypt prior to returning to Syria, echoed these thoughts. He articulated his frustration with the authoritarian nature of the Syrian regime and its pervasive influence and control over the academic sector:

The Syrian regime's intrusion was evident in every sphere of life, academic affairs included. They meddled in every minor or major detail. The disparity was apparent between Aleppo University and the university I attended in Egypt. In Egypt, the selection of a dean or department head was based on seniority and experience, without any intervention from security agencies. While in Syria, a recent graduate, if connected to influential regime figures, could be elevated to a position overseeing their former professors. This often resulted in a sense of disappointment among the more seasoned academics.

The deep-rooted and intimidating hegemony had a profound impact on the psyche of Syrian academics, even when studying abroad. Saleem, who had received a state-sponsored scholarship to do his PhD in Egypt, recounted an experience from his initial weeks there. While walking home one day, he came across a group of young Egyptians, one of whom was joking about Egypt's then-president, Hosni Mubarak. Saleem recalled, "I was shocked and filled with fear. I instinctively crossed to the other side of the street, worried that security forces might suddenly appear and arrest us. It was only later that I realised such expressions were normal in Egypt, where people enjoyed a relatively greater degree of freedom."

Saleem, along with fellow scholars Leila and Adam, who also pursued their studies abroad on state-sponsored scholarships, recounted to me their distressing experiences with the staff at the Syrian embassy. Leila described the embassy as resembling "a security agency," highlighting its intimidating atmosphere. Adam recalled the regular visits to the embassy to collect his salary, describing them as "a form of psychological torture." He noted that each visit required them to brace themselves for an "overwhelming level of hypocrisy".

Deema, who was a lecturer at Aleppo University's Higher Institute of Languages, shared another example of the Syrian regime's dominating influence in academia. She observed how the Arabic Department was initially overlooked due to low student enrolment, contrasting starkly with the well-supported English Department, sustained by substantial tuition fees from a larger student body. This dynamic shifted when a major American educational institution partnered with the University of Aleppo to provide Arabic courses to its American clients. Deema and two other female lecturers were chosen to teach these courses following an evaluation by an expert advisor from the American institution. They were provided with a short academic development course before the arrival of the American students. The program was highly successful, much to the satisfaction of the students. However, at a celebratory party, the University's president and the dean conspicuously ignored the contributions of Deema and her colleagues, focusing praises solely on the students. In response, the students themselves organised a party to acknowledge the dedication and quality of teaching provided by their Syrian instructors. Deema additionally pointed out:

We were later invited to the United States as part of an initiative to further develop our expertise in teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language. During our visit, we had an unexpected summons to the office of the Syrian ambassador. There, we encountered a rather hostile atmosphere; the ambassador interrogated us aggressively, questioning why the American institution had chosen the University of Aleppo over Damascus and why we, specifically three young female teachers, were selected for this programme. This experience was quite unsettling, leaving us feeling disheartened and intimidated by his demeaning attitude.

The programme was halted in 2011 due to the unfolding crisis in Syria. Deema learned afterwards that the university had replaced them with individuals from its inner circle for a similar opportunity in the U.S., notably including a minister's wife who was not even qualified to teach Arabic. This experience underscores the regime's pervasive nepotism and control over academic matters in Syria.

Besides facing multiple challenges within academic settings, male academics in Syria also confronted an additional burden after completing their studies. Like their male counterparts across the country, they were obligated to undergo a year and a half of compulsory military service. The Syrian military was notorious for its mistreatment of conscripted soldiers, often subjecting them to disrespect and humiliation as a means to foster obedience and submission. A few interviewees recounted their distressing experiences in the military. For instance, Adam shared his ordeal, stating, "upon my return to the country, I was immediately conscripted into compulsory military service. This experience was marked by a total disconnection from academic and scientific pursuits, coupled with brainwashing and moral degradation." This harsh reality led some

academics to deliberately postpone their graduation to avoid conscription. Furthermore, some mentioned that this was the key reason for them to leave Syria. Majed expressed this candidly, saying, "to be honest, my departure from Syria was purely to avoid military conscription."

These detailed narratives highlight how the Syrian regime's hegemonic powers have impacted academia, leaving no room for autonomy. Instead, the regime has tightened its control over academia's strategic and tactical decisions, ensuring that all aspects of academic life serve its objectives and submit to its authority.

6.1.1.2- Impact of Corruption on Academic Life. The topic of corruption within academia is deeply intertwined with the prior discussions about the Syrian regime's overarching dominance over various facets of life. Numerous participants spoke of the widespread corruption networks linked to the Ba'ath Party, security agencies, and other senior government figures. Ramez, who lectured at the University of Aleppo as well as another private institution, characterised the dominant rule within the country, academia included, as the "survival of the most corrupt." In most cases, success or advancement was not based on merit, skill, or ethical behaviour, but rather on one's ability to engage in and navigate corrupt practices. The participants recounted how in such an environment, the most unscrupulous individuals willing to exploit the system through dishonest or unethical means were the ones who thrived or maintained their positions of power.

To gain a clearer insight into the backgrounds of academics at Syrian HE institutions, Ayman segmented them into three distinct categories based on the time and location of their post-graduate studies. This classification emerged from his observations while teaching at several faculties at Aleppo University. Ayman described the first group

as academics who completed their PhDs overseas prior to the 1980s. This cohort was primarily chosen for their outstanding academic achievements and pursued their advanced studies predominantly in Western Europe and the USA, where they received high-quality education. They are considered the foundational pillars of Syria's higher education, credited with creating strong curricula and delivering remarkable educational outcomes.

However, the 1980s marked a period of significant decline in Syria's academic landscape, coinciding with the regime tightening its control over the country. During this era, state-sponsored scholarships were predominantly allocated through Ba'ath Party nominations, often sidelining academic qualifications. Ayman estimates that between 3,000 to 5,000 students received such scholarships for overseas postgraduate studies at that time. Predominantly, these students were sent to Warsaw Pact countries like Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, East Germany, or the Soviet Union. Many in this group were academically underperforming from the outset and received substandard education in these countries. It was common for them to boast about obtaining their degrees through corrupt practices rather than academic diligence. Upon their return to Syria, their impact on the higher education system was largely negative. Many, despite their academic deficiencies, secured prominent positions within Syrian academia due to their connections within the regime and became key decision-makers in educational institutions. This shift adversely affected the older, more experienced academics. Faced with the new academics' lack of competence and corruption, the seasoned professionals felt constrained, lacking the authority or means to challenge or significantly reform the system.

From the late 1980s until 2002, the practice of sponsoring students for overseas studies was largely halted, with only a few exceptions. During this period, despite the prevailing corruption and resource constraints, seasoned and capable academics at Syria's four main universities began advocating for the creation of master's and PhD programs. They endeavoured to provide quality education to the top students enrolled in these programs. Over time, their efforts led to the formation of a 'third group' of academics, who began contributing to and attempting to reform Syria's higher education system, which was in dire need of change. After 2003, the scholarship programmes saw a gradual revival, with students being sent to Arab countries like Egypt, as well as to Western Europe and other parts of the world. Notably, most students who went abroad for their studies after 2005 or 2006 did not return to Syria, as they completed their post-graduate programmes around the onset of the revolution.

In that landscape, a significant number of academics showed a preference for advancing into administrative and leadership positions, rather than prioritising the expansion of their academic expertise. This trend was accompanied by a belief among some that attaining a PhD marked the culmination of their scholarly journey, leaving little room for additional skill enhancement. The mere hint that their professional development could still continue was often met with resistance, viewed as a slight against their achieved status.

The impact of some incompetent academics on higher education was obvious through both explicit and implicit comments from the study participants. Mustafa recounted an episode from his undergraduate days, shedding light unprofessional behaviours among some academics:

I was attending a crowded lecture with over two hundred colleagues. Our lecturer held a senior position in the Ba'ath Party and had completed his postgraduate studies in Bulgaria. After dispensing information in a conventional manner, he solicited questions. A student, with due respect, asked a challenging question that left the lecturer at a loss. Instead of addressing the query, the lecturer resorted to publicly rebuking the student, calling him 'an animal' and berating his intelligence. A hush fell over us, and the unspoken directive was crystal clear: absorb passively and never venture to question.

Mustafa continued to share another narrative about the lecturer's wife, similarly Bulgarian-educated:

During the final examination for her course, we encountered a bewildering scenario where the test pertained to an entirely different subject. Upon contacting the lecturer, she arrived nearly an hour later, only to dismiss the mix-up with a laugh, remarking, 'It seems I've confused the subjects. You'll have a chance to reattempt in three weeks.' She departed, indifferent to the disruption her negligence had sparked, confident that she would face no accountability.

Noor additionally discussed the corrupt practices prevalent in the university. She pointed out, "corruption permeated the university's environment. Individuals who had connections with the department head, the dean of the college, or security agencies were given preferential treatment. They received advantages over others, including the chance to attend workshops or international conferences, often held in neighbouring countries."

Noor continued her account, saying:

To gain favour with these influential figures, one would have to cater to their interests. During my time as a lecturer in Syria, I frequently received demands to grant passing grades to certain students, which I always resisted. On a particular occasion, the head of the department approached me, insisting, 'This student is the wife of a high-ranking army officer; you must give her a passing score.' I didn't change her failing grade, but by the following day, her scores had been altered to meet their demands, and I was powerless to speak out against it.

Ramez voiced similar sentiments, highlighting the tension between corrupt, academically inept academics and their honest, competent counterparts. He described the situation, stating:

The involvement of numerous academics in the Ba'ath Party negatively impacted the integrity of university admissions, often resulting in preferential treatment for party members. This practice was further exacerbated by the administrative body, which detrimentally influenced the academic environment. The party's influence was extensive, encompassing both security and political dimensions, and exerted pressure on individuals to join the party, sometimes offering easier access to master's and doctoral programmes. Consequently, this led to the presence of academically underqualified individuals within the academic sphere.

These less proficient academics frequently harboured negative feelings towards their more accomplished and student-appreciated colleagues, viewing them as threats. The competent educators, who earned student admiration by providing current information and promoting engagement with scientific updates, starkly contrasted with their peers who repetitively taught outdated material. This disparity

in teaching quality and academic engagement not only exposed the limitations of the less competent academics but also fostered an environment rife with jealousy and resentment. This divide within the academic community, between those dedicated to educational advancement and those influenced by political loyalty, further strained the academic milieu.

Regrettably, corrupt practices extended their reach into research centres, mirroring the issues seen in universities. Adam shared his personal account of grappling with extensive corruption networks within one of Syria's largest research facilities. His story reveals a disheartening reality where unethical practices had taken root, severely compromising the effectiveness and outcomes of research endeavours:

I was appointed to the National Programme for Seed Multiplication, alongside my teaching responsibilities at the university. I embarked on practical scientific research with grand aspirations of making substantial contributions to my country. As the leader of a committee tasked with assessing the optimal regions for cultivating a vital strategic crop in Syria, we conducted extensive studies in Aleppo, Raqqa, and Al-Hasaka.

The insights gained from our scientific expedition were invaluable. Upon concluding the tour, I convened with the management of the National Programme, presenting a compelling proposition. I explained that, by leveraging the ideal conditions in the areas we had identified – lands owned by the state and equipped with all necessary infrastructure – we could ensure seed production to meet the entirety of Syria's needs. The only requirement was relocating some staff to these regions.

Regrettably, our hopes were dashed when we stumbled upon a sprawling network of corrupt individuals entrenched within the project and the institution. Their interests ran contrary to our proposed course of action, leading them to disregard our meticulously conducted study and dismiss our committee's recommendations. We even faced threats urging us to abandon our suggested approach. It became glaringly evident that corruption and favouritism were the underpinnings of the entire system.

The overarching context in Syria was marked by the hegemonic practices of the regime, which actively encouraged corruption and offered protection to those corrupt networks, provided they demonstrated unwavering loyalty to the regime. Each level within the hierarchy contributed to and facilitated the corruption of those in higher positions, ensuring they received their share of unlawfully acquired wealth and bolstered their authority.

This intricate web of corruption not only allowed the regime to maintain its grip on power but also served to expand its influence. It functioned as a self-sustaining mechanism wherein corruption at every level of government reinforced the corruption at the highest echelons, creating a pervasive culture of corruption that permeated throughout the entire system.

The participants' accounts in this section complement the reflections I presented in Chapter 2, providing a glimpse into the academic landscape prior to 2011. They detail who was at the helm of Syria's academic institutions during this time and how operations were manipulated to advance the regime's overarching strategies in this vital sector.

6.1.1.3- Lack of Development Strategies in Syria's Higher Education.

Considering the issues presented earlier, it becomes evident that Syria's higher education system suffered from a lack of strategies for academic development. Dominated by corrupt academics holding significant positions, there was a notable absence of both the desire and expertise necessary for enhancing the quality of higher education. This led to disarray at both strategic and tactical levels. Despite the aspirations of numerous dedicated Syrian academics to advance their skills and impart comprehensive knowledge to their students, the oppressive environment significantly limited their potential. Nonetheless, those who managed to engage in academic opportunities abroad often excelled, showcasing their ability to innovate and thrive within more supportive and developed educational frameworks.

Prior to 2007, Syria's higher education landscape was marked by a significant imbalance, with only four of the country's 14 governorates—each comprising multiple cities, districts, subdistricts, and municipalities—having universities. This scarcity of higher education institutions began to gradually change as smaller universities or branches of existing ones started to surface in additional governorates. Furthermore, the emergence of private universities began to alter the educational terrain across the nation. However, especially before these changes, the limited number of universities led to an overwhelming concentration of students in each university, adversely impacting the quality of higher education. This issue manifested differently across various academic disciplines, but it was especially severe in faculties with large enrolments, such as law, arts and humanities, and economics.

Susan, who had returned to Aleppo University to teach after earning her postgraduate degrees in the United States, shared her frustrations with the systemic shortcomings and the daily difficulties encountered at the university. Reflecting on her experiences, she noted:

In 2006, the Department of English Language and Literature was overwhelmed with over 10,000 students, a number that increased to more than 12,000 by 2010. My lectures were attended by over 500 students simultaneously, with 400 seated and approximately 100 standing. This situation made active communication, attentive listening, and personalised feedback virtually impossible. To mitigate this, I allocated extra time outside of lectures to engage with students and address their queries, though these efforts were insufficient given the scale of the challenge.

The marking of exam papers presented another monumental task. Teaching multiple subjects meant that I was responsible for evaluating over 4,500 exam papers each term. A common practice among colleagues was to assess only a small segment of each paper, often ignoring the remainder of the student's work. However, my commitment to fairness led me to meticulously review every word written by the students, an ethical stance that was both exhausting and time-consuming.

Another critical strategic issue was the disproportionate student-to-lecturer ratio. Our department operated with merely 9 to 12 lecturers, starkly contrasting with the Department of Arabic Language and Literature, which, despite having only slightly more students, boasted around 75 lecturers. This disparity underscored a significant imbalance within the institution's allocation of teaching resources.

Under these circumstances, educational practices remained largely conventional.

Institutions of higher education did not equip their lecturers—neither newcomers nor existing faculty—with any form of training, such as courses, workshops, or guidelines on pedagogical methods or assessment techniques. Lecturers were simply assigned to lecture halls or scientific labs without any preparatory guidance. Deema shared her experience of her initial lecture at the Higher Institute of Languages, highlighting:

Upon my arrival for a scheduled meeting with the department head, I was immediately handed a whiteboard marker and informed that a French student and an Armenian student were waiting for me outside hall X, with the directive to simply "go and teach them." Being a top student in my department did not inherently prepare me for teaching, a nuance that seemed overlooked. Furthermore, the university's library resources were severely lacking, and the department head seemed unaware of the available books or reference materials. This situation was a stark contrast to what I later experienced at the University of Damascus. A visit there with a friend revealed their department, focused on teaching Arabic to foreign students, was significantly more developed than what we had at the University of Aleppo.

Leila's experience bore resemblances to the ones described earlier. She recounted her tenure as a teaching assistant before leaving for her post-graduate studies abroad.

She explained:

Upon my appointment as a teaching assistant, I was immediately thrust into a disorganised environment without any form of orientation or clarification of my responsibilities. The faculty was vast, teeming with students, and the

administrative staff was largely uncooperative, operating without a discernible strategy or plan. This left me uncertain about how to effectively engage with students during seminars or lectures. The environment was further constricted by a lack of academic freedom; the possibility of expressing innovative ideas or engaging in critical discourse was severely limited. We were acutely aware of the presence of undercover students linked to the Ba'ath party or security services, vigilant to report any comments made. In such a restrictive context, contemplating the enhancement of our skills seemed an unattainable luxury.

Humam also reflected on his experience indicating an evident gap in formal training or guidance concerning teaching and learning skills. He shared insights from his time as a teaching assistant before pursuing advanced degrees, emphasising his dynamic participation and ongoing interactions with faculty and campus activities. He highlighted a notable absence of focus on teaching skill development, an aspect that seemed overlooked and undervalued within the academic framework. Humam pointed out the disparity in teaching effectiveness among lecturers, some of whom, despite their high ranks, displayed a surprising lack of depth in their teaching approach, often resorting to merely reading from texts during lectures. This contrasted with a few lecturers who demonstrated high competency levels. However, the prevalence of those lacking effective teaching skills was significant.

Many other participants shared comparable experiences, highlighting various deficiencies in faculty support for essential academic skills needed for success in higher education tenures. For instance, Ramez spoke openly about the absence of any strategies or tips on how to engage with, and manage, difficult students — a scenario that

can be daunting for even seasoned educators. This gap in his training left him to navigate these complex dynamics on his own.

In a bid to find his footing, Ramez, like many of his colleagues, looked to the practices of the more experienced, the 'early fathers' of his institution, as a model. This approach, however, was more about emulation than innovation, as it relied heavily on the established, perhaps outdated, methods of the past. Ramez and his peers endeavoured to refine these methods with their personal efforts, but the absence of a structured, modern approach to teaching, assessing, and receiving and giving feedback was palpable. He lamented the lack of diverse evaluation methods and progressive teaching techniques, which are essential in fostering an effective learning environment. This shortfall in academic development programmes highlighted a wider problem in the education system, which seemed to prioritise academic credentials over vital competencies like the art and science of learning and teaching.

Yahya asserted that this dilemma extended to all governance levels in higher education and was not restricted to learning and teaching skills. He had worked in different positions in Syria's HE, getting closer to decision-making roles. He said:

I was appointed as the dean of a faculty, and I received no training related to my new duties. The general principle was, 'You have to figure things out on your own.' There was no strategy, capacity building, or a clear list of policies and procedures to be followed, even though some decisions in a position like this could expose one to serious legal accountability.

Yahya elaborated that during the early 1980s, the motto 'Linking the University with the Community' was coined, signifying the aspiration to merge academic insights, higher

education methodologies, goals, and strategies with the community's needs and priorities, thereby bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Regrettably, this initiative existed merely in theory and was never brought to fruition.

Research skills were not better taken of. On the contrary, most of the participants said that research was not a priority in Syria's HE. Numerous academics engaged in the creation of substandard research, or merely translated works from other languages, presenting them as their own, and then published these in low-tier local journals to fulfil the prerequisites for academic promotion. Monitoring of the research's quality, originality, and relevance was significantly lacking. Mahmoud commented on the situation, stating:

In Syria, there was a glaring disregard for scientific research, with the published work tending to be superficial. These studies were not thorough but rather elementary, published solely to tick off a requirement or to claim that some form of research had been conducted. Commonly, these publications were in Arabic and appeared in local journals lacking any significant impact. Scrutiny over the authenticity of research was woefully absent, meaning that even if a research paper was a complete replication from another source, it went under the radar, with no inclination to investigate further. The academic sector was hindered by the absence of a definitive academic vision or a strategic framework for development.

A further impediment involved the curriculum and teaching materials, which were often outdated and not in step with current academic and industry standards. This stagnation largely resulted from a lack of strategic planning for curricular updates. Some lecturers, having taught the same material for years, were resistant to updating their

content, preferring the familiarity of established courses over the effort required to prepare and develop new materials. Moreover, institutional barriers compounded the issue, as introducing new materials often entailed navigating bureaucratic hurdles for approval and investing in the production of new textbooks—a process deemed less financially appealing compared to the sale of existing stock. A research participant highlighted this issue by noting that despite teaching a course on 'modern' drama, the curriculum's most recent play was from 1905. Their efforts to introduce contemporary plays into the curriculum were met with firm resistance.

The state of libraries was another critical shortcoming, with collections lacking both the latest books and key reference materials. Saleem narrated his struggles with accessing adequate resources at the university library, explaining:

Our faculty's library was severely limited, offering only a singular journal across various disciplines, which held little esteem within the academic world or in terms of journal rankings. Moreover, I faced a significant shortfall in academic theses and suitable library facilities for research. As an aspiring researcher preparing for graduate studies, I needed to familiarise myself with the format and preparation of doctoral theses. Consequently, I sought access to a PhD thesis in my area of study at the central library. Upon my visit, I encountered three staff members engaged in casual conversation. One of them reluctantly provided me with the thesis, implying I should hurry. When I inquired about a quiet place to study amidst their ongoing discussion, they offhandedly suggested I take the thesis with me, urging prompt return. Resorting to photocopying the thesis, I returned it slightly delayed, only to

be met with the visible annoyance of the staff, suspecting I had made copies. That incident deterred me from further visits to the library.

Contrastingly, during my time in Egypt, which is not considered a forefront of advancement, I was astonished by the wealth of resources in our faculty library, which housed more than 2,500 doctoral theses. There, I had the liberty to borrow, copy, and study any thesis from 8 am to 5 pm, undisturbed.

Yahya offered a sarcastic critique of the method used to stock university libraries, highlighting the inefficient and untargeted methods that contribute to the inadequacy of academic resources in some university libraries. He remarked:

Are you aware of the peculiar strategy some university libraries employ to acquire books? Some libraries, already deficient in essential books and references, resort to rather rudimentary methods for expanding their collections. For instance, a procurement officer might stumble upon a private bookstore going out of business and decide to purchase its entire inventory in bulk, without any consideration for the relevance, quality, or appropriateness of the books for student requirements.

Another significant issue that adversely affected the academic environment in Syria was the pronounced isolation of its scholars and educational institutions from the international academic community. When interviewing individuals who had undertaken their postgraduate studies abroad, a recurrent theme emerged: the stark contrast in 'openness to and interaction with the international academic community' they experienced elsewhere. Notably, even those who pursued their studies in Egypt, where the socio-academic context closely resembles Syria's, pointed out Egypt's comparatively greater openness. They highlighted Egypt's enhanced engagement with the international

academic sphere, especially with institutions in Western Europe and the USA, along with more substantial academic freedom and a more developed higher education infrastructure. Their feedback highlighted the detrimental effect of academic isolation on the educational landscape in Syria, underscoring the importance of international academic collaboration and exchange. For example, Leila reflected on her time in Egypt with notable distinction, saying:

The contrast between Egypt and Syria was profound, especially regarding respect. In Egypt, we were treated with dignity and were constantly reminded that we were on our path to becoming PhD holders. This approach made us feel valued and significant, a stark departure from the often-condescending attitude we encountered from some lecturers in Syria. Moreover, Egypt had mechanisms in place to ensure the quality of education, showcasing a commitment to academic excellence not as evident in Syria. The openness in Egypt was markedly more pronounced, providing us with abundant opportunities to engage in conferences and symposia, and to pursue academic scholarships. Additionally, there was a vibrant connection with numerous research centres, enhancing our academic experience and opportunities for growth.

Ramez offered a critical evaluation of the academic environment at his university, lamenting the absence of dynamic scholarly exchanges. Addressing the impact of this stagnation on the academic landscape, he articulated his concerns by stating:

Throughout my decade-long tenure at Aleppo University, my faculty hosted merely a single conference. This situation is nothing short of a disaster. There ought to be frequent conferences that delve into the most current topics and pressing issues

within our field. Such events are crucial for inspiring academics to deepen their knowledge and make meaningful contributions to their areas of expertise. An academic's growth is fundamentally linked to their engagement with research. This process involves staying abreast of the latest scientific advancements in their field and subsequently contributing their findings. The absence of such scholarly gatherings severely hampers the intellectual development and research output of academics.

Susan reflected on the challenges stemming from the isolation within the academic community, the rarity and low impact of internal events, and the obstacles to accessing international conferences. She explained her own frustration, stating:

We had very few local conferences, which were generally of low quality and offered minimal academic value. This lack of opportunity was extremely frustrating, and as a result, I didn't write or publish any research. I remember one of my colleagues was enthusiastic about engaging in conferences and publishing her work. She managed to participate in a somewhat international conference in Jordan and got her paper published in an Arabic journal. The financial burden of this participation was substantial, costing her an amount equivalent to several months of her university salary, all out of her own pocket. Witnessing the steep costs and the limited returns, I completely abandoned the idea of attempting something similar.

During our conversations, a few participants discussed a phenomenon well-known in some Syrian academic circles as 'the million-lira research visit,' which seemed to be an option primarily for certain disciplines. Adam provided insight into the origin of this term, attributing it to the substantial sum—approximately 20,000 USD at the time—that

academics received as reimbursement for undertaking these research visits. These were trips to chosen universities abroad, lasting about four months. Sharing his experience, Adam said:

During my postgraduate studies abroad, I encountered two Syrian lecturers participating in 'the million-lira research visit' at my institution. Having built a wide network at the university, I was keen to connect them with top researchers in their field, aiming to maximise the benefits of their visit. However, they candidly admitted that their primary motive was to secure the allocated funds. They planned to later publish any research in an Arabic journal, irrespective of its scholarly merit.

The myriad obstacles and detrimental conditions prevailing in the Syrian academic landscape, particularly the utter lack of strategic planning for the advancement of higher education, took a significant toll on Syrian academics. These circumstances greatly restricted their opportunities for genuine and productive involvement in academic development initiatives.

Grasping these facets of the participants' backgrounds sheds light on the origins of certain areas for improvement in their academic skills that many of them faced upon entering exile and interacting with international institutions like Cara. This includes challenges encountered with disciplinary and interdisciplinary research, navigating the publishing process, and engaging in international conferences, among other issues.

6.1.2- Academic Development Practices Pre-2011

In the midst of a challenging academic environment, primarily shaped by the oppressive actions of the Syrian regime and pervasive corruption, a notable number of Syrian scholars remained committed to advancing their professional abilities, seizing

every available opportunity to align with global academic standards. These scholars engaged in a variety of strategies to enhance their academic pursuits. They invested in self-driven efforts to improve their knowledge and skills, leveraged their connections with colleagues who had opportunities to study abroad, and sought inspiration and guidance from their most esteemed lecturers and supervisors. Moreover, some of them maximised their learning experiences while engaged in post-graduate studies abroad, gleaning valuable insights and practices. They also utilised the benefits of collaborating with both local and international research institutions active within Syria. Through these multifaceted approaches, these academics not only navigated but also endeavoured to thrive within a difficult educational landscape, demonstrating resilience and a steadfast commitment to academic excellence.

6.1.2.1- Individual Efforts. In an effort to navigate and rise above the challenging academic landscape in Syria, many Syrian scholars embarked on individual endeavours, primarily concentrated within their respective fields of expertise. Facing a myriad of obstacles, some scholars innovatively crafted makeshift laboratories to pursue scientific research, absorbing the financial burdens themselves. Others sought to enhance their practical skills through engagement with specialised manufacturing or technology firms, recognising the value of hands-on experience. Additionally, the necessity of accessing global academic resources prompted some of them to establish connections with Syrian peers linked to international academic networks, securing essential access to scholarly journals. This pursuit of knowledge was complemented by interactions with colleagues returning from studies abroad, from whom they eagerly gleaned knowledge and advice to further refine their expertise. Equally important, recognising the critical role of English

in the global academic discourse, some scholars chose to invest in language courses, personally shouldering the tuition fees.

6.1.2.2- Exemplary Lecturers and Supervisors. None of the participants had previously engaged in formal courses or workshops designed specifically for developing their teaching skills. Despite this lack of formal training, several exemplary lecturers, both within Syria and at institutions abroad where participants had studied, emerged as pivotal figures in the development of a wide array of their academic capabilities. These mentors contributed significantly, either through direct instruction or subtle influence, to the enrichment of the participants' skill sets in various dimensions: honing specialised knowledge in their academic fields, offering insights into effective research methodologies, or exemplifying successful teaching strategies and methodologies. The impact of these educators was profound, with participants noting that they often emulated and incorporated these admired teaching styles and techniques into their own practices upon assuming lecturer roles. Humam reflected on the significance of this influence, highlighting the indirect but invaluable mentorship these lecturers provided, which played a crucial role in shaping their professional and pedagogical approaches. He shared:

Certain lecturers, particularly my supervisors during my master's and PhD studies, were instrumental in my academic growth, imparting essential knowledge in research methodologies, writing techniques, and data analysis. Their influence was pivotal to my development as a scholar. I believe that the quality of guidance one receives is more dependent on the relationship between the supervisor and the student, along with the student's personal efforts, rather than the resources available through the university's infrastructure. The teaching strategies some of

my professors utilised left a lasting impression on me; I continue to apply these methods in my own teaching due to their proven effectiveness and positive impact. For example, among the approaches I admired and later incorporated into my own teaching were the use of visual aids, drawings, and dynamic discussions to break down and communicate complex subjects. This adaptation of their teaching styles has been a cornerstone of my approach to education, aiming to make learning both engaging and understandable for my students.

Ramez also reflected on the profound influence certain lecturers had on his academic journey, sharing his experiences with two particularly memorable educators. He recounted:

There were two lecturers whose contributions to my education I will always remember. One had studied at the University of Manchester in the UK, and the other was a graduate from a university in Japan. They excelled in every aspect: from the innovative teaching methods they employed, the modern and relevant information they provided, to their continuous support and respectful way of engaging with students. However, when selecting the two supervisors for my master's thesis, I aimed for a balance; I knew I needed one with strong academic credentials and another with robust university connections to navigate any potential challenges. This strategy paid off. My main supervisor was outstanding, providing invaluable scientific insights that not only elevated the calibre of my thesis but also broadened my scholarly competencies. Conversely, my second supervisor, though not involved in the scholarly aspect of my thesis, played an

important role in the administrative process, ensuring all necessary formalities were smoothly handled.

6.1.2.3- Local and International Research Institutions. Participants shed light on the crucial support extended by both local research institutions and international organizations active in Syria, such as the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), among others. Collaborating with these entities served as a pivotal means of breaking through the academic isolation often experienced within the country, opening doors to rich interactions with a diverse array of researchers and experts from across the globe, and significantly contributing to the enhancement of academic skills for many scholars. Reflecting on her tenure at a domestic research institute following her doctoral studies, Rama recounted:

In the national research institution where I embarked on my career, I was greeted by modern scientific facilities and laboratories. Beyond the cutting-edge infrastructure, the centre was vibrant with various training programs, activities, scholarships, and fruitful collaborations with research institutions from countries like Tunisia, Egypt, Italy, among others.

Mahmoud emphasised the critical importance of some international research organisations in providing essential academic opportunities. He detailed:

For some researchers, prominent international research bodies were their sole conduit to the wider academic world. These institutions enabled researchers to immerse themselves in a variety of research paradigms, offering a precious chance to collaborate with experts from around the globe. Such experiences were

invaluable, presenting a unique learning environment that was vastly different from local offerings. This exposure not only expanded their academic horizons but also significantly enriched their professional journey.

Imad detailed the transformative role his international research institution played in his academic and professional development, underscoring the myriad opportunities it provided for growth and exposure in his field. He explained:

Being part of a research institution is fundamentally crucial for honing specialised skills, which is achieved through active participation in a variety of events, including conferences, seminars, workshops, research projects, and routine scholarly gatherings. The opportunities extend beyond local borders, encompassing international missions, courses, or events that aim to deepen understanding of the latest scientific discoveries pertinent to one's field of study. I was selected by my institution to partake in a specialised training program in China, which was a pivotal moment in my career. Additionally, I contributed to and attended multiple conferences, both within Syria and abroad, such as in Turkey, further broadening my research experience. Moreover, the mentorship provided by supervisors from diverse international backgrounds, who brought with them a wealth of experience, was invaluable in enhancing my academic journey.

The stories from participants such as Rama, Mahmoud, and Imad underscore the pivotal role that research institutions played in the advancement of some Syrian academics prior to 2011. These entities were instrumental in both skill enhancement and the broadening of professional networks for numerous Syrian scholars, serving as crucial connectors to the global academic community.

6.2- The Impact of the 2011 Crisis on Syria's Academic Landscape

Before 2011, despite the challenging academic environment I have discussed previously, a certain operational system existed within academia. Academics had learned to adapt to and navigate this system, despite its prevalent corruption, thereby preserving their esteemed status in society and their academic identities. Financially, the situation for many academics improved after 2006, thanks to substantial salary increases and the opportunity to hold positions at multiple institutions, a development made possible by the emergence of private universities, allowing some to draw multiple incomes.

The revolution marked a pivotal shift, initially unfolding as peaceful protests before escalating into a widespread armed conflict. The academic community was divided in their response to the revolution. Corrupt individuals within academia resisted any change, strengthening their alliances with the Ba'ath Party and security forces, and intensifying surveillance efforts within universities, including recruiting students to report on the activities and conversations of their peers and faculty members.

In contrast, a portion of the academic sector hoped for a peaceful transition, though the vast majority remained silent, mainly due to fear of reprisal. During the early stages, a significant number of higher education students participated in the peaceful protests, which gradually transitioned into an armed conflict over approximately six months. The extent and severity of the conflict varied from city to city, with some areas avoiding armed conflict for up to a year and a half, or two years, after the uprising began.

The consequences of the conflict on higher education were profound and multifaceted, including a decline in security that affected all aspects of academic life, damage to the infrastructure of educational institutions, increased repression of both

students and academics, a surge in the number of students and academics ceasing to attend due to safety concerns or displacement, and a significant drop in the quality of education.

6.2.1- Deterioration of the Security Situation Affecting All Aspects of Academia

Susan shared her poignant reflections on the severe impact the conflict had on her daily life as an academic, detailing her prolonged struggle over four years at the university amidst tumultuous times. She described:

The ordeal was beyond challenging, deeply affecting every aspect of my academic and personal life at the university. The division it sowed was stark, splitting communities into those supporting the revolution and those against it. I understood from the very beginning that we would be trapped in a prolonged crisis, a bottleneck that would last years, with all of us suffering the consequences. I recall a distressing incident when a student protest erupted on campus and security forces responded with gunfire. I was delivering a lecture at that moment, engulfed by a wave of fear. When some students expressed their desire to join the demonstration, I intervened, tearfully urging them to stay, saying, 'You are like my own children, and I can't let you risk your lives.' As the situation deteriorated, many colleagues fled, and student attendance plummeted. The university barred us from bringing cars onto campus, exacerbating the already perilous security conditions. Each day seemed to bring new challenges. There were times when students had to attend exams at 6 pm in the dead of winter, with no electricity, lighting, or heating available. Enduring these severe conditions until 2015, I eventually reached my breaking point and left the country.

Mahmoud recounted the challenges he faced due to the deteriorating security conditions as he travelled to the institution where he taught during the times of conflict, stating:

It was an arduous ordeal. The institution where I worked was located in a neighbouring city, requiring me to undertake constant journeys through several military checkpoints. A journey that should only cover 35 kilometres ended up taking about two hours due to these checkpoints. The risks were manifold, compounded by the ever-changing frontlines and shifts in territorial control.

A further risk originated from within the university itself, involving collusion between the faculty dean and security forces. On a notable occasion, the dean contacted students known for their opposition to the regime, claiming they needed to visit the university for administrative reasons, such as collecting documents like transcripts. However, this was a trap; upon their arrival, the students were met not by administrative support but by a security patrol, which resulted in their immediate detention.

Other participants shared their harrowing experiences with bombardments, violent clashes, the pervasive establishment of checkpoints, and the closure of higher education institutions in several cities, which led to their relocation. This forced both academics and students to undertake lengthy journeys to access their universities or research centres. Beyond the immediate dangers and disruptions to education, they also faced daily challenges in securing essential needs such as food, fuel, and other basic necessities, all while living under the constant strain of concern for their own safety and the well-being of their families.

6.2.2- Oppressing Academics and Students

Securing any official document turned into a formidable obstacle for countless Syrians, as the regime introduced new mandates requiring individuals to appear in person for such requests. This approach was strategically employed to detain and exert pressure on those perceived as unsupportive of the regime. As a result, academics faced particular hardships in renewing their passports or obtaining academic records, including transcripts, diplomas, certificates of equivalence, among other essential documents. In the midst of these adversities, Ramez shared his distressing account of being imprisoned by the regime, revealing:

Despite the adversity that period presented, the thought of leaving my homeland never crossed my mind. I had just achieved my PhD in a field I was deeply passionate about and was on the verge of being appointed as a faculty member at the university, a lifelong ambition of mine to become an academic professor and a successful consultant. Financially, I was in a comfortable position. However, an incident during exam invigilation became the catalyst for my departure. When I caught a student cheating and took her notebook, she vindictively reported me to security forces, alleging that I was the head of a group working against the regime, leading to my arrest during a routine passport renewal.

The treatment I received during my arrest was dehumanising. Educated individuals were prime targets for mistreatment, perceived as threats by the regime. The regime's strategy was clear: to degrade academics and intellectuals, to demean all Syrians, especially those capable of fostering enlightenment and dissent. Witnessing first-hand the regime's brutal practices, I realised living in such

conditions was untenable. A place that strips away my dignity cannot be considered home. Like many others, I would be constantly at risk of arrest, death, or mistreatment, without any legal protection or means of defence.

Rama's ordeal was even much more distressing, marked by three separate detentions and exposure to extreme torture, culminating in her suicide attempts after her final release. She shared her harrowing story:

My first arrest lasted 42 days, with accusations of liaising with foreign entities and armed factions. It was only through my family's efforts, reaching out to influential figures and paying a significant sum, that I was freed and could return to my job, though I found myself unable to produce any meaningful work. The second arrest lasted several days before I was released again. Despite the suffering, I was determined not to abandon my country to the criminal regime.

The third arrest was by far the most brutal. I endured every conceivable form of physical and psychological torment. In a particularly cruel method of torture, I was placed in a room next to where others were being tortured, separated only by a window. They threatened that unless I 'confessed', they would continue to torture the person in front of me until death. Helplessly, I watched many die this way, without even knowing what confession they sought from me. After 24 harrowing days, I was released. I was so broken that I attempted suicide three times, each time narrowly saved by my family. Ultimately, this led me to the decision to leave for Turkey, seeking refuge from the unbearable conditions.

An increasing number of academics and university students embarked on perilous journeys to leave the country in search of safety and stability. Mustafa recounted his

harrowing experience with internal displacement before ultimately fleeing to Turkey. He narrated:

My family and I were constantly on the move, seeking refuge in different cities, towns, and villages. On our final attempt to escape, we aimed for Turkey, a journey that forced us to navigate through territories controlled by ISIS. We coordinated with a trafficker and, along with several other families, we set out under the cover of darkness, navigating treacherous paths. Unexpectedly, we found ourselves caught in a crossfire. Amidst the chaos, one of my three children was separated from us. In a state of horror, my wife and I panicked and started running and calling his name, ignoring the ISIS members chasing us. Fortunately, we found our son, terrified but safe. An ISIS member caught us and started to kick me fiercely, questioning our attempt to flee and why we were heading towards "the land of infidels, to Erdogan." They confiscated our ID cards, then detained us in a village mosque overnight. The next day, they released us on the condition that we would not attempt to escape again. Nevertheless, we reached out to the trafficker once more. In a surprising turn of events, we encountered the same ISIS member who had attacked me, now splitting the trafficking proceeds with the trafficker. After enduring numerous challenges, we finally made it to Turkey.

The conflict's far-reaching effects profoundly impacted not only those within Syria but also Syrians abroad, significantly influencing their lives and the well-being of their families, friends, and colleagues back home. Saleem, who was pursuing his PhD overseas when the revolution commenced, shared his experience:

During the onset of the revolution, I was abroad working on my PhD. The distress over my family's safety and the anguish over the regime's atrocities greatly affected me. This constant worry severely hampered my academic productivity. My days were consumed by keeping up with the news and staying in touch with my family as they navigated through various phases of displacement. I made it a priority to complete my viva before my passport expired, managing to travel to Turkey immediately after finishing it.

6.2.3- Deterioration of the Quality of Higher Education

The intricate situations described earlier have resulted in a marked deterioration in the quality of higher education. In the face of such existential threats, the standard of academic offerings became a secondary issue, largely overlooked by all. For students, educators, and the wider Syrian community, the primary focus shifted towards survival and the capacity to manage through these extraordinarily difficult circumstances. The pursuit of education took a backseat to the more pressing need of navigating the challenges that life presented.

Mahmoud highlighted the decline in higher education quality, attributing it to a shortage of faculty staff, increasing violence, crumbling infrastructure, and a scarcity of educational materials, among other issues. He remarked:

Many students attended university in military uniform, which significantly disrupted the educational atmosphere. As lecturers, we were compelled to avoid confrontations with them to safeguard ourselves from potential harm. The aftermath of the conflict saw a stark decline in education quality, with a diminishing respect for academia. This shift adversely affected the availability of educational

materials, laboratory equipment, and the overall infrastructure. The educational process suffered greatly; for example, if laboratory equipment broke, there was no possibility of repairing or replacing it."

The conversations with many research participants revealed the deep sadness they felt due to the conflict's impact on their personal lives and professional journeys. The narratives poignantly highlighted the loss of their academic positions and the derailment of their career paths. My personal story is intertwined with theirs, as I too endured the regime's hegemony, lost my position in academia, endured bombardments, faced internal displacement, and was ultimately forced into exile. Writing this chapter has been emotionally draining; each story recounted by my colleagues resurrected my own harrowing experiences, reawakening a trauma I have struggled in vain to surmount for over a decade.

6.3- Discussion

In this chapter, I have presented the participants' stories and viewpoints regarding their academic journeys, aiming to elucidate how these experiences have contributed not only to forging their academic identities but also significantly influencing their approach to academic development and their competencies and limitations.

Drawing from my emic perspective, shaped by first-hand experiences that mirror the stages detailed by the participants, I noted that the findings resonate with my own reflections in Chapter 2. There, my goal was to provide readers with a thorough understanding of the context within which exiled Syrian academics developed their careers. The participants' narratives vividly highlighted the profound impact of the Syrian regime's oppressive practices on their personal and professional lives. Additionally, the

findings in this chapter aligned with the literature review on academic development in Chapter 3, revealing significant gaps in this area across many global South settings, particularly in contexts like Syria. Furthermore, the stark accounts of the post-2011 conflict and its devastating impact on the participants, their families, and their career trajectories brought to life the severe effects of the crisis. These stories can enable readers to better understand and empathise with the difficult realities endured in such conditions.

6.3.1- Living and Working Under Ba'athist Hegemony

In Chapter 2, I developed a conceptual framework to underpin my study, employing a chronological approach. It posits that a complete understanding of exiled Syrian academics' situations and the creation of effective support strategies necessitate tracing their entire journey, which includes life under an oppressive regime before 2011, the onset of the 2011 crisis and its subsequent implications, the displacement process, and their eventual settlement in exile.

I examined the pre-2011 period, the initial node of my conceptual framework, through Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 2011). This concept refers to the way in which the ruling class sustains its dominance not just through physical force or coercion, but through the control of ideas, beliefs, values, norms, and practices. Over time, the worldview of the ruling class is normalised, becoming a dominant set of beliefs perceived as natural and immutable. According to Gramsci, this domination is achieved through key institutions such as education, media, religion, and the legal system, which collectively shape public consciousness.

Gramsci argued that for a social group to challenge power, they must first develop a counter-hegemony, or an alternative worldview that challenges the existing dominant

norms and values. This involves creating a new culture that promotes the interests of the subordinate groups (Gramsci, 1985; Gramsci, 2011).

The stories shared by the participants shed light on the Syrian regime's use of hegemonic tactics to dominate the higher education landscape in Syria, illustrating a deliberate strategy to exploit this vital sector for its own ends. The findings revealed the systematic politicisation of higher education—part of the integral state apparatus (Gramsci, 2011)—by the regime, primarily through the widespread infiltration and dominance of the Al-Ba'ath Party. This party established a formidable presence across university campuses, embedding branches in each faculty, staffed by influential agents. These agents, along with security force personnel, deeply entwined themselves in the academic framework, exerting control over virtually every element of the educational process.

My participants' stories showed that in addition to direct interventions in the academic sphere, the regime strategically extended its hegemonic grip on higher education by fostering corruption networks within the sector, aligning these networks' interests with its own. This strategy involved granting privileges predominantly, if not exclusively, to individuals and groups demonstrating loyalty to the regime. This approach was designed to entangle these groups into either consciously or unconsciously backing the regime's agenda, as they pursued their own interests within the framework of the existing system. Such dynamics – as Pizzolato and Holst (2017) identified in their examination of Gramsci's perspectives on the effects of cultural hegemony – often lead these groups to reinforce the prevailing order, conforming to the established structures and perpetuating the status quo.

Furthermore, the participants shared detailed accounts of the restricted academic freedom, describing how academics were isolated with scant chances for international engagement, forced to use static and outdated curricula, and faced suppression of any initiative to enhance learning and teaching approaches. Additionally, the narratives revealed that key positions in administration and leadership were reserved for regime loyalists, often regardless of their academic qualifications or achievements, with no democratic selection processes in place.

By exerting control over the educational system—limiting academic freedoms, dictating curriculum content, and placing loyalists in positions of influence—the regime embedded its values and norms within the fabric of higher education. This strategy not only marginalised dissenting viewpoints but also aimed to normalise the regime's ideological stance as the 'common sense' (Gramsci, 1985).

Through a combination of strategic efforts, the Syrian regime established and maintained its dominance over the decades leading up to 2011. It occasionally resorted to coercive violence to consolidate its grip but primarily relied on hegemonic tactics. These tactics involved exerting control over essential aspects of society, such as education, religion, media, art, and culture. This strategy not only reinforced the regime's power but also shaped the public's perception and acceptance of its authority.

Before 2011, the majority of Syrians, including academics, often maintained silence or outwardly expressed support for the regime. Even after the 2011 uprisings and despite the regime's atrocities, a significant number of Syrians continued to exhibit similar attitudes. While delving into the reasons behind this phenomenon falls beyond the scope

of my research, it is clear that the regime's pervasive hegemonic influence is a crucial factor.

This influence, intricately embedded within the fabric of Syrian society, ensured that individuals were indoctrinated from a young age in an environment where the regime stood as the unchallenged authority. Its pervasive presence across both public and private spheres enabled the regime to mould thoughts, beliefs, and opinions as self-evidence, unchallenged common sense (Gramsci, 2011). As a result, a significant portion of the Syrian population was conditioned to accept the status quo, making the notion of counter-hegemonic resistance or dissent not just challenging but frequently unthinkable.

6.3.2- Academic Development Frameworks

The narratives shared by the participants resonate with the studies outlined in Chapter 3, which identified academic development as a practice primarily concentrated in resource-rich nations, highlighting a notable deficiency in less affluent contexts, especially throughout much of the global South (Parkinson et al., 2020). This point was further elucidated in UNESCO's 2019 report, which acknowledged considerable progress in enhancing access to primary and secondary education in several global South countries. However, it also highlighted that tertiary education remained beset with ongoing challenges, with issues of quality being particularly prominent.

The participants' stories indicated that the absence of academic development frameworks in pre-2011 Syria was not primarily attributed to a scarcity of resources. Instead, it was directly caused by the regime's hegemonic and corrupt practices, resulting in a complex situation where decision-makers in the higher education sector lacked both

the competence and the motivation to initiate or permit any positive changes. Such conditions quashed any potential for academic development.

Furthermore, the research findings indicated that the crisis's onset markedly worsened the situation, with the conflict's various consequences negatively impacting the sector's infrastructure, resources, human capital, and quality, among other aspects. This aligns with the insights provided by Barakat (2021), Milton (2017), and Milton & Barakat (2016) regarding the adverse impacts of conflicts on the higher education sector. Additionally, the participants highlighted the significant neglect of this critical sector by key decision-makers, who have viewed it as non-essential or even a luxury, particularly in light of the more urgent issues. This perspective aligns with Buckland's (2006) observations regarding similar situations in areas ravaged by conflicts.

However, despite the compelling accounts from the participants, which resonate with my own experiences, I still find it imperative to note that my research sample may not comprehensively represent the entire Syrian higher education sector. The majority of my participants, whether explicitly or implicitly, expressed opposition to the regime's practices. They found themselves navigating through corrupt environments, striving to avoid engaging in corruption personally. On the other hand, many academics who were complicit in corrupt practices did not leave the country. Instead, capitalising on their connections with the regime, they retained their positions and utilised their influence to manoeuvre through the complexities of the situation in regime-controlled areas – an aspect that falls beyond the purview of my study.

In this chapter, I have delved into the backgrounds of exiled Syrian academics, detailing the narratives of their experiences before 2011 and the subsequent conflict to

present a detailed account of how these backgrounds have shaped their academic trajectories. In the next chapter, I continue exploring this journey with my colleagues, focusing on their exile. I will examine the coping mechanisms they have adopted to face their new realities, the ways in which they have strived to maintain their academic identity, endeavoured to safeguard their skills, and navigated the uncertainties of their professional futures. This aims to offer insight into the enduring spirit and adaptability of academics who, despite facing profound losses and displacement, continue to seek avenues for growth and professional development.

Chapter 7: Research Findings—Part 2

In the previous chapter, I presented a comprehensive overview of the conditions and backgrounds of Syrian academics before the 2011 crisis, followed by an examination of the profound effects this crisis has had on their overall life experiences and, in particular, their academic careers. These intricate experiences have been instrumental in shaping their academic identities, influencing their strengths and weaknesses to a significant extent. Moving into this chapter, I continue to explore their unique journey of forced displacement by delving into their specific needs, assets, and professional development practices in exile in Gaziantep, Turkey.

7.1- Needs of Syrian Academics Exiled in Gaziantep, Turkey

Grasping the specific needs of Syrian academics living in exile involves navigating through a complex and varied landscape, as their circumstances differ markedly from one individual to another. These variations are a result of diverse living conditions influenced by a range of factors including legal status, financial stability, institutional affiliations, social connections, as well as differences attributed to age, gender, and academic disciplines, among other factors.

In the discussion section of this chapter, I will introduce a holistic model that meticulously outlines the needs of the research participants. This framework is structured to facilitate a deeper comprehension and assist those entities committed to supporting exiled Syrian academics, or scholars in similar adversities, in formulating more impactful support strategies.

It is important to acknowledge that the identified needs are not entirely separate entities and frequently overlap, impacting each other. Furthermore, while the collected

data encompassed all outlined needs, the articulation of these needs varied significantly. Some participants expressed certain needs more explicitly than others. This variance can be attributed to the differences in their experiences and practices, which may have limited their capacity to distinctly and directly articulate some needs, including assigning them precise names or labels.

Moreover, to better understand the narratives and priorities of the research participants, it is important to reemphasise a vital point made in Chapter 2: Syrians in Turkey are not recognised as refugees in the conventional sense as seen in Europe and many other regions. Instead, they are categorised under 'temporary protection' status. This classification excludes them from receiving government support for housing, living expenses, language learning, employment assistance, and other forms of aid typically available to refugees worldwide. Additionally, Syrians face significant travel restrictions within and outside Turkey. For instance, traveling to a neighbouring city requires undergoing a lengthy application process for a 'travel permit,' which is often denied. This critical context shapes the challenges and perspectives detailed in the subsequent sections, profoundly impacting the narratives presented.

7.1.1- Fundamental Human Needs

A predominant theme that emerged from my conversations with participants about their needs was a unanimous yearning for a 'stable and secure life'. Their stories vividly depict a reality fraught with instability, precariousness, and uncertainty. Humam's narrative compellingly illustrates this prevailing feeling:

I need a minimum level of stability. At least to know my plan for the next year. This, of course, hinges on securing a job opportunity and achieving financial stability;

only then can I entertain the thought of academic development. My current priority is my family and ensuring their basic needs are met. To me, safeguarding the well-being of my family and myself is paramount, far surpassing the importance of advancing my academic skills. The harsh truth is, without a reliable income to cover our essential expenses, the prospect of focusing on academic pursuits is a luxury I cannot afford.

Humam's reflection not only shed light on his personal plight but also encapsulated a common aspiration among participants for a life devoid of the constant dread over their immediate future. It underscored the intricate balance between securing economic stability and the ability to chase personal and academic ambitions, highlighting a profound truth about the interplay between survival needs and the pursuit of intellectual growth.

Muhnnad also articulated a sentiment that mirrored the broader struggle, focusing on his relentless quest to ensure his family's survival before considering academic pursuits. He explained:

Stability is my foremost requirement, followed by more stability, and yet again, stability. It's essential for me to have a reliable source of income that addresses the basic necessities of my family. The question of enhancing my academic abilities seems misplaced when faced with the pressing uncertainties of paying next month's house rent or providing food for my children. I am not discussing desires for luxury; rather, I am emphasising the dire need for the basic provisions that every human being rightfully deserves.

Mustafa, who graciously invited me to conduct the interview at his residence, warmly welcomed me alongside his family. As we settled in, two of his children, radiating

warmth and hospitality, joined us. With evident pride, Mustafa began to share the remarkable achievements of his children in their studies, highlighting how they excelled and even surpassed their Turkish peers in class despite navigating through challenging circumstances. He revealed that his children were already familiar with me through his anecdotes; having attended some of my lectures, he had spoken highly of the sessions, describing them as both enlightening and enjoyable. This had sparked the children's curiosity and eagerness to meet their 'father's teacher'.

However, as the interview progressed, the tone shifted. About thirty minutes in, Mustafa touched upon the complexities of his life in exile, reflecting on how his academic qualifications had, paradoxically, brought him more challenges than benefits. His emotional turmoil became evident as he spoke; his voice quivered, and his eyes filled with tears, revealing the profound impact of his experiences and the emotional toll of navigating such a precarious situation:

I aspire for nothing more than a life of dignity. There are moments when I consciously refrain from disclosing my academic background and the fact that I hold a PhD; sometimes, I even feel a sense of shame in revealing such credentials. Upon relocating to Turkey, I secured a position as a project officer at a local Syrian humanitarian organisation. However, my line manager, lacking higher educational credentials, perceived me as a potential rival. Consequently, following the conclusion of the project I was assigned to, he exploited his connections within the organization to ensure my dismissal.

After several unsuccessful months in job hunting, I reached out to a small Syrian factory announcing vacancies for labour positions, careful not to disclose my

academic history. On my very first day, I found myself braving the predawn chill, awaiting the factory transport. As I boarded, a man seated beside the driver greeted me, "how are you, doctor?" This individual, a co-owner of the factory, had previously encountered me in Syria and was aware of my academic status. He inquired why I would settle for a job seemingly beneath my qualifications. My reply was straightforward: I was prepared to do any job to support my family.

Despite my earnest efforts and dedication, merely two days later, I received a modest sum of money with a message indicating the factory no longer required my services.

Even those more fortunate than Mustafa, who secured employment, predominantly outside the academic sphere—mainly with humanitarian organisations involved in providing cross-border aid to northwest Syria—voiced a sense of instability and insecurity. Alongside these challenges, they highlighted a lack of free time to either preserve or enhance their academic skills. The collective experience points to a significant struggle: navigating the uncertainties of their new lives in exile while attempting to uphold or enhance their academic pursuits amidst the demands of work and survival.

7.1.2- Stable Legal Status

The 'temporary protection' status of Syrians in Turkey, as I have highlighted before, significantly exacerbates their challenges. Several participants have characterised their prolonged tenure in Turkey, extending over a decade for some, as living in a state of perpetual emergency. This sense of vulnerability is compounded by the fear of arbitrary deportation, a threat that looms large despite conscientious efforts to avoid any form of trouble.

One telling example involved a colleague who experienced a minor traffic accident. Initially, the other party, who was at fault, apologised. Yet, upon discovering my colleague's Syrian nationality,

He switched from apologetic to hostile, badmouthing my colleague and demanding his immediate deportation. This sudden turn of events plunged my colleague into deep anxiety over the possibility of deportation, prompting him to envision the numerous challenges it would pose. He worried about the impact on his family, pondering the fate of his children who had been receiving a Turkish education for the past ten years and questioning how they could possibly adapt to another drastic change. Determined to avoid such a scenario, he was willing to assume complete responsibility for the accident and bear any financial burden the other driver demanded, all to secure his family's presence in Turkey. This story is a stark illustration of the fragile and uncertain reality Syrians under 'temporary protection' face, where even mundane incidents can escalate into existential threats.

Moreover, the utilisation of the Syrian presence in Turkey as a political tool by many Turkish politicians during various elections often involves stirring up public sentiment against Syrians by attributing a broad array of Turkey's challenges—economic, political, social, and beyond—to them. Campaign strategies have included the display of large billboards in prominent locations across different cities, featuring images of Syrians with provocative slogans like "We'll get them out!" Such rhetoric and actions escalate into hate speech, significantly exacerbating the living conditions for Syrians in Turkey, transforming their daily lives into a struggle for dignity and safety. In response to the heightened tensions during election periods, many Syrians find themselves retreating from public

spaces, overwhelmed by fear, anxiety, and a sense of hopelessness. Uncertain of their future and with limited options available, they grapple with the constant dilemma of how to navigate their existence in an increasingly unwelcoming environment.

The 'temporary protection' status, while offering Syrians a form of legal stay in Turkey, significantly curtails their freedom of movement, both within the country and abroad. The requirement for a 'travel permit' for even short trips to neighbouring cities casts a shadow over their lives, likened by some participants to living within an 'invisible prison'. Abbas, echoing the frustrations of many, recounted his experience with this restrictive policy. He, along with fellow Syrian academics, sought a 'travel permit' to attend an academic development workshop in Istanbul, organised by Cara. He shared:

We received an invitation from Cara to join an academic development workshop in Istanbul. Anticipating the difficulties in securing a travel permit, we proactively asked Cara for a formal invitation in Turkish, clearly stating our names and outlining the reason for our journey. With this invitation in hand, four of us academics approached the immigration directorate to submit our application for the travel permit. However, our encounter with the staff there was disheartening. They met our request with mockery, laughing at our aspirations before ultimately denying our application.

Several colleagues encountered missed opportunities for research incubation visits in the UK and other academic development programs abroad, a consequence of these rigid travel restrictions. Mahmoud shared his experience of being invited by the University of Durham in the UK, an opportunity he was forced to forego due to the travel limitations associated with his 'temporary protection' status. Similarly, Imad recounted his

disappointment at having to decline a research visit to a UK university, thwarted by the same travel constraints. These stories underscore the profound impact of such restrictions on academic advancement and professional growth for many Syrian academics exiled in Turkey.

In search of greater freedom of movement, some individuals have managed to shift their legal status in Turkey from 'temporary protection' to either a 'tourist residence permit' or a 'work permit'. This change, while offering increased mobility, introduces a new set of challenges. The annual renewal of these permits is fraught with uncertainty and is further complicated by the need to renew Syrian passports. This demands considerable effort and a substantial financial outlay, typically around 2000 USD, which includes both the official fees and additional payments to brokers operating within networks of corruption linked to the Syrian consulate. Moreover, these passports are only valid for a span of two years, adding another layer of complexity and insecurity to their lives in Turkey.

A small number of Syrian academics in Turkey have been fortunate enough to receive citizenship, a process lacking clear criteria for others to aspire and work towards achieving. Yet, this significant milestone is not devoid of its challenges. Some academics had initially found employment in Turkish universities as foreign lecturers, particularly in fields that necessitate instruction in Arabic or English. However, upon acquiring Turkish citizenship, they no longer qualify as 'foreign' lecturers, leading to the termination of their contracts. This predicament has forced a difficult choice upon some: a few participants recounted how they had to decline the citizenship offer – despite its considerable advantages – to safeguard their livelihoods. Conversely, others who prioritised gaining

citizenship faced the loss of their academic positions, illustrating the complex trade-offs and decisions some Syrian academics in Turkey must navigate.

7.1.3- Psychological Well-Being and Social Integration

Despite the evident necessity for various forms of psychological support that many participants undoubtedly required, it was notable that none explicitly acknowledged this need. This silence belies the deep psychological scars borne by many, scars that include not only the burdensome weight of traumatic memories such as bombardment, shelling, air-raids, and other distressing war-related experiences but also personal ordeals of detention and the profound sorrow of losing friends and family members in the conflict. These traumas, though not always explicitly mentioned, are evident in the backdrop of their stories—stories of losing stable, secure homes, the unexpected burden of rent, and the comfort of living amidst a supportive network of immediate and extended family. The transition from such stability to a life marked by displacement, fraught with danger and uncertainty, and the struggle to find footing in their current precarious situations, vividly illustrate the pressing, yet unspoken, need for ongoing psychosocial support.

Within our Syrian culture, particularly among men, acknowledging psychological struggles or expressing vulnerability is often neither acceptable nor common. Furthermore, in Syria, openly discussing mental health issues or seeking any form of psychological assistance was not a widespread practice. This cultural background contributes to the silence around mental health needs, despite the clear indications of trauma and the critical importance of support for those navigating such profound life upheavals.

The integration of Syrian refugees into their host community in Turkey has encountered significant obstacles. Initially welcomed with open arms, the Syrians found a positive reception among the Turkish populace, a testament to the host community's hospitality amidst the early stages of the Syrian exodus. Yet, as what was presumed to be a brief sanctuary extended indefinitely due to the protracted conflict in Syria, the welcoming attitude of the host community began to wane. The transformation was further accelerated by political manoeuvring, as Syrian refugees became a contentious issue exploited by various political parties in Turkey. This, alongside mounting economic difficulties stemming from both national and international pressures, gradually eroded the initial warmth towards Syrians, leading to increased animosity from some sectors of the Turkish public.

Complicating this shift is the pervasive uncertainty that clouds the future of Syrian refugees in Turkey. The indefinite nature of their stay, coupled with the lack of a clear and cohesive policy for managing their presence, has only deepened their plight and turned the endeavour of weaving into the fabric of the Turkish community more daunting and complex.

I have observed that numerous participants have not reached an advanced proficiency in the Turkish language, despite their prolonged residence in Turkey. In discussions about this, they highlighted several key factors hindering their language development. First, there was a noticeable lack of accessible, sponsored language learning programs, creating a significant barrier to their linguistic advancement. Additionally, the demands of their work schedules often left them with little time to dedicate to language study. Compounding these challenges was the pervasive uncertainty about

their futures in Turkey. The ever-present feeling that their stay was temporary and the anticipation of eventually being forced to leave discouraged many from investing the effort required to master the Turkish language. These circumstances collectively contribute to the difficulty in achieving language proficiency, affecting their ability to fully integrate into Turkish society.

Fadel shed light on this disparity by comparing his experience with that of his friends who sought asylum in Germany around the same time he moved to Turkey. In Germany, his friends were granted official refugee status, which entitled them to government support for their basic needs and enrolment in language schools to learn German. This support allowed them to focus entirely on their language studies, and upon achieving proficiency, the German government assisted them in securing suitable employment. In stark contrast, Fadel found himself in a situation where he had to work from his first day in Turkey to cover his living expenses, including rent, bills, and food. With a daily routine that stretched from 8:00 in the morning until after 6:00 in the evening, Fadel struggled to find any time for language learning. He managed to enrol in an online course to cover the basics, enabling him to conduct simple transactions and conversations while shopping, but the demanding nature of his work and life circumstances in Turkey severely limited his opportunities for further language acquisition.

An additional impediment to the social integration of Syrians within the Turkish community is the prevailing attitude of superiority among some members of the host community. This perspective often manifests in the belief that refugees are inherently inferior. Adam highlighted this issue, observing that during his interactions with some

members of the host community, he was met with disdain and a lack of recognition for the capabilities of Syrians. Ayman, too, recounted his experience at a prominent international conference in Turkey, where his attempts to engage with Turkish peers during networking sessions were met with belittlement. They questioned his knowledge on current topics within his academic field and insinuated that a Syrian refugee could not possibly measure up to the standards of a genuine academic. These experiences underscore the profound impact of some prejudiced attitudes on the efforts of Syrian refugees to integrate socially and professionally in Turkey.

Some participants reflected on their integration experiences, noting a distinctly more receptive atmosphere among religious conservative communities in contrast to secular ones in Turkey. This difference, they suggested, stems from the secular segments exhibiting stronger nationalistic biases, which can sometimes escalate into racism. Deema, who teaches in a department where Arabic is the primary language of instruction and which predominantly comprises staff and students from conservative religious backgrounds, found her interactions within this community segment to be markedly smoother and more positive. However, she also pointed out several obstacles that have impeded her full integration. Lack of support for Turkish language acquisition significantly limits her and her academic colleagues' ability to engage fully in the academic community, including attending or participating in conferences and symposia. Additionally, the income disparity she faces, earning less than her Turkish counterparts despite longer working hours, highlights the complex challenges Syrian academics encounter, even within more accepting parts of the host community.

7.1.4- Recognition of Qualifications and Academic Identity

Another prominent need articulated by many participants was for the acknowledgment of their academic achievements and the affirmation of their academic identities. Their accounts detailed the extensive investments they had committed to their education—efforts that span dedicating substantial time, incurring financial costs, and often enduring prolonged separation from family to pursue postgraduate studies abroad. These narratives underline the profound dedication they have to their academic pursuits and the establishment of their academic personas. The erosion of this hard-earned recognition upon entering exile is a source of significant distress, as it diminishes the value of their academic identities and scholarly achievements.

Many participants detailed the multifaceted hurdles they have encountered in the quest to have their academic qualifications recognized within the Turkish educational system. These difficulties span several dimensions, encompassing impacts of conflict, linguistic barriers, and procedural complexities. A significant impediment involves securing the necessary documentation from Syrian higher education institutions, which is often an insurmountable task due to the stringent controls imposed by the Syrian government. Furthermore, the lack of advanced proficiency in the Turkish language, especially in terms of academic and technical terminology, poses a considerable barrier. Additionally, the design of the 'degree equivalency' examinations, which are a prerequisite for academic recognition in Turkey, presents its own set of challenges.

A number of research participants highlighted the stringent and exhaustive requirements for the degree equivalency process. The procedure mandates the possession of comprehensive documentation for each educational stage—bachelor's,

master's, and PhD degrees. Missing even a single academic transcript can lead to the non-recognition of their qualifications. The situation is complicated because of the conflict context, where the Syrian regime has stipulated that individuals must be physically present to acquire any official document. This requirement makes it next to impossible for those academics exiled in Turkey to obtain the necessary paperwork. While some have resorted to using brokers affiliated with corrupt networks within the regime to secure these documents, this route is fraught with uncertainty and can entail exorbitant costs, with fees reaching into the thousands of dollars for each document.

A fortunate few academics in possession of their complete educational documents have qualified to take the degree equivalency exams. However, many among them have struggled to pass due to inadequate language proficiency, which significantly impairs their comprehension of the questions and their capacity to formulate comprehensive answers. Even for those who have surmounted the linguistic hurdles, the structure and substance of the exams introduce additional challenges. For instance, one participant with a PhD in agriculture shared their frustration, noting the broad scope of the bachelor's degree equivalency exam. Despite specialising in just one of the ten sub-majors of agriculture during their undergraduate studies and focusing on increasingly specific areas in their subsequent master's and doctoral research, they were expected to answer exam questions covering general knowledge across all sub-majors of agriculture, as well as in mathematics, physics, and chemistry. This expectation seemed unreasonable to them, highlighting the disconnect between the specialised nature of their academic training and the generalised demands of the equivalency examination.

Noor's experience resonates with the stories of many others, shedding light on the procedural challenges encountered during the equivalency examination process. She recounted:

I successfully passed the written test and was set for the interview the following day. This unexpected scheduling led to additional expenses, as I had to book a hotel stay and cancel my previously arranged flight, due to their last-minute notification. Despite the regulations allowing for an interpreter, my request for one was denied during the interview. Nevertheless, I confidently answered their questions, drawing on my extensive academic background. Surprisingly, some questions pertained to topics from my first year of undergraduate study. After responding to a question to which the committee initially nodded in approval, one member suddenly contested my answer, leading to a heated debate among them. Subsequently, I was asked to leave the room. Following my return to Gaziantep, I reached out to the committee's head via email but received no response. Ultimately, I was informed that I had not passed the interview.

Noor's story highlights the challenges and complexities of the equivalency examination process, reflecting the experiences of many exiled academics striving for recognition in their host country.

7.1.5- Academic Employment and Career Progression

A prominent theme that emerged consistently among nearly all participants was the desire to secure a position within academia, particularly within their specialised field of study. This aspiration was frequently cited as a pivotal element in their academic journey. Participants emphasized the importance of being connected to an academic

institution and progressing in their chosen discipline, which they have dedicated their lives to mastering and advancing. This is seen as the foundation of their academic existence. For instance, Imad acknowledged the financial stability his non-academic job offers but expressed profound dissatisfaction with the detour from his academic aspirations, stating, "I did not devote years of hard work to developing my academic expertise and aim to be recognized among the distinguished figures in my field globally, only to find myself in a non-academic role." This underscores the deep-seated longing for academic engagement and recognition that remains unfulfilled for many in their professional lives.

Adam shared a similar longing for a position in academia, emphasising his wish for academic recognition by saying:

I aspire to be acknowledged as a legitimate academic. Currently, at any academic gathering, I introduce myself as a 'former lecturer at University X', which leaves me feeling disconnected from my academic roots. I view my engagement in the humanitarian sector as merely a stopgap. At my core, I am an academic through and through, and this is reflected in how I approach explanations and use educational tools like markers and whiteboards, even in non-academic settings. Regrettably, I find myself compelled to pursue work outside academia merely to make ends meet.

Mahmoud also highlighted the vital need for an academic role, stating:

Participating in academic development activities here and there does not substitute for the experience of holding an actual academic position. It's essential for me to be connected with an academic institution, to have access to the full suite of academic privileges; to utilise its affiliation for scholarly growth; to make use of

comprehensive facilities like libraries, laboratories, and equipment; to participate in academic conferences and events; and to collaborate with a community of academic peers and support personnel, just as any academic professional in the global higher education landscape.

Many other participants echoed these feelings, voicing their dissatisfaction with having to work outside of academia and their readiness to accept academic positions, even at salaries lower than what some non-academic roles might provide. They emphasised that being employed in an academic setting would significantly enhance their opportunities for developing academic skills, expanding their professional networks, and advancing their scholarly careers. Unfortunately, their current engagements in non-academic sectors consume the bulk of their time, distancing them from academic pursuits and leaving scant time for scholarly development. This situation leads to a gradual erosion of their academic abilities and results in the loss of their hard-earned intellectual capital.

7.1.6- Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and Contribution

Through my observations, discussions with colleagues in Gaziantep, and interviews with research participants, a common theme has emerged: a widespread and pressing desire among academics to enhance their academic skills. Yet, these aspirations frequently encounter obstacles due to their distinct and challenging circumstances. As Humam succinctly put it, "we navigate a difficult, unconventional life. Our precarious and complex situations impede our capacity to preserve or advance our academic skills. Consequently, there is a pressing need for innovative solutions." This sentiment underscores the complex interplay between their aspirations for academic growth and the

realities of their situation, highlighting the critical need for creative approaches to support their academic development.

The array of professional academic development needs identified by the participants spans a comprehensive range of competencies. These include discipline-specific expertise, pedagogical skills, both disciplinary and interdisciplinary research capabilities, and proficiency in the English language. Beyond merely acquiring these skills, participants emphasised the importance of being active contributors within the academic community, rather than passive beneficiaries of structured academic development programs. This underscores their desire not only to enhance their own skills but also to engage dynamically in the broader academic discourse, contributing to and shaping the landscape of academic development.

Muneer characterised his experience as an academic in exile with the vivid metaphor of being "a fish out of water." He further explained:

When academics find themselves unaffiliated with academic institutions, distanced from laboratories, and struggling to conduct and publish quality research, their professional lives begin to wither. Additionally, a fundamental goal of pursuing my post-graduate credentials was to disseminate that knowledge to students and contribute to society through research and various academic endeavours. Being deprived of these opportunities feels like a slow professional demise.

The phenomenon of deskilling and the profound sense of loss experienced by academics who find themselves unable to practice their profession was poignantly articulated by Imad. He shared his own ordeal of being precluded from further honing his discipline-specific skills, underscoring the existential crisis it poses to his professional

identity. Imad draws a compelling comparison to illustrate his point, likening his situation to "a surgeon who hasn't performed any surgeries for an extended period and is inevitably at risk of losing their medical expertise and manual dexterity." This analogy vividly highlights the critical impact of inactivity on professional competencies, emphasizing the severe consequences for academics who are distanced from their field of expertise.

Moreover, many participants highlighted the critical role of English proficiency across all facets of academia, describing it as a pivotal factor that can significantly alter one's trajectory within the academic world. Proficiency in English opens doors to a myriad of opportunities, including participation in professional development activities, access to cutting-edge research, the ability to contribute to and publish in leading journals, and engagement in international conferences and symposia. Furthermore, it can greatly increase the chances of obtaining academic positions where English serves as the medium of instruction.

However, attaining a high level of academic English is acknowledged as a demanding process, necessitating substantial effort and dedication over an extended period. This challenge is exacerbated by the complex realities of living in exile, where time and resources may be scarce. The situation has been intensified by further challenges, including the Covid-19 pandemic and the devastating earthquake that hit Gaziantep and surrounding cities in February 2023⁶, resulting in tens of thousands of deaths and displacing millions. These calamities have affected every facet of life,

⁶ It should be noted that the narratives from my participants do not encompass the earthquake's impact. This is because the interviews and focus group discussions were conducted well before this calamity occurred, leaving the additional burdens it introduced unaddressed in the participants' accounts.

presenting further obstacles to the pursuit of academic excellence and the continuous honing of academic skills.

The vital importance of continuous academic development, interwoven with the extensive array of needs presented in the hierarchical model I have proposed, was compellingly conveyed in Ramez's insightful and succinct reflection:

As an academic, what do I require? It is essential for me to perpetually refine my skills; to deepen my knowledge within my area of specialisation; to bolster my capabilities in teaching; to elevate my research prowess; to remain abreast of the newest scientific breakthroughs pertinent to my field; to engage in meaningful research and add to scholarly discourse; to play a role in generating scientific knowledge; to achieve recognition and advancement within the academic hierarchy. All these endeavours necessitate a foundation of financial stability, emotional well-being, social security, and political safety, ensuring that both my fundamental and subsequent levels of needs are satisfied. This enables me to significantly contribute to the advancement of knowledge and deliver substantial added value to society.

7.1.7- Inclusion in Academic Communities

Participants unanimously expressed a profound desire to be part of a vibrant academic community that would provide a sanctuary, mutual support and affirmation of their scholarly identities. They envisioned this community as a collaborative forum where they can strategize and execute their commitments to enhancing higher education in their country—both now and in the future, as situations evolve. Such a network would also

serve to unify and amplify their advocacy efforts, ensuring their collective voice is heard within both the global academic arena and the academic institutions of their host country.

This community was seen as pivotal in expanding their opportunities for professional networking and active participation in a wide array of higher education events. The envisioned benefits extend beyond these immediate gains, potentially fostering an environment conducive to academic collaboration, professional development, and a stronger representation of their distinct perspectives within the wider scholarly discourse.

In Chapter 8, I will delve deeper into the multifaceted viewpoints of the participants regarding this issue, exploring in detail the underlying reasons they believe contribute to the lack of such a community. I will also examine the steps and critical factors they identify as essential for building—and subsequently developing—this community. Additionally, I will outline the myriad benefits they anticipate deriving from engagement with this envisioned dynamic scholarly body.

7.1.8- Academic Freedom

Not a single one of my research participants overtly mentioned a need for 'academic freedom.' This absence might reflect their intricate realities, where even contemplating such freedom feels like a luxury beyond reach. It could also relate to their current lack of formal academic affiliations, or it might stem from the myriad challenges they have navigated—ranging from life under a dictatorial regime, the profound impacts of ongoing conflict, perilous journeys of forced displacement, to the uncertainties of life in exile. Nonetheless, a yearning for this type of freedom subtly permeated their accounts. This underlying desire was discernible when they recounted the obstacles encountered

within Syria's higher education system prior to 2011, through their stories about diminished rights in exile, and even in tales of those who venture across the border to teach at unrecognised universities in northern Syria.

Leila shared insights on the nuances of academic freedom from her time teaching at a Turkish university's branch in northern Syria⁷, noting:

The privilege of teaching in a Turkish higher education setting comes with distinctive advantages. The system there grants lecturers substantial authority, imbuing them with academic freedom and autonomy. This allowed me to select courses thoughtfully and implement pedagogical approaches I deemed most effective for nurturing critical thinking and awareness in my students. Furthermore, this freedom was pivotal in establishing trust with my students, overcoming my initial reservations about how they would perceive me as a female lecturer in a region long influenced by various military factions, where the acceptance of female academics is not always straightforward. Nonetheless, the supportive legislative environment of Turkish universities significantly aided me in this respect. Consequently, I found that the majority of my students were receptive to my teaching style and methodology, welcoming me as their educator. This foundation of trust facilitated the development of a deeper connection, encouraging students to confide in me with personal matters and seek my advice. Such enriching interactions and the ability to positively influence my students' lives were primarily enabled by the academic freedom characteristic of the Turkish university system.

⁷ Since 2019, a couple of Turkish universities have initiated the establishment of faculties in northern Syria, providing an array of academic programmes. The teaching staff predominantly comprises Syrian educators, complemented by Turkish professionals who assume key administrative and leadership positions.

Other participants like Susan and Deema also voiced their experiences regarding the esteem they encountered as faculty members at Turkish universities, underscoring the degree of freedom and autonomy they were afforded. While they acknowledged facing certain challenges, these did not diminish the overall sense of independence and respect they enjoyed, especially when contrasted with the more restrictive academic atmosphere in Syria.

7.1.9- Innovation, Creativity, and Leadership

While the desire for innovation, creativity, and pioneering academic work was not overtly mentioned by my research participants, it was a theme deeply interwoven into their narratives. The drive to break new ground and make significant contributions within their fields was evident in specific accounts related to their areas of expertise. Susan and Leila reflected on how their rigorous practical and theoretical experiences, despite being challenging, honed their academic prowess and positioned them to make exceptional contributions in their respective fields. Imad and Fadel recounted their research efforts prior to 2011, aimed at achieving ground-breaking advancements in their academic fields. Saleem discussed his continuous pursuit of innovation and efforts to secure patents, while Ramez detailed his trailblazing work, noting his role in introducing novel technical concepts to his field, albeit with frustration over the lack of recognition from authoritative entities. Similarly, Muneer and Ayman shared their ambition to generate innovative solutions that could aid reconstruction in war-torn countries.

These narratives reveal a persistent aspiration among the participants for a dynamic academic career that not only advances their disciplines but also has a broader impact. Despite the profound challenges of the past thirteen years that have affected their

self-efficacy and self-esteem, their enduring passion for contributing meaningful and pioneering work to their fields and to the global community remains undimmed.

7.2- Assets of Syrian Academics Exiled in Gaziantep, Turkey

Even amidst the adversities faced by Syrian academics in exile over the last thirteen years, they possess a wealth of invaluable assets that can be harnessed as they strive to preserve their academic identities, enhance their skills, and make meaningful contributions to their fields of knowledge. These assets position them uniquely to not only play a pivotal role in the reconstruction of their homeland but also to offer significant contributions to their host countries and the global community at large.

When the conversation initially turned to their personal assets and the ways they could utilise them to navigate their lives in exile, many participants found themselves at a loss for words, struggling to articulate the strengths they possess. Initially, the most readily identified assets were those directly related to their specific fields of expertise. However, through further prompting and exploratory questions aimed at clarifying their thoughts, they began to recognise and articulate a broader range of assets. They highlighted their multilingual capabilities and the specialised knowledge gained from academic pursuits and teaching opportunities abroad. Additionally, they acknowledged the skills acquired in non-academic roles and their potential applicability within academic contexts. Beyond these practical skills, they also emphasised their dedication to their disciplines, their commitment to contributing to their homeland's advancement, and the extensive professional network they have meticulously developed over the years.

7.2.1- Field-Specific Assets

The majority of participants proudly highlighted their field-specific expertise, reflecting on the years dedicated to honing these skills. Several recounted their experiences working in laboratories, emphasising their competence in establishing and overseeing such facilities from start to finish. Some discussed their adeptness at integrating theoretical knowledge with practical applications within their disciplines. Additionally, others showcased their advanced specialised skills, drawing comparisons to their peers both within Turkey and on a global scale, underscoring their exceptional proficiency and the depth of their expertise.

Majed, during his tenure in Syria, embarked on a deeply involved journey within his specialised field. He not only pursued a PhD, but also worked hands-on in a practical setting in the same domain, blending theoretical insights with practical experience. This dual approach enabled him to make significant strides, culminating in a patent of considerable value that promised to enhance urban living. Despite these achievements, the lack of acknowledgment and the failure of institutions in exile to recognise his assets led to a disheartening period of unemployment. Faced with the need to support his family, Majed turned to tailoring—a skill he had mastered long before his academic pursuits began. This pivot highlights the stark contrast between his vast potential as an academic and the roles he was forced to assume due to circumstances beyond his control.

7.2.2- Linguistic Assets

The ability to communicate in several languages not only facilitates access to a wide array of scholarly publications but also enables exiled Syrian academics to disseminate research findings, educate, and actively participate in academic forums in

multiple languages. This linguistic agility affords them a unique edge in comprehending diverse cultural and academic landscapes, assimilating and synthesising information from various sources, and engaging in the creation of scholarly work. Consequently, this linguistic versatility positions them to generate remarkable contributions and achieve significant advancements across varied contexts.

For example, when I asked Ali about the potential advantages of his linguistic capabilities, he shared his thoughts:

Reflecting on your question about the advantages I possess as a fluent speaker of three languages, I must admit that initially, I hadn't considered my linguistic skills as significant assets. This oversight surprises me in hindsight, given their value. Unfortunately, I haven't leveraged these abilities to their fullest potential. I speak Arabic, Turkish, and English, which enables me to engage with a broad spectrum of academic materials. I can access research published in these languages, create scholarly works, and use them as mediums of instruction in university settings. Moreover, being proficient in these languages enhances my ability to understand and interact with diverse cultures, enriching both my personal and professional life.

Other participants, fluent in French, Russian, and Kurdish alongside Arabic, English, and Turkish, expressed that their rich linguistic skills are underappreciated and underutilised amidst the uncertainties of their lives in exile.

7.2.3- Diverse Academic Expertise Cultivated Across Multiple Countries

Syrian scholars' academic competencies, nurtured within Syria's higher education framework and augmented by skills honed through postgraduate studies overseas, have evolved amidst the challenges of exile. This has culminated in a sophisticated academic

mindset and a distinctive blend of expertise. Their thoughtful consideration of the advantages and challenges encountered at each stage of their academic journey, coupled with their efforts to extract the utmost value from each experience, has significantly bolstered their academic discernment and potential. This amalgamation of diverse educational backgrounds and experiences equips them with a robust and nuanced approach to scholarship, boosting their capacity for critical analysis and creative contribution to their fields.

Adam provided insight into the diverse backgrounds of Syrian academics living in Turkey, stating:

Consider the rich tapestry of experiences among Syrian scholars residing in Turkey. Our educational journeys have extended beyond Syria to include a variety of countries like Egypt, Russia, Britain, the United States, among others. We haven't limited ourselves to the perspectives of just one country; rather, we've synthesised these varied experiences into a cohesive whole. This diversity significantly enriches us, offering a wide array of educational backgrounds, methodologies in teaching and learning, and fields of study including agriculture, chemistry, mathematics, medicine, engineering, education, literature, and more, with each field encompassing numerous sub-disciplines. Our broad research skills and deep understanding of the different contexts we've lived and worked in, particularly those shaped by conflict, along with our capacity to gather, analyse, and contextualise data, equip us with unique advantages. These can lead to extraordinary outcomes, provided the right conditions are met.

7.2.4- Non-Academic Skills Transferrable to Academia

Numerous Syrians living in Gaziantep, Turkey, have found job opportunities with both local and international humanitarian organisations. Many of them have endeavoured to secure roles somewhat aligned with their fields of expertise. For instance, agronomists often engage in agricultural projects aimed at enhancing food security in Syria's vulnerable areas. Similarly, those with a background in education take on the management of educational initiatives; psychologists and sociologists frequently pursue positions in psycho-social support projects. Yet, some have ventured into careers distinctly different from their original fields. Regardless, many have achieved success, advancing to senior roles within their organisations and gaining valuable skills along the way. These skills, ranging from strategic planning and project management to a suite of soft skills, are highly transferable to academic contexts. Abbas reflects on his own journey, noting:

While I no longer work in the research setting I cherished, I sought employment where my technical expertise could facilitate success and allow me to maintain a connection to my academic interests. I think that the competencies I have acquired outside of academia are incredibly valuable and can be seamlessly integrated back into academia.

7.2.5- Resilience and Devotion to Syria

The resilience and determination of many participants, reinforced by their diverse experiences, stand out as pivotal assets. Most interviewees are either engaged in the humanitarian field or are persistently seeking academic positions in the challenging environment of exile. They view the new skills developed in these roles as invaluable

assets. Furthermore, they express a steadfast commitment to contributing to Syria, both presently and in the future, with plans to apply these acquired competencies towards the reconstruction of Syrian higher education. Indeed, some have already initiated this process by teaching at universities in northern Syria, despite encountering numerous obstacles. This proactive engagement and its implications for rebuilding Syria's academic infrastructure will be explored in greater depth in forthcoming sections.

Mahmoud expressed his dedication to his homeland and his aspiration to contribute to the restoration of its higher education system, stating:

The knowledge and academic skills I have gained hold little value unless I deploy them to enhance higher education in my country, to rebuild its foundations, and to educate forthcoming generations. Without this application, my life's efforts seem inconsequential, and I'm left with a profound sense of regret for not employing my abilities. True fulfilment for an academic lies in transferring knowledge and experiences to the next generations, thereby enhancing the well-being of our society and safeguarding our collective heritage.

Zaher voiced a similar dedication to contributing to the restoration of Syria's higher education, emphasising:

We, as Syrian academics in exile, need to come together to devise future strategies for rebuilding and reviving Syria's academic landscape, including universities, research centres, and other educational institutions. Currently, I believe my contribution can be best focused on coordinating efforts, planning, and proposing initiatives. I am hopeful that in the future, I will have the chance to play a more active role in enhancing Syria's academic framework.

7.2.6- Extensive Professional Networks

The participants pointed out the expansive networks they have built over time, spanning from their original ties in Syria to the countries where they pursued advanced degrees, and extending to the new relationships forged in Turkey, the UK, and various other nations worldwide. These networks represent a comprehensive mosaic of academic and professional connections, providing a vast pool of collaboration and support on a global scale.

Humam emphasised the value of nurturing an extensive international network and the profound positive influence of interacting with diverse academic communities across the globe, underscoring the precious opportunities these connections could afford. He remarked:

Exile has unveiled opportunities previously beyond our reach. Notably, we have established extensive networks spanning Britain, Europe, America, and Asia, engaging with academics across these regions. Such a network, I believe, would have been unimaginable within Syria's confines due to differing circumstances and priorities. This network has been instrumental in enhancing my academic skills and introducing me to cutting-edge research and educational techniques. This development represents a significant advantage for Syrian academics in exile, opening doors we previously didn't even consider, such as research incubation visits to the UK and potential scholarship applications. Our prior focus was solely on the prospect of returning to teach in Syria or possibly securing positions in the Gulf, with little thought given to broader possibilities. This shift in perspective, I

think, is not only pivotal but could also positively shape Syria's future, assuming we have the chance to return and leverage these global insights and connections.

Many participants, however, voiced that their valuable personal and shared assets are currently underutilised, hindered by several obstacles. These include an inherent struggle with collective action, oversight from both the host and international communities, and the enduring crises back home, all amidst the complex and often precarious conditions of Syrians living in exile. This underutilisation signifies a critical loss, as the considerable talents and expertise of these individuals remain marginalised in contexts that could greatly benefit from their contributions.

7.3- Academic Development Practices of Syrian Academics Exiled in Gaziantep, Turkey

In my conversations with research participants, three principal pathways emerged for practicing academic tasks and thereby fostering skill development. At the forefront is the support and opportunities provided by Cara through its tailored activities and events, which have significantly contributed to their academic growth. The engagement with Turkish universities emerges as another channel, only for those fortunate enough to secure academic appointments in Turkey. The third avenue involves teaching roles at universities in northern Syria, accessible either by physically crossing the border to teach on-site or through online platforms. These pathways highlight the diverse means by which the participants remain actively involved in academic pursuits, leveraging these opportunities to continue their professional development amidst challenging circumstances.

7.3.1- Academic Development Practices Through Cara

Cara has been described by numerous participants as the sole organisation actively acknowledging and supporting exiled Syrian academics, offering a lifeline to those who might otherwise feel isolated from the academic community. According to them, without Cara's intervention, their connection to the academic world would be significantly diminished, if not completely severed. Some participants went further, stating that the opportunities afforded to them through Cara's initiatives surpassed anything they could have envisaged within Syria's higher education system before 2011. These opportunities range from research incubation visits at universities in the UK and specialised academic development workshops conducted by leading academics, to comprehensive English language and academic English courses complemented by personalised tutoring sessions from volunteer academics. Moreover, Cara facilitates avenues for conducting high-quality research and publishing in prestigious journals, with the guidance of UK-based mentors, among various other activities and development initiatives.

In Chapter 9, I will provide a comprehensive exploration of the support and resources made available by Cara through its Syria Programme, detailing the extensive assistance and opportunities it has offered to Syrian academics living in Turkey. Additionally, I will delve into alternative approaches that Cara and the broader international community might have employed to more effectively assist academics in exile.

7.3.2- Academic Development Practices Through the Turkish Academic Sphere

The Turkish host community has extended considerable support to a small group of Syrian academics, offering a range of opportunities that have significantly aided their professional development. These opportunities span from doctoral and, to a lesser degree, postdoctoral scholarships, to teaching positions within both public and private universities. Notably, the introduction of the 'Arabic Programme' stands out, employing Syrian academics to instruct Syrian students in Arabic across several universities. However, the programme has confronted a range of challenges, culminating in its discontinuation in some cities or the decision to cease operations in others.

In Chapter 9, I will delve into the myriad forms of support and resources provided by Turkey, offering an in-depth overview of the assistance and openings extended to Syrian academics, enriching their academic and professional trajectories. Furthermore, I will investigate alternative strategies that could have created win-win situations, enabling Turkey to offer greater support to Syrian academics while also reaping benefits from their presence and contributions.

7.3.3- Academic Development Practices Through Teaching at Universities in Northern Syria

Despite its inherent difficulties, teaching at universities in northern Syria provides some Syrian academics residing in Turkey with important opportunities. This endeavour not only offers them academic roles unattainable in their host country—thereby addressing feelings of disenchantment and the erosion of their academic identity—but also allows them to contribute significantly to bridging the substantial educational void in these northern Syrian regions.

These areas, lying beyond the Syrian regime's control and home to millions of local residents alongside internally displaced persons from across Syria, are devoid of government aid and encounter a slew of challenges. These include political, security, financial, and infrastructural issues, as well as shortages in housing, livelihood, healthcare, education, and more.

In northern Syria, the higher education sector serves tens of thousands of students despite receiving no government support or international assistance, as tertiary education is often viewed as a luxury in such contexts. To fill this void, initiatives have been undertaken to establish universities that primarily rely on tuition fees, sometimes supplemented by modest donations from local or regional entities. Additionally, some branches of Gaziantep University have been set up in the area. However, these institutions face numerous challenges, such as lack of recognition, inadequate infrastructure, financial constraints, a shortage of academic staff, compromised educational quality, and substandard curricula, among other issues.

Participants detailed their challenging travels from Gaziantep to cities in northern Syria close to the border, highlighting the difficulties in obtaining the necessary permits for border crossing. They described the intricate and time-consuming process of navigating the border, a situation further complicated by security risks in the region, pervasive corruption, and the detrimental influence of various military factions exerting control over the area.

Other participants expressed a more optimistic view, acknowledging the complexities of the situation but emphasising their dedication to overcoming these challenges. They stressed their commitment to support students in dire need, actively

working to mobilise resources, apply their academic expertise, and utilise their local, regional, and international connections to enhance the higher education landscape in the region.

Most participants currently teaching at universities in those areas emphasised their need to devise specialised teaching techniques tailored to the distinct educational needs of students, many of whom face educational gaps resulting from the prolonged crisis and the numerous displacements they have endured. Additionally, grappling with limited resources and intricate circumstances, these educators have consistently highlighted their continuous search for viable solutions to address these obstacles. Furthermore, in response to the scarcity of specialised staff, some universities have adopted blended learning approaches, with certain lecturers teaching remotely from abroad to address this shortfall.

This concludes this chapter, having explored the various needs of Syrian academics in exile in Gaziantep, Turkey, examined their valuable skills and assets, and investigated their practices for academic development. In the next chapter, I will investigate the significance of community interactions in their lives in exile and how these relationships, or the absence thereof, affect their professional pursuits.

7.4- Discussion

The chapters presenting my research findings are crafted to offer a comprehensive and in-depth portrayal of the experiences of Syrian academics in exile in Gaziantep, Turkey. Before delving into the specifics of this chapter's findings, it is crucial to contextualise this discussion within the broader construct of the three dual-focus approaches that have informed my analysis. I contend that these approaches are critical

for an accurate interpretation of the findings and for effectively translating research insights into practical applications.

The first dual analytical lens I have employed enables a 'zoom out' to grasp the broader context, encompassing the era before 2011, the intricacies of the protracted crisis, the odyssey of displacement, and the complex realities of living in exile. Simultaneously, it 'zooms in' to reveal the detailed nuances within the participants' stories. Through my insider perspective, I have carefully unpacked and analysed these accounts, offering readers a deep understanding of those experiences, their origins, and their broader implications. This dual approach not only addresses a critical gap in academic discourse but also provides readers with a comprehensive view of the multifaceted realities of exiled Syrian academics.

The second bifocal approach I have utilised assesses both the needs and assets⁸ of participants, offering a holistic view that recognises their challenges while simultaneously highlighting their capabilities and resources. By examining the real needs and assets, this approach emphasises the potential for participants to address their needs and utilise their assets to positively transform their situations, advance their academic pursuits, and contribute significantly to their fields of study and society at large.

The third dual-focus approach I have adopted involves a thorough examination of both personal and collective experiences, underscoring the importance of individual and communal dynamics. Despite uncovering the absence of an active academic community for Syrian academics in Gaziantep – a topic I will discuss in detail in Chapter 8 – there

⁸ In the second and third bifocal approaches discussed here, I build upon the model developed by Parkinson et al. (2020), incorporating several adjustments which are elaborated on later in this section.

was a clear consensus among participants about the critical need to establish and nurture such a community.

Drawing on the insights gained from employing these three bifocal approaches in my study, it becomes clear that neither the exiled Syrian academics have fully grasped the breadth and depth of their circumstances across these dimensions, nor have the host and international academic communities. Although the in-depth exploration of internal support mechanisms within the community of exiled Syrian academics and the external support provided by both the host and international communities will be detailed in Chapters 8 and 9, I find it pertinent to briefly touch upon these elements in the current discussion for a rounded perspective.

In my engagement with my Syrian colleagues through interviews, group discussions, and continuous observation and reflection, I noticed their preoccupation with the intricacies of their immediate situations, often at the expense of understanding the broader overarching context. Moreover, they have placed a notable emphasis on their needs, with insufficient consideration of their assets, which has limited their visibility of potential solutions to their challenges. Additionally, their focus has predominantly leaned towards individual survival strategies, rather than collective actions that could offer improved solutions for everyone involved.

Similarly, I believe that the host community has struggled with understanding these three bifocal dimensions, failing to explore the exiled academics' circumstances in depth or recognise their capabilities and potential contributions. The host community's approach has predominantly been to interact only with some of them on an individual basis rather than grouping them into a unified structure, which would involve compiling their profiles

into a detailed database and facilitating the establishment of collective communication channels.

The international academic community, despite Cara's significant contributions, has neither 'zoomed in' to focus on specific details nor 'zoomed out' to grasp the overall picture, thereby failing to understand the crucial nuances. It has neglected the exiled Syrian academics, overlooking the intellectual capital they embody and their potential key role in rebuilding Syria's higher education. Moreover, it has not advocated for their rights or facilitated partnerships with relevant institutions to help them overcome challenges and continue their academic pursuits.

To enrich the outcomes of this discussion section, I will begin by interpreting the participants' accounts of their needs, constructing a tailored model that facilitates a deeper understanding of the needs of academics in adverse contexts. Subsequently, I will discuss their views on their strengths and skills and how they can leverage them. Finally, I will advance to propose a holistic model for academic development tailored to these challenging environments.

7.4.1- Academics' Needs in Challenging Contexts⁹

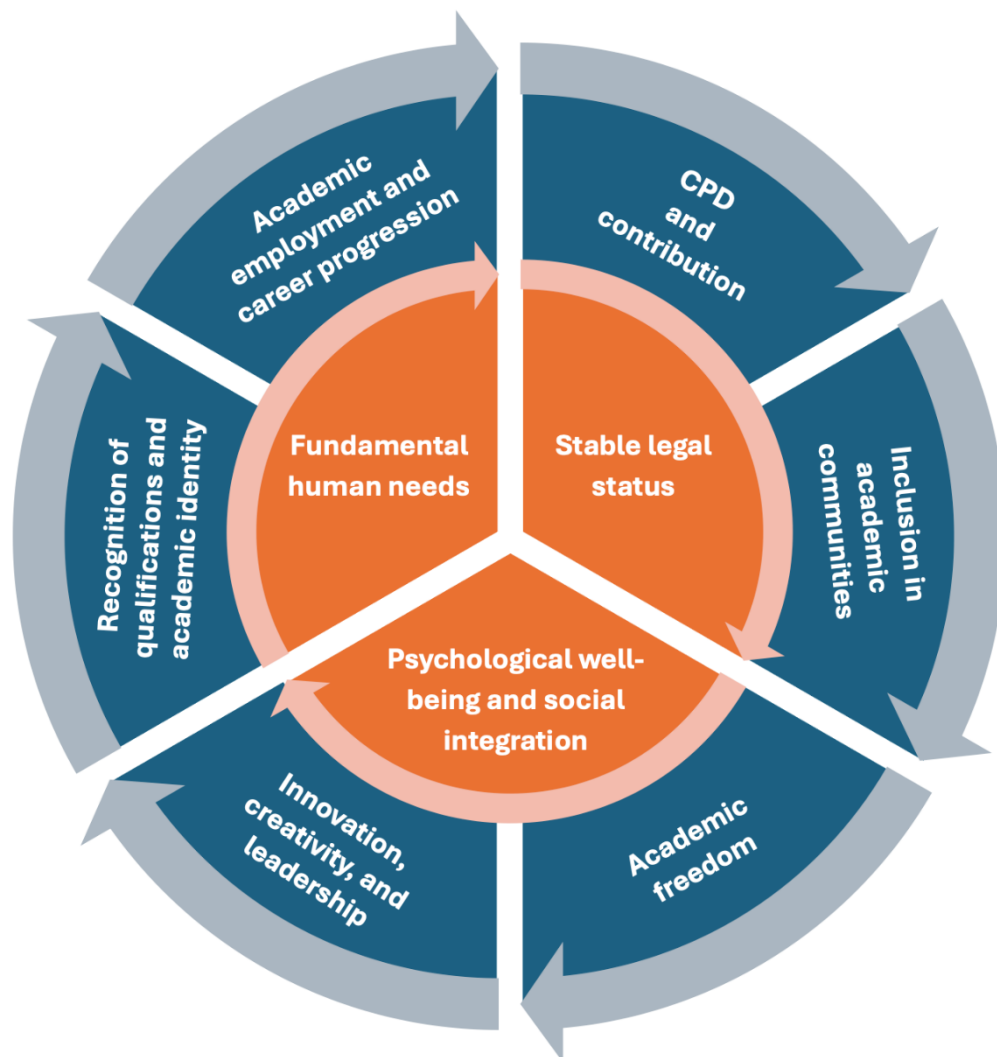
My research participants provided detailed narratives that highlighted the complex and multifaceted nature of their needs. They frequently noted that the limited support they received often tended to address less critical needs, neglecting their more significant concerns and reducing the overall effectiveness of such support. These insights prompted

⁹ This section examines the experiences of Syrian academics living in exile in Gaziantep, Turkey. However, the insights gained here may also resonate with the experiences of academics in other challenging circumstances. This includes scholars navigating conflict, post-conflict, or exile situations; academic groups facing marginalisation due to socio-political or economic barriers; and academics operating under oppressive regimes.

me to develop a comprehensive model that encompasses the full spectrum of needs encountered by exiled Syrian academics. This model, shown in Figure 5, aims to improve stakeholders' understanding of these needs, spotlighting overlooked challenges that may hinder the fulfilment of other critical needs.

Figure 5

Academics' Needs in Challenging Contexts



The model is structured with two concentric circles, encompassing nine distinct types of needs. The inner circle is divided into three sections focusing on the fundamental requirements of exiled people, regardless of their professional fields. These core needs were identified as critically important by the majority of my participants. They emphasised that without effectively addressing these essentials, they would continually face significant challenges that obstruct their ability to pursue additional objectives. For instance, during the interviews, several participants conveyed that, despite valuing the academic development opportunities presented to them, their capacity to engage was hindered by pressing concerns such as extended periods of unemployment leading to disappointment and a diminished motivation to develop skills that appeared unlikely to convert into any form of income to meet their urgent and basic needs. The three segments of this central circle are detailed as follows:

- **Fundamental human needs:** This section remains focused on basic necessities such as income, safety, dignity, and basic human rights, acknowledging these as the foundation for any further development or achievement.
- **Stable legal status:** It is imperative to establish a stable legal status to alleviate the stress and uncertainty faced by refugees, particularly those living under 'temporary protection' status, as is predominantly the case for Syrians residing in Turkey. This precarious standing restricts their employment prospects, freedom of movement within and beyond Turkey, and subjects them to ongoing stress and uncertainty.
- **Psychological well-being and social integration:** This segment focuses on providing mental health support, facilitating cultural adaptation, and fostering social connections both within the academic community and beyond. Acknowledging the

critical role of psychological resilience and a sense of belonging is essential for those facing the challenges of displacement. Many refugees endure psychological trauma resulting from perilous journeys, significant losses, and the possibility of encountering discrimination, racism, or prejudice in their host communities. Equipping those in exile with the ability to master the language of their host community is a critical component of their successful social integration. Confronting these challenges is key to their overall healing, adaptation, and development.

The outer circle, on the other hand, targets academic-specific needs, comprising six varied segments that span a broad array of scholarly dimensions. These components significantly influence the personal and professional spheres of exiled Syrian academics.

The details of these segments are as follows:

- **Recognition of qualifications and academic identity:** This section underscores the importance of validating and acknowledging the academic and professional qualifications of exiled scholars, facilitating their integration into the academic workforce, and respecting their professional identity.
- **Academic employment and career progression:** This segment emphasises the importance of securing affiliation with an academic institution and acquiring a position within one's academic discipline. It extends to include opportunities for professional growth and ascending through ranks within the academic sphere.
- **Continuing professional development (CPD) and contribution:** This part emphasises the importance of ongoing development opportunities for enhancing skills and knowledge through active participation in conferences, training courses, workshops, and other academic events. It includes gaining access to libraries, online

databases, research facilities, laboratories, and the essential modern technological tools for academic and professional pursuits. Beyond physical resources, it also covers software and platforms that enable digital scholarship, online collaboration, and remote learning. Additionally, this level underlines the value of opportunities to contribute to one's field, as well as to the broader society, country, and international community, mirroring the dual goals of personal advancement and societal contribution.

- **Inclusion in academic communities:** This section highlights the significance of actively participating in both local and global academic networks, seeking collaboration opportunities, and cultivating a sense of community with peers, mentors, and leaders in one's field. Such involvement delivers indispensable guidance and support, essential for fostering personal and professional advancement. Furthermore, for exiled academics, the establishment of a dedicated body – be it a union, association, society, or council – is crucial. This entity would advocate for their rights and offer support, playing a pivotal role in their successful integration and growth within the academic sphere. This aspect will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 8.
- **Academic freedom:** This section underscores the paramount importance of academic freedom, enabling scholars to engage in critical thinking, express ideas freely, conduct research, teach, and publish without restrictions. It emphasises the necessity of independence from political pressures, security forces, and other dominating influences, ensuring an environment where academic integrity and freedom of thought prevail.

- **Innovation, creativity, and leadership:** This segment is dedicated to enabling exiled academics to take the lead in pioneering initiatives, fostering innovation, and embarking on creative projects. It highlights the recognition of their significant potential to positively impact academia and society. This section is about providing the platform and resources necessary for these academics to make lasting contributions and carve out their legacies in the realms of knowledge and scholarship, promoting an environment where their innovative ideas and leadership skills can truly shine.

It is essential to consider these needs holistically, recognising their interconnectedness and mutual influences. The arrows in the model represent the interconnectedness among the various needs. Effectively addressing one area of need can significantly ease the fulfilment of others, and conversely, neglecting a critical need can undermine efforts to satisfy additional necessities. Grasping the complex nature of these needs, their interconnections, and priority levels can enable Syrian academics to identify better strategies for addressing them. Additionally, it offers institutions, policymakers, and support networks focused on aiding exiled Syrian academics, a detailed framework of needs. This framework can be instrumental in developing and implementing support programmes that are more tailored and effective.

7.4.2- Academics' Assets in Challenging Contexts

The stories shared by participants reveal that, despite facing complex challenges that have profoundly affected their lives and diminished their resources, they still possess a wealth of strengths and skills. These, if leveraged effectively, offer the potential to significantly improve their life situations, enabling them to continue their academic journeys and contribute meaningfully to the world.

However, during the individual interviews, it was clear that many participants initially struggled to recognise their assets. It required several probing questions to encourage deeper reflection on the resources they possessed and how these could be utilised effectively. Conversely, the dynamic shifted positively in focus group discussions, where the participants found it easier to collectively brainstorm and pinpoint strengths. Consequently, I believe that organising a workshop that encourages participants to explore and map out both their individual and collective assets could be significantly more effective. Workshop facilitators can organise the identified assets into several categories, including collective assets, individual assets, academic assets, non-academic assets, among others. Categorising assets in this manner allows for a more nuanced analysis and facilitates their strategic application in potential development initiatives.

7.4.3- Academic Development in Challenging Contexts

My research findings seamlessly align with the insights shared in Chapter 2 and the detailed literature review conducted in Chapters 3 and 4. The reviewed perspectives on academic development in resource-rich countries, despite their varying scopes and fluid boundaries, presumed the presence of functional institutions — a scenario not applicable to many Syrian academics exiled in Turkey. This unique situation demands a fundamentally different approach to academic development. The narratives of my participants resonate with the views of Abdullateef et al. (2020), who stressed the critical need for a customised academic development framework, one that is carefully adapted to the specific requirements of Syrian academics living in Turkey. This is because conventional academic development tools may fall short, proving to be ineffective,

unsuitable, or inaccessible to academics who have been marginalised due to conflict, displacement, and disconnection from formal academic institutions.

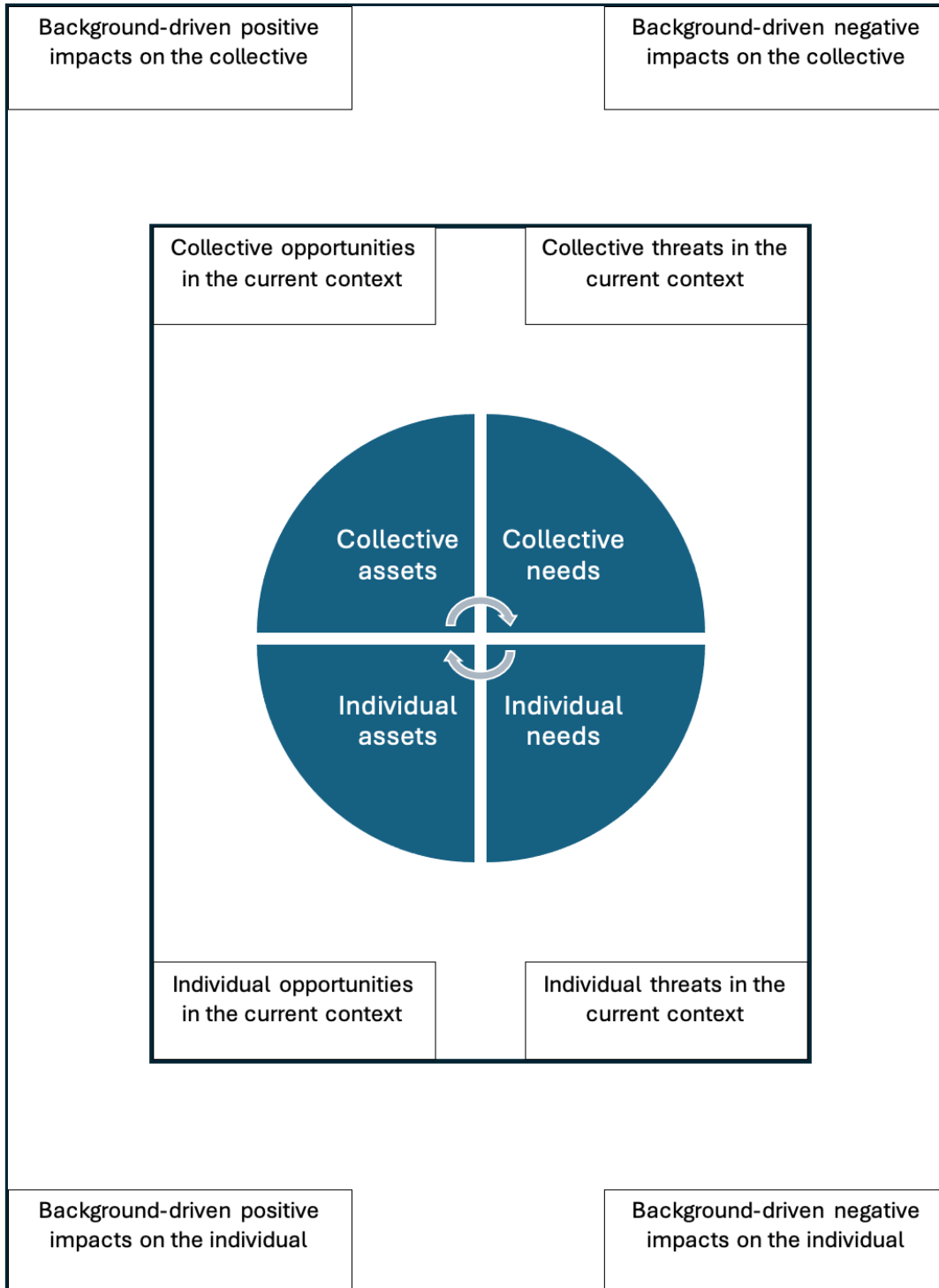
Parkinson et al. (2020) introduced an innovative model for academic development that is especially pertinent for exiled academics. This model (see Figure 2), which is integral to my literature review and central to my conceptual framework, reconceives academic development through a community development lens. Thus, it diverges from conventional perspectives, unbinding academic development from institutional settings. It provides a novel pathway for tackling the challenges faced by academics in similar vulnerable situations. While this model has been a source of inspiration, influencing various parts of my research both directly and indirectly, I am proposing a revised iteration that I believe could amplify its effectiveness and impact.

My proposal involves dividing the model into two main sections. The first section is dedicated to the 'understanding' phase, incorporating elements that enhance the ability of academic developers to comprehend the target group's situation, thereby enabling 'informed decisions' about crafting and implementing academic development initiatives. The latter section is devoted to the 'design' phase, where, informed by the comprehensive analysis from the first phase, developers meticulously create a comprehensive academic development model tailored to the unique circumstances of the target group.

The first segment of the new model, illustrated in Figure 6, is partially inspired by a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis (Benzaghta et al., 2021). It explores the background and immediate contexts, evaluating their impacts, the opportunities they offer, and the potential threats they pose. It also discerns both the individual and collective needs and assets of the target group.

Figure 6

Academic Development Model for Challenging Contexts: The ‘Understanding’ Phase



I consider this ‘understanding phase’ to be of critical importance. My experiences as an insider researcher, along with my observations and the narratives shared by my participants, reveal a clear lack of deep understanding among entities seeking to support exiled Syrian academics—a point further illustrated in Chapter 9. These organisations often fail to fully grasp the complex needs, assets, and situations of Syrian academics, which ultimately hampers the effectiveness of support initiatives.

During my participation in Cara’s Syria Programme, I met numerous dedicated academic developers who volunteered to assist Syrian academics. In conversations about the challenges they encountered, many highlighted their limited understanding of the complex context and intricate situations faced by Syrian academics as their primary obstacle.

Moreover, as discussed earlier in this chapter, many participants in individual interviews struggled to clearly identify their own skills. They required additional time for reflection and probing questions to help them articulate their strengths. Individual needs varied significantly across participants, and the collective dimension of their academic experiences remained unclear. However, group discussions offered a valuable platform for deeper exploration, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the academic community’s dynamics.

Furthermore, participants’ accounts—both in this chapter and in Chapter 9—highlighted that a lack of understanding of their specific circumstances often impedes efforts to resolve their issues. They described instances where organizations focused on involving them in academic development initiatives while overlooking their urgent need for basic human necessities. Another challenge is the demand by Turkish higher

education institutions for comprehensive documentation to recognise qualifications, despite the fact that these scholars come from a war zone, making it nearly impossible to obtain such documents from regime-controlled regions. Even when some manage to secure their paperwork, the design of equivalency exams often fails to account for their academic background and current circumstances, as detailed in participants' narratives earlier in this chapter.

Moreover, I hold the view that academic developers should treat needs and assets as interconnected elements, not as dichotomous entities. By doing so, academic development initiatives can concurrently harness certain assets and address specific needs, rather than creating distinct initiatives based solely on needs or assets. In the same vein, recognising how collective and individual challenges and opportunities intersect – rather than viewing them as diametrically opposed – can guide the creation of more impactful interventions.

Academic developers could host a workshop for prospective participants, where they present the model and guide participants through an interactive session to plot their collective experiences on the model's upper portion. Following this, individuals would be given time to ponder and chart their personal insights on the model's lower half. The model is strategically designed, with the left side dedicated to identifying positive contextual impacts, opportunities, and assets, and the right side to documenting negative impacts, threats, and needs, across both collective and individual levels. After this mapping activity, academic developers would possess a richly detailed and well-organised dataset, deepening their comprehension of the entire scenario.

To enhance precision, upon completing this stage, participants could be instructed to rank their identified opportunities, assets, threats, and needs based on their significance or potential impact. This approach would not only refine the insights gathered but also prioritise potential interventions based on the most critical or impactful factors.

This model equips academic developers with the ability to 'zoom out' to grasp the overarching context and its effects, and 'zoom in' for a closer look at the crucial details required to craft their interventions. Moreover, it arranges assets and needs adjacently, enhancing the capability to leverage assets while addressing needs effectively. Additionally, it plots collective and individual strengths and weaknesses in parallel, supporting the design of development initiatives that comprehensively incorporate both dimensions.

The second section of the model, shown in Figure 7, relies primarily on insights derived from the model's initial segment. The understanding phase paves the way for 'informed decisions,' which are instrumental in devising a customised academic development model that encompasses both strategic and tactical schemes.

Participants' narratives—further detailed in Chapter 9—revealed that many support efforts, whether by the host country or the international community, lack a strategic dimension. When engaging in these initiatives, participants often face uncertainty about the next steps, with no clear strategy to guide their progress. The absence of defined pathways for advancement and meaningful change underscores the need for a more strategic approach. For this reason, I have made setting strategic objectives and developing a comprehensive strategic plan a core part of this phase in

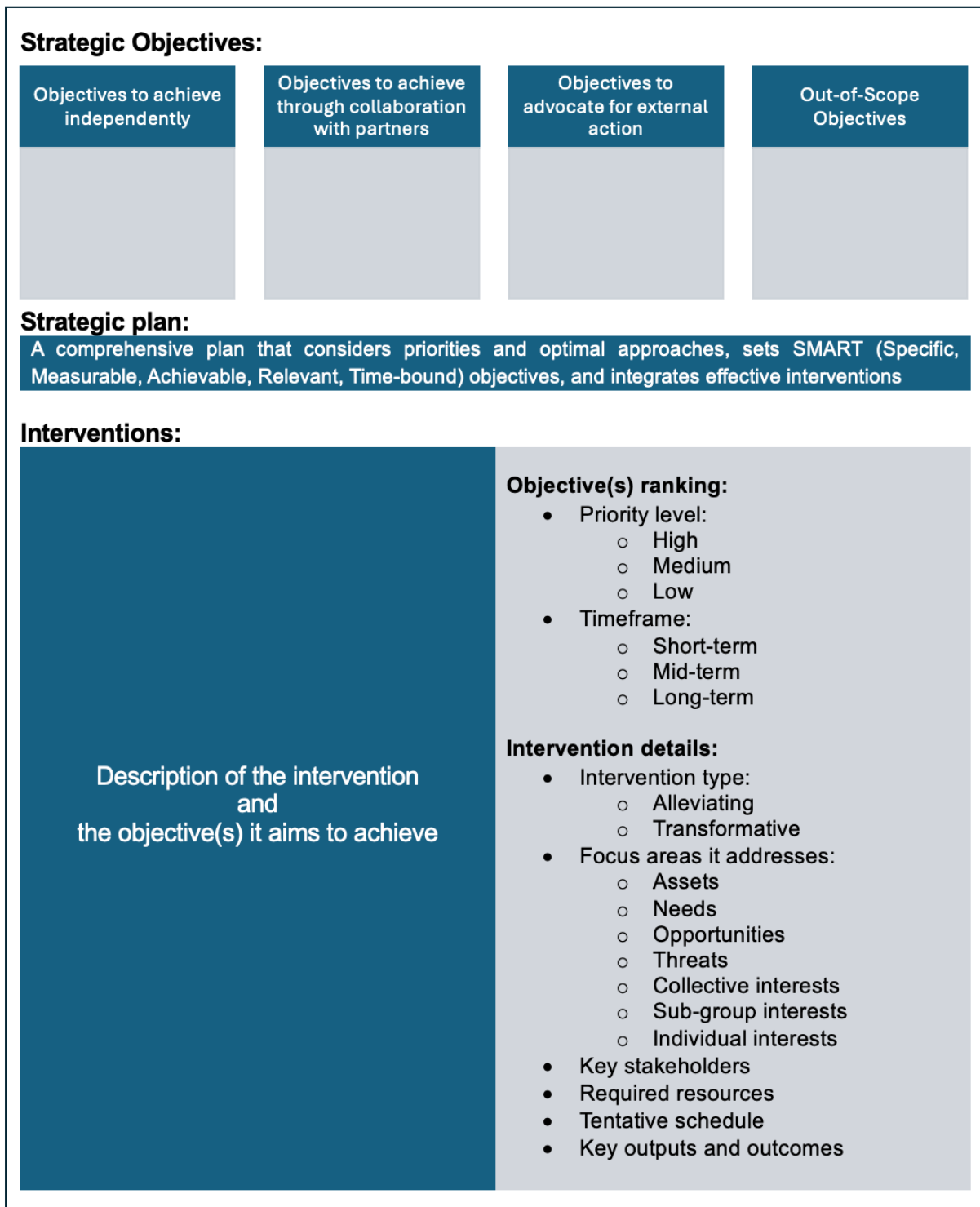
designing academic development efforts. Without such a strategy, these initiatives risk being far less impactful and may fail to drive substantial change.

Furthermore, the diverse individual and collective needs identified by participants are too complex for any single entity to address effectively on its own. Such a layered situation necessitates collaborative synergy and a concerted effort from a spectrum of pivotal stakeholders. Therefore, a comprehensive development strategy must encompass a dynamic collaboration network. This network should ideally bring together government agencies, academic institutions, funding bodies, non-profit organisations, expert academic developers, and volunteers, to name a few.

Based on my experience as an exiled Syrian academic, I believe a central coordinating body—whether a specialised institution, a designated program, or a collective formed by exiled academics themselves—should assume the crucial roles of coordination and strategy development facilitation. This leading body, guided by expert academic developers, should facilitate the full participation of key stakeholders in the strategic planning process, with a special emphasis on involving exiled academics themselves, to promote a bottom-up development of the strategy. A systematic approach is needed to identify a comprehensive set of clear objectives. Following this, objectives should be neatly categorised by their respective short-term, mid-term, and long-term horizons, as well as by their priority.

Figure 7

Academic Development Model for Challenging Contexts: The ‘Design’ Phase



Furthermore, the master strategic plan should be designed to embrace a broad spectrum of differences. Some efforts can be executed by an individual institution, whereas collaboration with one or more partners is essential for others. While some objectives can be completely realised, there are goals that surpass the capabilities of the collaborating parties, necessitating advocacy to prompt action from other relevant entities. Additionally, certain objectives might be entirely beyond the scope of the plan.

To maximise positive outcomes, this strategic plan should be augmented with a meticulously crafted implementation plan and reinforced by a robust monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL) system. Additionally, fostering a culture of transparency, respect, collaboration, continual learning, and perpetual enhancement is essential for securing success.

When crafting tactical interventions, it is crucial that each one is thoughtfully designed to meet its specific goals while aligning with and advancing the overall strategy. These initiatives could be tailored to address a combination of 'focus areas,' with a keen awareness of the distinct circumstances of the participants.

Although Parkinson et al. (2020) proposed that a model for academic community development should deeply acknowledge the community's 'heterogeneity' and the individual development needs within it, the dialectical framing of community-focused versus individual-focused dimensions might lead to a misinterpretation of these approaches as mutually exclusive. However, in my view, support strategies for enhancing the skills of exiled Syrian academics could unfold in three distinct manners: community-oriented initiatives that prioritise shared goals and the collective growth of the academic

community; individual-oriented efforts tailored to address the personal needs, strengths, and situations of each academic; and a hybrid approach that combines elements of both, potentially yielding greater effectiveness in certain scenarios. Moreover, to maximise the impact of some interventions, it may be beneficial to divide community members into different groups according to their specific assets or needs, academic disciplines, levels of expertise, interests, or other pertinent distinctions.

Moreover, the new model identifies two principal intervention types, aligning with the 'alleviating' and 'transformative' approaches outlined by Parkinson et al. (2020). It also suggests that elements of both approaches could be blended in some initiatives. Some interventions can be designed with an 'alleviating' approach, softening the impact of current problems by providing immediate, though not necessarily lasting, improvements. In contrast, other interventions may adopt a 'transformative' approach, aiming to address the root causes of issues to secure long-lasting change. Yet, certain initiatives may manage to skilfully merge these approaches, creatively formulating solutions that combine elements of prompt relief with efforts to address underlying issues. For instance, if the overarching strategy includes 'transformative' elements, such as amending policies in the host country to facilitate academic employment for exiled scholars, it would be beneficial to integrate specific 'alleviating' components into the plan to support this transition smoothly. This could involve offering intensive language courses in the host country's language, improving networking opportunities with local decision-makers, and bolstering the advocacy skills of these academics, among other measures.

Furthermore, the new model facilitates the creation of academic development interventions tailored to encompass a distinct mix of elements, including the backgrounds

of the targeted academics, the opportunities and challenges arising from their exile context, and the interplay between their specific needs and available strengths, among other considerations.

These interventions can manifest in a multitude of forms, each shaped by its unique objectives, the specific needs it aims to fulfil, the assets it seeks to utilise, and the personal or collective goals it intends to achieve, among other considerations.

The interventions can range from specialised workshops, tailored courses, and mentorship programmes to brainstorming sessions, collaborative meetings, and access to laboratories and an extensive range of library resources. They can also provide access to online learning platforms, publication support, research opportunities, and participation in both local and international conferences.

Moreover, they can include fellowship positions, competitions, talent recognition programmes, grants and scholarships, networking opportunities, academic visits, interaction with leading academics in their fields, peer review and feedback mechanisms, forums and special interest groups, as well as academic employment opportunities.

They can also encompass community development efforts, legal support services, psychosocial support systems, emergency funding, initiatives to promote integration into host communities, partnerships with pivotal institutions to bridge support gaps, resource mobilisation efforts, and targeted advocacy campaigns.

The outcomes of the overarching strategy critically rest on the shoulders of those orchestrating its design and implementation. Their expertise, nuanced insight, unwavering commitment, and proficiency in mobilising key stakeholders play a pivotal role in determining its success or failure. Navigating the complexities of exiled academics'

experiences demands a deep-seated dedication and the right mix of tools, resources, and decision-making prowess. When these elements are in place, a clear and achievable route to success emerges. This can empower exiled academics to thrive not only in their personal and communal endeavours but also in making meaningful contributions to their academic disciplines, bettering their homelands and host communities, enriching the global academic community, and benefitting humanity at large.

Having examined the needs and assets of Syrian academics exiled in Gaziantep, Turkey, and thoughtfully explored potential development strategies, I will next shift my focus to their collective actions. I aim to delve into their internal relationships and investigate the community aspect of their experiences in the following chapter.

Chapter 8: Research Findings—Part 3

In this chapter, my investigation delves into a further dimension of the experiences of Syrian academics in exile in Gaziantep, Turkey, specifically focusing on the community aspect. The individual interviews primarily examined the research participants' personal narratives, occasionally touching upon their roles and viewpoints concerning the broader community of Syrian academics in exile. On the other hand, the three focus group discussions¹⁰ were exclusively centred on the community aspect, examining the collective actions, mutual support, and collaboration within this academic community.

My analysis, informed by my observations and the insights from interviews and focus group discussions, reveals a notable absence of a cohesive 'community' among Syrian academics in Gaziantep despite their extensive personal networks. The term 'community' suggests a level of organisation and collective engagement that, according to participant accounts, does not accurately describe their interactions. These academics often base their interactions and gatherings with colleagues on personal relationships, lacking any structured form of community organisation. Their connections are typically formed with individuals from the same hometown, former classmates from undergraduate or postgraduate studies, current colleagues, or through other personal ties, rather than through a united academic community framework.

The discussions surrounding this topic have led me to identify three primary categories, each encompassing various themes: the reasons behind the absence of a

¹⁰ Given that the bulk of the data in this chapter is derived from group discussions, I will move away from the use of pseudonyms employed in earlier chapters. Instead, I will refer to individuals who shared their stories as 'participants'.

structured 'community' among Syrian academics in exile; the potential benefits of establishing such a community; and strategies for successfully creating this community.

8.1- Reasons Behind the Absence of a Structured Community Among Syrian Academics in Exile

The question of why many Syrians—across various fields, not just academia—tend to achieve individual success yet often struggle with collaborative endeavours is a topic frequently discussed within the Syrian community and has always intrigued me. In my research, I tried to investigate the barriers to establishing a well-organised, active, and productive community among Syrian academics living in Gaziantep, Turkey. Participants in the study pointed to a multitude of factors responsible for this situation, including the suppressive actions of the Syrian regime, a lack of skills in building and developing such communities, the adverse impact of the Syrian opposition's official agencies operating in Turkey, the diversion of academics into various non-academic positions, and the intricate challenges related to the uncertainties of exile life, among other reasons.

8.1.1- Impact of Syrian Regime Oppression

The Syrian people have long faced oppressive conditions. The nation briefly tasted freedom after shaking off French colonial rule in 1946, but the aftermath of colonisation soon unsettled the country's stability, leading to a series of coups. This period of political upheaval eventually saw the Ba'ath Party ascend to power in 1963. Following an internal coup, Hafez al-Assad took the reins in 1970, succeeded by his son Bashar al-Assad in 2000. Most research participants highlighted the Assad regime's malicious influence over the past five decades, pointing to its role in undermining Syrian society and instigating

division and mistrust among its people. Other participants elaborated that these deep-seated issues originated from long periods of colonisation and were intensified under the Assad regime's rule.

The repercussions of those eras continue to influence the lives of Syrians in exile. The participants consistently highlighted the pervasive 'mistrust' among Syrian academics in exile as one of the primary barriers to establishing a cohesive community. Their experiences with unsuccessful attempts to create a unified entity to foster academic pursuits further confirmed this feeling. One participant recounted:

In 2015, the Union of Free Syrian Academics was established, and we were invited to join. Sadly, it has not accomplished anything beneficial for the academic community. The union fell under the control of opportunists aiming to further their own interests. Unfortunately, these events demonstrate that a considerable amount of corruption has accompanied us into exile.

Another participant voiced their frustration regarding the unsuccessful collaborations among Syrian academics in exile, stating:

We are plagued by a 'virus' known as the 'Ba'ath'. Our interactions are characterised by hatred, mistrust, and quarrelling over insignificant matters. We lack tolerance for differences and the ability to engage in meaningful dialogue with each other. Our focus is on what divides us, not what unites us. Additionally, the legacy of the regime's police state and widespread corruption has infiltrated every aspect of our lives, leading to a situation where everyone aspires to be the sole leader, hoarding all benefits for themselves.

I believe that without significant efforts to address it, this detrimental legacy will continue to impact the lives of Syrians, including academics. It stands as a barrier to community building and development. Thus, for any initiative aimed at enhancing community cohesion to be effective, it should incorporate strategies that directly tackle key issues such as fostering trust among potential community members, promoting collaborative efforts, and ensuring transparency and accountability within the community.

8.1.2- Skill Deficiencies in Community Building

This issue is intricately linked to the earlier one, illustrating the stifling effect of the authoritarian Syrian regime on community growth. Collective work within communities was prohibited for Syrians, and the limited unions and syndicates available, which were meant to aid in fostering community, effectively acted as arms of the regime. While these entities did provide some benefits to their members—like financial assistance in certain instances—they did not actively represent their members, embody their interests, or provide protection, rendering them ineffective in building meaningful community ties.

The art of fostering collaborative work requires a multitude of factors, many of which are missing for Syrian academics in exile. The lack of active communities or even civil society organisations in Syria meant that academics were unaccustomed to forming or evolving such communal structures. As a result, they lack the essential know-how and experience to build a functional community while in exile.

A participant shared insights into the advantages offered by syndicates in Syria, noting that while academics were required to pay membership fees, these syndicates, in turn, provided some support, such as substantial financial assistance to the family of a deceased member and medical surgery funds for members in need. Nonetheless, other

participants expressed that these benefits did not align with their expectations of what a syndicate or community should offer. As one elaborated:

My teaching experience at both a public and a private university revealed to me the absence of an academic community in its authentic form. Universities functioned just like any other state-run institution, with its hierarchical structure and set of regulations. However, an engaging academic community, characterised by the free exchange of ideas and freedom, was notably missing. On a personal level, I never encountered such an environment. Rather than a vibrant community, what I observed was a system where everything was ideologically influenced and rigidly framed.

Another participant remarked on the notable absence of cohesive academic communities in Syria, which has resulted in exiled academics lacking the experience necessary to nurture similar communities in exile. He explained:

Let's speak honestly, the only venues that brought academics together were the workplace and the university's Ba'ath Party branch. The scope for discussions in departmental or faculty meetings was incredibly restricted. This was the reality across most institutions in the country. We did not have the academic freedom and the supportive work environment necessary for contemplating the creation of such communities. Furthermore, the looming threat of serious repercussions deterred the formation of any organisational body. The regime viewed any form of assembly or collective activity as a potential threat, suspecting it of harbouring political or ideological motives.

The conversations uncovered not just a shortfall in skills for building and fostering academic communities, but also an ambiguity regarding the concept of a community itself, including its potential roles, objectives, and relevant dynamics.

8.1.3- Adverse Impact of Syrian Opposition's Official Agencies Operating in Turkey

Two key institutions operate in Turkey as official representatives of the Syrian opposition: the 'National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces' and the 'Syrian Interim Government'. These entities are expected to support Syrians yet, paradoxically, their actions have often resulted in the opposite effect. Imposed upon the Syrian populace by international and regional powers, neither institution has been democratically elected by the Syrians themselves. Ideally, their role should be instrumental in supporting exiled academics, aiding the formation of academic communities, connecting these entities with both local and international audiences, and bolstering academic endeavours. However, the reality paints a different picture; many Syrians perceive these organisations as mere extensions of the Syrian regime, embodying its corruption and failings.

The Syrian Interim Government, which recently relocated its headquarters from Gaziantep to northern Syria, houses the 'Ministry of Education' and the 'Higher Council for Higher Education'. Yet, it has fallen short in providing necessary assistance to exiled Syrian academics or those living in northern Syria. A participant shed light on this issue, noting:

In exile, we have a big problem regarding the organisational process, beginning at the apex with the 'Coalition' and the 'Interim Government' and extending to the

general populace. As you know, the leaders of these institutions were not chosen by the Syrians but were instead appointed by external powers with their own agendas. So, why would they support academics? In fact, they often perceive intellectuals as potential threats, fearing that true democratic processes could elevate academics to positions of influence, thereby jeopardising their own authority.

Another participant recounted an instance when the Interim Government, while headquartered in Gaziantep, reached out through its Ministry of Education, initiating contact with academics to gather their CVs for a database. According to the participant, the initiative was intended to present this information to the Turkish government, aiming to foster collaboration and help exiled academics secure academic positions. Despite these efforts, the anticipated outcomes failed to materialise, and those in positions of authority exploited any arising opportunities for their personal gain and the benefit of their close associates.

Exiled academics do not exist in a vacuum, isolated from the broader context in which they find themselves. They cannot simply form a collective without taking into account the complex systems surrounding them. Acknowledging and understanding these complexities, and learning to adeptly navigate through them, are vital for increasing the chances of success in any community development endeavour.

8.1.4- Diversion of Exiled Syrian Academics into Various Non-Academic Positions

Several participants pointed out that many Syrian academics in Gaziantep are involved in the humanitarian sector, with some unemployed, and only a small fraction holding positions in academia. As a result, those working outside academia are too

preoccupied to engage in academic activities, while the unemployed are mainly focused on finding ways to sustain themselves financially. If a larger number of these scholars were placed in academic roles, it would significantly increase the likelihood of developing a vibrant 'community.' A participant expanded on this by stating:

Several factors contribute to the lack of an effective community, including instability and diverging concerns and priorities. I know many Syrian academics are prepared to work in any field to secure an income, manage basic living costs, and provide for their families. For these individuals, integrating into an academic community is not a top priority. Thus, if you invited them to a meeting to discuss the bylaws of an 'academic union', for example, they are likely not to attend. The focus of most academics on the day-to-day aspects of life outside academic pursuits presents an obstacle to establishing a unified entity that could bring us together.

The matter is closely related to the diverse array of needs and challenges highlighted in Chapter 7. Without tackling these critical points, any proposed initiatives for community development could lack substantial effectiveness.

8.1.5- Intricate Challenges Related to the Uncertainties of Exile Life

The experience of Syrians living in exile is fraught with difficulties and uncertainties. Many participants cited 'uncertainty' as a significant barrier to cultivating a vibrant academic community in Gaziantep. The conflict in Syria, initially expected to be brief, has now persisted for over 13 years, with no end in sight. The 'temporary protection' status under which they live adds another layer of complexity, dampening their enthusiasm to participate in a community that could potentially bring legal challenges they

are unprepared to confront. This lack of stability makes it difficult to devise any long-term strategies.

Furthermore, in exile, the scarcity of resources leads to intense competition among academics. This environment often forces them to view one another as rivals rather than collaborators. A participant further explained this dynamic, noting:

Yes, corruption exists, but the primary issues are the uncertainty and lack of resources. Everyone is focused on their personal predicament. Even those who currently have good jobs remain anxious about what the future holds, leading them to continuously strive for more. When I was in Syria, I didn't face this issue. As a faculty member, my job was secure, and my financial situation was stable. However, here, there's a tendency to compete rather than collaborate due to feelings of insecurity and the fear that the already precarious situation could deteriorate further at any moment.

Again, this issue ties back to the extensive range of challenges detailed in Chapters 2 and 7. The particular circumstances of exiled academics render conventional approaches to community development less viable, thereby calling for creative and innovative solutions.

Several participants highlighted the importance of understanding the barriers to community building, but pointed out that to truly succeed, the focus should shift towards identifying and implementing solutions, not just recognising the problems. They acknowledged a shared responsibility for the failure to establish a cohesive academic community so far. Nonetheless, by considering the substantial collective benefits that

could result from forging such a community, there is a renewed motivation to address and overcome the existing obstacles.

8.2- Potential Benefits of Establishing an Academic Community

All research participants unanimously voiced a strong desire to be part of an academic community that could significantly improve their overall circumstances while in exile. However, they emphasised that for this community to be truly effective, it must evolve from its current state of informal, individual communications to a more formal, organised structure that facilitates collective action. They elaborated that the multitude of complex experiences encountered prior to exile, coupled with the precarious conditions of their current lives create barriers that can only be overcome if the community adopts a formal and official framework. Such a structure would not only mitigate the challenges but also inspire greater participation and active engagement among its members.

When queried about the specific objectives of such a structured academic community, their opinions varied, though not extensively. For instance, some participants envisioned this community—referred to variably as a 'body,' 'entity,' 'association', or 'council'—as playing a crucial role in facilitating employment opportunities for its members. On the contrary, some participants believed that pursuing job opportunities should not fall within the community's remit.

In the subsequent sections, I will detail the primary themes discussed by the participants and the objectives they collectively or individually considered crucial for the community they aspire to join.

8.2.1- Creating a Networking Space for Academics to Forge Relationships and Better Utilise Their Assets

The participants expressed a strong need for a space where they could gather to network, socialise, share stories, voice concerns, and exchange expertise. Such a space would promote better acquaintance among them, break down barriers, enable meaningful dialogues, and contribute to the building of trust. One participant shared their thoughts on this matter, stating:

Following our discussion today, I've arrived at an initial conclusion: We need to meet up, no matter what, my friends. It's essential that we find a place for our gatherings. Whether it's in a park, a café, or a shopping mall, the crucial aspect is our coming together to converse and share ideas. Our common interests and shared experiences provide a fertile ground for generating positive outcomes from our meetings. Let's initiate with casual cultural get-togethers over coffee or tea to simply enjoy each other's company. Such meetings will prove immensely valuable, not just for psychological well-being and networking but also for exploring other mutual benefits. Indeed, what unites us far outweighs what divides us.

The lack of such a dedicated networking environment severely impacts exiled academics, deepening their professional isolation and contributing to a further erosion of community ties. In the absence of affiliation with formal institutions that could facilitate connections among them, the gap in their communal interactions is at risk of widening even further. This situation not only affects their professional growth and collaboration opportunities but also weakens the already fragile sense of trust among them.

The proposed networking space, which may emerge as one of the initial outcomes of community establishment, can simultaneously serve as a cornerstone. Its existence, enriched by the casual and formal collective activities it enables, could catalyse the gradual development of the community where trust, collaboration, and professional development thrive.

8.2.2- Representing and Advocating for Syrian Academics: Safeguarding Their Rights and Creating Communication Channels Under a Unified Representation

The challenging situations faced by Syrian academics in exile, combined with their disconnection from academic institutions or unions that could represent and advocate for their rights, drive their desire to be part of an official 'community.' This would help fill the void. They clearly stated that forming such an 'entity' would empower them to articulate their perspectives and interact more effectively with the Turkish government, organisations dealing with higher education, and the international academic sphere. They believed that being part of a unified, official association would ensure their voices are heard more attentively.

The participants held that such an 'entity' would offer them a sense of affiliation, reinforcing their academic identity. Additionally, it could streamline the process for their qualifications to be acknowledged by Turkish higher education bodies, through rigorous communication and collaboration aimed at filtering out counterfeit degrees and authenticating genuine ones. On this topic, a participant voiced their perspective, remarking:

The establishment of this academic body allows us to communicate with the Turkish government collectively, rather than as isolated individuals. It facilitates our

ability to engage in meaningful dialogue and collaborate on the accreditation of legitimate academic credentials. This collective would include academics from a variety of universities and fields, effectively minimising the risk of counterfeit degree holders, who are more easily spotted by their academic peers. Moreover, this community can employ additional reliable techniques to verify the authenticity of degrees. Currently, Syrian academics in Turkey remain largely invisible to local higher education institutions, with their expertise, experience, and professional backgrounds unknown. Attempts to reach out as individuals often result in silence. Yet, with the backing of a formal entity, our interactions with these institutions would dramatically change, ensuring our voices are heard and our credentials acknowledged.

The nuanced challenges faced by Syrian academics exiled in Turkey not only heighten the critical nature of this objective but also justify the academics' steadfast call for their envisioned community to receive official status.

8.2.3- Facilitating Academic Employment and Partnerships: Expanding Access to Research Funding and Professional Development Opportunities

The participants shared a belief that affiliation with such a structured community would markedly improve their chances of securing academic positions in their respective fields. This academic body would open doors to partnership opportunities with institutions across local, regional, and international levels. Many institutions could be ready to support Syrian academics, provided they proactively engage these entities through a consolidated, credible, and formal platform. Reflecting on this topic, a participant offered their insights, saying:

There are many international organisations that can offer us support and numerous opportunities, but only if we have a unified body. Currently, given our scattered state, it's challenging for them to find us or engage with us effectively. It falls upon us to take the initiative to organise ourselves, identify our strengths, market them to the key stakeholders, and communicate with them as an official entity, rather than as individuals. This approach is essential for building beneficial partnerships for Syrian academics in exile. If even a small fraction of the funds allocated for Syrian aid were dedicated to academics, the impact could be transformative. Such an investment would have far-reaching advantages, benefiting a vast number of Syrians and significantly enhancing multiple sectors such as education, industry, the economy, agriculture, health, and stability, among others.

Another participant recounted their attempt at securing an international research grant, underscoring how their chances would have improved within a well-integrated academic network, noting:

I submitted a research proposal to Cara, which was declined due to their non-support for this particular area of research. Subsequently, I sought a different grant, applying to a Canadian institution that allotted a one-million-dollar fund to the winning research. My submission was among the top ten shortlisted from around 600 global proposals, a significant achievement for an individual effort. The institution provided feedback, suggesting revisions for advancement to the subsequent phase, which was daunting to address single-handedly. Had there been an established academic entity, with a database cataloguing academics, their areas of expertise, and their collective experiences, it would have facilitated the

formation of cooperative research teams well-positioned to pursue such funding opportunities.

The rich diversity in the academic disciplines, backgrounds, skills, and competencies of exiled Syrian academics stands as a valuable asset. Moreover, their extensive knowledge of the Syrian context, which offers a fertile ground for research, combined with their access to critical data and their commitment to contributing to Syria-related projects, can position them as attractive partners to a broad spectrum of stakeholders.

8.2.4- Engaging in Social Solidarity Initiatives to Support Community Members Emotionally or Financially in Times of Need

The focus group discussions uncovered a complex array of emotions regarding insecurity. For example, participants reminisced about the syndicates they were part of in pre-2011 Syria. Despite not viewing the syndicates as a true academic community due to their inability to adequately represent them, facilitate their interaction, or defend their rights, the participants acknowledged some benefits. These included financial aid for surgical procedures, monetary support for families upon a member's death, and syndicate housing schemes¹¹. In their exile, on the other hand, many find themselves residing in rented accommodation, a situation that can be exacerbated by exploitation from some landlords who may take advantage of foreigners or refugees. Consequently, this leads to a pattern of frequent relocations as they are compelled to vacate and seek new housing.

¹¹ A syndicate housing scheme in Syria is a collective housing project organised by a syndicate, such as a teachers' union, where members contribute regular instalments towards the cost of constructing homes. The syndicate uses these funds to purchase land and manage the construction of houses. Later, each participating member is allocated a house and continues to pay the instalments until the full cost of the home is covered. This approach allows members to secure housing at a more affordable rate than may be available on the open market.

Another aspect of their concern revolves around the potential for encountering unforeseen legal issues. The existence of a structured academic community could offer essential support during these critical times. A participant shared their views on this matter, stating:

If you encounter abuse, get involved in a car accident, or face any challenging situation, even as a victim, you might risk deportation. An organised and cohesive community could actively support you and defend your cause. They would assign a lawyer to represent you, actively pursuing your case to ensure you receive your rights and prevent any injustice.

Having access to a supportive, engaged, and well-coordinated social network can prove immensely beneficial, particularly during periods of heightened vulnerability. Unfortunately, many displaced Syrians have experienced the loss of a substantial portion, if not all, of their support networks as a result of conflict and the ensuing complex crises. With many families having members, neighbours, or friends lost to the war or dispersed globally in their exile, the presence of a vibrant community can play a crucial role in filling this void.

8.2.5- Assisting Syrian Academics in Exile to Provide Greater Academic Support to Syria

The participants highlighted a further goal that could be attained by this structured academic community: facilitating support for higher education in parts of northern Syria beyond the control of the Syrian regime. They pointed out that, despite the wealth of resources possessed by exiled Syrian academics and their keen interest in advancing higher education back home, their contributions are often rendered ineffective due to the

absence of such an organised and operational academic network. A participant elaborated on this perspective, stating:

Our shared cause forms a cornerstone of our strength. Enhancing the quality of higher education back home is as critical as addressing the conditions of exiled academics. For instance, a university in northern Syria recently initiated a programme in a particular field by directly copying a curriculum from an overseas university, neglecting to consider its fit for the Syrian context. Therefore, I believe this academic institution has further responsibilities and is capable of offering substantial scientific and strategic support. Our commitment is motivated by a sense of duty to an entire generation.

Another participant resonated with this viewpoint, emphasising the duty of Syrian academics in exile to bolster the higher education landscape in northern Syria. They advocated for enlightening key institutions in the region to adopt more innovative and strategic approaches, aiming to prevent further deterioration of the situation. They explained:

Most universities in the northern part of Syria still implement the same academic frameworks that were in place under the regime, lacking any thorough evaluation of the practicality of the subjects taught. This situation leads to an overflow of graduates in traditional disciplines, raising concerns about their future career paths and job opportunities. Remarkably, for example, despite the pressing security challenges, no institution has yet introduced a programme in forensic science, an essential field under these circumstances. The higher education entities in northern Syria operate with extremely limited resources and focus primarily on

routine administrative tasks. There is an absence of strategic planning, willingness to adapt, consideration of actual needs, or an overarching vision.

By creating and fostering such a community, exiled academics will have the opportunity to combine their efforts and utilise their diverse skills and abilities to enhance the higher education landscape in their homeland. This is particularly pertinent in areas currently beyond the control of the Syrian regime, with the aspiration that these efforts will eventually benefit the entire country. Moreover, this community could significantly contribute to devising strategic plans, developing governance frameworks, and creating academic advancement opportunities within the higher education sector in these regions.

8.3- Strategies for Successfully Developing an Effective Academic Community for Syrian Academics Exiled in Turkey

Despite recognising the considerable benefits an active, well-structured academic community could offer, most participants remained sceptical about the feasibility of such an initiative amidst the significant challenges previously highlighted. Their insights into the critical elements and essential steps necessary for the creation and growth of such a community, while varying slightly, converged on several recurring themes. I will succinctly outline these key elements below.

8.3.1- Understanding Member Motivations and Identifying Barriers

Most participants emphasised the importance of the community having a realistic grasp of members' circumstances, motivations for joining and remaining active, and the challenges that could impede deep engagement, aiming to be as inclusive as possible to a broad spectrum of potential active members. A participant expressed their views on this matter, stating:

Personally, if I were considering membership in such an entity, I'd question what benefits it could bring me. Incentives usually fall into financial or moral categories, but this can vary based on individual circumstances and needs. If I'm facing financial instability, my foremost expectation from this body would be its support in finding employment opportunities and securing a steady income. Consequently, if I joined and this need wasn't met, I'd see no reason to stay. On the other hand, if my financial needs were met, I'd look for the moral benefits or the unique value this entity could offer. For example, I envision that joining would tackle particular academic hurdles, such as assisting in the recognition of my qualifications, supporting my progression through academic ranks, and facilitating my involvement in research initiatives. The opening question to attract potential members should focus on the advantages and services provided to members, as ultimately, the foundation of this relationship is reciprocal benefits. The principle is simple: I contribute and receive in return.

This viewpoint resonates with the argument I made in Chapter 7, highlighting the critical need for an 'understanding' phase before embarking on the planning of development initiatives. Whether initiatives are led by insiders, outsiders, or a combination of both, it is imperative to cultivate a profound comprehension of the entire situation based on an exhaustive analysis before proceeding with the design of prospective development efforts.

8.3.2- Cultivating Trust Among Community Members

Building trust within the community emerged as another critical theme among the participants, highlighting it as essential for the foundation and growth of the community.

Without overcoming this obstacle, forming, let alone developing, a community becomes a formidable challenge. The methods to foster this trust remained somewhat vague in the participants' discussions. Yet, they proposed some strategies they believe could aid in this process, such as creating networking spaces for interaction, enhancing opportunities for members to connect and engage in meaningful dialogue, concentrating on elements that unite rather than divide, and learning from past experiences while persistently striving for improvement. During the discussion, a brief exchange between two participants reflected some of these ideas:

A: First and foremost, we need to nurture trust among community members. Without it, our efforts are bound to fail.

B: How do you propose we achieve that? And why do we struggle with this issue when many other communities globally seem to establish mutual trust more effortlessly?

A: I think our previous experiences have largely been solitary pursuits. In our recent historical collective, we've seldom seen successful collaborative efforts. With the onset of initial disagreements, both trust and motivation begin to falter. Therefore, it's crucial that we learn from these experiences, refine our approach, and refuse to surrender.

Fostering deep trust among exiled Syrian academics presents a significant challenge, given the profound effects of their experiences. I believe that for any community development initiative to succeed, it must effectively address this critical issue, get this 'elephant' out of the room, and incorporate trust-enhancing features within its framework.

8.3.3- Electing Competent and Trustworthy Leadership Team

The participants underscored the pivotal importance of properly electing a leadership team that is both competent and trustworthy. They believed that the attributes of such a team could be the deciding factor between the initiative's success and failure. Some participants recounted instances of similar endeavours that did not succeed, attributing these failures predominantly to leadership teams that lacked either competence, integrity, or both. A recurring issue in these failed initiatives was leadership without the necessary skills or effective management strategies, leading to various setbacks. Additionally, there were instances where leaders took over the organisation, redirecting its resources and objectives to serve personal and associate interests. On this topic, a participant voiced their perspective, saying:

It's essential to put aside personal biases and prioritise the overall well-being of the group. In the process of electing the management or leadership team for this academic community, we should carefully select individuals who are not only skilled enough to ensure the community's success but also embody integrity, equity, and a strong commitment to the group's principles and aims. Supporting that team through challenges and towards success should be our priority, without letting personal relationships influence our judgment.

Alongside building trust within the community, establishing trust in its leadership is crucial. Members need to believe in the leaders' abilities and ethical standards, trusting that they have the essential expertise, skills, and commitment to steer the community towards its goals. It is critical for the community to be assured that their leaders prioritise the collective good above personal interests.

8.3.4- Developing a Clear Strategy with Transparent Regulations and Defined Guidelines for Compliance

The participants stressed the necessity for the proposed academic community to establish a comprehensive and robust governance framework, complete with a clear and well-articulated set of regulations. Drawing on their extensive experience in the humanitarian sector, several participants suggested that this 'entity' should start by adopting shared values and a code of conduct that would dictate the behaviour of its members. Additionally, it should develop a strategic plan outlining the community's objectives across short-term, mid-term, and long-term horizons; enact clear bylaws; and implement detailed, transparent policies and procedures. It is critical that rights and responsibilities are explicitly defined for all members. Furthermore, rigorous monitoring, evaluation, and accountability mechanisms must be instituted to guarantee adherence to the established rules and regulations. An exchange among three participants further illuminated this concept:

A- We need to move away from our unprofessional approaches by implementing solid and effective work from the start. Therefore, clarity is key. We should clearly define the goals and objectives of this entity, as well as the rights and responsibilities of its members. In addition, we should anticipate potential challenges and plan to mitigate them.

B- Yes, I agree. Transforming this concept into reality requires following a structured set of steps, beginning with establishing internal rules. Following this, we should invite potential members based on these rules. This structure will provide legitimacy to any forthcoming leadership and establish regulations

regarding its governance, focusing on the organisational framework and ensuring sustainability. This includes specifying roles, authorities, and responsibilities, as well as identifying the executive team and those in charge of leadership, strategy, institution-building, and governance.

C- I also believe it's vital to detail the processes for monitoring, evaluation, and accountability. How will these processes be executed, and by whom? How will we hold the leadership accountable if they make mistakes or take over control of this entity, as observed in previous instances? It's not just important to have the correct laws in place; ensuring these laws are effectively applied is crucial, or they will serve no purpose.

This discussion underscores that even though the participants might not have direct experience with building, developing, or actively engaging in thriving academic communities, they can leverage the competencies gained in other areas, especially from their work in humanitarian organisations. These skills can be adapted and applied within the academic context, providing a novel approach to community formation and development.

8.3.5- Legalising the Community's Operations

The participants emphasised the necessity of officially registering this academic entity to legitimise its operations. Such formal recognition would enable the leasing of an office for administrative tasks or a communal space for members to convene, collaborate, and organise joint efforts. Beyond legalising their meetings, formal registration would offer protection against potential legal challenges. It would also enable official interactions with

key stakeholders and prospective partners, in addition to legally administering the community's financial operations.

While there were differing views on the most suitable type of registration, participants collectively agreed that these were minor issues that could be easily addressed with a true commitment to forming the academic community. One participant pointed out Cara as a prime example of an institution that has effectively brought together a large group of Syrian academics in Turkey, emphasising that its official registration was crucial for accessing funding and leveraging the broad network of universities and academic networks in the UK.

8.3.6- Addressing Financial Needs for Sustained Community Functioning

There was a broad range of opinions among participants on addressing the financial needs necessary for covering both the setup and operational expenses of the entity. Some insisted that obtaining funding was essential for the initiative to begin and continue, while others perceived funding, especially from international donors, as a potential danger and a prospective source of failure. Alternatives like grassroots fundraising efforts and relying on membership fees were proposed by some, whereas a few advocated for the community to be of a non-financial nature: neither accepting nor distributing funds. Some of these differing perspectives are captured in the participants' quotes below.

- If I were given the choice between local and or foreign funding sources, I would lean towards the local. Let's be candid, a significant portion of foreign funding is often linked, directly or indirectly, to agendas of global intelligence agencies.

- We can be cautious and decline to carry out aspects that do not align with our values. Among the benefits of securing funds from major donor agencies is the comprehensive support they provide beyond financial assistance, including capacity building, networking opportunities, and help in forging key partnerships. Furthermore, engaging with such institutions would encourage our 'community' to refine its policies, procedures, regulations, transparency, and the general quality of its operations.
- In my opinion, the focus of this entity should be entirely on academic aspects, steering clear of financial involvement. The administrative team could divide tasks among themselves and operate voluntarily for a duration outlined in the community's bylaws, subsequently another team would take over to sustain the effort on a volunteer basis.

These in-depth discussions and diverse perspectives underscore the importance of careful financial planning and management in building and sustaining such a community. Without proper oversight, significant challenges may arise among community members. One of the research participants offered an extensive discussion on constructing the proposed academic entity. I will include their detailed contribution in its entirety:

In my view, the success factors for any institution are fourfold. Firstly, the presence of individuals who are committed to the cause and are competent. Secondly, the existence of precise and clear policies, procedures, and controls. Thirdly, the establishment of a mature institutional and governance structure. Fourthly, the availability of a technological infrastructure that enables the effective utilisation of

these resources. However, the most important element is the human resource—individuals committed to the cause who will not give up at the first, second, or third setback. They must have a strategic outlook and carry this message to attract others despite all obstacles—as you know, there's the forming stage followed by the storming stage, and the storming itself can recur several times, not just once—and so it goes for the rest of the stages.

Our biggest challenge is to build trust among us and change our mindset, as what we lack is trust, understanding, and clarity on the individual and collective interests that drive us to cooperate within this community. Another point relates to funding; when money comes into play, it often causes many disputes because we are not prepared; friends can become foes due to accusations of betrayal. Therefore, we must be ready for each stage with scientific and practical steps: institutionalisation framework and a leadership team capable of rejuvenating this entity.

Of course, at every stage, some individuals will join and others leave, but if the foundation is solid and built on correct institutional standards, this body will not be affected. Once we overcome this, what follows will be easier. Later, we can employ both academic and non-academic personnel – because we need a comprehensive institutional structure. This assembly can benefit both the academic community and society at large.

These initial steps may seem simple and limited, but in my opinion, they are paramount and have the potential to foster an optimal environment for academics, providing support, empowerment, and assistance in forming proper partnerships with key stakeholders.

The insights shared by my research participants illuminate the current state of academic interaction within the Gaziantep community, revealing a pronounced absence of an active academic network. They also outline elements of a feasible strategy to overcome this communal inertia. Such a community, should it come to fruition, holds the promise of achieving pivotal goals, enabling its members to surmount numerous challenges, and offering manifold advantages. Furthermore, it envisages the possibility of expanding to encompass cooperative efforts with colleagues residing in other Turkish cities. While the journey to cultivate and sustain this community is undoubtedly challenging, the potential benefits underscore the necessity for Syrian academics and supporting institutions to invest earnest efforts in this endeavour.

8.4- Discussion

The absence of vibrant, unifying communities among many Syrians, including those in academia, has always concerned me and sparked my curiosity about the underlying reasons. I once heard an insightful remark on TV by a seasoned Syrian academic and politician who has lived in exile for many years. He compared Syrians to grains of sand: close yet disconnected, hindering the formation of cohesive and active communities. In contrast, some other peoples are more like soil particles, which naturally bind together to create a fertile environment conducive to the flourishing of communal bonds. While I am still pondering the full extent of my agreement with this metaphor, the stark disparity between the numerous individual successes of Syrians worldwide and their few collective achievements forces me to deeply consider this dilemma.

Gilchrist (2009) emphasised that trust is the foundation of effective communities, nurtured through consistent, constructive engagements among community members.

However, prior to 2011, Syrian academics were largely excluded from such 'consistent and constructive engagements' due to the oppressive control of an authoritarian regime. This exclusion contrasts sharply with the 'sense of belonging' that McMillan and Chavis (1986) considered essential to community spirit, defined as "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (p.9). This highlights that Syrian academics, even in exile, struggle to move past the detrimental effects of their past experiences, hindering their ability to forge a cohesive community.

The accounts shared by my research participants reveal that this ongoing struggle has impeded efforts to establish a cohesive and vibrant community in Gaziantep and other Turkish cities. Nonetheless, their evident desire to be part of such a community, coupled with the goals they collectively set during group discussions and the strategies they formulated for building and nurturing a community, signals a positive outlook. It suggests that, given the right combination of factors, they are poised to overcome these challenges and realise many of their aspirations.

In the subsequent section, I propose a holistic model for community development tailored to the intricate circumstances of Syrian academics in exile in Gaziantep, Turkey, and applicable to other scholars in comparable contexts worldwide.

My review of the literature revealed that no existing approach or theory perfectly matches the specific circumstances and community development needs of Syrian academics in exile. To address this gap, I have developed a bespoke model to systematically guide these academics in creating and nurturing their community. This model is built upon insights from four foundational elements: a) my personal experiences

and reflections as an insider who has navigated the complexities of this scenario; b) skills in organisational development, strategic planning, and project management that I have developed outside of academia, which enable a strategic approach to this community development project; c) perspectives from my research participants, which address the absence of a structured community among Syrian academics in exile, the potential advantages of establishing such a community, and proposed strategies for its creation; and d) the various community development theories and approaches I explored in Chapter 4, drawing inspiration from each to optimally incorporate them into my proposed model.

To make the connections to the foundational theories and approaches explicit, I will introduce abbreviations for each, to be used alongside relevant concepts throughout the model. These are as follows: Social Capital Theory [SCT]; the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach [SLA]; Community Resilience Approach [CRA]; Collective Impact Approach [CIA]; Systems Thinking Approach [STA]; Asset-based Community Development Approach [ABCD]; and Factors identified by Mattessich and Monsey (1997) as crucial for successful community building [M&M].

This structure will ensure clarity in linking the proposed model's components to established approaches and theories, facilitating a deeper understanding of its underpinnings and potential for application in various contexts.

The model depicted in Figure 8 proposes seven dynamic phases as a guide for exiled academics and their supporting institutions involved in the formation and nurturing of their communities. These phases are not meant to be linear; they are designed to intersect and may be revisited as the community evolves. The model is crafted to be adaptable,

providing general guidelines that can be customised by its users to best suit the unique situations and experiences of the target academic groups.

While the narratives from research participants diverged on strategies for building and nurturing their community, the prevailing views supported the establishment of a type of structured organisation. Accordingly, the phases in my model are aligned with these perspectives and integrate insights from the other three foundational elements discussed earlier: my insider perspectives, organisational development skills, and the literature reviewed in Chapter 4.

Initiating: The spark of the commencing phase can be internal, arising from within the community, or external, suggested by a supportive institution. In either scenario, as emphasised by my research participants, it is essential to assemble a carefully chosen team to spearhead the process and navigate this delicate phase. As detailed earlier in this chapter, one research participant asserted that it is crucial to set aside personal biases and prioritise the community's well-being by electing a management team based on skill, integrity, equity, and commitment to the group's principles. The participant argued that supporting this core team through challenges should be a priority, without allowing personal relationships to affect decisions.

According to Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer (2012), to effectively create and oversee a collective impact, this 'backbone' team must possess a distinct skill set, providing a strong foundation for the initiative and orchestrating the collaboration of all stakeholders [CIA]. The influence of this core team is especially pronounced in the initial three phases. As the initiative progresses to its fourth phase, 'assigning roles and

responsibilities,' the governance model adopted by community consensus will inform the recruitment and mandate of personnel for the subsequent phases.

Figure 8

Community Development Model for Academics in Challenging Contexts



Participants' interactions in the focus group discussions emphasised that the core team initiating this effort should comprise pivotal community members. To effectively carry out its mission, this team needs to exhibit several essential characteristics:

- a) A profound understanding of the community's intricacies, strong connections throughout the community, and in-depth knowledge of significant stakeholders are essential [M&M; ABCD].
- b) Trustworthiness and a reputation for integrity among the community members are crucial [M&M; SCT].
- c) A genuine commitment to the well-being of the community, characterised by honesty and a prioritisation of the community's interests over personal or external agendas, is vital [M&M; SCT].
- d) Essential skills and capabilities to effectively manage the preliminary phases of the initiative are necessary [M&M; ABCD].

The formation of this team could begin with a single committed individual, who then strategically expands the team by incorporating others who share these essential characteristics. If needed, the team can seek guidance and advisory support from specialised external organisations. However, as emphasised by my research participants, it is vital for the team to carefully manage potential risks, such as loss of ownership or the influence of external rather than community-driven agendas. The collective qualities of the team and their supporters should cultivate extensive trust among potential community members, establishing a robust foundation for progressing through the later stages of the model.

Designing: During this phase, the core team undertakes an initial assessment of the situation to develop a roadmap that facilitates the progression of the 'community building' endeavour. This entails pinpointing key stakeholders whose involvement in the next stage is crucial, such as fellow community members, expert consultants, advisors, and

prospective collaborators. The team then designs a basic strategy for engaging these critical stakeholders. Furthermore, they assess the necessary resources required to follow through with the roadmap, determine strategies for acquiring these resources, set a realistic timeline, and outline initial goals for the community-building process. A significant discussion among three participants in FGD2—detailed earlier in this chapter—was instrumental in shaping this phase and influencing some of the subsequent ones. The participants stressed the importance of shifting away from unprofessional practices by establishing internal rules and implementing effective strategies from the outset. This structure, they argued, would not only grant legitimacy to future leadership but also provide a solid governance framework and ensure sustainability. Additionally, they highlighted the need for a robust mechanism for monitoring, evaluation, and accountability to ensure that the established regulations are effectively enforced.

At this critical juncture, the team should meticulously consider some vital aspects to ensure the smooth advancement to the next stage:

- a) The core team must determine whether they will undertake these tasks on a volunteer basis or seek compensation for their efforts. If opting for reimbursement, they need to identify potential sources of funding.
- b) The situation assessment should be conducted with meticulous care, accounting for underlying tensions within the community and the unique challenges presented by the context of exile.
- c) Selecting stakeholders for participation in the subsequent phase demands cautious consideration to ensure the initiative progresses efficiently. For example,

as emphasised by my research participants, it is imperative to include community members who are more likely to collaborate rather than compete [M&M; SCT].

- d) The skills, competencies, and qualities of the chosen stakeholders should be complementary, ensuring there are no gaps in the team's collective capabilities [CRA].
- e) Identifying potential risks early on and implementing strategies to mitigate them is essential for a smooth process.
- f) A well-crafted communication strategy is key to ensuring clear, effective exchange of ideas and information [M&M].
- g) Setting realistic, attainable goals for this phase is crucial, avoiding the pitfalls of overly ambitious targets [CRA].

Successfully addressing these considerations will pave the way for a seamless transition into the subsequent phase.

Engaging key stakeholders: During this phase, the core team initiates the execution of the roadmap by securing the required resources, reaching out to, and actively involving key stakeholders. The team not only shares its vision but also pays close attention to the insights and viewpoints of the engaged stakeholders. This stage may involve several meetings, necessitating facilitators adept at sparking innovative ideas, steering productive conversations, and achieving consensus among the main participants [M&M]. This phase focuses on meeting participants' needs to be part of an engaging community—one that understands their circumstances, respects their priorities, and encourages their active commitment. As one participant highlighted earlier in the chapter, before joining an entity, they would first evaluate its benefits, which may be financial or

moral, depending on individual needs. For those facing financial instability, support in finding employment is crucial; if financial needs are met, they would look for moral benefits, such as academic support, qualification recognition, career advancement, and research opportunities. Attracting members should centre on mutual benefits, as the relationship relies on reciprocity.

The 'backbone' team needs to demonstrate unwavering commitment and perseverance, prepared for the likelihood of encountering obstacles from the outset [M&M; CRA]. Flexibility and adaptability are crucial, allowing for revisions to their initial strategies in response to evolving circumstances [M&M; CRA]. Moreover, they should be open to incorporating suggestions and innovative ideas from stakeholders, especially when these contributions could enhance the community's well-being [CIA].

Additionally, during this phase, participants decide on the necessity of incorporating additional stakeholders—be it more community members, consultants, or institutions—to enrich the process. A dedicated team is chosen to embark on the subsequent phase, 'setting a strategy.' This 'strategy' team may consist of the same individuals from the 'backbone' team or new members, contingent upon the skills required and consensus among current members. They may also receive guidance from advisors affiliated with supporting institutions. A realistic timeline for this task is established, accompanied by a clear definition of the scope of work. The minutes from the final meeting are compiled and disseminated to all stakeholders involved in the process, ensuring transparency and shared understanding.

Setting a strategy: During this phase, the appointed 'strategy' team begins to formulate a detailed strategy, that clearly articulates the community's vision and core values, while

also integrating key components like a governance model and an initial Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) framework. This strategic plan may adopt the academic development model tailored for academics in challenging contexts, which encompasses both the 'understanding' phase and the 'design' phase—illustrated in Figures 6 and 7 of Chapter 7. This approach provides the strategy team with a thorough comprehension of the context, assets, needs, opportunities, and threats. It can also aid them in the crafting of a more impactful strategy.

To formulate a comprehensive strategy for the community, the 'strategy' team must consider and address several critical questions:

- a) Decision-making process: How will decisions be made within the community?
What processes or models will be utilised to ensure inclusivity and fairness?
- b) Financial considerations: Will the community engage in financial activities? If so, how will funds be sourced, managed, and utilised? This includes discussing potential fundraising strategies, financial management protocols, and transparency measures. This issue sparked significant controversy during the participants' discussion, as detailed earlier in this chapter.
- c) Legal status and registration: Is there a requirement for the community to be officially registered? This involves exploring the benefits and implications of formal recognition, such as legal status, eligibility for funding, and official partnerships. As demonstrated by the participants' perspectives, despite differing opinions on the most appropriate type of registration, most emphasised the importance of officially registering the academic entity to legitimise its operations.

- d) Management and structure: How will the community be organised and managed?
This encompasses defining the roles of boards, committees, and other organisational structures, and determining their composition and operational mechanisms.
- e) Selection and tenure of members: What criteria will be used to select members for various roles within the community? This includes deciding on the length of terms for positions and the process for election or appointment.
- f) Rights and duties of members: What criteria define eligibility for community membership? What will be the rights and responsibilities of community members? Establishing clear expectations and obligations is crucial for maintaining a cohesive and productive community environment.
- g) Strategic goals: What are the main strategic goals of the community? Identifying these goals will guide the community's direction and the types of initiatives it undertakes.
- h) Initiatives: What types of academic and non-academic initiatives will the community incorporate? This involves determining the scope of activities and projects that will be pursued to fulfil the community's objectives.
- i) Monitoring and evaluation: How will the community's activities and the effectiveness of its teams be monitored and evaluated? This entails setting up mechanisms for ongoing assessment and feedback loops to ensure continuous learning and improvement.

- j) **Accountability:** What mechanisms will be in place to ensure accountability within the community? This question addresses the need for transparent governance and accountability to members and stakeholders.

The participants' views, detailed earlier in this chapter, emphasise the need to consider these factors in order to prevent the issues that led to the failure of their previous efforts to establish or join an academic community in exile. I believe that addressing these and other pertinent questions will be vital in crafting a strategy that is aligned with the community's vision and capable of navigating the complexities of its operational context.

After formulating the strategy, the 'strategy' team reconvenes with stakeholders from the preceding phase to present the draft and solicit their feedback. This collaborative review process allows for the identification and resolution of any contentious issues. Achieving consensus on the final version of the strategy enables its adoption and distribution among participants, ensuring all are prepared to transition seamlessly to the subsequent phase.

Assigning roles and responsibilities: In this stage, the strategy team collaborates with prominent participants from earlier phases to reach out to a broad audience of potential community members [M&M], inviting them to gather, either in person or online. The team presents the initiative, shares insights from the completed phases, and outlines the next steps, potentially focusing on the election of governance structures such as a steering committee, an executive board, or specific committees, as outlined in the envisioned governance model. Once leadership roles are filled, the initial 'backbone' team passes the baton to the elected leaders [M&M; CIA], who then proceed to refine the strategy, elaborate on the governance model, and finalise the regulations. These documents are

subsequently put to a vote by the community, ensuring that the adopted measures have the endorsement of all recognised members [M&M].

Further planning and implementing: In this phase, the elected team begins to put the agreed-upon strategy into action, continuously refining and elaborating on the implementation plans. This stage requires meticulous attention to several critical aspects:

- a) For the community to flourish, several key principles should be adhered to [M&M]:
 - Exhibit flexibility and adaptability
 - Encourage wide participation of its members
 - Incorporate an effective communication system
 - Provide benefits to as many members as possible
 - Progress logically from simple to complex activities
 - Continuously gather information and analyse community issues
 - Invest in training to enhance community-building skills
 - Maintain high levels of transparency
 - Ensure community control over decision-making
 - Actively build beneficial partnerships with institutions outside the community
 - Efficiently mobilise a balanced mix of internal and external resources..
- b) Consistent and transparent communication among community members is essential for fostering trust, aligning goals, and cultivating a shared sense of purpose [CIA].
- c) The leadership team should focus on strengthening the internal 'bonding social capital' by developing and nurturing relationships among community members.

- Additionally, they should enhance 'bridging social capital' by engaging in external communication with a broader array of diverse groups, facilitating the establishment of new connections [SCT].
- d) This team should assume the role of 'connectors,' emphasising the unique gifts and talents within the community, establishing broad connections among members, building trust, and underscoring the community's open and welcoming atmosphere [ABCD].
 - e) The team should realise that people's access to existing resources is affected by the context of their vulnerability, institutional structures, and livelihood strategies. This awareness is key to formulating interventions that assist people in building resilience and navigating recovery from various shocks and stresses [SLA].
 - f) The team must foster an environment of inclusivity and cherish diversity in the community. A community enriched with diverse skills, perspectives, and resources tends to be more resilient, offering a broader spectrum of options to adapt to changes. Furthermore, communities that adapt to living with change and uncertainty, actively enhancing and utilising their capacity to prosper in such environments, manifest higher levels of resilience [CRA].
 - g) The community functions as an integrated system, comprising numerous interlinked components. To ensure the prosperity of this system, the focus should be on the 'relationships' between these components rather than on the components individually [STA]. Additionally, achieving significant and sustainable social change at a broad level is beyond the capacity of any single

organisation acting alone. Realising systemic social change requires the collective efforts and coordination of various organisations and stakeholders spanning multiple sectors [CIA].

By comprehensively understanding these crucial aspects, thoughtfully reflecting on them during decision-making, and weaving them into the fabric of the community's daily activities and interactions, the community greatly improves its prospects for success, growth, and realisation of its objectives.

Continuously enhancing: This final phase is intended as a continuous journey. The community must persistently improve its performance using a robust MEAL framework, enhance its connections both internally and externally, deepening trust among members and establishing stronger relationships with external stakeholders. Furthermore, it must meticulously refine its strategy, ensuring steadfast commitment to its objectives and unwavering adherence to its core values.

The unique circumstances encountered by exiled academics render traditional community development approaches ineffective, demanding creative and innovative solutions. The bespoke model I have developed draws on my insider perspective, blends academic and practical skills, incorporates the narratives of my research participants, and leverages comprehensive insights from my extensive review of pertinent community development theories in the literature.

Through this seven-phase comprehensive model, I have outlined a detailed roadmap designed to assist exiled Syrian academics, and those in similarly challenging situations, in establishing and sustaining a unified community. This roadmap aims to synergise their collective efforts, navigate the complexities and obstacles of their

circumstances, and empower them to collaboratively fulfil both their academic and non-academic needs. By leveraging their combined skills and enhancing their resilience, this model positions them to advance their academic endeavours and, ultimately, contribute their scholarly insights for the benefit of their homelands, host societies, and the broader global community.

In this chapter, I have delved into the community dynamics of Syrian academics in exile in Gaziantep, Turkey, examining the barriers to forming a robust community, the anticipated advantages of establishing such a community, and the participants' views on the necessary steps for its development. Moreover, I have tailored a comprehensive model to guide them in the process of building and nurturing their community. In the following chapter, I will proceed to examine the external support received by these academics and identify opportunities for enhancements that could increase the effectiveness of addressing their needs and leveraging their assets.

Chapter 9: Research Findings—Part 4

In this chapter, I will explore the support provided to Syrian academics exiled in Gaziantep, Turkey, by both the Turkish and international academic communities. Through the lens of the exiled academics' individual and collective stories, I will overview the efforts made by these key stakeholders to assist the academics in meeting their needs and leveraging their assets. Moreover, I will examine aspects of these support efforts that could have been approached differently to enhance their effectiveness, aiming to shed light on how future efforts might be refined to better serve the needs of Syrian academics or other scholars in similar circumstances.

9.1- Support Provided by the Turkish Academic Community

I would like to make it clear that the accounts presented here primarily focus on the academic assistance and do not discuss other forms of support that the participants may have received. The majority of participants have voiced gratitude towards the Turkish populace for their warmth and hospitality. On the academic front, however, they noted the absence of a unified strategy within the Turkish academic sector for managing their affairs or systematically providing support, despite their significant numbers and the diversity in their fields and skills. There is an absence of a comprehensive database to catalogue their identities and qualifications, which would enable effective communication and collaboration with the Turkish academic sphere. The avenues of support that I will outline in subsequent sections are ones that, for the most part, these individuals had to seek out on their own initiative.

9.1.1- Scholarships for PhD Programmes and Post-Doctorate Positions

A few participants shared that they, or their acquaintances, had significantly benefited from scholarships for PhD programmes in Turkey. These scholarships played a pivotal role in their academic progress, helping them to fulfil various academic goals. For instance, Khaleel recounted a transformative experience related to his academic pursuits. After being displaced to northern Syria from his hometown, he was on the verge of abandoning his PhD aspirations due to the complexities of his situation in displacement. However, upon discovering the Turkish Scholarship Programme, he applied and was subsequently accepted. This scholarship facilitated his relocation to Turkey and allowed him to pursue his PhD, covering his essential living expenses. Khaleel described the process as remarkably seamless, highlighting the substantial support the scholarship provided during his academic journey. He explained:

I began my PhD studies in 2015 under conditions that were considerably more lenient than those imposed on students today. Back then, the requirement to demonstrate proficiency in a foreign language, a hurdle current applicants must clear by submitting a TOEFL certificate or an equivalent qualification, was not applicable to me¹². The institution accepted Arabic as a sufficient foreign language qualification. My sole requirement was to enrol in a Turkish language course, a mandate that was fully supported by the scholarship. This relaxed set of requirements facilitated a smoother transition into my academic pursuits.

¹² Many Turkish universities mandate that prospective international PhD candidates demonstrate English proficiency by submitting certificates like TOEFL or IELTS, or results from local language tests such as YDS or YÖKDİL, even if the language of instruction for their programmes is Turkish.

Ali's story shares similarities with Khaleel's, as both found their challenging circumstances transformed into academic opportunities through the Turkish Scholarship Programme. Unable to secure employment that matched his academic background, Ali found himself working as a labourer in Istanbul, earning 1200 Turkish liras a month. The turning point came when he was awarded a scholarship for his PhD, which notably provided him with the same monthly income, thereby enabling him to get back to his academic pursuits. He recalled:

Securing the scholarship for my PhD was a pivotal moment. The application process was straightforward, and I faced no discrimination as a Syrian. Interestingly, they didn't require proof of foreign language proficiency from me. However, some faculty members were hesitant to supervise international students, mainly due to language barriers. Although foreign students are required to reach a C1 level in Turkish before starting their designated programmes, they often find the tasks of academic reading and writing challenging, which can pose difficulties for their supervision. Therefore, I had to put in extra effort to find a supervisor in my field of study. Aside from this, my experience was overwhelmingly positive.

Mahmoud also shared insights into his post-doctorate tenure at a Turkish university, highlighting how the position not only provided financial support but also offered substantial academic advantages. He detailed the access he gained to comprehensive academic facilities, a vibrant scholarly community, and the privilege of affiliation with an academic institution. For Mahmoud, as an academic in exile, these aspects were vital. They not only allowed him to preserve his academic identity but also

facilitated the development of his skills, expanded his professional network, and enabled him to engage in collaborative research projects.

These scholarships and academic opportunities, available broadly to international candidates and not exclusively to Syrians, have aided numerous undergraduate and postgraduate Syrian students. This includes academics whose academic paths were interrupted by conflict and displacement. Yet, there has been a lack of initiatives specifically designed to address the distinct circumstances of exiled Syrian academics, with the goal of facilitating the continuation of their academic pursuits.

9.1.2- The Arabic Programme

This programme embarked on a great mission to hire Syrian academics for teaching Syrian students in Arabic at three Turkish universities: Gaziantep, Harran, and Mardin (Yavcan & El-Ghali, 2017). This initiative was met with enthusiasm by Syrian academics in Turkey, offering them a glimmer of hope for returning to their esteemed teaching positions in university classrooms. Designed with the primary goal of enabling Syrian students to pursue their higher education in their native language, the programme offered a selection of courses in a few disciplines at these three universities. This approach sought to dismantle language obstacles, ensuring Syrian students could seamlessly continue their education while also offering exiled Syrian academics the chance to regain academic employment.

Despite its promising outset, the programme soon began to falter, with many of its branches either closed or on the verge of closure. The precise causes of this decline remain ambiguous. Some participants cited the absence of a robust strategy from the Turkish academic community to ensure the programme's longevity and success.

Additionally, internal conflicts within the leadership teams at certain Turkish universities were also blamed for undermining the programme's effectiveness.

One of my research participants discussed the obstacles impacting the Arabic Programme at Harran University in Urfa, sharing:

Frankly, the integration and support of Syrian academics in Turkey lack well-defined, consistent, and strategic frameworks. Arabic Programmes were initiated at several universities, only to be subsequently discontinued. A notable example is Harran University, which launched an agricultural engineering programme in Arabic in 2016. This programme attracted a significant number of students who started their education focusing on fundamental subjects like mathematics, physics, chemistry, and biology. However, just a year later, the programme was unexpectedly terminated. Students who had finished the first year were then required to learn Turkish and transfer to the corresponding Turkish programme to pursue their studies. The decision-making process behind such changes often hinges on the internal dynamics and power structures within the university. For instance, a programme's fate could depend on the influence of its proponents or detractors within the faculty. A programme might be initiated when its supporters are in a position of influence, only to be closed if power shifts to individuals who oppose it.

The Arabic Programme at Gaziantep University remains operational but has not admitted new students for the past two years, signalling its potential shutdown. Muneer, who was a faculty member of the Arabic Programme in Gaziantep, highlighted the challenges facing the programme. He pointed out that many students in the programme

faced educational setbacks due to the severe conditions they had experienced and interruptions in their educational paths. Moreover, he recognised the fresh approach of the programme and conceded that the challenges it met in its formative phase were inevitable, given its novelty.

Muneer observed a lack of cohesion between the Turkish staff and the Syrian academics involved in the programme, noting that a considerable portion of the Turkish faculty he interacted with at the university were not in favour of the programme, with some even advocating for its discontinuation. Noor, another lecturer at same programme, shared her insights as well, noting:

The Arabic Programme is on the brink of closure, having ceased to accept new students two years ago. Frankly, we face numerous challenges, including resistance from some university staff members who subtly convey that we are unwelcome. On one occasion, the faculty dean addressed us with criticism, questioning, 'why don't you clean the boards before leaving? The lecturers coming in the next day are upset to find Arabic written on the board.'¹³

Furthermore, even though students enrolled in the Arabic Programme at Gaziantep University were charged tuition fees, Syrian faculty members noted that their compensation was substantially less than that of their Turkish peers. They also pointed out the absence of professional development activities, expressing uncertainty about whether this shortfall was exclusive to them or affected their Turkish colleagues as well.

If the Arabic Programme had been adequately sustained and developed, it could have provided an excellent chance for many exiled Syrian academics to continue their

¹³ The Arabic Programme at Gaziantep University conducts its classes in the evening, utilising the same classrooms as the university's regular programmes, after those regular classes have concluded.

academic work, enhance their skills, contribute to their fields, and assist displaced Syrian students.

9.1.3- Other Individual Opportunities

Some participants reflected on an initiative at Mustafa Kemal University in Hatay designed to incorporate a few Syrian academics into the faculty, with the goal of preparing them to teach certain courses or engage in research projects. This endeavour, however, did not achieve its intended outcomes and was ultimately discontinued. The lack of success was attributed by some participants to the Syrian academics chosen for the initiative. They criticised these individuals for their lack of commitment and poor performance, accusing them of not taking their responsibilities seriously. Sharing their thoughts on this issue, a participant provided their perspective, noting:

There was a window of opportunity for some colleagues at Mustafa Kemal University in Hatay to assimilate into the Turkish higher education landscape. Unfortunately, many of the individuals selected for this initiative lacked the necessary expertise and commitment. They carried over a problematic mindset from Syria, failing to serve as commendable examples. This situation cast a shadow over other academics who were eagerly awaiting such a chance. The Turkish academic community, for its part, did not set clear selection standards or devise a strict framework for monitoring and evaluating their performance. Although I'm not completely familiar with the specifics of their experiences, it appears their failure to deliver meaningful results led to the discontinuation of the programme.

While the majority of my research participants expressed their strong commitment to academic ethics, diligence, and devotion to their fields and overall academic responsibilities, it is important to acknowledge that the Syrian academic community in exile is diverse. This community includes individuals whose work ethics may not be as strong, whose expertise might not meet the highest standards, or who may have been influenced by the corrupt practices common within Syrian regime institutions. Given the community's size and the varied backgrounds of its members, such variations in adherence to core academic values are to be expected. However, by implementing precise selection criteria, clearly defining roles and responsibilities, setting specific KPIs, and establishing a thorough appraisal system, the likelihood of misconduct or substandard work significantly diminishes.

Some participants discussed other personal efforts of Syrian academics to find positions at Turkish universities, both private and public, utilising their ability to teach in Arabic or English. Yet, these opportunities are not without their challenges. For instance, if any of these 'fortunate' academics were given the chance to acquire Turkish citizenship—a significant opportunity that could greatly enhance their legal status and address numerous challenges—they would be forced to relinquish their jobs. As foreign lecturers, acquiring Turkish citizenship would inevitably result in the loss of their positions, followed by the initiation of a protracted and intricate process to fulfil the necessary criteria to secure positions as Turkish nationals. This process involves providing documentation that may be difficult to obtain due to the conflict in Syria, as well as passing numerous exams that could be daunting due to language barriers and other difficulties. Muneer

shared his experience, highlighting the impact of such complex situations on academic pursuits:

The myriad challenges we face have deeply influenced our academic endeavours. Even those willing to assist us encounter numerous bureaucratic hurdles, demanding a plethora of documents. Obtaining these documents from war-afflicted Syria is just the beginning; getting them recognised involves navigating a maze of bureaucratic procedures. I secured a position in the Arabic Programme at Harran University, but upon receiving Turkish citizenship, I found myself jobless. The process required numerous documents and responses from my university in Aleppo, which is under regime control and unresponsive to inquiries from the Turkish higher education authorities. Even if a response had been possible, I would have needed to have my entire educational background, from high school to my PhD, officially recognised, which includes passing extensive examinations. It's a lengthy and complex tale of disappointment.

Participants affiliated with private universities noted receiving enhanced academic support and greater opportunities to attend academic events and conferences. One educator from a private institution in Gaziantep shared their experience:

My university has provided substantial academic support, encouraging the adoption of innovative curricula and the application of modern teaching techniques. They have also supported my engagement in high-quality research and funded my attendance at conferences. For conferences held within Turkey, the university covers all expenses, regardless of whether the conference is international or local.

For those held abroad, they subsidise half the costs. This backing has rejuvenated my academic involvement significantly.

It is important to mention that my insights into the academic development practices at Turkish public universities are limited, as none of the study participants were employed in such settings outside of the Arabic Programme. Therefore, the experiences shared by participants primarily pertain to the Arabic Programme and may not fully represent the broader academic environment within these institutions.

9.2- How the Turkish Academic Community Could Have Improved Support for Exiled Syrian Academics

The participants' views shared in interviews and group discussions highlighted that Syrian academics are an asset, not a burden. Many of them are accomplished scholars with a broad spectrum of theoretical knowledge and practical skills, alongside unique intellectual contributions that can enhance the calibre of any academic setting they join, provided they are afforded appropriate opportunities. The conversation acknowledged how the prolonged crisis's uncertainties may have deterred the Turkish academic community from formulating a strategic response to integrate these academics, further exacerbated by the broader economic turmoil affecting all aspects of life in Turkey in recent years. Nevertheless, the participants maintained that there were several untapped approaches that could have led to mutually advantageous outcomes for both exiled Syrian academics and the Turkish academic landscape.

9.2.1- Developing a Comprehensive Strategy to Integrate Syrian Academics

The participants in FGDs noted that a collaborative approach could have been more effectively pursued by the Turkish academic community through initiating dialogues

with exiled Syrian academics, establishing a detailed database capturing their profiles, and incorporating them into shared workshops. Such strategic engagement could have facilitated a concerted effort to navigate challenges, mitigate risks, and secure positive results that serve the collective interests of both the Syrian academics and the Turkish academic community.

The participants in the three FGDs emphasised that a well-crafted strategic plan could have created pathways for integrating Syrian academics by first offering them opportunities to master the Turkish language. Following this, the scholars could be given positions in teaching or research within Turkey's extensive network of universities and research centres. This strategy could also include Syrian academics in professional development workshops, connect them with Turkish colleagues for joint research projects, and invite them to academic conferences and symposia. Such a comprehensive approach would enable the Turkish academic community to harness the rich expertise of Syrian academics, aiding in the preservation and enhancement of their academic skills and preventing the loss of valuable intellectual capital.

9.2.2- Crafting Innovative Solutions

The participants suggested that the Turkish academic community could have explored innovative approaches to both support Syrian academics and leverage their expertise for Turkey's benefit. One such idea was the creation of a distinguished university utilising Arabic as the medium of instruction across various disciplines. This institution would not only offer academic roles to Syrian scholars and other Arabic-speaking academics but also draw a significant student body from the Arab world. Given Turkey's cultural and geographical proximity to these regions, there's a strong potential to attract

a large number of students willing to pay premium tuition fees for the opportunity to study in Arabic within Turkey. Consequently, this proposed university could emerge as a prestigious academic centre, attracting vast numbers of students from the Middle East and serving as an indirect but significant force in strengthening Turkey's connections with the Arab nations. This would result in substantial social, cultural, economic, and political benefits for Turkey.

Should the establishment of such a university initially present challenges, integrating robust, high-quality Arabic-language programmes into select Turkish universities could fulfil comparable aims. This strategy would not only achieve the intended goals but also substantially elevate the reputation and academic rankings of these institutions.

Overlooking the complex issues that Syrian academics in exile in Turkey face and failing to address their needs on a collective basis not only exacerbates their conditions but also leads to the erosion of the valuable intellectual capital they hold. Driven by desperation, numerous academics have opted to leave Turkey, seeking sanctuary in other countries through various means, including dangerous and illegal routes, endangering themselves and their families. Additionally, this neglect results in a missed opportunity for the host community to benefit from their scholarly expertise and the mutual advantages that could emerge from establishing reciprocal, beneficial programmes.

While these narratives and insights reflect on the experiences of the participants over the past decade in exile, considerable opportunities still exist for meaningful transformation. This can be achieved through the implementation and consistent support of well-structured and earnest initiatives.

9.3- Support Provided by the International Academic Community

The participants voiced their profound disillusionment with the international academic community, a collective that professes to uphold principles of inclusivity, support, and collaboration among scholars globally. They articulated a deep sense of abandonment by global higher education institutions and United Nations bodies, which, despite their resolutions and sustainable development goals advocating for the rights of academics, inclusion, and equity in higher education (Kopnina, 2020), seem to fall short in practice. This discrepancy between the proclaimed ideals and the experienced reality highlights a critical gap in the support and recognition afforded to scholars, particularly those in dire circumstances such as Syrian academics in exile.

As outlined earlier in my thesis, a singular beacon of support has been the Council for At-risk Academics (Cara), which initiated its Syria Programme in 2016. This programme encompasses a range of supportive activities such as academic development workshops, courses in general English and English for academic purposes, research fellowship opportunities, research incubation visits, access to an online platform featuring a "Comprehensive Online Foundation Course", and weekly virtual academic gatherings among other activities. In the forthcoming sections, I will explore the participants' perspectives on their engagement with Cara, detailing the academic assistance they received from the organisation, and their insights on potential improvements for more effective outcomes.

9.3.1- Istanbul Workshops

Nearly all participants reminisced about the workshops organised by Cara in Istanbul prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Regardless of their specific focus, these

workshops offered a unique combination of social and academic interaction. Syrian academics would journey from across Turkey to Istanbul, transforming these workshops into vibrant assemblies of intellectual exchange. It was here that they were recognised as academics once more, rekindling old connections, establishing new ones, and engaging with visiting academics from the UK. These encounters, rich in academic dialogue, allowed participants to temporarily reassume their scholarly identities, refine their skills, and immerse themselves in a dynamic academic environment. Many participants emphatically stated that without Cara's support, their academic identities might have been irretrievably lost, underscoring the profound impact of these activities on their professional and personal lives.

The Covid-19 pandemic profoundly impacted every facet of life, compelling organisations worldwide, including Cara, to pivot from traditional in-person engagements to virtual assemblies. The research participants indicated that the shift to virtual interactions had tangibly affected their level of involvement and the progress they had made within Cara's activities. Many expressed a longing for a return to pre-pandemic normalcy, cherishing the hope that they would once again attend the highly esteemed workshops in Istanbul when conditions permit.

9.3.2- English Language Courses

A key feature of Cara's Syria Programme has been its emphasis on enhancing English proficiency among the participants, a facet overwhelmingly deemed beneficial by most. The programme offered a comprehensive suite of English improvement initiatives, including general English courses, academic English workshops, online conversational

skill sessions, and personalised weekly tutorials conducted by volunteer tutors from the UK.

Despite the varied proficiency levels among participants, due to various factors, a significant number noted that enhancing their English skills has markedly broadened their academic horizons. This includes gaining the ability to access and comprehend academic articles in English, collaborate on and publish research papers in renowned journals, widen their academic networks with English-speaking peers, engage in international conferences, and partake in research incubation visits to the UK, among other valuable opportunities.

I had the privilege of contributing to this English proficiency enhancement scheme for about four years, during which I taught numerous colleagues in Gaziantep through direct, face-to-face general English classes. Following the pandemic's onset, these sessions transitioned to an online format, allowing for the inclusion of Syrian colleagues residing in various cities across Turkey.

9.3.3- Research Initiatives

Many participants highlighted that, in Syria's higher education system, research was often undervalued, with publishing activities, when they occurred, typically confined to lower-tier local journals. This landscape underwent a transformative shift through Cara's emphasis on fostering high-quality research. Cara's approach involves a meticulous process of inviting exiled academics to develop research proposals, which are then assessed by expert panels. Successful proposals receive funding, and the research teams are paired with UK-based volunteer mentors. These mentors provide comprehensive support throughout the research process, from conceptualisation to

publication in reputable journals¹⁴. These research endeavours encompass a diverse spectrum of disciplines and interdisciplinary areas, signifying a notable transition from the earlier research environment for Syrian scholars. Mahmoud shared his reflections on participating in Cara's research initiatives, stating:

Initially, when Cara introduced the idea of collaborative research projects between Syrian and British scholars, it seemed almost too ambitious, almost like a fantasy. However, the moment arrived when I engaged in joint research efforts with prestigious institutions such as the University of Edinburgh, the University of Sussex, and Durham University, among others. The culmination of our work was the publication of our papers in top-tier academic journals. Looking back, that experience has been genuinely amazing. It has marked a profound shift and a substantial advancement in our scholarly research endeavours.

This research strand has provided a valuable opportunity for numerous Syrian academics in exile in Turkey, enabling them to reengage with academia regardless of their employment status. It has played a crucial role in enhancing their research capabilities, contributing to their respective fields, and enriching academic discourse overall. Moreover, it has allowed them to author well-crafted studies that have been published in prestigious journals, thereby recognising and valuing their scholarly contributions.

9.3.4- Research Incubation Visits

Another initiative, viewed by all of its participants as exceptionally ambitious, was the research incubation visit. This programme has offered select participants, especially

¹⁴ The articles are accessible through the Cara Syria Programme website: <https://cara-syria.org/publications/>

those proficient in English, the chance to spend up to two months at a UK university as visiting scholars. In this capacity, they would embark on joint research projects with academics at their host institutions.

These invaluable visits, granted to a significant number of exiled Syrian academics thus far, have played a crucial role in broadening their academic vistas. They have enabled participants to gain direct exposure to the UK higher education system, engage in various conferences and academic development activities, expand their professional networks, refine their skills in research and publication, and benefit from the UK's well-resourced academic environment, offering a plethora of additional benefits. Muneer shared insights from his research trip to the UK, stating:

My research incubation visit to a British university was truly a remarkable and highly valuable experience for my academic career. Obtaining a UK visa posed a significant challenge; my application faced rejection four times before finally being accepted on the fifth try. The institution I visited is renowned globally as a top research centre in my specialty, and the professor I collaborated with ranks highly on the international scale. The opportunity to use the university's cutting-edge laboratories, equipped with the latest tools and technology, and to engage with world-renowned experts in my field, was unparalleled. I also developed numerous academic skills that were not offered or practiced back in Syria. This visit was a critical milestone in my academic journey. On a personal level, such an opportunity would have been unimaginable had I remained within the institutions of the regime.

I find a strong connection with Muneer's experiences, as I too was fortunate enough to receive a similar opportunity. This programme enabled me to spend two

months as a visiting scholar at the University of Kent, an experience that transformed my life. It allowed me to reclaim my academic identity, immerse myself in a more advanced academic environment, engage in conferences, and establish connections with numerous academics across various disciplines. This journey led to a collaborative research project, which was subsequently published in *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* (Heron et al., 2020). It also reignited my pursuit of doctoral studies, which had been halted by conflict. Now, as I approach the completion of my PhD journey with a blend of exhaustion and profound hope, I am inspired by the potential to continue my academic journey, support academics in challenging contexts, contribute to my homeland and host community, and make a broader impact on humanity.

9.3.5- Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (FHEA)

Cara's Syria Programme has played a pivotal role in supporting some eligible Syrian academics in exile to pursue the Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy. By providing volunteer mentors and funding the application fees, Cara has facilitated their engagement with the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF). This framework is instrumental for candidates to understand the competencies, skills, and conduct expected of higher education professionals, enabling them to critically evaluate their teaching practices. Achieving this fellowship not only signifies a commitment to teaching and learning in higher education but also boosts their prospects for academic employment. Having been recognised as a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy myself, I have since volunteered to mentor two Syrian colleagues on their path to FHEA recognition.

Humam shared his journey towards FHEA recognition, stating:

Currently, I am not engaged in teaching at local universities. While I did teach at Gaziantep University for a brief period, there was a lack of emphasis on academic development. However, Cara's consistent offering of workshops, sessions, and notably the FHEA fellowship, has been pivotal in my academic growth. The fellowship initiative, which included invaluable help from two academic mentors during the application process and the coverage of expenses, was very beneficial. The process of applying for the fellowship was itself a rigorous journey in skill enhancement and reflective practice within higher education. Addressing questions about assessment methods, for instance, compelled me to critically evaluate and better articulate various practices of mine that I had not previously examined in detail. The path to the fellowship motivated me to seek out additional resources, engage in deeper reflection, and refine my understanding of these essential academic practices. Spanning approximately three months, this effort led to me obtaining the fellowship, significantly enhancing my academic confidence and broadening my prospects for future academic pursuits.

These initiatives, alongside numerous others such as weekly soirées, workshops aimed at enhancing learning and teaching skills, support for conference and symposium participation, and various collaborative projects, position Cara as a singular beacon of hope amidst the broader neglect of exiled Syrian academics by the international academic community.

9.4- Potential Improvements in Cara's Syria Programme

The research participants identified several potential areas for enhancement within Cara's Syria Programme. These areas include the need for a more clearly defined

strategy, a stronger framework for accountability, and initiatives more specifically designed to accommodate the diverse skill sets, interests, and disciplinary backgrounds of the participants, among other considerations.

Despite Cara's significant efforts, numerous participants observed the absence of a clear, overarching strategy communicated to them. While they were informed about the workshops in advance, the broader context and how these workshops interlinked to meet strategic objectives remained unclear. One participant highlighted this concern, stating, "I wish a clear strategy had been communicated to all program members at the beginning of each year, outlining the intended objectives, planned workshops, workshop levels, eligibility criteria for attendees, and attendance priorities, among other details."

Some participants reflected on opportunities for enhancement, particularly highlighting a need for improved engagement and transparency in the different phases of the programme. They expressed a wish for increased involvement in the design of programme activities and a more systematic approach to ongoing evaluation and feedback that would have allowed for adjustments. Notably, they felt a comprehensive accountability framework¹⁵ could have better facilitated the expression of concerns, suggestions, and complaints. Reflecting on these experiences, one participant remarked:

¹⁵ In this context, accountability means setting up clear and accessible systems that allow programme members to hold organisers and leaders accountable for their decisions and actions within the programme. This involves establishing formal channels for feedback where participants can express their concerns, suggestions, and complaints. Additionally, it requires transparent communication about programme activities and outcomes, coupled with a commitment to address and act upon the feedback received. Importantly, this process ensures that community members are not treated as passive recipients but are actively engaged in shaping the initiative.

In retrospect, the basis for involvement in certain opportunities wasn't always clear, leading to questions about the selection process for roundtables, research incubations, and some other activities. Had there been more detailed policies, transparent decision-making, and dependable channels for open dialogue, it would have greatly improved our ability to engage with the programme and voice our insights, concerns, and even complaints in a constructive manner.

Moreover, several participants suggested that more favourable outcomes might have been achieved through a more nuanced grouping of participants, taking into account their varying levels of skill proficiency, academic disciplines, or areas of interest, among other factors. The significant skill disparities among participants in certain activities notably reduced their impact. Reflecting on this, one participant shared:

In my view, applying a one-size-fits-all approach to developing academic skills wasn't optimal. A detailed assessment of each participant's training needs and skill level should have preceded the workshop designs. Within a single workshop, it's common to encounter an advanced participant finding the content redundant and time-wasting, while a novice might seek far simpler insights. Additionally, aligning participants by academic discipline and facilitating connections with field-specific academic experts could substantially enhance the learning outcomes.

While pinpointing areas for refinement is beneficial, it is imperative to acknowledge the nuanced circumstances surrounding Syrian academics in exile. The enduring crisis in Syria, coupled with its resultant uncertainties, the intricate involvement of diverse stakeholders, and substantial funding hurdles, have undeniably complicated Cara's mission. To the best of my knowledge, the Syria Programme stands as the organisation's

first venture of this scale and complexity. It has pioneered a range of initiatives that go far beyond Cara's previous efforts, particularly its traditional fellowship scheme. The rich compilation of lessons learnt from this endeavour has the potential to significantly influence both the ongoing evolution of this Programme and the framework for future initiatives.

9.5- How the International Academic Community Could Have Supported Exiled Syrian Academics

The participants conveyed a predominantly negative view of the international community, encompassing the global academic sphere, marked by profound disappointment and dissatisfaction. They shared a sense of abandonment by a wide range of entities, including Arab countries, countries of the global North, UN agencies, organisations focused on education, and others. This feeling of widespread neglect was deemed by them as utterly unjustifiable.

The participants underscored their belief that they should not be viewed as a burden, pointing out the considerable time, effort, and financial resources they have dedicated to reaching their academic stature. They argued that they have much to offer in any collaborative endeavour. Yet, despite the lofty ideals professed by numerous relevant institutions and the plethora of conferences and meetings globally purporting to support the rights of academics in challenging circumstances, they feel forsaken. Some participants speculated that this neglect by various international actors might be intentional, aimed at dimming any prospects for the resurgence of Syria's higher education system in the foreseeable future. A participant expressed their insights on the matter, highlighting:

There seems to be a deliberate lack of support for the advancement of Syrian academics, and the prosperity of our societies, despite the dynamic, intelligent, capable, and productive nature of our population. Moreover, it appears that the root of most of our problems—our authoritarian criminal regime— is tacitly accepted by key international actors, with no genuine desire for change. Should this tyrannical regime be replaced by a democratic, pluralistic system that honours human rights and the dignity of citizens, our country could shift from a consumer-centric to a production-driven economy. This transformation would shift our internal dynamics from being fractured along sectarian and ethnic lines to becoming a unified force capable of global competition, an outcome not desired by these international stakeholders.

Education, spearheaded by academics, is fundamental to human and societal development, laying the groundwork for civilization. A well-educated person is less prone to falling into extremism or engaging in violence. Therefore, the marginalisation of academics directly undermines the potential for cultivating a cultured, peaceful society. Let me give you an example of a policy that deliberately compromises education; the payment structure by humanitarian organisations working in northern Syria vividly reflects this issue, with facility guards, for example, earning a monthly salary of 300 dollars, whereas teachers are paid only 100 dollars—if they are fortunate enough to find such positions. This deliberate undermining of the educational sector aims to foster ignorance and extremism, keeping the region fragmented and weak to fulfil exploitative ambitions.

The participants articulated a clear message: with real commitment, the international academic community and associated funding bodies could have devised numerous effective strategies to support exiled Syrian academics. These strategies would have addressed their pressing needs, provided them with opportunities to preserve and enhance their skills, and facilitated their integration into the academic landscape. Possible support approaches include:

- Advocacy at international forums: playing a pivotal role in leveraging international platforms to pressure decision-makers and funders into providing comprehensive support that addresses both academic and non-academic needs.
- Partnerships with the host community's higher education sector¹⁶: creating meaningful partnerships with higher education institutions in Turkey to facilitate the integration of these academics, with financial support either partially or fully covered by international sponsors.
- Support for the Arabic Programme: bolstering the success of initiatives like the Arabic Programme through dedicated advocacy and aid from the academic community.
- Facilitating global academic connections: connecting the academics with various higher education institutions and research centres worldwide, thus offering them opportunities for remote work.

¹⁶ This type of intervention, which showcases a transformative community-focused approach as detailed in the academic development model by Parkinson et al. (2020), is notably lacking in the current support provided to Syrian academics in exile. Conventional academic development programmes often miss the critical aspect of changing structures and systems, which reduces their effectiveness in unique situations like those of academics in exile. Hence, these suggestions aim to extend the field to better accommodate and address such distinctive circumstances.

- Providing opportunities for advancement: extending opportunities for scholarships, fellowships, and post-doctoral positions to further their academic careers.
- Enhancing support for organisations like Cara: amplifying the contributions to organisations such as Cara by increasing support for their existing initiatives and promoting the inclusion of a broader array of efforts.

Each of these avenues represents a feasible method of assistance that could have vastly improved the situation for Syrian academics in exile, demonstrating the wide array of support mechanisms that were, and potentially still are, available.

The participants' narratives, shared in the interviews and FGDs, feature a decade marked by unfulfilled potential, casting a light on their enduring disappointment. Yet, they remain hopeful, advocating for their voices to be heard now more than ever. They believe in the possibility of transformative action that could rescue their collective intellectual heritage, allowing them to reintegrate into the academic sphere and fulfil their scholarly responsibilities. This persistent optimism underscores their determination to overcome past obstacles and contribute valuably to academia, preserving and enhancing their intellectual legacy.

9.6- Discussion

My research findings, in harmony with the reflections presented in Chapter 2 and the extensive literature reviewed in Chapters 3 and 4, demonstrated that despite the pivotal role that exiled academics could play in restoring higher education and thereby aiding the stabilisation and recovery of communities affected by conflict (Millican, 2018), the necessity of supporting these individuals is often disregarded. Enhancing the skills and expertise of these academics could substantially improve the calibre of professionals

within the country, such as doctors, engineers, teachers, lawyers, scientists, and artists. This could be achieved through the involvement of these academics in lecturing roles at universities in regions outside the Syrian regime's control in northern Syria currently, or potentially across the entire country when future circumstances allow. Therefore, overlooking this vital intellectual resource risks degrading all facets of life for years to come.

Moreover, the perspectives shared by the participants aligned with the findings from the literature, revealing that, in conflict settings, higher education frequently becomes deprioritised, with international aid mainly directed towards immediate lifesaving efforts. Consequently, educational initiatives, when implemented, tend to focus narrowly on primary education, ignoring the crucial role of higher education. As Bakarati and Milton (2015) noted, it is not surprising that, during conflicts, financial resources and attention shift towards security measures, thereby disadvantaging other essential sectors. Such a shift in priorities leaves higher education struggling for resources, leading to its decline or, in some cases, total collapse.

However, the Syrian Crisis, now extending over 13 years, presents a uniquely complex challenge with no end in sight. In the midst of this prolonged conflict, the world has largely overlooked the significant contributions that exiled Syrian academics could make to their country's present and future. Consequently, these scholars find themselves adrift, with opportunities to utilise their expertise and prevent the loss of essential intellectual capital fading. Experiencing neglect and isolation from the international academic community, Syrian academics voice their deep frustration with the scant

support from global entities, as underscored by Parkinson, McDonald, and Quinlan (2020).

Regarding the host community, I acknowledge the multitude of challenges Turkey has encountered in the last decade, from the immediate impact of an intense proxy war at its borders and significant economic upheavals to the social intricacies involved in accommodating a large influx of Syrians. Yet, as explored earlier in this chapter, I argue that opportunities for creating mutually beneficial scenarios to support exiled Syrian academics have been, and continue to be, feasible and achievable.

For the international community, I set aside the accusations of ill-intent expressed by some participants. While I understand the reasons behind such views, stemming from prolonged suffering, intricate circumstances, and an overwhelming sense of global neglect—factors that can lead to wrong judgments—I instead pinpoint two primary causes for the current situation.

Firstly, the inability of exiled Syrian academics to mobilise a unified front to advocate for their cause—I acknowledge the reasons behind this difficulty, as detailed in Chapter 8. Notwithstanding obvious differences across different contexts affected by conflict, exile, and oppressive regimes, I believe the difficulty in fostering unity and garnering attention is not unique to Syrians but is a shared struggle among many vulnerable groups around the world.

Secondly, the issue of insufficient coordination at the international level. The world, grappling with an array of crises, finds itself in a perpetual state of emergency. This reality diverts resources and focus, allowing the concerns of exiled Syrian academics to fall through the cracks of global priorities. Consequently, these scholars are not overlooked

out of malice but as a result of a world distracted by competing demands and lacking effective coordination channels.

This analysis, bearing my insights and reflections, underscores the importance of looking beyond surface-level judgments to grasp the complex systemic issues at play. It advocates for a concerted effort to enhance coordination, advocacy, and awareness, aiming to better support and acknowledge the valuable contributions of exiled Syrian academics.

I will primarily glean insights from this chapter, supplemented by the cumulative knowledge acquired from previous chapters, to examine these findings through the lens of the Collective Impact Approach, introduced by John Kania and Mark Kramer (2011). This perspective will guide my proposal for creating a global network committed to supporting academics in challenging contexts. This includes not only exiled Syrian academics but also extends to all scholars facing precarious situations¹⁷.

The narratives of my research participants in this chapter vividly conveyed their profound disappointment due to the sparse support they had received, which neglected their rights and disregarded the invaluable intellectual capital they possess and the crucial contributions they could offer. Furthermore, they called for a spectrum of actions to address their plight. These actions included establishing a comprehensive and consistent strategy for their support, devising innovative solutions tailored to their unique circumstances, championing their rights, forging stronger partnerships with institutions

¹⁷ This proposed global organisation could delineate the type of challenging contexts it would respond to and prioritise them based on urgency. Its scope could include supporting scholars navigating conflict, post-conflict, or exile situations; academic groups facing marginalisation due to socio-political or economic hurdles; and academics under oppressive regimes. Furthermore, it could even broaden its support to include academic communities impacted by natural disasters like earthquakes and floods.

both in their host country and internationally, improving the accountability frameworks for initiatives undertaken to help them, and bolstering the support extended to the organisations dedicated to assist them.

These accounts underscore that traditional academic development frequently falls short in addressing complex situations, such as those faced by Syrian academics in exile. They also underscore the necessity for crafting innovative solutions that transcend the constraints of conventional academic development approaches. The model of academic development as community development, introduced by Parkinson et al (2020) and integral to my conceptual framework, together with the various models I have developed in my thesis, present potential solutions to these intricate challenges.

The *Collective Impact Approach*, selected as the analytical lens for interpreting the findings of this chapter and devising an innovative solution for the unique challenges faced by exiled Syrian academics—as also explored in Chapter 8 as an approach for community development—asserts that substantial and enduring social transformation cannot be achieved by isolated efforts of any solitary organisation. It insists that systemic change requires the cooperative engagement and synchronisation of diverse entities and stakeholders from multiple sectors.

This approach is based on five key conditions which, when collectively applied, can lead to profound outcomes. Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer (2012) delineated these conditions as:

- Common Agenda: All participants have a shared vision for change including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions.

- **Shared Measurement:** Collecting data and measuring results consistently across all participants ensures efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable.
- **Mutually Reinforcing Activities:** Participant activities must be differentiated while still being coordinated through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.
- **Continuous Communication:** Consistent and open communication is needed across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation.
- **Backbone Support:** Creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organization(s) with staff and a specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative and coordinate participating organizations and agencies (p.1).

Inspired by this approach, I saw the necessity to refine it into a model that, from my perspective, provides a more customised framework. This iterated model is designed to lead to actionable steps that directly respond to the perspectives shared by my participants and to facilitate more effective outcomes in supporting them. Moreover, I hope that if my proposed network has a chance to see light, it will bring about significant positive changes in the lives of many—if not all—academics navigating challenging contexts such as conflict, post-conflict, and exile scenarios.

My proposal model advocates the establishment of a global association dedicated to supporting academics in such environments. It could be named the 'Global Network

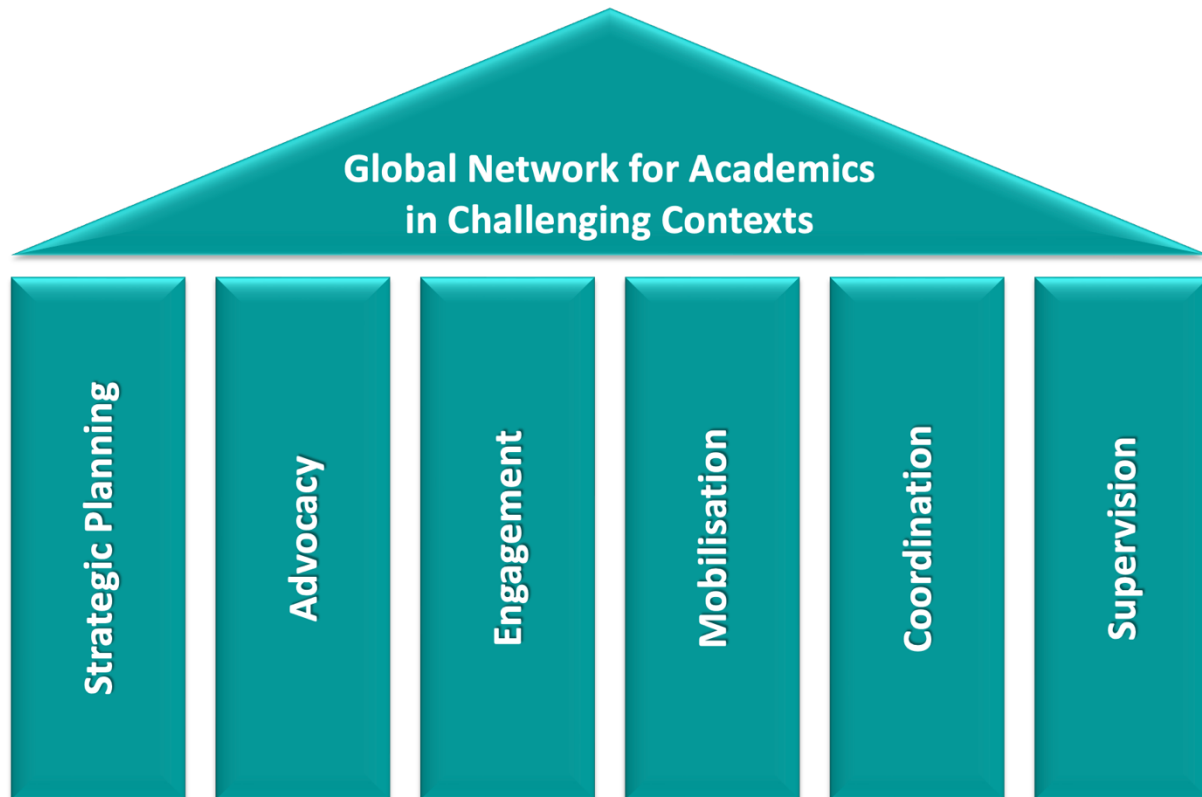
for Academics in Challenging Contexts¹⁸, for instance. This organisation would distinguish itself from existing entities like Cara in several ways. Firstly, it would aim to pool resources globally and harness academic skills from a broad array of countries and universities, in contrast to Cara, which primarily relies on a network within the UK. Secondly, this organisation would focus on mobilisation, coordination, and supervision, rather than direct implementation like Cara. This strategic positioning would allow it to play a more substantial role, engage more key stakeholders, address gaps in the efforts of organisations like Cara, and offer enhanced support to them.

This international organisation, led by a diverse group of scholar-activists from around the world, would be structured around six foundational pillars that represent its six core functions, as depicted in Figure 9. Although these functions bear resemblance to some aspects of the five main conditions described by Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer (2012) in their *Collective Impact Approach*, they offer a more nuanced and directly applicable framework for this proposed global network.

¹⁸ This scope could include scholars navigating conflict, post-conflict, or exile situations; academic groups facing marginalisation due to socio-political or economic hurdles; and academics under oppressive regimes.

Figure 9

Key Functions of the Proposed 'Global Network for Academics in Challenging Contexts'



As I envision it, this international network would not be a direct 'implementing' entity; rather, it would be a body capable of discerning the big picture, crafting broad strategies, and orchestrating various efforts, accomplishing the following six core functions:

- **Strategic planning:** When reflecting on the support they received from the host academic community, Cara, and the international academic community, my research participants underscored the absence—and the critical need for—a clear strategy to outline their academic paths in exile and guide their development. They noted that the lack of such a strategy not only intensified their struggles but also deepened the

uncertainty surrounding their situations in exile. Therefore, this network is proposed to devise overarching strategies specifically tailored to the distinct circumstances of academics in similar challenging contexts. This involves a thorough assessment of the unique experiences, assets, needs, opportunities, and threats faced by these academics, both at the collective and individual levels (see Figure 6), whether navigating conflict zones, repressive regimes, exile, or other forms of adversity. Leveraging a deep comprehension of these diverse contexts, the network formulates strategic plans that specify clear objectives, methodologies, and targeted outcomes for aiding academics. This customised approach guarantees that strategies are not merely reactive to the academics' immediate requirements but are also in harmony with broader objectives for their empowerment, resilience enhancement, development, and professional progression, tackling both academic and non-academic hurdles at their roots. Through strategic planning, the network establishes the course and priorities for initiatives, steering all involved stakeholders towards cohesive, impactful actions.

- **Advocacy:** The research participants repeatedly voiced their frustration over being overlooked by relevant entities. They expressed feeling lost and unheard, highlighting the urgent need for an organisation that can effectively advocate for their rights and amplify their perspectives. Acting as a formidable advocate for academics in challenging contexts, this organisation can utilise its influential status to shape conversations, influence policymaking, and redirect funding priorities on global platforms and across media landscapes. It can proactively highlight the distinct challenges these academics encounter, aiming to elevate their plight to the forefront

of international attention. Moreover, this advocacy extends to raising awareness about the immense potential these academics hold for contributing to their environments, academic fields, the broader academic landscape, and humanity at large, if provided with the right support. By showcasing the untapped value and contributions of these scholars, the organisation seeks to catalyse change at the policy level and secure the essential support needed for these academics to thrive. Engaging with policymakers, stakeholders, and the public, the organisation endeavours to foster a conducive environment for transformative action, ensuring that the voices of those academics are not only heard but also recognised for the value they can add.

- **Engagement:** The participants' narratives underscore the absence of a functioning academic community for Syrian academics in Gaziantep and the challenges they face in establishing and sustaining such a network. They also highlight the lack of clear pathways for integrating Syrian scholars into Turkish academic institutions and expressed a strong desire for opportunities to engage with the international academic community through fellowships, remote job opportunities, and participation in global conferences. These insights emphasise the critical engagement role that the proposed organisation could effectively fulfil. This 'engagement' function is inherently multifaceted, spanning several layers of continuous interaction and communication. It includes nurturing connections among academics within challenging contexts to strengthen their community bonds. It also aims to engage academics directly in shaping the strategies meant to support them, from articulating their needs and preferences to contributing to the creation of frameworks for monitoring, evaluation, and accountability. Furthermore, this function seeks to connect these academics with

the academic community in their host country—if they are in exile—and with the broader global academic community, creating a supportive network where ideas, resources, and collaboration opportunities are freely exchanged, thereby bolstering the overall resilience and collective capability of academics worldwide. On another level, this function targets the involvement of various stakeholders in providing robust support, including but not limited to academic development professionals, consultants, universities, research institutions, organisations dedicated to higher education, and both private and public sector institutions, including governmental agencies.

- **Mobilisation:** From both my observations and participants' accounts, it is evident that organisations like Cara, which support exiled Syrian academics, face persistent challenges in securing the resources necessary to continue their work and fulfil their mission. These implementing bodies require the backing of institutions designed to actively mobilise and channel resources to sustain their efforts. Rather than offering direct support, this function involves inspiring a range of stakeholders, seeking various avenues of support from a wide array of potential contributors, including private donors, governmental agencies, international foundations, profitable companies, and volunteer networks. It identifies and advocates for galvanising financial, logistical, legal and academic support through advocacy and partnership, channelling these resources through implementing bodies—such as Cara and other specialised organisations—to meet the needs of academics in challenging contexts. By strategically campaigning and leveraging social media, traditional media, and direct outreach, the organisation seeks to build a robust support system that can respond effectively to the varying needs of academics facing adversity.

- **Coordination:** The participants' narratives highlight the critical need for coordination among various stakeholders to address their diverse challenges, ranging from academic needs to basic human necessities and legal status in the host country. Without clear priorities and streamlined efforts, responses often become fragmented, with efficiency and effectiveness diminished. This lack of cohesion risks leaving essential needs unmet, as resources and actions are dispersed across a complex network of stakeholders. The proposed organisation specifically aims to orchestrate the efforts of diverse actors dedicated to aiding academics in challenging contexts. As a pivotal hub, it not only fosters collaboration but also strategically aligns these efforts to enhance overall efficiency and maximise impact. It works diligently to prevent the duplication of efforts, focusing intently on the most critical needs. Additionally, it plays an essential role in knitting together the activities of various stakeholders, thereby forging a cohesive force that exceeds the sum of its parts. Through this function, the network cultivates synergies, pools resources effectively, and facilitates productive partnerships among key actors.
- **Supervising:** Many participants, reflecting on the support initiatives they had been involved in, emphasised the need for greater transparency and stronger accountability mechanisms. Achieving this is challenging without a supervisory body to monitor and evaluate the initiatives carried out by implementing organisations. This is where the importance of oversight comes into play—ensuring that all initiatives and partnerships are aligned with the network's strategic objectives and maintaining a standard of accountability throughout the entire process. It entails monitoring the execution of interventions by partner organisations, evaluating their outcomes, and offering

feedback and guidance to ensure consistency with overarching goals and compliance with established standards. Additionally, it emphasises maintaining a solid accountability framework, equipped with efficient communication channels to engage with the targeted academic communities in challenging contexts, thereby enhancing transparency and cultivating trust among all stakeholders. Crucially, it involves gathering lessons learned and disseminating them among collaborators for cumulative and ongoing improvement, along with adapting strategies as needed to realise the desired outcomes.

I believe this proposed global network, with the right support from key international actors, holds significant potential to drive the desired transformation in the lives of thousands of academics in challenging contexts. Consequently, it could catalyse the utilisation of their expertise, contribute to the advancement of their countries, and help devise more sustainable solutions for some of the world's most intractable problems.

In this chapter, I have detailed the perspectives of my research participants regarding the external support they received from both their host academic community and the broader international community. Moreover, I have proposed the creation of a global network with a comprehensive mandate aimed at improving the circumstances academics living in challenging contexts. The following chapter will conclude my thesis, providing recommendations based on the gathered insights.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

In this concluding chapter, I will synthesise the insights gleaned from the preceding chapters, highlighting how the study has effectively addressed the three main research questions and addressed the research objectives. Building upon this foundation, I will underscore the significant contributions of my research and present targeted recommendations for the Syrian academics in exile, the academic community within their host country, Turkey, and the wider global academic community. Additionally, I will discuss the limitations encountered during this research and propose directions for future studies, aiming to shed light on the experiences of academics navigating difficult circumstances worldwide.

10.1- Summary of Findings

My research findings are organised into thematic segments, presented across four chapters for clarity and depth. Chapter 6 served as an introduction to the participants' experiences, offering insights into their backgrounds prior to 2011 and the events following the crisis. The subsequent chapters, 7, 8, and 9, each addressed a specific research question, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of distinct aspects of the study.

10.1.1- Exploring the Context

My research has revealed the profound influence of the academic landscape in Syria before 2011 on the present competencies and limitations of Syrian academics in exile. Drawing on Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony—a key theoretical element in the conceptual framework of my research—the analysis explored how the Syrian regime's authoritative control imposed a significant level of isolation on the academic community, severely limiting opportunities for both internal collaboration and external engagement.

This control extended to stifling academic freedom, a task facilitated by the extensive infiltration of the Al-Baath Party and security forces within university campuses across the country. Leadership positions within these institutions were assigned based on loyalty to the regime, through a corrupt network that valued allegiance over academic credentials, skill sets, or experience, and bypassed democratic election processes. This approach not only compromised the integrity and autonomy of academic institutions but also undermined the potential for academic excellence and innovation, casting a long shadow over the capabilities and vulnerabilities of Syrian scholars today.

Syria's higher education landscape notably lacked structured plans for academic development, mirroring a deficiency in both the will and the expertise among the leadership to elevate the standards of higher education. Syrian academics motivated to enhance their academic prowess found themselves navigating this void largely through self-directed efforts and the mentorship of a scarce few distinguished faculty members who could guide them during their undergraduate or post-graduate studies. The academics who managed to pursue further education abroad or to collaborate with esteemed international research entities found a partial escape from the stifling academic environment in Syria's institutions. These opportunities provided a window into more open academic settings with superior infrastructure, offering a chance for these scholars to refine their academic abilities to a greater extent than their peers who lacked such opportunities.

The onset of the 2011 crisis inflicted severe damage on the academic sector in Syria, where deteriorating security conditions impacted all areas of life. Education faced unprecedented disruptions, with many universities halting their operations. The crisis

contributed to a sharp decline in the quality of education, heightened levels of oppression against academic staff and students, and triggered the displacement of millions, including more than 2000 academics (King, 2016).

10.1.2- Exploring Needs, Assets, and Academic Practices in Exile

Since their transition to life in exile in Turkey under the "temporary protection" status, Syrian academics have encountered a multifaceted set of challenges, which has unveiled a broad spectrum of essential humanitarian and academic needs, including:

- **Fundamental human needs:** the basic requirement for a stable income to ensure access to food and shelter for individuals and their families;
- **Stable legal status:** the ability to live, work, and move freely within the host country without fear of deportation, ensuring their safety and legal security;
- **Psychological well-being and social integration:** recognition and support for their psychological traumas, alongside proactive efforts to integrate them into the host community;
- **Recognition of qualifications and academic identity:** validation and acknowledgment of their academic and professional credentials, which is crucial for their integration into the academic workforce and the preservation of their professional identities;
- **Academic employment and career progression:** opportunities to connect with academic institutions, secure roles within their fields, and progress in their careers;
- **Continuing professional development (CPD) and contribution:** avenues to continue developing their professional skills and knowledge, along with the chance to contribute to the academic community;

- **Inclusion in academic communities:** participation in local and international academic networks, seeking opportunities for collaboration, and fostering a sense of belonging among peers, mentors, and field leaders;
- **Academic freedom:** the freedom to engage in critical thought, freely express ideas, pursue research, teach, and publish without restraint;
- **Innovation, creativity, and leadership:** the space to lead in the development of new initiatives, encourage innovation, and undertake creative projects.

Despite the intricate challenges and diverse needs they face, exiled Syrian academics carry a treasure trove of strengths and capabilities. These assets, when effectively utilised, can significantly enhance their living conditions and enable them to continue their scholarly endeavours while making substantial contributions to the global community. Their key resources include:

- **Field-specific assets:** their deep-seated academic skills and knowledge meticulously cultivated over years of dedication and hard work.
- **Linguistic assets:** the array of languages they command, offering them an edge in various academic settings and discussions.
- **Diverse academic expertise cultivated across multiple countries:** a rich academic mindset and a unique blend of knowledge shaped within Syria's educational sphere, enriched by advanced studies abroad, and refined through the adversities of exile.
- **Non-academic skills transferrable to academia:** a broad spectrum of skills acquired outside the academic realm, including strategic planning and project

management, alongside valuable soft skills, all of which are readily applicable in academic contexts.

- **Resilience and devotion to Syria:** a deep-rooted commitment to contributing towards Syria's future, leveraging the insights and abilities gained from new academic experiences or non-academic endeavours to assist in rebuilding Syrian higher education.
- **Extensive professional networks:** the wide-reaching networks developed over time, spanning from initial connections within Syria to those established in countries of further study, and extending to new acquaintances made in Turkey, the UK, and other nations around the globe.

The experiences of Syrian academics living in exile in Gaziantep, Turkey reveal a wide variation in how they pursue the advancement of their academic skills, careers and expertise. The majority of participants identified the Cara Syria Programme as the sole source of academic development opportunities, a point elaborated upon in Chapter 9. A few participants have found teaching positions within the Arabic Programme at public universities, such as Gaziantep University or Harran University. Additionally, one participant has had the opportunity to teach at a private Turkish university. Others have ventured across the border to teach at institutions in areas of northern Syria beyond the control of the Syrian regime. While these positions have allowed the academics to engage in higher education teaching, structured opportunities for academic development were scarce. The exception has been the private university, which has been noted to provide comparatively better academic development prospects.

10.1.3- Internal Support and Collaboration Within the Community of Exiled

Academics

The research has uncovered a stark absence of a cohesive community among Syrian academics in Gaziantep, with the sparse interactions that do exist being primarily based on personal connections rather than any form of collective endeavour. Participants highlighted a range of reasons for this fragmented state. The legacy of oppression by the Syrian regime, which restricted free assembly and collective action outside of government-controlled entities aimed at maintaining the regime's control, has had a lasting impact. This past environment has left many academics without the knowledge or experience necessary to create and nurture a supportive community network. Additionally, the role of Syrian opposition's official bodies in Turkey has also been counterproductive, failing to support exiled academics or promote communal ties effectively. The diversion of Syrian academics into various roles, many outside the academic sphere, further reduces opportunities for meaningful interaction and collective activities. This situation is exacerbated by the challenges of exile life, including the uncertainty of their futures in Turkey and the scarcity of resources, which fosters a competitive rather than a collaborative atmosphere among them.

However, despite the current lack of structured community engagement, the findings reveal a pronounced eagerness among the majority of participants to partake in such collective efforts. They underscore the importance of forming a special kind of community, one that is formal and officially recognized, tailored to their distinctive circumstances in exile. This envisioned community aims to fulfil multiple roles: serving as a networking hub for academics to forge meaningful relationships and effectively utilize

their collective assets; acting as a representative body to safeguard their rights and establish communication channels with key stakeholders, thus offering a unified voice; facilitating academic employment and fostering partnerships to expand collective access to research funding and opportunities for professional development; supporting social solidarity initiatives to provide emotional or financial assistance to community members in times of need; and enhancing academic support for Syria, thereby contributing to the educational and scholarly reconstruction of the country.

Furthermore, the findings have highlighted the strategies participants envision for the successful establishment of an effective academic community in Gaziantep. These strategies entail discerning the motivations of potential members for joining and pinpointing obstacles to their participation; fostering trust within the community; electing a leadership team that is both capable and trusted to guide the community's formation and growth; crafting a clear strategy that includes transparent rules and specific guidelines for adherence to ensure proper governance of the community; legitimising the community's activities to shield its members from legal issues and facilitate formal dealings with important stakeholders; and tackling the financial requirements necessary for the community's ongoing operation.

10.1.4- Support from Host and Broader International Academic Communities:

Received Assistance and Existing Gaps

The research highlights a lack of systematic support for Syrian academics in exile in Gaziantep from the host academic community. Nevertheless, there have been some support channels, which, largely, participants had to pursue independently. These opportunities include scholarships for PhD programs and post-doctoral positions, the

Arabic Program designed to employ some Syrian academics to instruct Syrian students in Arabic, and a few other sporadic opportunities.

The findings emphasise Syrian academics' belief in their role as assets rather than liabilities. My analysis revealed several overlooked strategies that could foster mutually beneficial relationships between them and the Turkish academic sector. These strategies involve developing a holistic approach for integrating Syrian academics into Turkey's academic framework, and devising innovative solutions such as establishing a prestigious university where Arabic serves as the primary language of instruction across diverse disciplines. This proposed institution would not only create academic opportunities for Syrian scholars and Arabic-speaking academics but also potentially attract a vast number of students from the Arab world, offering substantial social, cultural, economic, and political rewards for Turkey.

The research reveals a deep-seated disillusionment among the participants with the international academic community, stemming from a perceived neglect by global higher education institutions and United Nations agencies. The Cara Syria Programme stands out as the solitary support structure, offering a broad spectrum of assistance. This includes specialised academic development workshops in Istanbul, led by volunteer scholars from the UK and designed to gather Syrian academics from across Turkey; English language training; funding for research projects; incubation visits to UK universities for research development; and opportunities for achieving fellowship status within the Higher Education Academy, among other initiatives.

The research suggests that Cara could enhance its support efforts by implementing a more precisely articulated strategy, strengthening its accountability

mechanisms, and developing initiatives that are more tailored to the varied skills, interests, and academic disciplines of the participants, among other targeted improvements.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that with authentic commitment, the international academic community and related funding organisations can develop a multitude of impactful strategies to aid exiled Syrian academics. Such strategies include engaging in effective advocacy efforts at global forums, establishing partnerships with the higher education sector in the host community and increasing support for initiatives implemented locally, facilitating connections with global academic networks to provide remote work opportunities, offering advancement opportunities through scholarships, fellowships, and post-doctoral positions, and enhancing support for active organisations like Cara.

10.2- Recommendations

The insights gleaned from my research offer a profound and hitherto unavailable exploration of the experiences of Syrian academics in exile in Gaziantep, Turkey. This comprehensive analysis paints a vivid picture of their circumstances and has led me to craft a set of targeted recommendations for the academics themselves, the academic community in their host country, and the broader international academic sphere.

10.2.1- Recommendations to the Exiled Syrian Academics

My colleagues, I recognise the profound impact that living under an authoritarian regime has left on you, as well as the immense hardships you have endured since 2011—challenges so severe they could crush even the sturdiest souls. Yet, I have also witnessed

your remarkable resilience¹⁹. You have not only survived these adversities but have emerged with enhanced capabilities, insightful perspectives, and new skills. As this research concludes, my recommendations are intended to encourage you to fully acknowledge and utilise your strengths, address your weaknesses, and make meaningful contributions to your fields, your homelands, your host communities, and the broader expanse of humanity. The four key recommendations I offer to you are:

- a) **Have faith in yourselves:** Never allow anyone to diminish your worth, either as individuals or as academics. Your journey, marked by immense resilience in the face of losing homes, careers, belongings, and perhaps even loved ones in the conflict, commands profound respect. Starting anew in a foreign land, mastering new languages, acquiring new skills, and navigating these challenges while preserving your dignity and contributing actively to your communities—these are feats of remarkable strength. You ought to take pride in your perseverance and maintain a positive outlook, continuing to build on your strengths for even greater success and fulfilment.
- b) **Engage within an academic community:** Involvement in a supportive academic community, where members empathise with your experiences and share similar interests, can have a transformative effect on both your personal and professional growth. The collective strength of a unified community far exceeds the capabilities of its individual members. Such a community can provide a network of emotional, intellectual, and professional support that can unlock opportunities otherwise inaccessible to individuals on their own. Although the challenge of nurturing this

¹⁹ I adopt this tone and rhetoric as an insider researcher, employing an emic perspective and incorporating an autoethnographic element into the study.

kind of community is significant, especially in our unique circumstances, the potential benefits make it a pursuit worthy of repeated efforts. With genuine commitment, a skilled leadership team, the application of lessons learned, and a commitment to continuous improvement, creating a thriving academic community is achievable. If we manage to establish such a community, we will not only aid ourselves but will also set a precedent that can inspire the creation of other communities within our society, passing on a legacy of success to future generations.

- c) **Be proactive:** Rather than waiting for an invitation or recognition from the host or international academic communities to acknowledge your expertise, address your needs, or resolve your challenges, you should take the lead. Collaborate with your academic peers within the academic community—or even just with a small circle of trusted colleagues initially—to assess your current situation and set clear goals. Persist in your communications and approach challenges with patience, understanding that the path to resolution is often complex. Aim to contribute actively to the process, not just as a recipient of support but as a vital participant in shaping outcomes.
- d) **Continue to refine your academic skills:** Regardless of your current professional sector in exile, never forsake the academic identity you have dedicated substantial time, resources, and effort to develop. Strive to enhance your academic abilities by taking advantage of every opportunity available. Doing so will not only bolster your resilience and safeguard your intellectual assets but also improve your prospects for returning to valued academic pursuits and making meaningful

contributions to the scholarly community, both within your home country and internationally, as soon as the situation allows.

10.2.2- Recommendations to the Academic Community in the Host Country

The hardships endured by Syrian academics do not render them less capable; such adversities could befall anyone, anywhere in the world. Instead, their unique circumstances have refined their skills—academic and beyond—and strengthened their determination to succeed both personally and professionally. Despite the diversity and variance within the Syrian academic community, many among them are distinguished scholars possessing deep knowledge and extensive expertise, representing a valuable addition to any academic setting. Supporting them is not only a moral imperative but also a practical strategy that can benefit both the Syrian academics and the Turkish academic sphere²⁰. My recommendations for the Turkish academic community, drawn from this research, include:

- a) **Engage in meaningful communication with exiled academics:** Displacement leaves individuals feeling uprooted and disoriented. This sense of loss is particularly acute among academics, who often occupied esteemed positions within their home countries, contributing significantly to their institutions and enlightening countless students. Establishing effective communication channels with them is crucial—it can alleviate their distress, signal recognition of their value, and open avenues for them to demonstrate their expertise and potential contributions. Failure to engage, conversely, may lead to disillusionment,

²⁰ By the 'Turkish academic sphere,' I refer to the Ministry of Higher Education, higher education institutions, research centres, and other organizations dedicated to higher education.

prompting some to consider leaving the host country by any means necessary, even at great personal risk, further aggravating their plight.

- b) **Craft a comprehensive support framework:** This can begin with a detailed analysis of the specific challenges faced by exiled academics, employing the 'understanding phase' from the 'academic development model for challenging contexts,' as illustrated in Figure 6. Then, the process can move forward by leveraging the 'design phase' detailed in Figure 7 to develop a strategic framework. This strategic framework should outline objectives that the Turkish academic community can achieve independently, those that necessitate collaboration with local or international partners, goals appropriate for advocacy efforts, and others that are outside the current scope. The strategy should aim to capitalise on the exiled academics' strengths, meet their needs at both the individual and collective levels, and include measures that are either alleviating, transformative, or a combination of both. Realising meaningful transformation in the lives of exiled Syrian academics necessitates authentic dedication and cooperative efforts from a broad spectrum of stakeholders. This includes both local and international entities, encompassing government bodies, non-governmental organisations, and funding agencies. This strategy will enable Turkey to leverage the expertise of these academics by incorporating them into its higher education system or by supporting their contributions to the reconstruction of Syria's higher education in northern Syria, and potentially across the entire country when circumstances improve. This can bolster Syria's stability, incentivise the return of Syrian refugees, and enhance overall regional stability.

- c) **Foster innovative solutions:** Through working in partnership with various stakeholders, it is possible to devise unconventional initiatives that offer reciprocal advantages to both exiled academics and their host communities. An example of such innovation, mentioned earlier in this chapter, is the proposal to establish a university in Turkey where Arabic serves as the language of instruction. Such an initiative has the potential to attract numerous students from the Arab world, yielding substantial social, cultural, economic, and political gains for Turkey.

10.2.3- Recommendations to the International Academic Community

The international community, including the academic sector, should recognise both the ethical responsibility and the strategic advantages of supporting exiled Syrian academics. By embracing the duty to assist fellow academics in distress, the international academic community upholds the principles of inclusivity and solidarity. Such support not only enriches global knowledge but also strengthens our commitment to a more collaborative academic world. As outlined earlier in my thesis, these individuals represent substantial intellectual wealth crucial for the revitalisation of Syria's higher education system. The loss of such capital would detrimentally impact the sector for many generations. Furthermore, given that academics play a pivotal role in educating students across diverse fields such as medicine, engineering, law, education, social sciences, arts, humanities, and more, the ripple effects of neglecting this responsibility would extend, leading to profound consequences across all these sectors.

It is striking to observe the world's readiness to allocate vast sums of money and resources on armaments and engage in devastating conflicts, while simultaneously hesitating to assist those who are instrumental in educating and enlightening people,

expanding minds, and enriching knowledge. Such efforts play a crucial role in combating extremism, countering terrorism, and fostering peace. The expenditure on a single missile, aimed at destruction, could instead be redirected to profoundly impact the lives of hundreds of academics, and by extension, positively influence the futures of their students and communities.

The international academic community, as it stands, presents a somewhat indistinct entity. I believe that every academic institution around the world bears a piece of the collective onus to support not only exiled Syrian academics but also any scholar living in challenging conditions. In my view, this responsibility is rooted in the ethical principles of the academic world—solidarity and support—which are crucial not only for upholding the rights and well-being of fellow scholars but also for ensuring the robust exchange of ideas that is essential to academic progress. By supporting these scholars, academic institutions safeguard the diversity of perspectives that is vital for the advancement of knowledge and the fostering of global understanding.

Despite this, tangible accountability remains elusive. It is a poignant irony that the academic world, populated by the brightest minds and leading research institutions, often misses the mark in recognising and championing the cause of their distressed colleagues. This discrepancy underscores the imperative to initiate the 'Global Network for Academics in Challenging Contexts' that I proposed in Chapter 9. Such an organisation, with its broad and inclusive mandate, could assume a pivotal role in these circumstances, effectuating meaningful improvements in the livelihoods of these scholars.

In the case of Syrian academics exiled in Gaziantep, Turkey, this proposed global network could significantly amend the weaknesses in the response of the international

academic community, as detailed in Chapter 9 and highlighted again earlier in this chapter. Such an international entity would play a key role in bridging the existing gaps, offering a streamlined and unified response to support these academics in navigating their challenging circumstances.

10.3- Contributions

My research stands out for its holistic approach to studying the experiences of exiled Syrian academics, providing a unique emic perspective, unveiling rich and in-depth findings, and introducing innovative insights and frameworks, all of which are further elaborated in subsequent sections. Moreover, while the contributions of this study are immediately pertinent to the experiences of Syrian academics exiled in Turkey, their relevance extends far beyond this group. They have the potential to inform and improve the support strategies for academics across the globe living in challenging contexts.

10.3.1- Comprehensive Approach

The conceptual framework underpinning my research, depicted in Figure 1, employs a holistic approach to thoroughly understand the experiences of Syrian academics in exile in Gaziantep, Turkey. This approach is characterised by several key aspects: it begins with an assessment of their educational backgrounds prior to 2011, continues with an analysis of the impacts of the ongoing crisis in Syria since then, and deeply explores their displacement and exile narratives. Furthermore, the study looks into both the strengths and needs of these academics, their individual and collective experiences, their academic development practices, and the support systems available to them, both within their immediate academic community and from external sources in their host country and the wider international academic context. Moreover, it identifies

deficiencies within these support mechanisms and proposes actionable steps to bridge the gaps. This approach is novel in its depth and breadth, providing unprecedented insights into the situation of these exiled academics.

10.3.2- Emic Perspective

The insider perspective that permeates my research brings forth an authentic narrative from someone deeply entrenched in the context and who has navigated each phase of the journey first hand. Before the crisis, I was directly involved in Syria's higher education system. I then faced the dire repercussions of the conflict, including the loss of my job, home, and possessions. I experienced internal displacement before ultimately being compelled into exile. Outside the academic realm, I strived to keep my scholarly skills sharp, while also engaging with my peers as a colleague, educator, and mentor. Through various challenges in both my personal and professional life, I sought out support systems and relentlessly pursued the continuation of my academic endeavours. This emic perspective, enriched by continuous reflection, represents a pivotal contribution to the literature, articulating the experiences of Syrian academics through the words of one who has lived them.

10.3.3- Authentic and Rich Participant Narratives

The narratives provided by the research participants represent a rich mosaic of experiences, encompassing a wide array of backgrounds including men and women, academics at the onset of their careers as well as those deeply established, individuals whose academic experiences were confined to Syria, and those who pursued further education abroad. This diverse group includes academics currently engaged in their field, those who regularly cross borders to teach at universities in northern Syria, individuals

working outside the academic sphere, and some facing unemployment. Their stories, richly detailed across various themes and collected through one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions, are further enriched by my direct observations and continuous reflection. This multifaceted approach enables a nuanced analysis and interpretation of the research data, culminating in findings that are both extensive and profound.

10.3.4- Evidence-Based Frameworks, Strategies, and Practical Tools

Like many of my Syrian colleagues in Gaziantep who have found it challenging to secure academic positions, my professional journey has led me to roles within local and international humanitarian organisations. My responsibilities have encompassed strategic planning, organisational development, and project management, among others. This diverse professional background has significantly influenced how I approached the interpretation of my research findings. In addition to using my conceptual framework and engaging with the relevant literature, I have instinctively applied the skills honed in these non-academic roles to craft solutions and propose models for addressing the challenges faced by exiled Syrian academics. These contributions, stemming from a unique combination of academic insight and practical experience outside academia, offer actionable guidelines and innovative frameworks tailored for academics navigating similar challenging circumstances.

10.4- Limitations

The limitations of my research encompass a range of factors, including the representativeness of the sample and the broader scope of my study, which did not delve into specific dimensions such as differences across academic disciplines or challenges that are unique to gender. Furthermore, my research faces potential limitations due to my

own biases as a researcher, as well as biases that may influence the participants' narratives. It is also constrained by temporal and geographical factors, and susceptible to the impact of various external elements that could affect its outcomes.

10.4.1- Sample Representation and Data Generalisation

After setting the 'boundaries' of my case and pinpointing the 'research population', I embarked on identifying potential interview and focus group participants through my established network. This step was further enhanced by employing Snowball Sampling Methodology (SSM), allowing initial participants to recommend others who met the research criteria. Throughout this process, I endeavoured to ensure diversity among potential participants, aiming for a broad representation across men and women, age groups, academic disciplines, and experiences both pre- and post-displacement, to capture the group's complex dimensions.

Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that not all members of the identified 'research population' were chosen to participate in this study. Those not included may offer different perspectives and experiences, presenting a limitation in the representativeness of my research findings.

The objective of my research is not to extrapolate its findings to wider populations but to achieve a deep and sophisticated comprehension of the case of Syrian academics exiled in Gaziantep through the narratives of the participants. Embracing Robert Stake's (1995) principles, I emphasise that the essence of case study research lies not in enabling broad generalisations in a conventional, statistical manner, but in facilitating an in-depth exploration of a specific situation. This notion of 'naturalistic generalization' posits that case study insights can prompt readers to identify related phenomena within their own

contexts or experiences and apply the gained insights to similar contexts on an intuitive and experiential level, rather than relying on statistical prediction.

Hence, researchers seeking to get data that can be generalised in the conventional statistical sense should consider conducting further investigations. This involves employing alternative research methodologies and choosing different samples to achieve those ends.

10.4-2- Exploring Gender-Specific and Discipline-Related Variations

The comprehensive nature of my research facilitates an extensive exploration, marking a significant advantage. However, this broad approach also implies that a detailed examination of specific variations falls beyond its intended scope. For example, while the study's participants—comprising both men and women—have shared insights that touch upon gender-specific issues, such as the unique challenges of military conscription faced by men and reservations about how female lecturers would be received in a region long influenced by various military factions, these gender-based nuances warrant more focused investigation beyond the scope of this research. Similarly, although participants from various academic disciplines have raised points specific to their fields, like the necessity for specialised, well-equipped laboratories, gaining a comprehensive understanding of these discipline-specific perspectives necessitates additional, more targeted studies beyond what my current research aimed to cover.

10.4.3- Researcher and Participant Potential Biases

In embracing a subjective approach for this research, I have consciously acknowledged my biases and deeply valued participants' perspectives. This position has shaped the selection of my research topic —recognising that the journey of Syrian

academics in exile is inextricably linked to the broader tapestry of their lives, both prior to and following the crisis of 2011, and through the ordeals of displacement and exile. This acknowledgment has steered the adoption of my research stance (an emic viewpoint), my chosen paradigm (constructivism), the methods selected for data gathering (in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations), and the manner in which I have approached the analysis, interpretation, and presentation of the findings. While these biases are fundamental to the integrity of my study, some scholars may view them as limitations that merit recognition.

10.4.4- Temporal and Geographical Limitations

While my study includes a distinctive longitudinal element through ongoing participant observation and reflective analysis of the experiences of exiled Syrian academics, it is fundamentally designed as a cross-sectional study. It mainly relies on data gathered at a single point in time through interviews and focus group discussions. To achieve a different set of detailed outcomes, such as tracking the progress of exiled Syrian academics over a long duration and measuring the effects of support on their professional development and the new opportunities it has created for them, a traditional longitudinal study would be required. This would involve the repeated collection of data over a prolonged period and its subsequent detailed analysis to discern changes and trends.

Furthermore, my research is largely limited to examining the experiences of Syrian academics within the confines of Gaziantep in southern Turkey. While these findings might reflect parallel scenarios for Syrian academics elsewhere in Turkey, a broader investigative scope is essential to confirm this. The circumstances of Syrian academics

in exile across various global locales may differ significantly, necessitating distinct studies to fully understand the diverse challenges and opportunities they encounter.

At the culmination of my thesis, my ambition is that this research has meticulously navigated the intricate lives of Syrian academics in exile in Gaziantep, Turkey. By delving into the depths of their individual and collective strengths, addressing their nuanced needs, evaluating their professional development opportunities, examining their internal community dynamics, and assessing their relationships with both the academic community in their host country and the wider global academic sphere, I aim to have shed light on their multifaceted experiences.

It is my sincere hope that this study has not only succeeded in capturing and amplifying the voices and stories of the participants but has also managed to translate these experiences into a narrative that resonates across a broader spectrum, reaching stakeholders, policymakers, and global audiences. Through the dissemination of these insights, I aspire to spark a dialogue that transcends borders and academic fields, advocating for a deeper understanding and support for Syrian academics in exile.

Moreover, I envision that the findings and recommendations emerging from this work will act as a catalyst for tangible, positive transformations. I hope these insights will not only benefit Syrian academics navigating the complexities of exile but also offer valuable lessons and strategies for academics in similar situations worldwide. In doing so, this study aims to contribute to a more empathetic, informed, and proactive academic community that recognises the value and potential of every scholar, irrespective of their circumstances. Through this endeavour, I wish to inspire action that upholds the dignity, rights, and professional aspirations of scholars living in challenging contexts around the

world, fostering an academic environment that is inclusive, supportive, and enriching for all.

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Appendix 1: Ethics Review

If academic staff or students answer ‘yes’ to any of the questions in Section IV A) of the Ethics Review Checklist, a full ethics application must be made to the CSHE Research Ethics Advisory Group (REAG). Complete this form and send it to the Chair of the REAG along with supporting documentation: a copy of the full research proposal; any participant information sheets and consent forms; any surveys, interview schedules; any advertising material or proposed website wording. **It is important to note that you must not commence any research with human participants until full approval has been given by the CSHE REAG - you will be notified via email when this has been granted.**

Overview
Name of Applicant(s)
Nidal Acac
Contact Details (Please include your UoK address, email and telephone number)
Na534@kent.ac.uk +905310105390
Title of Project
Professional Development for Academics in Exile: An In-Depth Case Study of Syrian Academics in Turkey
Lay Summary (Please provide a brief summary of the study)
<p>This research aims to investigate the situation of Syrian academics exiled in Gaziantep, Turkey. It explores how those academics utilize the assets they have – as a community and individuals – to maintain and develop their academic skills. Furthermore, the research seeks to identify their academic needs and inform decision-makers – in the international academic community and education-focused organizations – of effective ways to help in this situation and other similar conflict and post-conflict contexts.</p> <p>First-hand accounts from within the Syrian academic community are scarce. Therefore, as an exiled Syrian academic myself, I am an insider and can bring a fresh and underrepresented perspective to this field of research. I can understand the participants’ circumstances before and after the crisis, speak their language, and express the sensitivity of their situation.</p> <p>The research follows the case study methodology and uses four methods to collect the data: document review, participant observation, in-depth interviews, and group discussions.</p> <p>The participants are Syrian academics exiled in Gaziantep, Turkey. They hold – or had held prior to the Syria Crisis – a post as a lecturer and/or researcher in a higher education</p>

<p>institution or equivalent. Snowball Sampling Methodology (SSM) will be used to recruit participants through networks and connections.</p> <p>In addition to the PhD thesis, the research findings can be disseminated through publication, conferences, and lectures.</p>
Name of Supervisor(s) (If applicable)
<p>Dr Tom Parkinson</p> <p>Dr Kathleen Quinlan</p>

Risks and ethical issues
Please list the principal criteria for inclusion and exclusion
<p>The participants are Syrian academics exiled in Gaziantep, Turkey. They hold – or had held prior to the Syria Crisis – a post as a lecturer and/or researcher in a higher education institution or equivalent. Those who meet the criteria will be eligible to participate in the research regardless of their gender, age, religion, ethnicity, political views, or any other factors.</p>
How long will each research participant be in the study in total, from when they give informed consent until their last contact with the researcher/s?
<p>Participants will be involved during the interviews and FGDs that will last about 60 minutes and 90 minutes respectively. They can skip any questions they do not want to answer. In addition, they will have the ability to withdraw from the interview or FGD at any time they like without giving any reason and without being disadvantaged in any way. In addition, as an insider, I will observe public academic and social interactions throughout the whole data collection period and my observations will not be intrusive – I will reflect on the events I normally participate in as a member of this community.</p>
What are the potential risks and burdens for research participants and how will you minimise them? (Describe any risks and burdens that could occur as a result of participation in the research, such as pain, discomfort, distress, intrusion, inconvenience or changes to lifestyle. Describe what steps would be taken to minimise risks and burdens as far as possible)
Please describe what measures you have in place in the event of any unexpected outcomes or adverse effects to participants arising from involvement in the project
<p>The main risk of taking part in the study is that some participants may feel uncomfortable talking about their past and current experiences or answer certain questions they consider sensitive; they might have concerns regarding the response of the Syrian regime, other ruling bodies in Syria, their current employers, or any other entities that might impact them or their family members. In this case I will change or skip those questions as it is my desire for participants to be as comfortable as possible. Moreover, after transcribing the interview audio recordings, I will share the transcription with participants and ask them if they agree to it, or if they would like to delete or alter any specific part of it. The participant information sheet will also include the contact information of some organizations based in Gaziantep that provide free psychological support services which the participants can benefit from if they feel uncomfortable after the interview of the group discussion.</p>

<p>Participant information and consent forms can be handed to potential participants in person or sent through WhatsApp or email (depending on their preferences). The forms will be put in simple clear Arabic to stress the fact that participation is voluntary and that they are free to withdraw at any time during the study without giving any reason and without being disadvantaged in any way. I will make sure that the data is fully pseudonymised and there is no way to identify any participant. I will be responsible for transcribing the recordings of the interviews and group discussions. Audio recordings will be destroyed once transcribed.</p>
<p>Will interviews/questionnaires or group discussions include topics that might be sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting, or is it possible that criminal or other disclosures requiring action could occur during the study?</p>
<p>Some questions might be considered sensitive to the participants.</p>
<p>If yes, please describe the procedures in place to deal with these issues</p>
<p>In this case I will change or skip those questions as it is my desire for participants to be as comfortable as possible. Also, after transcribing the audio recordings, I will share the transcription with participants and ask them if they agree to it, or if they would like to delete or alter any specific part of it. I will also make sure the participants know they are free to withdraw at any time during the study without giving any reason and without being disadvantaged in any way.</p>
<p>What is the potential benefit to research participants?</p>
<p>First-hand accounts from within the Syrian academic community are scarce. Therefore, as an exiled Syrian academic myself, I am an insider and can therefore bring a fresh and underrepresented perspective to this field of research. I can understand the participants' circumstances before and after the crisis, speak their language, and express the sensitivity of their situation.</p> <p>The emic perspective of the research will shed light on the situation of Syrian academics in Gaziantep and lead to a better understanding of their individual and collective needs and assets, and how they maintain and develop their academic skills and support each other professionally, intellectually, and emotionally. Furthermore, the research findings will inform decision-makers – in the international academic community and education-focused organizations – of effective ways to help in this situation and other similar conflict and post-conflict contexts.</p> <p>Furthermore, the reflection process will help Syrian academics exiled in Gaziantep have a deeper understanding of their situation, assets, and needs both as a community and individuals.</p>
<p>What are the potential risks to the researchers themselves?</p>
<p>I might face some risks similar to the participants'.</p>
<p>Will there be any risks to the University? (Consider issues such as reputational risk; research that may give rise to contentious or controversial findings; could the funder be considered controversial or have the potential to cause reputational risk to the</p>

University?) The purpose here is not to hinder risky research but to ensure that you have considered possible outcomes.
NO
Will any intervention or procedure, which would normally be considered a part of routine care, be withheld from the research participants, e.g. disruption of a student's access to their normal educational entitlement and curriculum? (If yes, give details and justification)
NO

Recruitment and informed consent
How and by whom will potential participants, records or samples be identified?
As a starting point, I will use my network of participants through Cara's Syria Programme to identify potential participants. Then, I will use Snowball Sampling Methodology (SSM) to recruit further participants through networks and connections.
Will this involve reviewing or screening identifiable personal information of potential participants or any other person? (If 'yes', give details)
No
Has prior consent been obtained or will it be obtained for access to identifiable personal information?
-
Will you obtain informed consent from or on behalf of research participants? (If 'yes' please give details. If you are not planning to gain consent, please explain why not).
Participant information and consent forms will be handed to potential participants in person or sent through WhatsApp or email (depending on their preferences). The forms will be put in simple clear Arabic to stress the fact that participation is voluntary and that that they are free to withdraw at any time during the study without giving any reason and without being disadvantaged in any way.
Will you record informed consent in writing? (If 'no', how will it be recorded?)
Yes
How long will you allow potential participants to decide whether or not to take part?
After they receive the invitation along with participant information and consent forms, potential participants will have up to a month to decide whether or not to take part.
What arrangements have been made for persons who might not adequately understand verbal explanations or written information given in English, or have special communication needs? (eg, translation, use of interpreters?)
The forms will be put in simple clear Arabic to stress the fact that participation is voluntary and that that they are free to withdraw at any time during the study without giving any reason and without being disadvantaged in any way. Moreover, I will be willing to meet participants in person or virtually to answer any questions they might have.
If no arrangements will be made, explain the reasons (eg, resource constraints)
-
Confidentiality

In this section personal data means any data relating to a participant who could potentially be identified. It includes pseudonymised data capable of being linked to a participant through a unique code number.

If you will be undertaking any of the following activities at any stage (including in the identification of potential participants) please give details and explain the safeguarding measures you will employ

- Electronic transfer by magnetic or optical media, email or computer networks
- Sharing of personal data outside the European Economic Area
- Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, emails or telephone numbers
- Publication of direct quotations from respondents
- Publication of data that might allow identification of individuals, either directly or indirectly
- Use of audio/visual recording devices
- Storage of personal data on any of the following:
 - Manual files
 - University computers
 - Home or other personal computers
 - Private company computers
 - Laptop computers
 - Servers at the University or elsewhere

The interviews and group discussions will be conducted in person or remotely considering participants' preferences (face-to-face, WhatsApp, Skype, or Zoom); they will be recorded using an audio recorder device (for face-to-face interviews) or the audio recording function of the selected online platform. They will be pseudonymised at the point of being transcribed by me (the researcher). Audio recordings will be destroyed once transcribed. If any participant does not approve the interview or group discussion being recorded, I will take synchronous notes that will be pseudonymised at the point of collection. I will make sure that there is no way to identify any participant – If necessary, I can change the information about a participant's gender, discipline, age or any other information that can identify them.

For the duration of the study, all data will be stored on a password-protected file on the researcher's computer. Paper consent forms will be kept securely in a locked cabinet in the researcher's place. The supporting research data from this study (the fully pseudonymised textual transcription data) will be deposited and archived on the secure Kent Data Repository (KDR). This will permit possible re-use and sharing of this data under an Open Access CC-BY licence.

How will you ensure the confidentiality of personal data? (eg, anonymisation or pseudonymisation of data)

All information collected about the participants will be kept strictly confidential and held in accordance with University of Kent guidance and GDPR guidance and requirements. Participants' personal data will only be accessed by the researcher.

Interview and group discussion recordings will be transcribed by the researcher and will be fully pseudonymised. Audio recordings will be destroyed once transcribed.
Who will have access to participants' personal data during the study?
Participants' personal data will be accessible only to the researcher.
How long will personal data be stored or accessed after the study has ended? (If longer than 12 months, please justify)
I will not keep any participants' personal data after the study has ended. The supporting research data (the fully pseudonymised textual transcription data) will be deposited and archived on the secure Kent Data Repository (KDR). This will permit possible re-use and sharing of this data under an Open Access CC-BY licence. In addition to the PhD thesis, I plan to disseminate the research findings through publication, conferences, and lectures. I will follow the guidelines of publishers and conference organisers as long as they do not conflict with what I have clarified in this application form.
Please note: as a requirement of many funders, where practical, researchers must develop a data management and sharing plan to enable the data to be made available for re-use, eg, for secondary research, and so sufficient metadata must be conserved to enable this while maintaining confidentiality commitments and the security of data.

Incentives and payments
Will research participants receive any payments, reimbursement of expenses or any other benefits or incentives for taking part in this research? (If 'yes', please give details)
No
Will individual researchers receive any personal payment over and above normal salary, or any other benefits or incentives, for taking part in this research? (If 'yes', please give details)
No
Does the Principal Investigator or any other investigator/collaborator have any direct personal involvement (e.g. financial, shareholding, personal relationship, etc) in the organisations sponsoring or funding the research that may give rise to a possible conflict of interest? (If 'yes', please give details)
No

Data Protection and GDPR compliance
What data do you need to collect (e.g. is this the minimum necessary for the research purposes?)
Personal data, narratives, and opinions.
Does it infringe on any personal rights?
No.
Have you included a privacy notice in participant information including a link to the University-level privacy notice?
Yes.
What would happen if the data was leaked?

Some participants might suffer the implications of giving accounts of their experiences or expressing their opinions. These can vary depending on the entity that might 'dislike' their opinions.
What measures have been put in place to mitigate risks to individuals?
All information collected about the participants will be kept strictly confidential and held in accordance with University of Kent guidance and GDPR guidance and requirements. Participants' personal data will only be accessed by the researcher. Interview and group discussion recordings will be transcribed by the researcher and will be fully pseudonymised. Audio recordings will be destroyed once transcribed. For the duration of the study, all data will be stored on a password-protected file on the researcher's computer. Paper consent forms will be kept securely in a locked cabinet in the researcher's place.
What processing option will you use (e.g. 'task in the public interest' / consent, etc.) and will an exemption apply to your research (e.g. processing for archiving purposes and for scientific or historical research and statistical purposes)?
Consent
How do you plan to store, access and work with, the data you collect?
For the duration of the study, all data will be stored on a password-protected file on the researcher's computer. Paper consent forms will be kept securely in a locked cabinet in the researcher's place. The supporting research data from this study (the fully pseudonymized textual transcription data) will be deposited and archived on the secure Kent Data Repository (KDR). This will permit possible re-use and sharing of this data under an Open Access CC-BY licence.
Will there be any third party involvement in processing the data?
No
Will the data be transferred outside of the European Economic Area?
The data will be collected in Turkey.
Can you fully anonymise the data and still achieve the same results?
Yes
What will you do with the data once you've finished with it?
The supporting research data (the fully pseudonymised textual transcription data) will be deposited and archived on the secure Kent Data Repository (KDR). This will permit possible re-use and sharing of this data under an Open Access CC-BY licence.

Publication and dissemination
How do you intend to report and disseminate the results of the study? If you do not plan to report or disseminate the results please give your justification
In addition to the PhD thesis, I plan to disseminate the research findings through publication, conferences, and lectures. I will follow the guidelines of publishers and conference organisers as long as they do not conflict with what I have clarified in this application form.
Will you inform participants of the results? (Please give details of how you will inform participants or justify if not doing so)

Yes, I will share the draft research findings with them before submitting my thesis or publishing any related papers.

Management of the research

Other key investigators/collaborators. (Please include all grant co-applicants, protocol authors and other key members of the Chief Investigator's team, including non-doctoral student researchers)

NO

Has this or a similar application been previously rejected by a research Ethics Committee in the UK or another country? (If yes, please give details of rejected application and explain in the summary of main issues how the reasons for the unfavourable opinion have been addressed in this application)

NO

How long do you expect the study to last?

• Planned start date: 09.05.2022	• Planned end date: 15.09.2024	• Total duration: 2 years
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Where will the research take place?

Gaziantep, Turkey

Does your research involve you travelling overseas?

Yes

If yes, please read, complete and attach to this proposal the University of Kent's Overseas Travel Risk Assessment Form (available here:

[https://www.kent.ac.uk/safety/hs/pages/travel-work-overseas/Travel'work Overseas Oct09 RevNov10.pdf](https://www.kent.ac.uk/safety/hs/pages/travel-work-overseas/Travel%20Work%20Overseas%20Oct09%20RevNov10.pdf)).

Insurance/indemnity

Does UoK's insurer need to be notified about your project before insurance cover can be provided?

No

Children

Do you plan to include any participants who are children under 16? (If no, go to next section)

No

Please specify the potential age range of children under 16 who will be included and give reasons for carrying out the research with this age group

-

Please describe the arrangements for seeking informed consent from a person with parental responsibility and/or from children able to give consent for themselves

-

If you intend to provide children under 16 with information about the research and seek their consent or agreement, please outline how this process will vary according to their age and level of understanding
-

Participants unable to consent for themselves	
Do you plan to include any participants who are adults unable to consent for themselves through physical or mental incapacity? (If yes, the research must be reviewed by an NHS REC or SCREC)	
No	
Is the research related to the 'impairing condition' that causes the lack of capacity, or to the treatment of those with that condition?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	If 'yes' proceed to next question
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	If 'no' the study should proceed without involving those who do not have the capacity to consent to participation
Could the research be undertaken as effectively with people who do have the capacity to consent to participate?	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	If 'yes' then the study should exclude those without the capacity to consent to participation
<input type="checkbox"/> No	If 'no' then the inclusion of people without capacity in the study can be justified
Is it possible that the capacity of participants could fluctuate during the research? (If yes, the research must be reviewed by an NHS REC or SCREC)	
No	
Who inside or outside the research team will decide whether or not the participants have the capacity to give consent? What training/experience will they have to enable them to reach this decision?	
-	
What will be the criteria for withdrawal of participants?	
-	

Declaration
To be signed by the Chief Investigator

- I agree to comply, and will ensure that all researchers involved with the study comply with all relevant legislation, accepted ethical practice, University of Kent policies and appropriate professional ethical guidelines during the conduct of this research project
- If any significant changes are made to the design of the research I will notify the CSHE Research Ethics and Advisory Group (REAG) and understand that further review may be required before I can proceed to implement the change(s)
- I agree that I will notify the CSHE REAG of any unexpected adverse events that may occur during my research
- I agree to notify the CSHE REAG of any complaints I receive in connection with this research project

Signed:

Date:

What to do next

Send your completed form, along with all supporting documentation, to the Chair of the CSHE Research Ethics Committee. Current chair (July 2016 -) is Dr Tom Parkinson (t.parkinson@kent.ac.uk).

Checklist

Please ensure you have included the following with your application (where relevant):

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| • Full research proposal (current project) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| • Participant information sheet | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| • Consent form | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| • Covering letter (if relevant) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Any questionnaires/interview schedules/topic guides to be used | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| • Any approved instruments/measures to be used | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Any advertising material to be used to recruit participants | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Confirmation that project is covered by UoK insurance policies (if necessary) | <input type="checkbox"/> |

This form is modelled on that used by the Social Sciences Faculty Research Ethics Advisory Group.

If you need advice on how to complete this form or have queries about ethical issues, please contact your supervisor, the Director of Research or the Chair of the CSHE REAG. There are useful resources in the CSHE shared folders, in the library and on the Research Services webpages.

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS
YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET

Invitation Paragraph

I am a PhD candidate at the Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Kent. I would like to invite you to participate in this research study which will be part of my PhD thesis. You should only participate if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study?

The aim of the research is to investigate the situation of Syrian academics exiled in Gaziantep, Turkey. It explores how they utilize their assets – as a community and individuals – to maintain and develop their academic skills. Furthermore, the research seeks to identify their academic needs and inform decision-makers – in the international academic community and education-focused organizations – of effective ways to help in this situation and other similar conflict and post-conflict contexts.

The research will involve a 60-minute interview and/or a 90-minute focus group discussion.

Why have I been invited to take part?

I am inviting you to take part because you are a Syrian academic domiciled in Gaziantep, Turkey.

Do I have to take part?

No, participation is voluntary. If you agree to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep, and be asked to sign a consent form. The consent form will include a privacy notice that will explain how your data will be collected and used.

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time and without giving a reason.

You need to be aware that

- All information collected about you will be kept strictly confidential and held in accordance with University of Kent guidance and GDPR guidance and requirements.
- Your personal data will only be accessed by the researcher. Any personal data will be destroyed either upon completion of the study, or within two years where you agree to be contacted as part of a follow-up study.
- Interview audio recordings will be transcribed and pseudonymised by the researcher. Audio recordings will be destroyed once transcribed.
- In addition to pseudonymising your interview data, I will ask you if you prefer to make any necessary changes to sensitive personal data (such as your age, gender, discipline, ...etc.) to keep full anonymity.
- For the duration of the study, all data will be stored on a password-protected computer file on the researcher's laptop. Paper consent forms will be kept securely in a locked cabinet in the researcher's place.

- After transcribing your interview audio recordings, I will share the transcription with you and ask you if you agree to it, or if you would like to delete or alter any specific part of it.
- Pseudonymised data from this study may also be used for publication and disseminated at conferences and lectures.
- The supporting research data from this study (the pseudonymised textual transcription data) will be deposited and archived on the secure Kent Data Repository (KDR). This will permit possible re-use and sharing of this data under an Open Access CC-BY licence.
- You will have access to the study findings if you so wish.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and will be asked to sign a consent form. I will then contact you via email or phone to organise a suitable time for the interview. The interview will be audio recorded (if you approve this. Otherwise, I will only take synchronous notes). Audio recordings will be destroyed once transcribed. The interview will take about 60 minutes and will be conducted at a place suitable for you and me. You can suggest the place you prefer and have a chaperone to accompany you in case of in-person interviews. You can also select the video-conference platform if you prefer an online interview. The questions will focus on your experience as an exiled Syrian academic.

I may also contact you and ask you to participate in a follow-up 90-minute focus group interview with 5 other participants. The questions will focus on the situation of Syrian academics exiled in Gaziantep, Turkey.

What are the possible benefits and risks of taking part?

The information I will get from the study will help me better understand the individual and collective needs and assets of Syrian academics in Gaziantep; how they maintain and develop their academic skills; and how they support each other professionally, intellectually, and emotionally. Furthermore, the research findings will inform decision-makers – in the international academic community and education-focused organizations – of effective ways to help in this situation and other similar conflict and post-conflict contexts.

The reflection process will help Syrian academics exiled in Gaziantep have a deeper understanding of their situation, assets, and needs both as a community and individuals. The main risk of taking part in the study is that you may feel some discomfort talking about experiences and opinions. In this case I will change the questions as it is my desire for participants to be as comfortable as possible. Moreover, I can suggest some organizations based in Gaziantep that can provide free psychological support services such as:

Hope Revival Organization: <https://hope-revival.ngo/>

UOSSM: <https://www.uossm.org/>

How is the research being funded? The research is not funded.

Who has reviewed this study? This study has been given a favourable ethical opinion by the University of Kent Ethics Committee.

Who should I contact for further information?

If you have any questions or require more information about this study, please contact me at:

Nidal Acac na534@kent.ac.uk

What will happen to the results of the study? I will include the findings in my PhD thesis and may disseminate them in publication and conferences.

What if I want to complain about the way data is handled?

If you wish to raise a complaint on how I have handled your personal data, you can contact the Data Protection Team on the matter. If you are not satisfied with the response or believe I am processing your personal data in a way that is not lawful you can complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) (<https://ico.org.uk/>).

For contact details of University of Kent's Data Protection Team and information on the University of Kent's information compliance policies please visit: <https://www.kent.ac.uk/infocompliance/>

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering taking part in this research.

You have up to a month to get back to me and let me know whether you would like to participate or not.

Appendix 2: Interview and Group Discussion Questions

Semi-structured interview questions

Academic development pre-2011

- 1) How did you develop your academic skills before 2011?
- 2) How has the Syria Crisis affected you as an academic?

Academic needs in exile

- 3) How are you developing your academic skills while exiled in Gaziantep, Turkey?
- 4) What needs do you have as an exiled academic? How do you try to meet them?
What can help you meet them better?

Academic assets and internal support in exile

- 5) What assets do you have as an exiled academic? How do you utilize them? What do you need to manage to better leverage them?
- 6) How do you benefit from your Syrian colleague academics (professionally, intellectually, emotionally, etc.)?
- 7) Do you support your Syrian colleague academics? How?
- 8) Have you taught at any universities in northern Syria? If yes, please describe your experience.

Host community

- 9) As an academic, do you receive any kind of support from the host country, Turkey? If yes, give details.
- 10) Have you taught at any universities in Turkey? If yes, please describe your experience.

11)What do you think they could do differently to support Syrian academics exiled in Gaziantep?

12)Do you receive any kind of support from the Turkish academic community? If yes, give details.

13)What do you think they could do differently to support Syrian academics exiled in Gaziantep?

Education-focused NGOs and International academic community

14)Do you receive any kind of support from education-focused organizations? If yes, give details.

15)What do you think they could do differently to support Syrian academics exiled in Gaziantep?

16)Do you receive any kind of support from the international academic community? If yes, give details.

17)What do you think they could do differently to support Syrian academics exiled in Gaziantep?

18)Have you visited the UK for a research incubation visit? If yes, please describe your experience.

Similar contexts

19)Do you know any Syrian academics living in a different city in Turkey? How is their situation different? What do you think we can learn from their experience?

20)Do you know any Syrian academics living in exile in a different country? How is their situation different? What do you think we can learn from their experience?

21) Are you familiar with any other similar situations of academics in conflict, post-conflict, or exile contexts? What do you think we can learn from their experience?

Wrap up

22) Many Syrian academics are interested in rebuilding Syria's higher education; how do you think you can participate in this?

23) Do you have any other comments on the topic of exiled Syrian academics in general?

Personal Information:

- Preferred pseudonym
- Age Group (21 – 30 / 31 – 40 / 41 – 50 / 51 – 60 / 60 +)
- Academic Area
- Job before the Syria Crisis
- Current job
- Year you left Syria
- How long have you been living in Gaziantep? Where did you live before?
- When and where did you get your master's degree/ PhD?

Group Discussions

The Syrian academic community in Gaziantep

- 1) Do you think that the Syrian academic community in Gaziantep is functioning well?
What do you think it needs to develop and function better?
- 2) What internal and external challenges does this community face? How do you think it can overcome these challenges?

Community needs and assets

- 3) What needs does this community have? How do you think it can meet these needs?
- 4) What assets does this community have? Are they being utilized by the community?
How do you think it can leverage these assets?

Academic development practices

- 5) What academic development practices does the community facilitate to its members?

Internal and external support

- 6) How do the community members support each other professionally, intellectually, and emotionally?
- 7) What external support does this community receive? Please give details.
- 8) How can this support be enhanced to achieve better outcomes?

Similar contexts

- 9) Are you familiar with any other similar communities? What can we learn from their experience?

Giving back to Syria and the world

10) How do you think the Syrian academic community in Gaziantep, and in exile in general, can participate in rebuilding Syria's higher education?

11) What can the Syrian academic community in Gaziantep, and in exile in general, provide to the international academic community?