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„Aspirations and Capabilities Stirred up by Conflict: The Impact of the Yemen Crisis on Migratory Patterns and Behavior Along the Eastern Corridor"

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Contents

List of abbreviations

AQAP	Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula
CBPR	Community-based participatory research
CDC	Constitution Drafting Committee
DLM/SLM	Dual Labor Market/ Segmented Labor Market
ECDHR	European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	gross domestic product
GMG	Global Migration Group
GWP	Gallup World Poll
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICG	International Crisis Group
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IDP	internally displaced person
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
NDC	National Dialogue Conference
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
MEE	Middle East Eye
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MMC	Mixed Migration Center
PDRY	People's Democratic Republic of Yemen
REF	Research and Evidence Facility
RMMS	Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat
STC	Southern Transitional Council
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US	United States of America
UNDESA	United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
YAR	Yemen Arab Republic

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Abstract

While Yemen has repeatedly made international headlines for the catastrophic situation brought about by years of conflict and multiple crises, it is often overlooked that the country serves as a transit node in one of the busiest migration routes in the world. The so-called Eastern Corridor spans from the Horn of Africa onto the Arabian Peninsula and presents the regional frame of this thesis that seeks to explore how the unfolding of the crisis in Yemen since 2011 has impacted the migratory patterns and behavior in the region. In order to overcome deficits of traditional approaches in migration studies, the meta-framework of aspirations and capabilities put forward by Hein de Haas is applied to review the literature on the situation and allow for a more nuanced understanding of migrants' motivation and migration decisions. It could be established that the people migrating in the region do not respond to migration drivers in an automated manner, as often portrayed in traditional approaches. On the contrary, they exhibit truly agentic behavior in the context of complex configurations of individual aspirations and capabilities embedded in larger opportunity structures that potentially work to constrain or facilitate migration. These findings contribute to a growing body of literature that foregrounds migrants as the subjects that actively shape migration processes rather than being pushed and pulled by external forces.

Während der Jemen aufgrund der katastrophalen Lage, die durch jahrelange Konflikte und vielfältige Krisen entstanden ist, immer wieder in die internationalen Schlagzeilen gerät, wird oft übersehen, dass er zugleich als Transitland einer der meistgenutzten Migrationsrouten der Welt dient. Der sogenannte *Eastern Corridor* erstreckt sich vom Horn von Afrika zur Arabischen Halbinsel und bildet den regionalen Rahmen dieser Arbeit, in der untersucht werden soll, wie sich die Krise im Jemen seit 2011 auf das Migrationsverhalten in der Region ausgewirkt haben. Um die Defizite traditioneller Ansätze in der Migrationsforschung zu überwinden, wird das von Hein de Haas vorgeschlagene Meta-Konzept der *aspirations and capabilities* angewandt, um die verfügbare Literatur zu der Situation zu evaluieren und ein differenzierteres Verständnis der Motivation und Entscheidungen der migrierenden Populationen zu ermöglichen. Dabei konnte festgestellt werden, dass die Menschen nicht auf die automatisierte Weise auf Migrationstreiber reagieren, wie es in traditionellen Ansätzen oft dargestellt wird. Konträr zu weitverbreiteten Annahmen, nehmen sie aktive Rollen ein und setzen bewusste Handlungen basierend auf einem komplexen Zusammenspiel individueller Bestrebungen und Fähigkeiten, die wiederum in Makrostrukturen eingebettet sind, welche etwaige Migrationsbestrebungen sowohl einschränken als auch erleichtern können. Diese Erkenntnisse erweitern die wachsende Zahl an Studien, die Migrantinnen und Migranten als handelnde Subjekte in den Vordergrund stellen, welche Migrationsprozesse aktiv mitgestalten, anstatt in einer *push-pull* Manier von externen Kräften kommandiert zu werden.

1. Introduction

In recent months, Yemen has resurfaced in international media, with observers yet again drawing attention to what has been termed 'the world's worst humanitarian crisis' for several years now.[1] Ever since the outbreak of the civil war in 2015, the situation has continually worsened and this time, it was the wheat shortages due to the Russian invasion in Ukraine that have been putting additional pressure on the already food-insecure population and, thus, have centered the world's attention on the disintegrating state once again. However, as Wilson-Smith (2019: 1) put it, "analyses of the civil war's humanitarian and geopolitical implications often overlook Yemen's role as the epicenter of one of the world's busiest mixed migration routes". In 2019, an average of 11,500 people per month crossed the Gulf of Aden, migrating along the so-called 'Eastern Corridor' from the Horn of Africa to make their way through Yemen and to Saudi Arabia, even surpassing the monthly crossings in the Mediterranean (UN 2020). This already opens the case for an interesting investigation as to why the dire conditions in Yemen, including an open conflict, do not seem to have deterred people from migrating to and through the country. What is more, when active fighting broke out and a Saudi-led coalition intervened with airstrikes across the country in 2015, observers were expecting a mass exodus by people fleeing the violence, however, the number of Yemeni refugees was much lower than anticipated and has not risen notably ever since (Akumu & Frouws 2016: 14). The overarching question to both of these observations lies at the heart of migration studies and will present the core interest of this thesis: Why do some people move, while others stay where they are?

In order to explore these questions thoroughly, this paper will first take an exclusively theoretical approach, reviewing different conceptual frameworks in the study of migration, before turning to the case study of the migration phenomena present along the Eastern Corridor and in Yemen in particular. In the first part, several conventional paradigms will be contrasted and evaluated with regard to their explanatory power towards modern migration. Then, as an alternative to the traditional approaches, de Haas' (2021) aspirations and capabilities framework will be presented as a particularly promising theoretical base that offers a comprehensive yet nuanced way of exploring migratory behavior in all its dimensions, including non-movement as an integral part of human mobility. In the second part, I will begin by providing an overview on the origins and the most relevant developments of the Yemen crisis. Understanding the origins and nature of the

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[1] See for instance Abdiker *et al.* (2018), IOM (2019b), Semnani and Sydney (2020), and ECDHR (2022).

conflict, as well as some of the crucial developments during the past years will help to get a better grasp of the forces at play within but also in the vicinity of the country, which all have undeniable effects on the migratory behavior in the region. The latter will then be explored in detail, with separate sections focusing on movements within, from, to and through Yemen.

As already indicated in a broad sense above, the main interest of this thesis lies in understanding the migratory behavior in and around Yemen in the face of the ongoing crisis. The precise research questions read as follows:

1) Why did only relatively few Yemenis leave the country despite the heightened security threats, infrastructure breakdown and large numbers of internally displaced people?
2) Why did the number of immigrants or transmigrants from the Horn of Africa not decrease but actually increase in the face of the dire conditions in Yemen?

The goal of this thesis is not only to explore and answer these questions but, in doing so, to also add to the growing body of literature that views migration as a function of people's aspirations and capabilities. Taking this approach allows not only for a migrant centered perspective but, at the same time, it incorporates broader opportunity structures that undoubtedly influence migration decisions. And while no claims can be made regarding generalizations that would go beyond the specific case of Yemen and the Eastern Corridor, the contribution can be such that this serves as a potential proof of concept for the aspirations and capabilities approach, while also providing another example of migration studies that seeks to highlight the migrants' agentic role in shaping migration processes rather than just being part of it.

2. Methodology

This thesis is organized as a literature review and aims at reviewing and collating the academic writing available and relevant to the research focus at hand. Additionally, various governmental as well as non-governmental organizations serve as a source for quantitative as well as qualitative data on migration flows, migrant populations, and a range of additional pieces of information regarding migrants' motivations, perceptions, and experiences. By combining scientific and gray literature, it is expected that certain knowledge and information gaps could be filled that undoubtedly exist given the dire conditions in the region that make research on the ground extremely difficult if not impossible.

Online searches for relevant academic literature were conducted with the Library and Archive Services of the University of Vienna, as well as the search engine Google Scholar. Initial

searches broadly addressed the different approaches taken in migration studies, with the snowballing method allowing to gather greater numbers of articles on the topic. Also, reports and data sheets from international organizations were gathered using the query functions typically provided on the respective web pages. The main databases and archives consulted in this way included those of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), and the Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (RMMS), which was later renamed Mixed Migration Centre (MMC). Keywords for the searches typically included but were not limited to variations and combinations of the terms 'Yemen', 'migration', 'crisis', 'conflict', 'Eastern Corridor', 'Horn of Africa', 'refugees', 'immobility', 'internally displaced' etc. With regard to selection, most articles and reports written in English were reviewed if they fell within the thematic, geographic and temporal frame of this study. However, different institutions sometimes provided varying or even contradicting data and information on specific aspects. Where feasible, such discrepancies were investigated, with the result of either a widened range of data used or the exclusion of the sources that were deemed unreliable.

While authors naturally take a certain theoretical standpoint towards their object of interest, it was important in this paper to extract relevant information without simply emulating the conclusions drawn by others. Rather, my interest lay in adopting a distinct theoretical approach and attempting to review the available literature from that perspective, in the hopes of gaining deeper and more nuanced insights. In order to achieve this, the first half of the paper is dedicated towards a conceptual exploration of approaches to migration studies. On the one hand, this should help to understand and deconstruct approaches and lines of arguments typically followed in migration studies and thus also present in the articles consulted in this investigation. On the other hand, the theoretical framework of aspirations and capabilities (de Haas 2021) is foregrounded as an alternative to overcome former deficits and provide a new perspective with promising insights into migration phenomena and behavior. The second part of the paper will then be dedicated to the case study and the application of this novel approach in order to refute some of arguments made in the past about migration, view certain phenomena in this area from a different angle, and to provide a more nuanced understanding of the migratory situation in this region of the world.

3. Migration theory

Migration studies is a vast scientific field at the crossroads of various social sciences. Here, numerous ways of engaging with the multifaceted nature of migration intersect with some of the more traditional concerns of migration theory. The latter could be briefly summarized in the questions as to "why people migrate, where they choose to go and how migration flows wax or wane" (Carling & Collins 2018: 909). An important dimension that seems to be sometimes overlooked or at least treated with neglect by many theorists is the issue of why, in fact, so few people are on the move, while the majority remains where they are. This aspect will therefore receive particular attention in the theoretical exploration below. First, I will provide an overview on different approaches that were used in the past to study migration before I turn to the cross-sectional concept of aspirations and capabilities. The latter will then serve as the theoretical base for further investigations in the case study section of this thesis.

3.1.   An overview of theoretical approaches to migration

Migration studies constitute a sometimes messy and unorganized patchwork of theories and models which deserves and, in fact, demands attempts to group and potentially synthesize existing approaches into something more comprehensive and perhaps able to address the phenomena of human migration in its diversity and complexity (de Haas 2021: 11). Reproducing and compiling the work of Hein de Haas as well as other authors, I have put together a list illustrating such an attempt in Table 1. It features a number of theories that were categorized under four main paradigmatic strains according to their underlying assumptions. At this point, it is important to note that the sets of theories and models are by no means complete, but rather aim at providing an exemplary overview and maybe highlight certain approaches that proved to be relevant in one way or another. In the following chapters, each of the four paradigms or perspectives is addressed separately, with the functionalist and the historical-structural paradigm receiving particular attention due to their larger presence in literature and consequently their more influential standing. The goal is to describe the development and characteristics of the paradigms and theories while also evaluating their explanatory power and potential shortcomings with regard to modern migration phenomena. For reasons of practicality, not all theories and models listed in Table 1 will be discussed in detail, however, more elaborate discussions can be found in the referenced literature.

Table 1 Paradigmatic classification of migration theories (own design; based on Arango 2000, de Haas 2010b, de Haas 2021, and Massey *et al.* 1993)

	Theories and models	**Underlying assumptions**
Functionalist paradigm	Neo-classical migration theory (Todaro 1969), push-pull models (Lee 1966), new labour migration theory (Stark 1991)	Migration is, by and large, an optimization strategy of individuals or families making cost-benefit calculations with regard to the uneven geographical distribution of labor and capital; migration strives towards an equilibrium that erodes the disparities between sending and receiving areas
Historical-structural paradigm	Neo-Marxist conflict theory (Collins 1994), dependency theory (Frank 1966), world system theory (Wallerstein 1974), dual labour-market theory (Piore 1979), critical globalization theory (Sassen 1991)	Migration is being shaped by structural economic and power inequalities; migration plays a key role in reproducing and reinforcing such inequalities; powerful elites oppress and exploit poor and vulnerable people; capital seeks to recruit and exploit labor; ideology and religion serve to justify exploitation and injustice
Symbolic interactionist perspective	Transnational theory (Vertovec 2010), diaspora theory (Safran 1991), creolization theory (Cohen 2007)	Migrants' everyday experiences, perceptions and identity become the main focus of inquiries in migration studies
Internal dynamics perspective	Network theory (Massey *et al.* 1987), institutional theory (Massey *et al.* 1993), migration systems theory (Mabogunje 1970), cumulative causation theory (Massey 1990)	Migration processes have a tendency towards becoming partly self-perpetuating, leading to the formation of migrant networks and migrant systems

3.1.1. The functionalist paradigm

Ever since lasting theory building in the scientific realm of migration started in the second half of the twentieth century, the functionalist paradigm and the theories it encompasses have assumed a strong and highly influential position in migration studies. However, in the past decades this powerful stand has withered away significantly, as new paradigms and theories have emerged and migration processes themselves have evolved, exposing inherent weaknesses of the formerly well-established approach and cracking the mold applied by theorists in the past. Said theorists drew much of their explanatory power from the area of economics, reflecting the then prevailing notion of the general primacy of economic motivations in migration (Carling & Collins 2018: 913). This

way of thinking can be traced back to the observations made by Ernst Ravenstein towards the end of the 19th century, who lists various factors, such as bad or oppressive laws, heavy taxation or an unattractive climate, that can potentially produce "currents of migration", but he eventually concludes that "none of these currents can compare in volume with that which arises from the desire inherent in most men to 'better' themselves in material respects" (Ravenstein 1885: 212). This notion of economic reasoning lying at the heart of human migratory behavior was then firmly established several decades later by Arthur Lewis and his dual economy model, which should eventually become a predecessor of neo-classical migration theory (Arango 2000: 284).

Lewis' model was designed to address economic development; however, migration played an essential role, possibly making it the first truly theoretical explanation in this field (ibid.). In a nutshell, dual economies are comprised of an expanding modern sector that typically exhibits a demand for workforce and a traditional one where a growing pool of subsistence farmers is working at zero marginal productivity. According to Lewis, migration sets in to satisfy the need of the modern sector for cheap migrant workers and allowing the traditional sector to get rid of surplus labor, potentially resulting in further expansions in the modern sector and a strive in the farming communities towards higher capital-output ratios (Arango 2000: 284). With people migrating from the traditional sector to the modern sector, not only are their individual economic needs satisfied but both the sending and receiving sector should benefit, leading to the advancement of the economy as a whole (Karpestam & Andersson 2020: 5).

While Lewis focused on internal labor migration in his work, scholars would soon extend the grasp of this functionalist paradigm by attempting to explain a wider array of migration that also goes beyond national borders. Before the first neo-classical theory was formulated, push-pull models emerged as a prototype that interprets migration "as a function of income and other opportunity gaps between origin and destination areas" (de Haas 2021: 5). These gaps are directly related to various economic, environmental, and demographic factors which are assumed to "push migrants out of places of origin and lure them into destination places" (de Haas 2010a: 4). With the advance of neo-classical economics, it was not before long that a corresponding migration theory was then pioneered by Michael Todaro in 1969, bringing economic concepts such as rational choice, utility maximization, expected net returns, factor mobility and wage differentials to the center stage of the academic discourse on migration (Arango 2000: 285).

At the macro-level, the neo-classical migration theory picked up on the hypothesis implicitly brought forward by Lewis that migration results from an uneven geographical distribution of

labor and capital (de Haas 2011: 9). At the micro level, it is assumed that a rational and risk-neutral individual tries to maximize their income by conducting cost-benefit analyses and migrating to the area that promises the most gains (Fischer *et al.* 1997: 54; Karpestam & Andersson 2020: 4). Scholars then theorized further that through migration and the resulting capital flows, the disparities between areas are being eroded away, reducing the incentive to migrate and ultimately leading to the cessation of migration (Arango 2000: 284-5; de Haas 2010a: 5). Migration as a whole is therefore characterized as a "positive phenomenon contributing to productivity, prosperity and, eventually, greater equality in origin and destination societies through bidirectional flows of resources such as money, goods and knowledge" (de Haas 2021: 5). This thinking also complies with the functionalist tendency to see society as a system of interdependent parts that share an inherent tendency towards an equilibrium (de Haas 2011: 8)

The initial success of the neo-classical migration theory and the functionalist paradigm as such is not surprising. In the words of Arango, it is "[s]imple, elegant, akin to commonsense" and it has the advantage of "combining a micro perspective of individual decision-making and a macro-counterpart of structural determinants" (Arango 2000: 285). Furthermore, it has to be noted that the notion that migration results from spatial disparities continues to dominate most migration models as well as 'commonsensical' and non-specialist thinking about migration that can, for instance, be observed in geographical textbooks (de Haas 2010b: 4; Malmberg 1997: 29). However, as already indicated in the beginning, the firm stand of the functionalist paradigm has nonetheless received major blows. Brought about by its own intrinsic shortcomings and further aggravated by the profound changes of the characteristics and nature of international migration since the mid-1970s, the neo-classical theory has thus been in demise for the past decades.

To begin with, the neo-classical theory has been incapable of explaining why so few people are actually on the move, given the fact that our world is defined by huge differences in income, wages and levels of welfare and opportunities. Terming it "the Achilles' heel of neo-classical theory", Arango, among other authors, states that real migration flows do not even rudimentary come close to the volume that should be expected if they were to conform to the functionalist postulate that expects people to migrate in order to overcome said differences and disparities (Arango 2000: 286; de Haas 2021: 6; Hammar & Tamas 1997: 1). In the same vein, it could be asked why the levels of both immigration and emigration tend to be higher in wealthier nations than their poorer counterparts, or why economic development often leads to an increase in emigration, while the neo-classical migration theory would predict the contrary (de Haas 2021: 6). Similarly, the

proclaimed reduction in economic disparities and the establishment of an equilibrium among sending and receiving countries could not be sustained by available data (Arango 2000: 287).

Another set of conceptual issues arises from the one-dimensional nature of neo-classical migration theory. While the functionalist perspective suggests that a rationally conducted cost-benefit analysis by the individual will determine whether or not migratory movements will take place, factors such as "poverty, inequality, immigration restrictions, government repression and violence can prevent people from migrating, cause their forced displacement or compel migrants into exploitative work conditions", however, these are not included in the functionalist equation (de Haas 2021: 5). Furthermore, by excluding political and social dimensions, the neo-classical approach has inherent difficulties in grasping the often differentiated nature of migration processes, and is therefore increasingly at odds with a world where migration barriers, structural inequalities as well as discriminatory behavior are deterring would-be migrants (Arango 2000: 286; de Haas 2014: 8).

In the face of this criticism, the new economics of labor migration became a popular variant of neo-classical migration theory in the 1980s, including a few amendments and additions. While the basic cornerstone – rational choice based on a cost-benefit analysis – remains the same, the individual is replaced by an entire family or household that seeks to 1) diversify their sources of income, 2) overcome malfunctioning credit markets through remittances and 3) reduce their sense of relative deprivation compared to households in their vicinity (Karpestam & Andersson 2020: 7). In doing so, the new economics of labor migration pay heed to factors such as income distribution, imperfect markets and relative poverty that have been typically overlooked from a neo-classical perspective (Arango 2000: 288; de Haas 2021: 5). Undoubtedly, this is beneficial with regard to extending the grasp of the functionalist outset. However, the theory remains trapped in the assumption that the decision maker – now households instead of individuals – is a rational actor that plays their role in the allocation process of labor and resources which should decrease economic inequalities between origin and destination areas - a claim that, as already pointed out above, is hard to sustain (de Haas 2010a: 232; de Haas 2021: 5). For that matter, functionalist theories face even greater difficulties in explaining how, in the real world, migration can - instead of reducing disparities - at times even reinforce pre-existing inequalities, which stands diametrically opposite their equilibrium cornerstone (de Haas 2021: 7). In this regard, the historical-structural paradigm brings forward the argument that the existing structures "have, in fact, a tendency

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to reproduce or even reinforce inequalities", making it potentially superior in its explanatory power, which I will further investigate below (de Haas 2014: 10).

3.1.2. The historical-structural paradigm

As already pointed out above, theories under the historical-structural paradigm, share the assumption that - opposite to what functionalist theories are suggesting - social and economic systems reproduce and sometimes reinforce structural inequalities instead of trending towards an equilibrium where disparities may have been eroded away (de Haas 2011: 11). An explanation for this diametrically opposed view lies in the perception that, while in neo-classical theory migration is caused by quantifiable economic differences in sending and receiving areas, structuralists highlight the impact of social, economic or political structures that determine the preconditions for migration (Malmberg 1997: 37). Within this framework neo-Marxist conflict theory further elaborates that it was capitalist modernization which caused sustained changes to the aforementioned structures and set the scene for labor migration that has the sole purpose of serving the interests of the wealthy by providing a cheap, exploitable labor force (Castles *et al.* 2014: 32).

Interestingly, while the historical-structural paradigm rejects the functionalist idea that migration serves the purpose of moving economies in both sending and receiving areas forward, it does not challenge the view that with overall economic progress, migration will decrease and eventually cease as soon as disparities have been eliminated (de Haas 2010b: 14). In addition to that, we can draw further parallels between the functionalist paradigm and the historical-structural theory of the dual or segmented labor market (DLM/SLM) coined by Michael Piore (1997), albeit including major caveats. At a basic level, similar to Lewis' dual economy model, Piore suggests that economic advances have resulted in the segmentation of the labor markets into a primary and a secondary sector, which ought to present the root cause of migratory movements. However - turning to the inherent differences - the segmentation predominantly took place in advanced industrial societies, creating on the one hand a capital-intensive primary sector where "wages are high, jobs are secure and there are significant returns to education" and on the other a labor-intensive secondary sector that "employs low-wage, unskilled labor, has a low degree of job security and low returns on education" (Karpestam & Andersson 2020: 8). According to DLM, migration sets in because the overall characteristics of the secondary sector do not attract domestic workers but instead labor migrants are recruited to fill that void (Arango 2000: 288; Piore 1979: 35).

In a similar vein, world system theory (Wallerstein 1974) focuses on macro-economic processes and the idea that there is a high demand of cheap labor in advanced economies. However, to explain the root causes of the resulting migration, it takes one step back to when 'capitalist penetration' brought about major disruptions in less developed countries which, until today, have been assured by neo-colonial regimes, multinational corporations and direct foreign investment (Arango 2000: 290). Said initial disruptions occurred in the course of the modernization and commercialization of agriculture which caused the displacement of workers and created a large labor surplus that could not be absorbed by the not yet developed non-agricultural sector. The result was an uprooted working class, prone to move abroad to 'core-countries' that have high demand for cheap and unskilled workers (Castles *et al.* 2014: 32). In a nutshell, according to the world system theory, migration thus constitutes the product of the "domination exerted by core countries over peripheral areas", a view that is also shared by the dependency theory that was brought forward in the 1960s and thus fits well under the umbrella of the historical-structural paradigm (Arango 2000: 290).

And while it can provide valuable insights to look at migration through this historical-structural lens, as it may shed light on the past and present linkages between countries at different economic stages, it is important not to overlook the inherent flaws and shortcomings of this paradigm. Beginning with the feature it shares with the functionalist perspective, namely, that migration decreases as areas become economically more developed, it has to be restated that the migration-development nexus is by no means linear and that even the opposite, that is, an initial increase in migration in the course of economic progress, can be observed – an issue that will receive further attention in the subsequent chapters. Moreover, upon closer inspection of DLM, it can be stated that neither the assumption that all migration is demand driven nor that it is entirely organized through recruitment hold, when applied to the differential nature of real migration flows (Arango 2000: 290). Also, DLM is unable to explain why immigration rates sometimes differ greatly across countries that share similar economic structures (ibid.).

To conclude, it can be said that the overall rather one-sided and deterministic perspective of the historical-structural paradigm exhibits very similar weaknesses to the ones of the functional paradigm, albeit their otherwise opposing views. For that matter, historical-structural views, too, leave hardly any room for human agency: while migrants are described as rather robotic utility optimizers in neo-classical theory, neo-Marxist conflict theory and its cognates portray them as passive victims of global capitalist forces (Arango 2000: 291; de Haas 2021: 8). An attempt to

overcome this deficit and to conceptualize the diversity of migration, while also shedding light on migrants' agency, was made by a growing body of literature that emerged in the 1980s (Castles *et al.* 2014: 37). We will now turn to some of the representatives of these perspectives that tried to incorporate the migrants' identity, relationships, and transnational interactions, which are all presumed to exert influence on migration processes at large.

3.1.3. The symbolic-interactionist perspective

Alongside others, transnational theory emerged towards the end of the 20th century, as a growing body of literature was attempting to grasp the impact of globalization processes on international migration. It argues that the advances in international telecommunication have increased migrants abilities to maintain social ties across borders and, in fact, the entire globe, allowing them to "foster multiple identities, travel back and forth, to relate to people, to work and to do business and politics simultaneously in distant places" (Castles *et al.* 2014: 41). This array of opportunities is said to not only have an impact on migrants' identities and their behavior, but also contribute to wider transformations that involve the migrants' entire social network and the institutional settings that they are embedded in, ultimately feeding back into globalization processes (Vertovec 2004: 970).

In a similar vein, diaspora theory (Safran 1991) places migrants within a community that spans across national borders and that is connected through a shared identity that can be sustained more easily thanks in part to technological progress (Castles *et al.* 2014: 42). These transnational communities and the migrants associated with it typically exhibit several of the following features: 1) often traumatic dispersal from an original homeland; 2) alternatively, the expansion from said homeland for economic purposes; 3) a collective memory and myth about the homeland; 4) and idealization of the supposed ancestral home; 5) a return movement; 6) a strong group consciousness and sense of solidarity sustained over a long time; 7) a troubled relationship with host societies; 8) the possibility of a thriving settlement in tolerant host countries (Cohen 1997: 180). And while this allows for interesting insights into the ways that international migration is potentially shaped and defined by globalization processes and transnational migrant networks, there are some inherent shortcomings that need to be addressed too.

First of all, referring to the historical cases of the Jewish and Armenian diasporas, some critics note that transnationalism as such is not a new phenomenon, and that globalization merely increased its scope instead of causing its emergence (Castles *et al.* 2014: 42). While this chips away from one of the pillars of transnational theory, the conceptual orientation towards migrants'

identities and how they both shape and are shaped by migration processes remains a solid second base. Focusing on such aspects of migration alongside highlighting the migrants' role as subjects that relate to one another clearly represents a strength of symbolic-interactionist perspectives when compared to the functionalist or historical-structural paradigms. At the same time, however, it can be noted that an inherent weakness stems from the fact that while said aspects are foregrounded, one of the core questions of migration studies, namely why people migrate, is mostly neglected or answered in a reductionist manner. In this regard, diaspora theory offers three causes for migratory movements (see 1), 2) and 5) above). And while forced displacement, a strive for economic betterment and returning to one's origin country can be highly relevant factors in understanding migration, they do not summon up enough explanatory power for the complex migratory behavior we can observe, especially since all three are viewed within a diasporic context that simply does not apply to the majority of migrants (Castles *et al.* 2014: 43). This leaves us with a theoretical approach that, while highlighting some interesting and relevant aspects of migration, falls short of grasping the phenomenon outside of its limited scope. That being said, we will now turn to the internal dynamics perspective, uniting theories that have a similar outset to the interactionist one, but attempt to go a little further in assessing the driving factors of migration.

3.1.4. The internal dynamics perspective

While the above transnational and diaspora theory focus merely on the role of identity and migrants' positions within transnational communities, theories emanating from the internal dynamics perspective, such as network theory (Massey *et al.* 1987), institutional theory (Massey *et al.* 1993), migration systems theory (Mabogunje 1970) and cumulative causation theory (Massey 1990), expand their view in a way that explores how migration is linked to additional forms of exchange between migrants and the social networks or institutional framework they are embedded in. Among other aspects, they address how migration relates to a flow of goods, ideas and money as well as how these change the initial conditions under which migration takes place (Castles *et al.* 2014: 43).

The indispensable role of migrant networks lies at the core of the internal dynamics perspective. Foregrounded by network theory, they are defined as "sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin" (Massey *et al.* 1993: 448). These networks and the interactions that take place within are generally subsumed as social capital that serves to

facilitate the migration process by providing access to both tangible and non-tangible resources (Arango 2000: 291). As soon as some pioneer migrants have established themselves in a destination area, they can aid their friends and family due to their own experiences, giving them relevant information about travelling to and settling in the host country, as well as dealing with the local bureaucracy and finding employment (Karpestam & Andersson 2020: 9). Migration networks can therefore have a multiplier effect, providing potential migrants with more and more social capital while simultaneously reducing the costs and risks typically associated with the migration process.

Similarly, albeit with a different focus, institutional theory explores the facilitating role of institutions that arise alongside and often in response to migration processes. According to theorists, it is the imbalance between the large number of people that seek entry into certain countries and the limited amount of immigrants these countries typically accept that create a lucrative niche for entrepreneurs and institutions dedicated to promoting international movement for profit (Massey *et al.* 1993: 450). This can take the form of cheap flight connections established between emigrant and immigrant countries, as well as illegal services that facilitate undocumented migration (de Haas 2010c: 1590; Karpestam & Andersson 2020: 11). The establishment of the latter then can in turn lead to the formation of humanitarian groups that, in the face of migrant exploitation, aim to help people on the move by providing counseling, social services, shelter, legal advice and sometimes even protection from immigration law enforcement authorities (Massey *et al.* 1993: 450). Just like the availability and growth of migrant networks, the build-up of such institutions that are dedicated to arranging immigrant entry – legal and illegal – contributes to an increase in social capital potentially available to future migrants. And with more people making use of this capital, migration is bound to increase, which points at the self-perpetuating nature of migration often proclaimed by the internal dynamics perspective (Arango 2000: 292; de Haas 2010c: 1590; Faist 1997: 193; Karpestam & Andersson 2020: 9).

While the feedback cycles described in both network and institutional theory tend to reinforce each other rather directly, there are other feedback mechanisms that work on a more contextual level and that are theorized by migration systems and cumulative causation theory. The former was pioneered by Akin Mabogunje, who focused on the ways that information flows between destination and origin areas would lead to the establishment of a stable migration system that featured "almost organized migratory flows from particular villages to particular cities" (Mabogunje 1970: 13). Along the same lines, Douglas Massey reintroduced and expanded on Gunnar Myrdal's (1957) concept of "circular and cumulative causation" that described, how "migration induces

changes in social and economic structures that make additional migration likely" (Massey 1990: 4-5). These changes include, among others, 1) the impact of remittances on income and land distribution inequality and related feelings of relative deprivation; 2) the capitalist disruption of agrarian production systems and displacement of workers in sending areas; and 3) the establishment of a 'culture of migration' due to a narrative of 'the successful migrant' (Massey *et al.* 1993: 451–3). And while these scenarios seem plausible to understand how various feedback mechanisms can develop and lead to continued migration processes, we are left with two conceptual weaknesses that I will now turn to.

Firstly, empirical evidence altogether puts the concepts of migration networks and migration systems into perspective, as the majority of cases of initial migration moves does not trigger anything close to the self-perpetuating dynamics suggested by the theories. This inherent flaw was systematically overlooked, as sampling in empirical studies tended to focus on the network variable, ignoring the majority of cases in which initial migration moves did not lead to migration networks or migration system formation (de Haas 2010c: 1596). Secondly, the central argument of theories from the internal dynamics perspective is largely circular, clashing with real world migration observations that potentially feature a decline in migratory movements and a breakdown of migration networks, too. Alongside the suggestion that migration, once begun, continues as long as there are potential migrants, they barely give any insight into possible migration dampening mechanisms (ibid.: 1612). Lastly, related to the inability to conceptualize negative feedback processes, the theories also appear to neglect the double-edged nature of social networks: While it is true that social groups are indeed extremely useful in facilitating the migration of group members, they might similarly work towards excluding outsiders (Castles *et al.* 2014: 46). Thus, concluding with another set of theories that only provides limited conceptual consistency and a restricted applicability with regard to observable migration phenomena, we will now turn to a more promising approach that attempts to grasp migration in its entirety by combining and synthesizing existing theories and models into a conceptual meta-framework.

3.2.   Migration as a function of aspirations and capabilities

Despite the presence of numerous and varied approaches to the complex phenomenon of migration, it appears that none have been able to provide answers to some of the questions at the heart of migration studies without leaving major issues unaddressed, overgeneralizing and oversimplifying differentiated processes, or suggesting models that are de facto disproven by real world

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migration. While some of the views presented above do in fact provide valuable insights into some forms of migration in the past and present, they lack the compatibility as well as the malleability to cater for the qualitative and quantitative multiplicity that is inherent in modern migration, and also non-migration for that matter. In the following chapters, I would like to turn to an approach introduced by Jørgen Carling (2002) and further elaborated, among others, by de Haas (2014). It views migration as a function of aspirations and capabilities, yielding a promising framework that aims at recycling and combining some viable notions from prior approaches while also introducing new perspectives – a constellation that I will now explore and review in detail.

3.2.1. A meta-conceptual framework

To begin with, it is relevant to note that various authors (Carling & Schewel 2018) have shared the perception that formulating a comprehensive theory of migration remains the biggest challenge in migration studies to this day, while some scholars (Arango 2000) deem it an impossible feat altogether, given the complex and diverse nature of the phenomenon. However, de Haas (2021: 3) notes in this regard that "it would be misleading to suggest that the goal of social theory is to develop all-explaining, universal theories because social phenomena always need to be understood within the specific historical and social contexts in which they occur". Also referring to the quest towards a universal theory of migration, Tomas Hammar and Kristof Tamas (1997: 2) state that "what we need at this stage is not a new general theory, but a multidisciplinary evaluation of available social science theories in an attempt to apply them to the new world of international migration". And while the complexity of the phenomenon and the perceived impossibility of uniting existing theories may cause some to abandon efforts towards a comprehensive conceptual framework altogether, de Haas elaborates further that complexity, on the contrary, should be the very reason that we embark on theoretical quests to discern, as he puts it, "the wood for the (empirical) trees" (de Haas 2021: 4). In this context, the aspirations and capabilities model does not claim to provide another competing theory with absolutist claims but rather a meta-conceptual frame that attempts to strike a balance between diversity and unity in approaches to migration (Carling & Schewel 2018: 960).

Under this pretense and returning to the most prominent paradigms in migration studies, namely the functionalist and the historical-structural approach, it is the proclaimed goal to swap theoretical exclusivism for conceptual eclecticism, allowing for a combination of the explanatory value of both concepts and benefitting from the fact that one theory might be more suitable for

certain types of migration than the other and vice versa (de Haas 2021: 9). In doing so, the framework caters for the need of incorporating a variety of perspectives, levels and assumptions in order to explain the complex and multifaceted nature of the phenomenon at hand (Massey *et al.* 1993: 432). In this regard, de Haas elaborates that migration theories can potentially be combined across five analytical dimensions: 1) different levels of analysis (macro-, meso- and micro-level); 2) different geographical, regional and national contexts; 3) different social groups; 4) different points in time; and 5) different thematic or disciplinary perspectives (de Haas 2021: 11). As will be outlined below, the aspirations and capabilities framework theorizes migration in such a way that spans across various of these dimensions and brings together aspects of theories that may stand as diametrically opposed as the functional and historical-structural representatives mentioned earlier.

The foundation for this integrative approach was laid by Carling (2002) who studied the migratory behavior among people in Cape Verde and came to conclude that "migration first involves a *wish* to migrate, and second, the *realization* of this wish", later conceptualizing this distinction as people's aspiration to migrate, on the one hand, and their ability to do so, on the other (ibid.: 5; original emphasis). While making human agency a central element of the equation, the division of migration into a two-step process creates the base for a diversified perspective towards migratory phenomena and, among others, integrates the multilayered issue of non-migration, which has been largely overlooked or ignored by conventional theories in the past (de Haas 2014: 22). As illustrated in Figure 1, the separation acknowledges the possibility of people wanting to migrate but not being able to, and also people not wanting to migrate even though they would have the ability to, pointing at the potentially two-fold reasons for observed non-migration (Carling & Schewel 2018: 947). This diversification already caters for a much broader spectrum of migratory constituents than conventional theories do and provides a conceptual base for research interested in discrepancies between migration intentions and behavior, such as the one conducted by Katy Gardner *et al.* (1985). Furthermore, Carling sought to include structural conditions as determining factors in the migration (non-)realization process, that he subsumed under the terms 'emigration environment' at the aspiration stage and 'immigration interface' at the ability stage, which are also included in Figure 1.

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Emigration
environment

Immigration
interface

Voluntary
non-migrants

Aspiration

Involuntary
non-migrants

Ability

Migrants

Individual-level
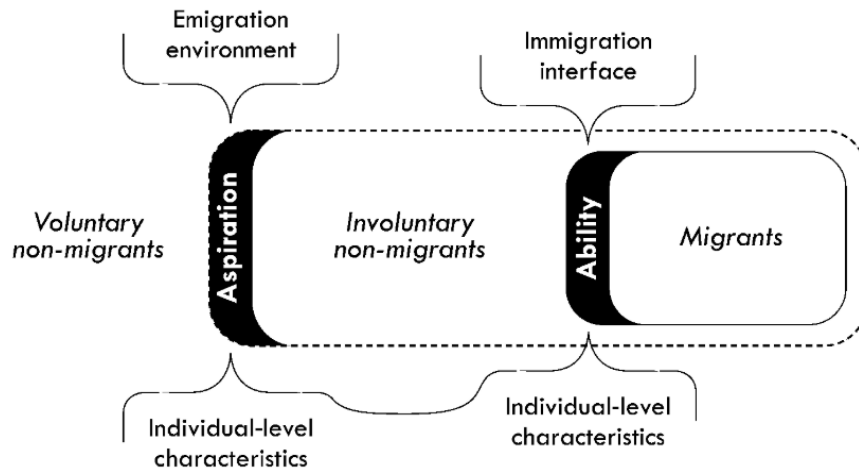characteristics

Individual-level
characteristics

Figure 1 The aspiration/ability model (Carling 2002: 12).

In the following chapters, I will explore in detail how de Haas' (2014) aspirations and capabilities approach, that emanated from Carlings' grounding, works further towards integrating concepts of both human agency and structural conditions as integral parts of migration into one consistent framework, while also revising conceptualizations of mobility as well as immobility, in order to foreground the relevant and varied nature of non-migration, too.

3.2.2. Conceptualizing agency and structure

As already indicated at various points above, one of the main conceptual problems of conventional migration theories remains their incapacity to conceptualize human agency while at the same time placing it within a distinct structural setting. Taking the example of the functionalist paradigm, theorists do in fact describe migrants as decision making agents. However, drawing on the definition provided by de Haas (2021: 14), who states that "agency reflects the limited – but real – ability of human beings (or social groups) to make independent choices and to impose these on the world", it becomes clear that the near robotic analysts in the neo-classical migration theory fail to qualify as real agents, as they do not really make 'independent choices' but rather react homogenously to external stimuli and act in a predictable way according to the result of their cost-benefit calculations. Turning to structure, the functionalist paradigm largely omits the "patterns of social relations, beliefs and behavior" that, according to de Haas (ibid.), "limit the opportunities that people have – or perceive to have – and the economic, social and cultural resources which they can

access". The historical-structural approach, on the contrary, does indeed pay a lot of tribute to macro-structures that govern human behavior – a little too much in fact. While de Haas (2021: 14) notes that certain structures are significantly constraining the migrants' freedom and agency, he highlights that people – with very few exceptions such as deportations – will always retain a certain degree of agency. According to the neo-Marxist approach, however, migrants are mere pawns moved around by capitalist forces, with no room for independent decision-making (Castles *et al.* 2014: 32).

With regard to the migrants' agency and elaborating on the criticism expressed above, de Haas (2014; 2021) put forward a distinct set of five issues that conventional theories typically leave unattended and that the aspirations and capabilities model strives to address (see Figure 2). To begin with, he highlights the fact that the people's ability to move, their aspirations (to stay or to go), their choices and opportunities to obtain work, housing, legal status etc. are all strongly influenced by their access to economic (material), social (other people), cultural (ideas, knowledge and skills) and bodily (good health) resources, which are unequally distributed within and across communities and societies (ibid.). This assumption stands diametrically opposed to the notion of the functionalist paradigm presented above that suggests that people simply react to external stimuli in similar, automatic and predictable ways, migrating as soon as the benefits exceed the costs of moving (de Haas 2014: 17). In a similar vein, conventional theories rule out the option of people simply having different ideas of what a 'good life' could be and that migrating might, but might as well not, be perceived as a step towards such an idea. Without knowing people's overall aspirations, we cannot assume that they will exhibit similar migration behavior once they are confronted with a similar set of external factors (ibid.). Once people's aspirations could be established, we might face a third issue, namely the situation in which someone indeed wishes to migrate, however, not for the sake of an instrumental purpose, but for intrinsic reasons such as wanderlust, curiosity or a desire to break free and discover new horizons. Sounding potentially trivial to some, de Haas and other authors suggest that particularly for young people, not only in the Western societies, migrating presents a viable tool to satisfy the need to separate from their parents, prove their independence or mark their transition to adulthood (de Haas 2021: 15). Fourth, and already touched upon briefly, comes the need to incorporate both mobility and immobility into one conceptual framework. Without preempting too much - since the next chapter will address this issue in detail – it has been acknowledged by several authors, that conventional migration theories fail to account for the people who do not migrate and particularly the ones that are not able to,

indicating a great need for conceptual adaptations (Arango 2000; Hammar & Tamas 1997). Finally, turning to the often applied conceptualization of 'forced' and 'voluntary' migration, some authors have been pushing for the dissolution of this dichotomy (Castles *et al.* 2014; de Haas 2021). As already described above, the new notion that all migration happens within a certain amount of constraints entails that all migrants also retain a certain, albeit limited, amount of agency – otherwise, they would not be able to move in the first place – which provides us with a continuum along which we should be able to classify most types of migration in a much more nuanced and differentiated manner than with the traditional forced-voluntary dichotomy (de Haas 2021: 16).
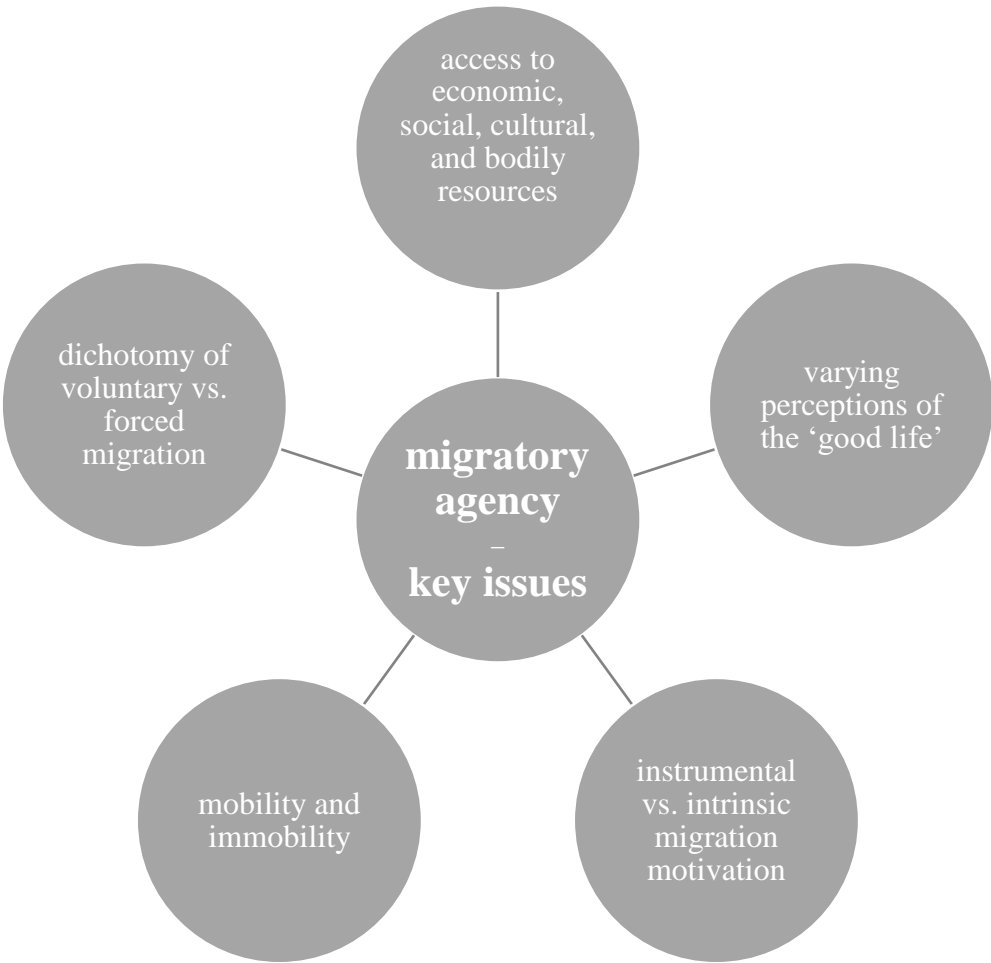

Figure 2 Issues regarding migratory agency sometimes neglected by conventional migration theories (own design; based on de Haas 2014: 17-18 and 2021: 15-16).

Moving now to the necessary integration of structure in the aspirations and capabilities approach, it is worth taking a closer look at two preceding concepts, that were incorporated into the new framework: the notion of 'capabilities' coined by Amartya Sen (1999) and Isaiah Berlin's (1969) distinction of 'positive and negative liberties'. Originally not developed for the specific context of migration, the former represents Sen's attempt to conceptualize 'development' in a new way, using people's freedoms as the basic building blocks of a society that is meant to thrive. Freedoms in this context, are described as "the 'capabilities' of persons to lead the kind of lives they value – and have reason to value" (Sen 1999: 18). The role of having such capabilities or freedoms is twofold: 1) on an individual level they should enrich human life (constitutive role); and 2) on a greater societal level they should contribute to economic progress (instrumental role) (ibid.: 36-7). Consequently, he states that these capabilities should be assessed in order to evaluate the development of a society, instead of focusing on traditional economic parameters such as wealth and income, or utilitarian measures such as pleasure and happiness (ibid.: 55-6). And finally, it is relevant to note that Sen emphasizes that his idea of freedom and capabilities involves both the overall possibility of 'leading the kind of life one values' (e.g. through the presence of human rights and public services etc.) as well as the individual's real opportunity to do so (e.g. exercise their voting right or participate in public life etc.) (ibid.: 17).

This latter distinction runs almost parallel, albeit within a slightly different context, to the conceptualization put forward by Berlin (1969), who introduced the notion of 'negative and positive liberties'. While 'liberty', which he uses interchangeably with 'freedom', encompasses a myriad of meanings, he wanted to shed light on these two concepts, which he perceived to be central and highly relevant for both human history and future (Berlin 1969: 121). According to him, negative liberties refer to the freedoms granted to people in order for them "to pursue, and even to conceive the various ends which men hold good or right or sacred", corresponding one-on-one to Sen's notion of leading the kind of life that people value and, more precisely, the overall possibility to do so thanks to institutional entities or broader societal structures (ibid.: 124). Positive liberties, on the other hand, foreground the set of freedoms that springs from the individual's resources and capacities, which potentially provide them with the opportunity to benefit from the negative freedoms they have, while a lack thereof can constrain their ability to act in a self-directed and agentic way, even within a general set of negative liberties present (Berlin 1969: 131).

While the conceptual grounding laid by Carling (2002) did provide a means to integrate structures into a theoretical approach to understanding migration processes by evaluating the

emigration environment as well as the immigration interface (see Figure 1), de Haas took the endeavor further by synthesizing and transferring the above views by Sen and Berlin into the aspirations and capabilities framework. Starting with Sen's capabilities concept, he saw great potential in viewing migration and more precisely the capability to choose whether or not to migrate as two-dimensional in the sense that, in addition to the instrumental-functional purpose of improving people's living conditions, being able to migrate (or stay) is a potential wellbeing-enhancing factor in its own right (de Haas 2021: 20). This also provided a new conceptual perspective on human mobility at large, which I will address separately in the next chapter. Moreover, to understand how people's aspirations and capabilities are shaped by structural forces, the distinctions put forward by Sen and Berlin also provide a viable base. Applying them to migration studies, allows for a differentiation between a macro-structural layer, where migration policies and more general legislative as well as societal and economic forces are at play, and a micro- and meso-level, where the individual's access to resources can further constrain or heighten their capability to migrate. In the same vein, people's aspirations are influenced by the opportunities they perceive to have within the given structures. This allows for a differentiated and more nuanced perspective towards the ways that people's agency is influenced by external structures. For instance, as de Haas (2021: 24) put it, while a government may grant nominal freedom of movement to people, this absence of external constraints – i.e. the presence of negative freedoms – is not a sufficient condition for people to exert migratory agency, as poor people may still lack the 'positive liberty' that will enable them to enjoy the freedoms granted to them.

Bringing together the aspects presented above, Figure 3 illustrates the integration of both agency and structure within the aspirations-capabilities framework. Beginning on the left, the distinction of structure as a two-layered concept consisting of different sets of freedoms is crucial to being able to conceptualize and, for that matter, understand the patterns that potentially influence migratory aspirations and capabilities and consequently lead to (non-)migration outcomes. De Haas (2021: 26) notes in this regard that it is important to speak of patterns and not to reduce structure to a set of constraints, as it is often done by other theories, since it ignores the potentially enabling nature of certain structural conditions. Income or a lack thereof can both heighten and constrain people's capability to migrate, just like state policies can aim at facilitating the migration of certain people or groups, while debilitating others (ibid.). The many ways in which negative and positive liberties can potentially affect and interact with aspirations as well as capabilities, ultimately leading to (non-)migration outcomes, will be further addressed in the context of specific

migration drivers in the subsequent chapters. At this point, it is relevant to note that, while structure shapes both aspirations and capabilities, changes in an individual's capability can affect their aspirations, too. Highlighting the case of deprived people and groups, Arjun Appadurai (2004) introduced the idea of the 'capacity to aspire' and a potential lack thereof, which de Haas also integrated into his framework. He clarifies that it is by no means the case that the poor "cannot wish, want, need, plan, or aspire […] but part of poverty is a diminishing of the circumstances in which these practices occur" (Appadurai 2004: 69). Transferring this notion to migration, de Haas (2021: 26) states that "increased capabilities are also likely to increase aspirations, first, by making people aware of alternative opportunities and lifestyles and second, by making people believe that migration is 'within their reach', that they can actually 'make it'". However, whether aspirations and capabilities will lead to migration outcomes or not, is still highly dependent on the core factor of mobility, which de Haas sought to re-conceptualize in its entirety as I will show in the next chapter.
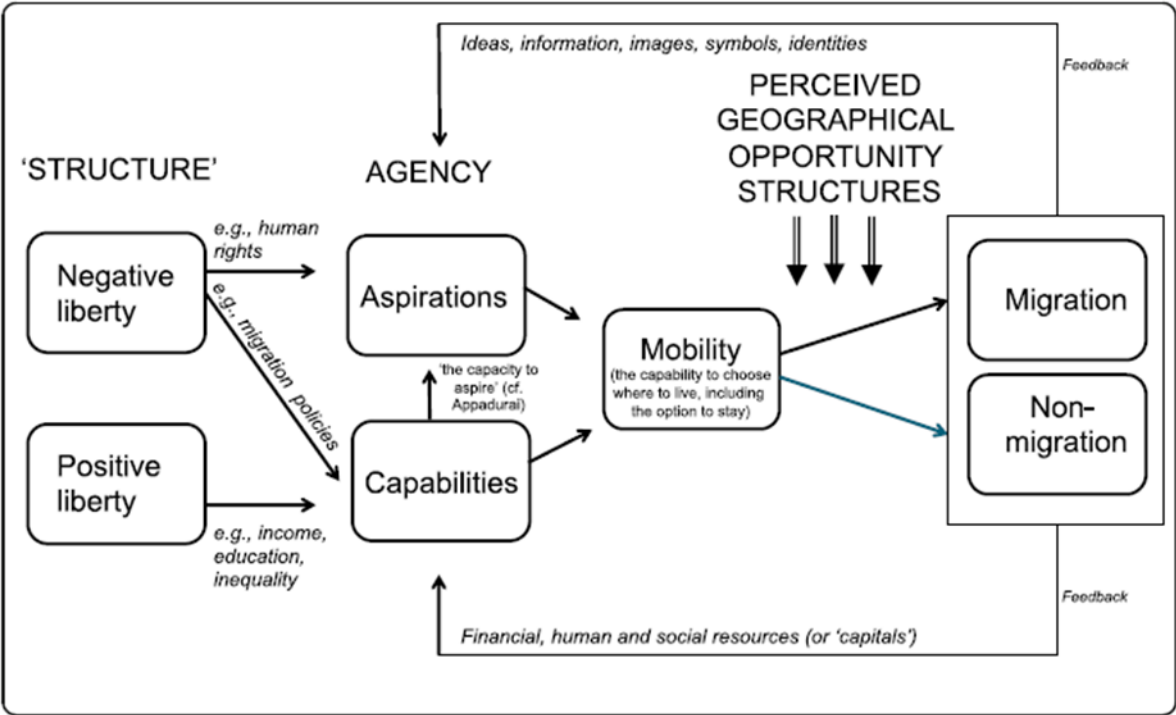

Figure 3 Expanded aspirations-capabilities framework for conceptualizing migratory agency and structure (de Haas 2021: 25)

3.2.3. Human mobility revisited

As stated before, the usefulness of some migration theories that try to explain *why* people move in general is often dimmed by their inability to explain why, in fact, so few people migrate, while most people either decide not to or were deprived of the ability to make this decision in the first place. This common deficit largely prevails as contemporary research continues to exhibit what many authors refer to as either a 'sedentary bias' on the societal level or a 'mobility bias' on the academic level, denoting the notion that staying is the unquestioned norm and mobility or movement is the anomaly that demands explanation (Arango 2000: 293; Carling & Schewel 2018: 954; Fischer *et al.* 1997b: 74; Glick Schiller & Salazar 2013: 184; Hammar & Tamas 1997: 1). To name just one recent example, the World Migration Report 2020 features a chapter on human mobility in the context of environmental change that defines the phenomenon as "a broad spectrum of people movement", indeed paying heed to its differentiated nature, however, neglecting altogether the notion of staying or not being able to move as well as the reasons behind such (in-)action as an interesting and relevant field of migration studies (Oakes *et al.* 2020: 254). Notwithstanding, there has been a growing, albeit still limited, body of literature that aims at the reconceptualization of human mobility in order to remove the blind spot that resulted from the mobility bias, and adequately address non-migration and immobility as integral parts of migration studies (Carling 2002; de Haas 2014; Fischer *et al.* 1997b; Glick Schiller & Salazar 2013; Schewel 2015).

The aspirations-capabilities framework falls in line with this endeavor, promoting human mobility as a concept that attempts to capture migration and sedentary behavior, that is movement and non-movement in all its dimensions (de Haas 2021: 22). The first step in such a direction was taken by Carling (2002), who began by shifting significant focus towards the idea of immobility - and involuntary immobility in particular – calling it a phenomenon equally relevant to contemporary migration studies as are the observed flows of migrants. This stems on the one hand from the general observation shared by many researchers that only a fraction of human populations is on the move, despite the predictions of functionalist or historic-structural theories, and on the other from his personal research on Cape Verde, where many people did in fact aspire to migrate, but could not realize this wish. As a result, Carling (ibid.: 8) created a conceptual framework that attempted to explain non-migration while accounting for both voluntary and involuntary dimensions of the immobility he observed. The latter distinction, which was previously unaccounted for by traditional theories, was made possible through the introduction of the two-step aspiration-ability approach, that looked at human mobility as a two-phase process on part of the individual,

namely "the evaluation of migration as a potential course of action and the realization of actual mobility or immobility at a given moment" (Carling & Schewel 2018: 947). Kerilyn Schewel (2019: 344) further elaborated this focus on the phenomenon of immobility, stating that it is never absolute "because all people move to some degree or another in their everyday lives; rather it is always relative to spatial and temporal frames". All these notions and perspectives combined to become an integral part of the aspirations-capabilities framework proposed by de Haas.

Following Carling's notion of involuntary immobility, the similar idea of 'trapped populations' put forward by other scholars began to receive heightened attention (Black & Collyer 2014; Humble 2014). While both concepts denote people or groups that aspire to move but lack the ability to do so, the concept of being trapped also mentions the nuanced difference between those who want to move – for a potential multitude of reasons – and those who need to in the face of crisis or imminent threats (Black & Collyer 2014: 52). In this regard, the authors acknowledge, however, that a primary distinction between not wanting and not being able to migrate is already difficult to establish and calls for a reframing of migration theory in order to explain the full range of aspiration decisions (ibid.) Consequently, it is doubtful whether the secondary differentiation between the *wish* and the *need* to migrate will be feasible anytime soon. Nonetheless, by including these distinctions, the authors are successful in raising awareness for a sub-group of trapped populations that deserves special attention, since it is particularly vulnerable and often directly exposed to violence, extreme and multifarious deprivation as well as other forms of human rights abuses (Black & Collyer 2014: 54; Humble 2014: 56–7).

Contrary to the above situation, albeit not deserving any less attention, is the case of people who have the capability to move, and initially have no intention of exploiting this freedom, however, they are deprived of a viable option to stay. This can occur under different circumstances, one of which being refugee migration, that can be characterized as "a response to severe distress at home rather than a positive response to opportunities elsewhere" (de Haas 2014: 32). Once they have arrived or settled in a destination area, some migrants might again or for the first time be exposed to a similar situation where they have to move against their will. In this regard, Boersema *et al.* (2017) investigated the Assisted Voluntary Repatriation practices in the Netherlands and came to the conclusion that the voluntariness of said return migration is highly questionable. Instead, they suggest the term 'soft deportation' – as opposed to forced removal through deportation – to describe the situation in which individuals are offered the opportunity to return to their country of origin sometimes including certain payments, while the alternative of forced deportation looms

from a distance (Boersema *et al.* 2017: 8). Consequently, people may migrate out of fear of being deported forcibly, again presenting a case of migration where aspirations are not reflected in people's behavior, albeit with a different outcome than with the trapped populations described above.

Finally, Schewel (2015) presented yet another perspective that should later become part of the mobility concept used in the aspirations-capabilities framework. She introduced the category of 'acquiescent immobility', referring to "those who do not wish to migrate and are unable to do so", with acquiescence implying non-resistance to the constraints that impede migration (Schewel 2019: 335). While such behavior could potentially spring from a lack of what Appadurai (2004) termed the 'capacity to aspire', Schewel (2015) found in her research in Senegal that people do, in fact, have many different reasons for staying alongside an awareness for the – at least theoretical – option of migration. She summarized that family motivations – being with a spouse, children or parents – were the most prevalent among all respondents, followed by a diverse field of, at least in part, economic, nationalistic or emotional reasons (Schewel 2015: 20).

That being said, when de Haas decided to attempt the reconceptualization of human mobility, his interest was three-fold: 1) embed migration and mobility at large within broader concepts of social change; 2) create a comprehensive concept that integrates both movement and non-movement; and 3) provide a more nuanced and differentiated view on mobility sub-categories (de Haas 2021). Beginning with the first one, de Haas used the term 'social change' or 'social transformation' to subsume all kinds of processes of economic, political, cultural, technological and demographic change, and while such a perhaps vaguely sounding argument demands a decent amount of empirical assessment and analyses, it presents an important step away from traditional views that see migration as functioning according to predetermined patterns and including only a limited amount of economic or demographic factors (de Haas & Fransen 2018: 9–11). Thus, de Haas characterizes migration as being shaped by a multitude of processes of social change that it is part of, while also affecting these processes in a reciprocal, albeit potentially asymmetrical, relationship (2014: 19). The ways in which migration presents itself with relation to other social processes and the outcomes it produces are highly contingent and more often than not non-linear, counter-intuitive or at times seemingly paradoxical (de Haas 2021: 13-14). Therefore, it appears only sensible to not see migration as a "response to development disequilibria or a function of static 'push' and 'pull' factors" or worse "a problem to be solved", but rather as an intrinsic part of social transformation processes that cannot be seen in isolation (ibid.: 12).

Moving on to the second goal de Haas had in mind when reconceptualizing mobility, it becomes apparent that he opted to changing the meaning of the term 'mobility' on its highest conceptual level, while maintaining its original definition when addressing the sub-categories.[2] In his view, recycling the notion put forward by Sen (1999) that capabilities present an intrinsic well-being-enhancing value, mobility should not be defined through actual movement but rather by "people's capability to choose where to live – including the option to stay" (de Haas 2014: 26). In doing so, he responded to his own demand for "a truly agentic view on migration" that captures "both non-migratory and migratory behavior" (ibid.: 25). This can be seen as an achievement that potentially works against the prevailing mobility bias, as it is neither "presuming moving or stay-ing as the norm but acknowledges that they are two sides of the same freedom-of-mobility coin" (de Haas 2021: 31).

| | | Migration capabilities | |
		Low	High
Migration aspirations (intrinsic and/or instrumental)	High	**Involuntary immobility** (feeling 'trapped')	**Voluntary mobility** (most forms of migration)
	Low	**Acquiescent immobility**	**Voluntary immobility** *and* **involuntary mobility** (e.g. refugees, 'soft deportation')

Table 2 Aspirations-capabilities-derived individual mobility types (de Haas 2021: 22)

As already indicated above and illustrated in Table 2, when establishing the sub-types of human mobility – which now denotes both movement and non-movement – de Haas built upon several conceptual bases laid by his colleagues, leaving him with five distinct categories of human mobil-ity that he organized according to the prevalence of rather high or low aspirations and capabilities, respectively. Starting with individuals and groups that neither have the capability to migrate, nor express any aspirations to do so, he adopted Schewel's (2015) suggestion of 'acquiescent

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[2] To rule out semantic confusion and ambiguities, I am suggesting changing the term '(im)mobility' on the sub-categorical level (Table 2), while keeping 'mobility' as the denominator for the overall concept. My suggestion would be to use 'movement' across all subtypes of mobility (e.g. involuntary movement) and 'stasis' for the immo-bility counterparts (e.g. involuntary stasis), crediting Glick-Schiller and Salazar (2013) from whom I adopted the latter. That being said, however, after conferring with de Haas and given the scope of this paper, I will leave further debates and the potential implementation of any such adaptations to others. In the remainder of the paper, the original terminology will be maintained as is.

immobility', marking another step to covering the traditional blind spot of migration studies with regard to non-movement phenomena. For further reference, acquiescence here largely corresponds to Ahmed's (1997: 176) notion of 'despondence' denoting the situation in which people neither exercise 'voice' (i.e. express that they want to migrate) nor 'exit' (i.e. actually attempt to migrate) which may occur due to "structural poverty and repressive political control", that "render them despondent and thus inactive". Moving along the aspirations spectrum to those who do, in fact, aspire to move, but lack the capability to do so, de Haas integrated Carling's (2002) category of 'involuntary immobility' as well as the related idea of 'trapped populations', allowing for the conceptualization of situations in which people are often particularly vulnerable and thus deserve attention which they were traditionally refused by other approaches. Slightly shifting the perspective, he further incorporated the notion of 'involuntary mobility' to include the types of migration under which people are moving despite the fact that their aspirations would suggest otherwise, accounting, among others, for refugees that flee from distress in origin areas or return migrants that, as Boersema *et al.* (2017) put forward, can rather be described as 'softly deported' than voluntarily returning. Finally, coming to the two categories that exhibit the most agency and least constraints of all, de Haas suggests 'voluntary mobility' and 'voluntary immobility' to describe situations in which people have "a reasonable option to stay", that does not involve any "dangerous, highly exploitative or life threatening situations", while also having the capability to migrate, leaving them in a situation where their overall life aspirations will decide whether they will move or stay (de Haas 2021: 23). With all these differentiations in place, we are left with a notably comprehensive and promising conceptualization, especially with regard to covering formerly disregarded or neglected forms of mobility that do not result in movement. This and all the above combine to provide a strong theoretical base that was deemed suitable and unites enough explanatory power to yield interesting insights when applied to specific migration phenomena. As another theoretical preparatory step, I would like to continue by exploring how specific structural factors are potentially shaping people's aspirations and capabilities, which in turn will determine whether we will observe movement or not.

3.3.   Drivers of modern migration

After outlining relevant basic assumptions as well as presenting the conceptual cornerstones of the aspirations-capabilities framework, I will now explore specific factors that can be observed as exerting notable influence on whether and to what extent people aspire to and are capable of

migrating. While such theoretical investigations into some of the whys and wherefores of migration were formerly dictated by the functionalistic as well as historic-structuralist search for immediate causes for migratory movements, migration studies has brought forward new terminology and conceptualizations that aim to cater for the often complex, non-linear and sometimes even counterintuitive ways that different factors play into the development of (non-)migration phenomena. In this regard, Jørgen Carling and Francis Collins (2018: 919–20) showed that since the 1990s the use of the term 'causes of migration' has been constantly less popular than the denomination 'determinants of migration', even though the latter has experienced a decline in usage over the past two decades, too. This reduced presence can in part be attributed to the emergence of the expression of 'drivers of migration', which has experienced a sharp and steady increase in popularity since the early 2000s and, in 2016, stood at the same level as 'determinants of migration', with both of them being used more than three times as frequently in academic literature as 'causes of migration' (ibid.). And although seemingly proving successful already, it is worth taking a closer look at the notion of drivers of migration and establishing a working definition before moving on with the endeavor to explore concrete factors that influence people's aspirations and capabilities.

Over the course of the years, the idea of certain factors *driving* instead of *causing* migration received a boost in research concerned with the effects of the environment and particularly climate change on migratory movements, with scholars acknowledging that there is a connection, however, not as direct and immediate as 'causing' might suggest (Carling & Collins 2018: 920). In this regard, Black *et al.* (2011) came forward with a five-dimensional model that encompassed political, demographic, economic, social and environmental drivers of migration. And while this corresponds almost exactly to de Haas and Fransen's (2018: 10) five dimensions of social change, namely politics, demography, economy, culture and technology, which combine to shape migration processes, Black's understanding of migration drivers does not yet integrate smoothly into the aspirations-capabilities framework. As becomes apparent in the more elaborate conceptualization by van Hear *et al.* (2018: 927), in which drivers of migration are understood as "forces leading to the inception of migration and the perpetuation of movement", their notion does not include the ways in which some factors may play a limiting role with regard to people's aspirations and capabilities. This presents a shortcoming that was also criticized by Schewel (2019: 329), who again traces this tendency back to the aforementioned mobility bias in migration studies. Thwarting this apparent bias and providing a viable definition for the purposes of this thesis, Mathias Czaika and

Constantin Reinprecht (2020: 2) state that "migration drivers are structural elements that have the potential to facilitate, enable, constrain, and trigger migration processes". Including the potentially constraining dimension of drivers of migration, it provides a valuable and practical notion that can be integrated into de Haas' framework as a theoretical elaboration of the structural conditions that shape people's aspirations and capabilities and potentially lead to (non-)migration outcomes. Not-withstanding, given the fact that the aforementioned wording 'determinants of migration' is equally present and often used synonymously within the context of the aspirations-capabilities framework (de Haas *et al.* 2019; de Haas 2021; Flahaux & de Haas 2016). Therefore, while applying the definition presented by Czaika and Reinprecht (2020), I will proceed by using 'drivers' and 'determinants' interchangeably. While doing so, I am acknowledging that Czaika and Reinprecht would refrain from such a consolidation, as they perceive the latter to suggest "a causal relationship between some structural factors and migration" (ibid.: 4). However, given de Haas' framework's overall notion that migration is primarily a function of people's aspirations and capabilities and thus only indirectly influenced by structural conditions, I do not take issue with talking about determining factors, that is determinants, playing a vital role in the formation of said preconditions for migration. In fact, with regard to reducing or constraining factors, I would argue that in some contexts 'determinant' could be more appropriate than 'driver', given the propulsive connotations of the latter. In this regard, it could be said that 'determinant' presents a rather neutral term, not entailing any tendency towards movement or non-movement.

Before turning to concrete examples of the structural elements that potentially constitute migration decisions and the connected processes according to the aspirations-capabilities model, it must be noted that the following exploration is by no means comprehensive but rather represents a purposely limited selection of determinants that are deemed particularly relevant for the context of this research. On this note, Czaika and Reinprecht (2020) provide a comprehensive and detailed overview on a wide array of migration drivers, which lends itself for broader insights and serves as a base for the following categorical analysis. In an attempt to narrow the focus, I will foreground the three dimensions of economic, politico-institutional, and security drivers of migration, which I will elaborate and address separately in the following chapters. At this point it is important to stress that, even though described separately for clarity, they are often interrelated and potentially exhibit strong feedback effects on each other. This also hints at the overall complex and sometimes even ambiguous roles that migration drivers can play – indirectly leading to an increase in migration in one instance, while reducing or limiting aspirations and capabilities to migrate in another.

The goal of the next chapters is to disentangle some of these at times seemingly counterintuitive or at the first glance even paradoxical developments and unearth the underlying processes of social change as well as their influence on people's aspirations and capabilities.

3.3.1. Economic drivers

As already pointed out earlier, traditional theoretical approaches to migration typically mirrored the primacy of economics prevailing at their time and ascribed disproportionate explanatory power to economic thinking and behavior as the main driver of migration (Arango 2000: 284; Carling & Collins 2018: 913). And while such economic migration theories mostly fall short of explaining the varied nature of human (non-)movement, reviewing economic factors can provide valuable insights for understanding certain migratory patterns and behavior (Karpestam & Andersson 2020: 8). On a macro-scale, the nexus between economic development – typically measured through the GDP per capita or the Human Development Index (HDI) – and migration presents such an area of interest that I will now explore further. Before, however, it is relevant to note that the debate on the relationship between the two has been on the table for more than half a century and, as de Haas (2010a: 227) put it, "has swung back and forth like a pendulum, from developmentalist optimism in the 1950s and 1960s, to neo-Marxist pessimism over the 1970s and 1980s, towards more optimistic views in the 1990s and 2000s". However, as should become apparent in this section, in order to grasp the true nature of the migration-development relations, it is necessary to move beyond such one-sided and largely ideological perspectives that typically stem from either a functionalist approach that sees migration as an economic optimization strategy advancing development, or a historical-structuralist thinking that views migration as both arising from and perpetuating economic inequality, i.e. under-development in origin areas (de Haas 2010a: 227; Hermele 1997: 133).

Interestingly, while coming from fundamentally different standpoints, the above perspectives do share the common assumption that migration – in one way or another – presents the antithesis to economic development: If there is migration, it results from deficits in the economy of the sending regions and, consequently, if migration is to be reduced, which presents a common goal in contemporary politics, policy should aim at accelerating development in said areas with the help of aid, trade and remittances (de Haas 2020: 17). And while the persistence of this mindset might be explained through its appeal to intuition, which in turn is typically shaped by neo-classical thinking, it is even more surprising that it has prevailed in the face of empirical findings that,

in fact, show the exact opposite to be the case. In this regard, an increasing body of literature has acknowledged that not only does development tend to initially *increase* migration, but their relationship appears to be much more heterogenous and non-linear than previously assumed (Castles *et al.* 2014; Czaika & Reinprecht 2020; de Haas 2010a; de Haas & Fransen 2018; Fischer *et al.* 1997a).

In an attempt to embed this phenomenon in a theoretical model, transition theories postulate that "development leads to generally increased levels of migration and that societies go through migration transitions characterized by and inverted U-shaped pattern of emigration" (de Haas 2010b: i). As illustrated in Figure 4, this entails an initial steep rise in emigration, while immigration is only set to gain pace once a certain level of development is reached, and the rapid surge in emigration numbers has started to slow down. As emigration levels then decrease, immigration remains on a constant rise, until eventually a net-emigration country transitions into a net-immigration country (indicated through a dotted line in Figure 4). As convenient and empirically proven as the conceptualization of transitioning countries might appear, theorists have so far failed to explicitly theorize the causal mechanisms underlying the migration trends they describe and, moreover, have left the question unanswered as to how migration develops after the point of transition (de Haas 2010b: 10). This is where the aspirations-capabilities model helps to dig a little deeper and explore the underlying processes further.

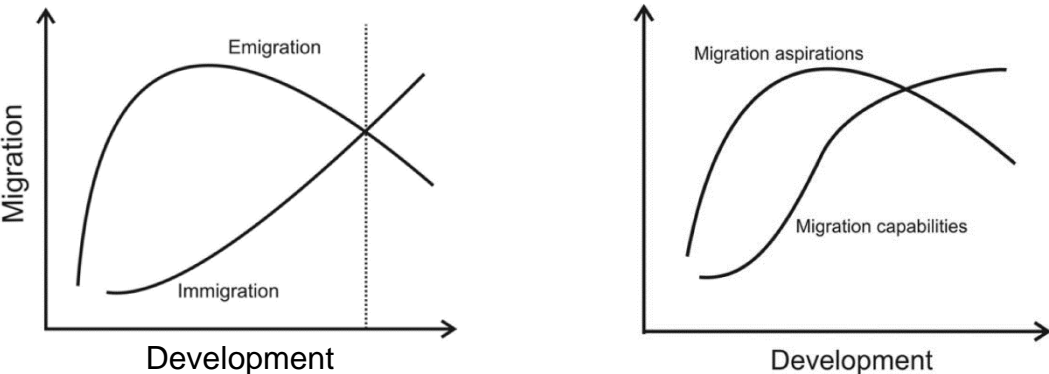**Figure 4** Comparison of the assumed relation between migration and development in transition theories (left) and the hypothetical changes in migration aspirations and capabilities (right) (de Haas 2010b)

According to de Haas *et al.* (2019: 895), economic development not only increases people's access to resources like money, knowledge, improved infrastructure, and different types of networks, but

also raises their awareness of economic opportunities and lifestyles elsewhere. As illustrated in Figure 4, the endowment with more resources and the exposure to new images, ideals and ideas of the 'good life' result in a steady increase in people's capabilities and aspirations (ibid.). And as long as people's aspirations and capabilities change faster than and exceed local opportunities, this is very likely to lead to growing emigration numbers (de Haas 2021: 27). This model cannot only be applied to explain international migration, but proves valuable on a national level too: In the case of attempts to counter migration from rural to urban areas, the construction of roads, the expansion of the electricity grid, and the establishment of schools is very likely to accelerate out-migration as traveling and communication were facilitated and exposure to new ideas and lifestyles has potentially also increased people's aspirations to migrate (de Haas 2020: 21). Finally, it is worth looking at some outliers that could not be appropriately described through the blind application of the transition model. Cape Verde and Lesotho, for instance, exhibit – relative to their population – rather high levels of emigration, and while transition theory does not provide any potential explanations, it is likely that there is simply a greater mismatch between the aspirations of the local youth and the work or lifestyle opportunities that are present, or rather not present, within the largely rural country (ibid.: 20). In a similar vein, contrary to their developmental stage, Arab Gulf states as well as some small city states with high levels of international connectivity exhibit much larger immigration numbers than economically similarly advanced nations, and while this breaks the mold proposed by transition theories, the aspirations-capabilities model allows for the assessment of structural conditions that could potentially distort the migration pattern typically observed elsewhere (ibid.). In this specific case, a potential explanation lies in the state policies directed at migration flows, which I will turn to in the next chapter. To conclude, it can be stated that the aspirations-capabilities perspective deactivates the automatism put forward by transitional thinking and instead highlights that a set of criteria, namely people's aspirations and capabilities as well as the underlying structural conditions need to be considered in order understand migration phenomena.

Impossible to separate from developmental perspectives on migration is the role of labor markets. De Haas *et al.* (2019: 897) argue that "labor demand in destination countries is the most important force driving international migration, particularly if we consider that family migration is, more often than not, the indirect consequence of labor migration". Labor migration represents an attempt to balance a disequilibrium that can span from regions to continents. On the one hand, we observe people who aspire to work in order to secure a high enough income to cater for their

needs and desires, but do not find satisfying employment opportunities in their immediate environment. On the other, there is a national economy or regional labor market that exhibits, as Castles *et al.* (2014: 240–1) put it, a "socially constructed" need to import labor, which results from poor wages, bad working conditions and a low social status in certain sectors that typically deter domestic workers. And while these jobs are shunned by locals, migrants see their opportunity to achieve the gains in income, status and well-being that could not be provided by the economy in their origin countries (de Haas *et al.* 2019: 897). At this point, however, it is important to reinstate that labor migration presents anything but the automatism typically proposed by neo-classical theories. In this regard, Czaika and Reinprecht (2020: 13) provide a comprehensive overview on literature available on the differentiated and nuanced nature of labor migration and the ways that, depending on people's aspirations and capabilities, migratory processes are triggered or constrained by job related prospects. To highlight just one interesting insight, research has shown that regarding the formation and realization of migration aspirations "negative economic and unemployment prospects in the origin country have a stronger effect on bilateral migration flows than equal-sized positive prospects at the destination" (Czaika 2015: 78).

Now, to further differentiate the understanding of how economic factors can potentially determine individuals' migration decisions, it is worth continuing on this level of the individuals' perceptions of their economic environment. In this regard, several authors have pointed out that instead of looking at the absolute economic constitution of a country or its individuals, it could also be promising to put these factors into perspective and look out for what they term 'relative deprivation' among potential and actual migrants (Czaika & Reinprecht 2020; de Haas 2010b; de Haas *et al.* 2019; Stark & Wang 2000). In this thinking, household members could aspire to and make use of their capability to migrate not primarily to ameliorate their situation with regard to absolute standards but rather to improve their relative standing within a specific reference group (Stark *et al.* 2009: 119). Along these lines, Czaika and de Haas (2012: 439) found that, while absolute deprivation in sending communities typically constrains migration, relative deprivation in both origin and destination areas can potentially drive migration aspirations and the realization of such, depending on the scale and focus applied. Further investigating the role that feelings of relative deprivation could play in both internal and international migration, scholars have found mixed and sometimes ambiguous results depending on the specific context in which (non-)migration occurs. This demands further differentiation in order to pinpoint specific correlations, which will be addressed below.

For one, the distinction between vertical and horizontal relative deprivation in potential migrant communities is promising in discerning possible migration outcomes. In this regard Czaika (2013) found that vertical inequality, that is feelings of relative deprivation within groups, heightens emigration aspirations, whereas horizontal inequality, observable between different social groups, makes non-migration more likely. It is assumed that people in general are more likely to "compare and pitch their own aspirations against the living standards within the social networks they identify with, rather than those of urban elites or foreign populations" (de Haas *et al.* 2019: 896). Interestingly, such feelings of vertical or in-group relative deprivation can be increased in the course of successful migration projects entailing remittance-driven increases in inequality or the presence of successful migrant role models within one's community, pointing to the internal dynamics and feedback mechanisms of migration that can similarly influence people's aspiration to migrate (de Haas 2010b: 20).

Similar to the presence of feelings of relative deprivation, the overall reduction in inequality can have varied effects on migration aspirations, too, particularly when contrasted in sending and receiving countries. Czaika and de Haas (2012: 438) state in this regard that reducing inequality in destination areas through income redistribution, potentially decreases attractiveness for prospective immigrants from higher income groups in sending countries. Conversely, compressing the income distribution in sending communities could lead to greater feelings of relative deprivation among high income individuals who compare themselves to international standards (ibid.). In general, however, the magnitude of said impacts of changes in relative deprivation, particularly with regard to international migration, is assumed to be rather small, especially when compared to the role of absolute deprivation (Czaika 2012: 144). The implications, however, are nonetheless interesting: Adding to the conclusion from above that development typically entails an increase in capabilities and thus the realization of migration aspirations, it is also possible that, depending on the specific characteristics of the economic change, people's aspirations might fade alongside their decreasing feelings of relative deprivation, which presents a much more nuanced understanding of the nature of the driving force of economic factors (de Haas *et al.* 2019: 898; Stark *et al.* 2009: 122). While being of interest to researchers, such knowledge is also vital for policymakers who are attempting to exert influence on migration processes, which presents another complex issue that I will now turn to.

3.3.2. Politico-institutional drivers

With regard to the driving forces in migration, Joaquín Arango (2000: 293) said that "the relevance of the political dimension nowadays can hardly be overstated", since "nothing shapes migratory flows and types more than admission policies". This is not surprising, given the immense amount of new and comprehensive policy programs, including border controls, visa systems, deportations, anti-trafficking legislation, as well as targeted programs for development assistance, international trade and foreign investment that aim at regulating the influx of migrants (Hammar & Tamas 1997: 11). In a similar vein, albeit to a much lesser extent, countries have implemented specific emigration policies in order to put their surplus work force to good use and hopefully benefit in the future from a backflow of both material and immaterial resources (Castles *et al.* 2014: 79–80). However, it would be imprudent to assume that all these policies are shaping migration exactly the way they were intended to and that migrants are dancing predictably to the politicians' tune. Reiterating the insight from above that policies that aim to induce economic development in origin countries in order to curb migration are likely to have the opposite effect, it becomes evident that scholars and policy makers alike need to revise their common perceptions in an attempt to gain a better understanding of the varied ways policies influence people's aspirations and capabilities to migrate (de Haas 2020: 22).

The fact that migration policies sometimes do not have the intended or, in the case of the above example, even the opposite effect has sparked a debate on their overall effectiveness that is yet to be resolved. And while some authors speak of policy failure (Bhagwati 2003; Castles 2004), and others observe control mechanisms that generally work – highlighting the example that nine in ten Africans move to Europe within the law (de Haas *et al.* 2019) – there is convincing evidence that it was mere conceptual confusion about what constitutes *effectiveness* that caused this controversy in the first place (Czaika & de Haas 2013). Crediting the latter with providing valuable conceptual groundwork that should help the reconciliation of seemingly opposing views, I would like to foreground their distinction between policy effectiveness and policy effects: The effectiveness of a certain measure is concerned with creating a relation to a desired outcome, while the effects denote the mere ability of policies "to influence the level, direction, timing, or composition of migration" (ibid.: 504). And although being highly relevant, I will not further engage in the former debate on policy effectiveness, but instead dive into the varied and sometimes even counterintuitive ways that policies – particularly restrictive ones – can affect migration phenomena by changing the structural conditions that in turn influence people's aspirations and capabilities.

To begin with an almost paradox example, there is evidence that restrictive immigration policies can potentially spark migration aspirations that would not arise under conditions of full mobility freedoms. De Haas (2021) drew this conclusion from his observations in Morocco and Spain, where Moroccans would typically circulate back and forth between the two countries, often with mixed motives of tourism, pleasure, and work. With the introduction of visa requirements in 1991, these unrestrained movements ebbed away, however, resulting in a market for smuggling and a tendency among Moroccans to stay longer than intended or even settle for good and cancel return plans (ibid.: 19). Similar effects were observed by Simona Vezzoli (2021), who compared migration patterns in the three neighboring states Suriname, Guyana and French Guyana, and noticed that while more than half of the populations of the former two lived abroad, French Guyanese did not exhibit anything comparable to the perceived obsession of the others to leave their countries. Vezzoli attributed this behavior largely to the fact that having full mobility freedoms encourages people to stay – since they could move instantly if they wanted to – while closed borders can trigger an obsession with getting out as soon as the opportunity arises (ibid.: 1).

Further conceptualizing the sometimes unintended effects of restrictive migration policies exemplified above, de Haas (2011) and Czaika and Hobolth (2014) came forward with their notions of 'substitution effects' and 'deflection', respectively. As summarized in Table 3, de Haas assumed four substitution effects to occur as potential consequences of immigration restrictions. First, migrants may simply opt for a destination country with less restrictive policies, resulting in the geographical diversion – or spatial substitution as he calls it – of migration flows. This is particularly likely, if migrants perceive alternative destination countries to be similar in terms of culture, language, and opportunities (de Haas *et al.* 2019: 908). Second, when migration through one channel becomes more difficult, people potentially try out different ways before canceling their plans altogether. Such categorical substitution, as observed above with the example of Moroccans trying to get to Spain, also corresponds to the findings of Czaika and Hobolth (2014). They concluded that the deterrence effect of restrictive asylum and visa policies "is largely counterbalanced by a displacement of asylum seekers into irregularity"[3] (ibid.: 19). According to their estimates, a ten percent increase in asylum rejections raises the number of apprehended irregular migrants by about three percent while a ten percent increase in short-stay visa rejections leads to a five percent increase in irregular migration (ibid.: 2). Third, in the expectation of tightening restrictions,

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[3] i.e. "take place without the requisite documentation and frequently involve human smugglers and traffickers" (UNHCR 2015c: 1)

migration might surge within a short period of time as a kind of 'now or never decision'. Such inter-temporal substitution may also occur as the result of policy liberalizations when people are not convinced that borders will remain open. And while these increases are typically temporary, they can have lasting effects on public opinion towards immigration liberalizations (de Haas *et al.* 2019: 909). And last but not least, another phenomenon, also observed above with Morrocans canceling their return plans and instead opting for permanent settlement, is that of reverse flow substitution. Immigration restrictions thus have the potential of interrupting return migration that would otherwise naturally occur as a result of economic cycles in the host countries, undercutting the potential immigration-reducing effect of visa restrictions (ibid.: 910). The common observation across all four substitution effects is that, while constraining people's capabilities in the form of taking away negative freedoms related to unrestrained movement, migration policies typically do not dampen migration aspirations – with the exceptional case of return migration – and might, on the contrary, even trigger or reinforce them.

Table 3 Potential substitution effects caused by immigration policy restrictions (own design; based on de Haas 2011)

Spatial substitution	• diversion of migration to countries with less restrictive regulations
Categorical substitution	• reorientation towards other legal or illegal channels
Inter-temporal substitution	• migration surges in the expectation of a future tightening of regulations
Reverse flow substitution	• immigration restrictions decrease return migration flows

Highlighting further dimensions of the policy effects on migration, it is worth looking at the differentiated nature of potential short and long-term outcomes produced by restrictive immigration laws. On the one hand, in the absence of viable alternatives, significantly limiting migratory influx could lead to situations where migrants can neither choose another path nor cancel their migration project but, due to a lack of capabilities, become trapped within their country or in transit (Black & Collyer 2014: 54; Humble 2014: 56). While this potentially represents the anticipated decline in immigrants for the destination country, it poses new challenges and perhaps problems for the populations that are trapped and the countries that are currently hosting them. On the other hand,

once policies have led to the establishment of a migratory route – intentionally or unintentionally – it is not unlikely that these structures will persist and begin reinforcing themselves. Government policies are thus creating socially differentiated and geographically bundled pathways, also known as migration corridors, where migrant networks and complex feedback processes are at play, which in turn render unintended policy effects more likely (de Haas *et al.* 2019: 911; de Haas 2021: 26). This also points towards the idea that in order to make good use of migration policies, it is not only important to understand the effects that restrictions or liberalizations can have on potential and actual migrants, but also to review the complex and sometimes counterintuitive ways that people's aspirations and capabilities are shaped by other structural forces that lie beyond the reach of migration policy (de Haas *et al.* 2019: 915). Issues of security present such a powerful force which I will address in the following chapter.

3.3.3. Security drivers

In their comprehensive account, Czaika and Reinprecht's (2020: 21) conceptualization of security factors that potentially drive migration ranges from civil conflict, persecution and other human rights violations to political instability, repression, unrest as well as corruption and lack of political freedom. However, reinstating an overarching theme in the aspirations-capabilities concept, migration does not happen as an automatic response to these security threats (Raleigh 2011: 82). With the exception of extreme scenarios such as eviction, slavery or deportation, people migrating to escape from different forms of immediate threats or perceived insecurity are exercising their agency as far as possible, assessing their, albeit potentially highly constrained, capabilities within larger opportunity structures and deciding where and by what means to migrate (de Haas 2014: 27). While in these cases people are constrained in their mobility freedoms in the sense that the option of staying is often not available if they aspire to escape from insecurity; conflicts or other security concerns might similarly constrain them in their capability to move, leaving them in a particularly vulnerable 'trapped' state of involuntary immobility (Black & Collyer 2014: 52). In the face of these exemplary migration and non-migration outcomes influenced by different security drivers, it is worth further exploring the ways in which these determinants can create or eliminate opportunity structures and affect people's aspirations and capabilities to migrate.

Along the lines of the above notion that migration does not occur as an automatic response to external factors, it is also important – particularly in the context of security drivers of migration – to reiterate the aspirations-capabilities framework's pretense to overcome the dichotomous

divide between forced and voluntary migration. As already elaborated in previous chapters, rather than having a binary labeling that ascribes migrants either zero or one-hundred percent sovereignty in their decision making, viewing people's choices "along a forced-voluntary continuum is necessarily more reflective of the complexity of individual experiences, agency and contextual circumstances" (Erdal & Oeppen 2018: 993). That being said, it has to be acknowledged that migration or non-migration driven by security factors naturally will be situated towards the highly constrained end of the spectrum, with migrants primarily being concerned about minimizing their risks rather than maximizing their utility (Fischer *et al.* 1997b: 50; Haines 2019: 90). Consequently, with regard to the different types of mobility that can be observed in security driven migration, we are likely to encounter predominantly cases of involuntary mobility as well as involuntary immobility.

Turning to specific determinants behind said mobility types, the dominant paradigm in conflict related migration studies suggests that "migration occurs when overt threats to security increase beyond an acceptable level" (Raleigh 2011: 85). Albeit rather vague, the term 'acceptable' is crucial here. It would be misleading to assume that once conflict breaks out and violent encounters move within the vicinity of potential migrants that they would instantly attempt to migrate. In fact, observations in numerous conflict ridden countries indicated less migration than expected, with large portions of the populations staying where they were despite potential security risks (Engel & Ibáñez 2007: 338; Kirwin & Anderson 2018: 16; Sharp 2020; Williams 2009: 10). Moreover, in times of subsiding levels of conflict, "individuals were less likely to migrate compared to periods with no violence" (Williams 2009: 144). The potential implications are two-fold: 1) conflicts are spatially and temporally dynamic in that they do not pose the same and possibly unacceptable levels of threats to all people in their vicinity; and 2) whether or not a person migrates in the face of conflict also depends on their individual capabilities and perceived opportunity structures (Raleigh 2011: 85).

Highlighting the differentiated and dynamic nature of civil wars and communal conflict, Clionadh Raleigh (2011) discerns the spatial patterns of 'chronic zones', 'hotspots', 'frontlines' and 'contested areas' which potentially change radically over the course of the conflict. Chronic zones are characterized by low-level but ongoing exposure risks towards violence in typically wide and patchy areas where, as in the example described above, "people will feel safer staying at home instead of traveling which will increase their exposure to danger" (Williams 2009: 144). Hotspots, on the other hand, denote small, defined spaces with high rates of clashes between conflicting

parties and are frequently located in urban areas (Raleigh 2011: 87). Given that international and non-governmental aid is likely to also concentrate in such hotspots and urban centers, we observe these to also become the site of both outward and inward conflict migration, with some people fleeing violence while others are driven towards potential relief (ibid.: 87-88). Contested areas and frontlines, albeit posing less concentrated security risks than hotspots, are defined by higher violence against civilians than chronic zones, given that in these areas active fighting and frequent shifts in power often result in people getting caught in spontaneous clashes or being mistaken for opposing forces (ibid.). Furthermore, with different types of conflicts occurring in geographic proximity, an antagonized group in one area may not be targeted through violence somewhere else, even though fighting might occur to a similar extent. Conflict zones can therefore even attract migrants if they present a lessened direct threat to individuals (ibid.). Within conflicts, we can therefore discern multiple scenarios in which people are exposed to varying degrees of violence and other security threats, that can potentially make movement or non-movement the more promising choice and a likely outcome.

Moving to the second implication, however, not all people caught in conflict are endowed with the same capabilities and choices to potentially escape violence. While most migrants exercise a great deal of agency when deciding where to go and by what means, their decision is more often than not constrained by a number of limiting factors. In this regard, referring to the migrants' economic, social, cultural, symbolic and human capital, van Hear (2004: 2) notes that "there is a hierarchy of destinations that can be reached by migrants and asylum seekers, according to the resources – financial and network-based – that they can call upon", pointing to the unequally difficult nature of navigating between and away from areas of high and low conflict frequency and intensity. Adding a yet more nuanced perspective, Williams (2009: 93) found that "working a salaried job and owning land, both of which are location-specific and non-saleable, decreased the likelihood of migration after violent events", while owning livestock as a saleable item actually increases the likelihood of migrating in response to violence. Therefore, consideration of such economic factors are highly relevant and valuable for understanding the migration propensities of people in the face of violence, however, there are additional dynamics at play that also deserve further inspection.

For one, there is a potential vicious cycle to be set off once migrants resort to the services of smugglers when facing insecurity driven constraints in their migration ambitions. It is not uncommon that militias profit from trafficking, detaining and extorting people trying to escape

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violence. Therefore, a growing flow of migrants represents a significant source of income, enriching conflict parties and terrorist groups only to exacerbate insecurity and potentially drive further migration (Horwood & Reitano 2016: 17). What is more, potential migrants do not rate this double jeopardy of either being trapped with violence where they are or facing potentially similar threats when engaging in irregular or illegal migration equally. Research among potential migrants in East Africa has shown that while being very much aware of the serious risks and security issues involved – including extortion, robbery, exhaustion, dehydration, starvation, deprivation of sleep, physical violence, kidnapping as well as verbal and sexual abuse – over 40 percent state that "the benefits of migration are worth the protection risks faced during the journey and upon arrival in transit and destination countries" (RMMS 2014a: 5). Findings from surveys conducted in Senegal even showed that 25 percent of potential illegal migrants are willing to accept a substantial risk of death in their endeavor to escape (Mbaye 2013: 23). This non-deterring effect of violence under certain conditions also helps to understand migration towards regimes that limit the political freedoms of their citizens. In such countries we often observe lower levels of emigration than people's aspirations in the face of repression might suggest, pointing at the fact that regimes typically constrain the movement of their own citizens (McKenzie 2005: 19). However, at the same time countries that would likely fall under that category, such as the autocracies in the Gulf region, often exhibit rather high immigration rates and accommodate large immigrant populations (de Haas 2020: 20). A possible explanation lies in the fact that while their autocratic structure allows them to freely recruit foreign labor for their segmented and typically discriminatory labor markets, they are also less sensitive to domestic political pressure for immigration reduction (de Haas 2010b: 39). From the migrants' perspective, accepting the trade-off between political freedom and employment opportunities under overall safe conditions then does not seem surprising anymore.

Finally, it is important to underline the long-term and sometimes indirect effects security drivers can potentially have on migration. While violence typically has an immediate and direct influence on people's migration decisions, conflict at large has protracted effects on opportunity structures and people's aspirations and capabilities. Not only will the rebuilding of previous structures take years if not decades, establishing a functioning state that can offer life chances to their population and prevents a reoccurrence of further conflict will be equally lengthy and even more difficult (Horwood & Reitano 2016: 5). Along these lines, Collier (1999: 181) estimated that "during civil wars GDP per capita declines at an annual rate of 2.2 percent" and even "if a civil war lasts only a year, it was found to cause a loss of growth during the first five years of peace of 2.1

percent per annum, a loss not significantly different from that had the war continued". The implications for migration decisions are varied: On the one hand, migration aspirations are likely to remain high as the environment and infrastructure are in bad shape and cannot provide for the needs of the people (Khavarian-Garmsir *et al.* 2019: 9). On the other hand, the economic setback is likely to deprive many of the capabilities to actually migrate, making migration of large portions of the population unlikely until further development potentially lifts them out of poverty and results in renewed migratory behavior (de Haas 2020). It can therefore be concluded that security drivers such as violence have non-linear short- and long-term effects on people's migration decisions (Bohra-Mishra & Massey 2011: 401). This requires a differentiated assessment of the temporal and spatial dynamics of the driving forces at play as well as the overall structural conditions and resources available to potential migrants in order to discern what migration or non-migration outcomes are likely to occur.

4. Measuring migration in practice

After a deep dive into migration theory, it is necessary to also briefly address practical issues involved in the measurement of migration and migration flows in particular. In the following chapters, I would like to outline some of the methods and approaches to measuring the volume, direction and composition of migration flows as well as the means by which researchers engage with migrants as the subjects of the phenomenon. Clearly, there are also limitations to the ability to fully capture migratory behavior as it is often volatile, temporally and spatially dynamic, and can potentially occur under circumstances that would expose researchers to security threats, too. Therefore, I will also address the constraints and other issues scholars are potentially facing. Finally, I will concentrate on the aspirations-capabilities approach and describe the practical implications for research within this framework.

4.1.   Methods and their limitations

To begin with, census analysis is the most commonly applied tool used to measure migration, with national censuses not only providing high-quality and credible data about the total number of international migrants but also a large amount of social, demographic and economic information about their characteristics, patterns and behaviors (Gold & Nawyn 2019: 537). With regard to migrant stocks, censuses are the primary source of information for the majority of nations, notwithstanding that some countries maintain population registers, which provide similar results

(GMG 2017: 13–7). A basic distinction among the former can be drawn based on the question whether people are counted according to legal residence or 'usual residence', in the sense that they live and sleep there even though they might not be registered (Woodrow-Lafield 2019: 539). Either way, the key questions that are crucial for migration study purposes include the place of birth, citizenship and place of residence five years ago (Massey & Clemens 2008: 5). Further questions that are sometimes included and potentially useful concern ancestry, parental birthplaces, entry dates, languages spoken and departures of household members (Woodrow-Lafield 2019: 540). In addition to the answers to these questions, comparisons of population stocks across time may suggest the net flows of migrants between the last and current census (ibid.: 543). In addition to census data, which can only provide a retrospective view on the population, states typically also continuously gather information relevant to migration studies in the form of legal changes in residence and visas being issued for different reasons (Black & Skeldon 2009: 6). And even though this can provide researchers and policy makers with almost real-time flow data, this method, by definition, excludes all those who entered or remained in the country by irregular or illegal means (ibid.). Therefore, both census and immigration data can provide very useful and comprehensive data on legal immigrants, however, they largely fall short of covering alternative - and for research particularly interesting – forms of migration. In addition to that, census sources typically ignore emigration and, moreover, are by design limited in their ability to collect data on migration motivations or drivers that led the individual to change their residence (GMG 2017: 8; Woodrow-Lafield 2019: 547). And while different visa categories allow for some differentiation and causal modelling for migratory behavior, this approach, too, is inherently limited to a few forms of migration. This is why complementary data sources, such as surveys, are often the method of choice to get a better understanding of migration decisions.

One inherent advantage of surveys, when compared to censuses, is that they only cost a fraction of what a nationwide data collection would require (Black & Skeldon 2009: 10; Sana 2019: 553). Apart from that, specialized surveys provide a powerful tool to generate detailed data on peoples' migration projects and, if organized in a multi-sited format, can also account for emigration practices and overcome tendencies of 'methodological nationalism' that leads to a focus on one's own country as the destination of migration (Beauchemin 2014: 921). In this regard, the 'ethnosurvey' presents a sub-type of migration surveys that can provide bi- or even multinational data while also maintaining one of the strengths of survey research, namely a standardized data collection (Sana 2019: 553). In this format, "random sampling is applied in a small number of

study sites to conduct a number of household interviews, typically 200, which pooled with interviews from other sites adds to a sizable data set" (ibid.: 557). For clarity it is relevant to highlight that, even though conducted in the form of an interview, there is no interview guide, but instead there is a fixed set of variables on which the interviewer needs to collect specific information (ibid.). And while having been successfully adopted throughout Latin America, Africa, Europe and East Asia, recent developments have also responded to the general recommendation of bringing the migrants themselves into migration research (Black & Skeldon 2009: 17). As such, community-based participatory research (CBPR) has become a popular means in the U.S. to allow migrants to participate in all stages of research on their own communities. This setting has not only proven to be beneficial to data collection at large, but has also undermined the 'stranger-interviewer norm' which posited that "in order to collect unbiased and valid data, the interviewer must have no prior social relationship with the respondent" (Sana 2019: 561). Results showed that insider interviewers were "more successful at eliciting greater respondent effort and more honesty than outsider interviewers, considerably weakening prior assumptions on that matter (ibid.). Despite this success and the overall potential to complement census data, surveys do remain somewhat limited in their ability to dig deeper into the migrants' experiences and motivations, which provides a good reason to turn to proper interviews for additional insights.

Interviews present a highly malleable and multifunctional research format that can take anywhere from a few minutes to several hours, be conducted in one-on-one or group interactions and be highly structured, almost like a survey, or have no structure at all and be directed to a large extent by the interviewees themselves (Gu 2019: 566). In the migration research context, the goal of the interview is to "acquire in-depth knowledge of immigrants' life experiences", not only trying to give immigrants a voice but also foregrounding their perspective as integral to migration studies (ibid.). Two ways of doing so are presented through 'in-depth interviews' and 'life history interviews'. While the former involves the interviewer maintaining certain control over which topics are explored and what perceptions or experiences are discussed, the latter is only rudimentarily guided and aims at the interviewee telling stories of what has happened in their life, resulting in an account that also features experiences, albeit from a wide range and across different phases of life (Gu 2019: 568). When interviewing migrants within this format, there are certain issues to be kept in mind in order to ensure the validity of the research. Migrants present a unique population in that they often do not speak the host country's language, have a different cultural background and have potentially experienced dramatic changes before or in the course of their migration

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project, calling for a number of considerations when designing and conducting the interview (Gu 2019: 570). For one, it has been shown that it is beneficial to hold the conversation in the subject's first language as it not only allows them to express themselves without being limited by their language competency in a foreign language, but it also helps to establish a connection between the researcher and the interviewee and set the base for good rapport (ibid.: 574). Moreover, it is important that researchers familiarize themselves with the migrants' origin culture and sensitize to social norms, taboos and potentially problematic topics or terminology (ibid.: 576). In a similar vein, interviewers must also be considerate with regard to migrants' constitution and familiarity with such research. Particularly immigrant laborers and refugees might be exhausted or traumatized and thus difficult to approach for interviews, requiring flexible planning and empathic guidance (ibid.: 573). If done well, the strengths of this approach lie in "its focus on subjects' voices as well as its ability to show the richness and complexity of lived experience" allowing researchers to "acquire in-depth understanding of the interviewees' perceptions and feelings" (ibid.: 578). As with the other methods described above, mixing and combining different approaches is desirable (Findlay & Li 1999: 51; Gu 2019: 578). Given the time consuming and labor-intensive nature of such in-depth interviews, highly structured surveys might be added to reach a larger sample of migrants and determine some basic characteristics that can then be further enriched with the insights gained in the interviews. In doing so, the quantitative data from national censuses can be enhanced with both quantitative and qualitative findings from large scale surveys and smaller sampled interviews, resulting in a generally more differentiated picture of migration capturing migrant stocks as well as individuals' migration experiences.

4.2.   General constraints and limitations

As already indicated in the beginning, gathering and compiling comprehensive data on migration sometimes poses a difficult feat. Among others, collecting information is being complicated by the facts that 1) migrants' reachability varies largely, 2) data collection is typically constrained by limited resources and local circumstances, and 3) definitions and terminology differ around the globe and often carry political weight. With regard to the first one, it is clear that some types of migration are easier to measure than others. And while migrants that enter a country through a visa or with other official documentation, are immediately accounted for, irregular or illegal migrants are partly or totally excluded from data collections, since they do not enter through official channels and tend to move under the radar of documentation agencies (GMG 2017: 18). Even if certain

institutions are present at border crossings to assess the inflow of such undocumented migrants, the sheer volume of movements renders data collections difficult (ibid.). What is more, our knowledge of trafficking "is arguably even weaker than our knowledge of irregular migration", therefore presenting a clandestine migration phenomenon that eludes the observations of state institutions and researchers alike (Black & Skeldon 2009: 13).

Second, quantity and quality of available data on migration varies largely across the globe, reflecting low research capacity in many poorer countries (Black & Skeldon 2009: 4). In the same vein, meta-studies have shown that there is a significant difference in focus and volume of migration research depending on the geographic region, also pointing at deficits in funding among these nations (McAuliffe *et al.* 2020: 156). This leaves us with a situation in which "only just over half of the countries have information on place of origin or citizenship for their stock of foreign-born" (Black & Skeldon 2009: 8). Interestingly, in some cases such as Australia, this does not stem from a collection deficit but rather the decision simply not to code the available data, raising the important question whether really every country should be expected to code their data on all places of origin - that is at least the 196 member states of the United Nations – and whether this would be in their interest (ibid.: 5). It is indeed questionable, why particularly nations with highly limited budgets should invest in such an endeavor, given that "the benefit from the data will accrue mainly to other countries" (ibid.). Apart from that, assuming that financial resources are available, collection efforts are potentially further constrained by the degree of regional infrastructure, and even more so, by security factors. Political crisis and related conflicts, which are potentially powerful drivers of migration, also seriously constrain institutions' abilities to conduct research, sometimes rendering already limited efforts in many developing nations even more futile. To name a few examples, the censuses in Nicaragua, Colombia, Peru and El Salvador planned for 2000 had to be postponed by five and six years, respectively (Woodrow-Lafield 2019: 42).

Third, as with all social sciences that are practiced globally, terminology and definitions may vary considerably from one country or region to another. Visa categories or classifications such as 'temporary worker', 'student' or 'irregular migrant' may have different denotations across countries, making comparisons but also harmonizations into larger datasets a difficult task (Black & Skeldon 2009: 7). What is more, data on populations and migrants in particular, carries considerable political weight along various dimensions. For instance, state and other institutions might attempt to adapt categories and definitions in order to suit their interests and achieve certain political or ideological goals (Massey 2010: 126). These range from painting an image of the migration

situation that will likely influence the allocation of attention and resources to using results in order to legitimize certain policies. One such instance could be observed in Myanmar in 2014, when the first national census in 30 years was conducted: The government did not allow self-identification as Rohingya – a de facto stateless Muslim minority group – while listing a total of 135 other ethnic groups to choose from (Woodrow-Lafield 2019: 548). Such practices, indicating state disapproval of certain groups, can lead to the issue of people distrusting censuses and other forms of data collection entirely. The results can range from increasing non-cooperation of migrants to public campaigns against surveys that could potentially feed into anti-immigrant rhetoric and lay the base for discriminatory treatment (Black & Skeldon 2009: 8). The question on whether to include a citizenship question in the 2020 U.S. census presents another example of such politicization. In that case, protest and lawsuits filed by several states against the former Trump administration led to the omission of the question (Wines 2019). Consequently, while being vital for research and policymaking, data on migration can potentially be problematic, too, calling for a differentiated and considerate approach that attempts to combine a mix of methods without infringing on people's privacy or providing scientific grounding for anti-immigrant rhetoric and policy.

4.3. Considerations from an aspirations-capabilities viewpoint

Apart from an inherent interest in the volume, direction, and composition of migratory movements as well as the driving forces in the background, the aspirations-capabilities approach seeks to explore people's aspirations to migrate (or not) even when there is no observable migration outcome. Working against the bias in migration studies, people who stay should therefore be of equal interest to researchers as their moving counterparts. Consequently, in order to also cover the ones who stay – voluntarily or not – data collecting methods need to acknowledge and explicitly target migration as a 'two-step process' in order to discern people's aspirations and mobility configurations independent from actual cross-border movement or similar events that would typically lead to migration study inquiries (Schewel 2019: 344). Along these lines, many researchers have already shifted their focus in this way, with Carling and Schewel (2018) providing an overview and evaluation. To highlight one such endeavor, it is worth foregrounding the Gallup World Poll (GWP) which presents an, albeit not perfect, in its near-global coverage unique survey attempting to measure migration aspirations almost anywhere in the world. While being successful in many ways, it is important to note that there are a few considerations to be made with regard to both the collected data and potential future research replicating the methodology used. For one, comparability of

aspiration values is possible but only sensible under consideration of additional parameters (Carling & Schewel 2018: 952). For instance, the desire to emigrate was higher in the United Kingdom (29%) than in Afghanistan (21%), which would be rather counter-intuitive, if it was not for the follow up questions, which revealed that the proportion of people actually making preparations for emigration was three times higher in Afghanistan (ibid.). This points to the importance of designing a survey in a way that allows for a deeper understanding of the nature and degree of people's migration aspirations. Another issue is wording: By asking about the aspiration to 'permanently' move to another country, the GWP willingly or unwillingly excluded circular or return migrants while at the same time neglecting the fact that many migrants do leave with the desire to return, but for various reasons never do (Carling & Schewel 2018: 951). Consequently, a potentially large number of aspiring migrants is subsumed with people who have no migration aspirations at all. In this regard, the EUMAGINE survey included a more promising question that referred 'living and working abroad' and leaving a potential return in the future open (ibid.). The results largely corresponded with the findings from the GWP, however, the values were consistently higher, suggesting that wording in the latter did in fact have a selecting function among different types of potential migrants (ibid.). Based on these findings, future research and survey design in particular can potentially bring us a lot closer to discerning the varied nature of migration aspirations as well as migration and non-migration outcomes.

5. The Yemen crisis

The first half of this paper was dedicated to a theoretical deep dive into migration studies and particularly the concepts that have been introduced to study and interpret migratory patterns and behavior around the world – most of them with some, albeit often limited, success in answering the core question of why people move while others remain where they are. In this regard, de Haas' framework of aspirations and capabilities has presented itself as a promising meta-concept that could allow for new insights into the intricacies of human mobility phenomena. Therefore, in this second half, I will attempt to put the theories to practice and turn to the migration that has been occurring for decades in the greater region around Yemen, stretching from the countries the Horn of Africa to the Gulf states on the Arabian Peninsula, also known as the Eastern Corridor.

In the specific case of Yemen, we have been observing migration alongside a series of civil wars and multiple crises over the past decades. Therefore, any assessment of the migratory

behavior there would be incomplete without providing sufficient insight into the severe conditions that have undoubtedly had an influence on life as a whole and more specifically migration in the affected areas and most likely also in the larger region of origin, transit and destination countries. In the following chapters I will thus provide an overview of the varied crises and conflicts that have been battering and shaping the country and its people ever since its foundation a mere three decades ago. First, I will briefly address the period from the formation of the Republic of Yemen in 1990 until the revolution in 2011. Then, I will shed light on the transition period from 2011 until 2014 before turning to the aftermath of the coup d'état and the outbreak of the civil war that has been still ongoing at the time of this writing.

5.1.   The Republic of Yemen

Naturally, the history of what is known today as Yemen spans more than three decades into the past and there are without a doubt important historic events that date back further than the period that will be covered here. In this regard, Helen Lackner (2014: xiii–xvii) offers a comprehensive overview of the historic chronology of events in the region since 1839 for further inspection. Nonetheless, the formation of the Republic of Yemen[4] in 1990 appears to provide an appropriate start for a historic investigation that does not go beyond the scope of this thesis while presenting valuable insights into the events that would eventually culminate in what has been repeatedly considered "the worst humanitarian crisis in the world" (Sharp 2020: i)

In 1990, the current crisis in all its gravity was still far beyond the horizon. The new Republic of Yemen was formed after the unification of the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR), which comprised the northwestern part of the country, and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), contributing the southern and eastern parts of the country's land area today. The leader of the new state was Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had been president of the former YAR since 1978 and who would then add another 21 years in office, making him the longest lasting ruler anywhere in Yemen since the end of the Ottoman period (Lackner 2014: 7). Although the former states had two different political systems – the PDRY was the only socialist country in the Arabian Peninsula – the unification under Saleh initially signaled a peaceful transformation as there was both political and economic desire among politicians as well as factions of society that saw the benefits of a larger and thus more powerful nation (Lackner 2016: 15). However, relations between the Yemen

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[4] In this paper used synonymously with the shorter term 'Yemen'.

Socialist Party (YSP), that represented southerners' interests, and Saleh's General People's Congress (GPC) rapidly deteriorated after unification, with YSP leaders being assassinated and Southerners feeling less and less represented by Saleh's regime (Lackner 2014: 9). As southern leaders were then pushing for a secession, this led to a first civil war between the north and south less than four years after unification. Saleh's supporters decisively won this brief conflict, which allowed him to consolidate his power while the resentment among southerners towards the north only grew amidst feelings of oppression and occupation (Lackner 2016: 26). In the years that followed, southerners experienced economic disenfranchisement and repressive rule which would eventually lead to the emergence of the Southern Separatist Movement, also known as Hirak. They formed a loose network of various elements that, although divided over their agenda, would engage in anti-Saleh activism and eventually contribute to the 2011 revolution (Hall 2018: 113).

Before it should come to that, however, Yemen had to endure a series of additional armed conflicts in its northern region, where the government fought the Houthis in six wars between 2004 and 2009 (Lackner 2014: xvi). The Houthi Movement, also known as Ansar Allah, firstly organized "to protect Zaydi traditions against the growing influence of Salafism and Sunni Islam" represented and promoted by Saleh's regime (Hall 2018: 113). However, with each violent crackdown by the government the movement grew to become a political and military faction broadly criticizing the government's neglect of their region, corruption, and illegitimate practices with regard to Saleh's grip to power (ibid.). Interestingly, waging war after war against the Houthis appears to have not only served the purpose of fighting opposition but also to deal with internal disagreements in Saleh's regime. Specifically, it was Ali Mohsen, the leader of the military forces, who presented some opposition to Saleh, particularly with regard to his succession as president and, therefore, Saleh was hoping for a weakening defeat on Mohsen's part or even his death in combat against the Houthis (Lackner 2014: 10; Lackner 2016: 16). While this idea never came to fruition, the living conditions in the northern region deteriorated constantly, with anti-government sentiment becoming more widespread amidst the war-torn and neglected population (Sharp 2020: 6). In addition, Lackner (2018: 3) states that the rise of the Houthi movement also brought forward the issue of sectarianism between Sunni and Shi'a communities, which was largely absent in social or political discourse until then. In this regard, Bogumila Hall (2018: 112) notes that before, "people frequently dismissed the importance of religious differences, proudly stating that Yemen was not Syria, or that the only difference between the Shias and the Sunnis was a prayer technique". The change sentiment can in part also be contributed to the intervention by Saudi Arabia, a Sunni

led country, during the 2009 Yemen led operation 'Scorched Earth' in the final attempts to defeat the Houthis. Because of the widespread perception that Saudi Arabia had previously attempted to use its power and funds to promoting Salafism, a Sunni branch, in Yemen and other countries, Peterson (2008: 2) assumes that Houthi extremism is a reaction to what they perceive as "a creeping Salafi [Sunni] invasion of their territory and faith".

In the same year that Saudi Arabia joined Saleh in his fight against the Houthis in the north of the country, the militarily neglected south witnessed the merger of Saudi and Yemeni al-Qa'ida terrorist groups to form al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which further added to the destabilization of the country while being indicative of Saleh's receding sphere of power and influence (Baabood 2018: 75). Saleh himself was also aware of the developments taking place in the country and feared he might lose in the parliamentary elections scheduled for 2009, which prompted him to postpone them until 2011 in an attempt to get on top of the issues undermining his regime (Lackner 2016: 16). However, there was an almost insurmountable accumulation of negative factors that characterized the first decade of the new millennium, making life for Yemeni people increasingly difficult and further fueling their discontent with the government (Lackner 2014: 9). Putting the rampaging economic recession and multiple political, social and environmental crises in a nutshell, Hall (2018: 114) aptly described the situation saying that "[n]o matter from which region, the educated youth could not find jobs, the sick could not access healthcare, workers were exploited, farmers lacked water, drivers could not afford fuel, and everyday life was a struggle for the majority of Yemenis, with the exception being the secluded elites". Said elites profited from the monopolization of politics by Saleh, his relatives, and close associates which led to "the gradual restriction of the pluralism that characterized Yemen as the most democratic regime in the Peninsula in the early 1990s" (Lackner 2014: 9–10). By the time the Arab Spring began to whirl through MENA countries, not much was left of the original setup of the country and "on the eve of the 2011 popular mobilization, [Yemen] was in chaos – with some even referring to it as a 'failed state'" (Hall 2018: 113).

5.2. Yemeni revolution 2011 and the transition period

As already indicated above, when people started protesting in Tunisia, Libya or Egypt, the conditions in Yemen could be described as dire at best. Years of conflict, political tensions, governmental mismanagement and neglect as well as a worsening economic and water crisis have pushed the country to a point where both domestic and foreign observers commented that an imminent

political crisis would pose serious threats to the country's viability (Phillips 2011: 6). However, as Lackner (2016: 20) states, it was not clear, what would be the straw that would break the camel's back. Eventually, in January 2011, the protests in Sana'a took off. After Saleh initiated talks about a constitutional change that would allow him another term in office and another deferral of the already postponed election due to parliamentary disagreements, popular anger materialized, and tens of thousands of predominantly younger Yemenis – later to be known as *shabab* – came onto the streets demanding Saleh's departure (Lackner 2016: 20-21). After his loyalists claimed Sana'a's central square in an attempt to prevent it from becoming the main stage for protests as it happened in Cairo, students and other activists occupied the area around the university campus, turning it into what they called *Midan al-Taghyir,* 'Change Square' (Carapico 2014: 32). The peaceful protests continued and grew on a constant basis until mid-March, when pro-regime snipers fired into the crowd of demonstrators, leaving more than fifty dead (Bonnefoy 2013: 93). This violent act by Saleh's regime resulted in a tenfold increase of protestors the following days and, even more importantly, the defection of high-ranking figures from the ruling party GPC. Most prominently, there was Ali Mohsen, the military leader that had opposed Saleh before, who abandoned him entirely and offered support to the protestors (Hall 2018: 117). And while this move gave the protestors hope and promised protection against the government's violence, it also marked a shift from a peaceful resistance towards active clashes with government forces (ibid.: 118).

With the government's security forces as well as the military concentrated in the area of Sana'a, this led to a security void in the other parts of the country that would be quickly exploited by the Houthis in the north and AQAP in the south, allowing them to take control of villages and towns and expand their territory (ibid.: 119). In the wake of this expansion, the Houthis further adopted anti-establishment, anti-American and anti-Zionists beliefs that they prominently displayed on their banners reading "God is great! Death to America! Death to Israel! Curse the Jews! Victory to Islam!" (Sharp 2020: 6). As these events unfolded, the other Gulf states became increasingly concerned that either the pro-democracy movement might inspire similar endeavors in their countries or that the clashes might spiral into a civil war that could in turn affect their own security (Hall 2018: 119). Consequently, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)[5] engaged in mediation talks and brokered a deal, namely the Gulf Initiative, that was eventually signed by Saleh

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[5] Comprised of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

in fall of 2011 resulting in his replacement by his vice-president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi and the formation of a provisional government. Furthermore, a National Dialogue Conference (NDC) was established in order to draft and implement a new constitution (Baabood 2018: 68).

The outset of this transitional phase appeared promising. As Hall (2018: 120) states, "external observers and some Yemenis breathed a sigh of relief that the civil war in Yemen appeared to have been averted". Also, the political process of resetting the democratic base of the country through the NDC seemed a viable way of achieving meaningful change in the country. This was also reflected in the composition of the NDC, where not only all political factions were to be represented – including the *shabab*, the Houthis and the southern Hirak – but also 28.5 percent were women (Baabood 2018: 68; Lackner 2014: 14). However, for many this did not go far enough. It was perceived as particularly problematic that the majority in the NDC was still made up of the old power elites, while the young people who were driving the uprising were underrepresented. As a consequence, the majority of the *shabab* rejected the transition deal and Nobel laureate Tawakkul Karman decided to boycott the conference, arguing that "supporters of the former regime had been granted too many seats" (Bonnefoy 2013: 100). In addition, most Yemenis were not following the NDC anyways, as power cuts happened on a daily basis, poverty was still spreading and water tables were steadily dropping (Carapico 2014: 41). The counter-terrorism operations during that time led by the US and Saudi Arabia did not help to appease the public either. In an attempt to curb the expansion of AQAP in the south, there were more than fifty recorded US air strikes in 2012, threatening Yemenis on a regular basis and in one reported case killing three children and nine other civilians (Carapico 2014: 42). Therefore, the protests never stopped but instead continued and evolved.

Besides the ivory tower politics of the transitional government and the NDC as well as the protests in the streets of Sana'a, there were other dynamics outside the capital that were similarly clouding the hopes for real democratic change at the end of the transitional period. The Houthis were able to expand their territory in the north due to what Lackner (2016: 59) called an "alliance contre nature" with former president Saleh, given that they have been fighting each other a few years earlier. However, common enemies often help to overcome animosities and while the Houthis benefitted from the support of Saleh loyalists in the state's military and other armed groups, Saleh himself was content to see their sphere of influence grow, as it would limit the chances of success of the transitional processes. Throughout the latter, Saleh consistently tried to undermine the proceedings by using his influence on the members of his party, that were also

granted seats in the NDC, preventing agreements and blocking the legislative processes (Lackner 2016: 61). As the work of the NDC was eventually coming to a close, with some 1.800 recommendations, but still with major issues unresolved, discontent among opposition forces had grown to a new high, given, in particular, the publicized plans on the new division of Yemen into six, instead of formerly five, federal regions (Hall 2018: 122). In response, the Houthis joined peaceful protests in Sana'a in fall 2014 before violently taking control of the city (Baabood 2018: 68). This marked the end of the transition period and the beginning of the civil war.

5.3.   Coup d'état 2014 and civil war

With Sana'a under Houthi control, President Hadi was eventually forced to resign in February 2015 and later escaped his house arrest to the southern city of Aden, which he then declared the temporary capital and seat of the legitimate government of Yemen (Hall 2018: 125). With rising military pressure by the Saleh-Houthi alliance pushing further south, Hadi had to seek refuge in Riadh, after which Saudi Arabia spearheaded a joint military operation called 'Decisive Storm' with support of a coalition of Arab countries[6] "to restore Hadi as president and defeat the Houthis" (Baabood 2018: 68). On March 26, a Saudi-led air campaign started and with support from UAE ground troops they were able to retake Aden after almost four months of intense fighting as well as a sea and air blockade (Lackner 2016: 22). Full scale war had broken out and the Yemen-Saudi Arabia border had reverted to being a frontline, with Houthis launching attacks across with increasing frequency (Rossiter 2018: 39).

With the beginning of Saudi-led intervention, new official actors assumed a role in the Yemen conflict, while others covertly exerted their influence, and some stepped forward to build and strengthen their position. Alongside the coalition of Saudi Arabia and other Arab states, the US, France and UK prominently committed to supporting the Saudi military with weapons, technology, logistics and intelligence, while also pledging large amounts of humanitarian aid to Yemen (Sowers & Weinthal 2021: 175). One of the common goals that the US aimed to pursue in the region, was to "defeat Iran's efforts to establish a foothold in the Arabian Peninsula threatening Saudi and Gulf security" (Feierstein 2018: 19). This has become a goal after years of speculations on Iranian involvement in the Yemen crisis and the Houthi rebellion more precisely. Since 2015, the US have been patrolling the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden to enforce an international arms

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[6] Including Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Qatar, Sudan and the UAE

embargo, and they have repeatedly intercepted shipping vessels carrying Iranian arms headed for Houthi territory (Sharp 2020: 10). And while Iran has been playing down its involvement, this feeds into the longstanding animosity between the US and its allies on the one side and Iran on the other, adding a proxy dimension to the already multifaceted war.

Another point of interest for the US stems from the fact that AQAP was able to benefit from the Houthi takeover and not only regain its former strength but grow notably. Even during the transition, major terrorist actions happened frequently and killed hundreds of people (Lackner 2016: 9). In the years, that followed, various factors contributed to the growth and strengthening of different political and military factions in the country, AQAP among them. They have exploited the increasing polarization in society as well as the retreat of the Yemeni state, while gaining financial power during their one year control of the port city of Mukalla (Baron & Al-Muslimi 2017: 2). Another factor contributing to their success was the steady deterioration of the country including threats to life or property by any of the belligerents. Because, even though Yemenis are not necessarily drawn to AQAP's ideology, desperate times can cause people to take desperate measures and, consequently, "many Yemenis, confronting perceived existential threats […] have aligned with al-Qa'ida as a matter of self-preservation" (Feierstein 2018: 23). And it appears that even perceived progress in the fight against terrorism, such as the killing of the AQAP leader in 2015, can simply mean a "shift among aggressive armed Islamist away from al-Qa'ida and towards the even more aggressive Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (Lackner 2016: 29). It presents a vicious cycle, and "as long as Yemen continues its slide into failed statehood and catastrophic humanitarian crisis, AQAP and similar groups will continue to thrive (Baron & Al-Muslimi 2017: 9).

With all these actors and interest groups present, the war in Yemen has become an "in-creasingly protracted and regionalized conflict in which local militias, regional powers and outside forces pursue conflicting interests that have precluded a political settlement" (Sowers & Weinthal 2021: 162). However, analyzing the crisis as a battlefield of groups and interests falls short of the fact that Yemen is plagued by a humanitarian crisis as much as by sheer physical violence (Hall 2018: 129). With the Saudi-led military intervention in 2015, Yemen saw a marked increase in the targeting of civilian infrastructure and, while in the period between 2012 and 2014 primarily en-ergy structures such as oil and gas pipelines or electricity installations were hit, there was a signif-icant shift towards agriculture, health, transportation and water infrastructure thereafter (Sowers & Weinthal 2021: 163–4). Highlighting the latter, water has been scarce in Yemen long before the

current conflict erupted, and the ongoing destruction and breakdown of services has made matters only worse. In 2011, according to Ward (2015: 361), only "44 percent of the population had access to networked water supplies". Years later, Baabood (2018: 76) speaks of an unprecedented water crisis and notes that "Sana'a is estimated to become the first capital city in the world to run out of water". In a similar vein, food security has deteriorated alarmingly since 2015 because of various factors. While local production became more difficult due to security issues but also because of water scarcity, the economic breakdown has wiped out incomes leaving millions of families unable to afford food and resulting in food insecurity for two thirds of the population - more than 20 million people (UNOCHA 2019: 33–4). To make matters worse, in 2017 Yemen was ranked among the most unsafe countries to provide health care (Sowers & Weinthal 2021: 172). This comes in addition to the fact that numerous health facilities have either been destroyed or left only partially functioning, moving the little health care available out of the reach of large portions of the population (ibid.). As a result, according to UNOCHA (2019: 17), there was a child dying in Yemen every ten minutes because of preventable diseases such as diarrhea, malnutrition or respiratory tract infections, making it a much larger cause of death than direct acts of violence. Therefore, it is clear that besides the violence and security threats, the wartime destruction of Yemeni infrastructure caused comparable harm to the people in Yemen, undermining or sometimes completely destroying their livelihoods (Sowers & Weinthal 2021: 176). Naturally, besides those who live in this grave situation, the crisis also affects those who attempt to move in, from and through the country, which brings me to the investigation of the impact of the crisis on the migratory behavior in the region.

6. The impact of the Yemen crisis on migration

Bearing all the insecurity and destruction of infrastructure and livelihoods described above in mind, I will now turn to the issue of migration in the face of this crisis. First, I will present the regional as well as the temporal delimitation that provide the frame for this investigation. Second, I will focus on Yemen as a country of origin to take a closer look at Yemenis' mobility within the country as well as their cross-border movements. This should allow for insights into how the Yemeni population was affected by the crisis in their migratory behavior. Third, I will assess international migration along the Eastern Corridor that features Yemen as a transit country, looking specifically at how the situation in Yemen has influenced people in the Horn of Africa in their choices

with regard to migration on this route. With both internal and international migration, the core interest lies in viewing the migrants' agency through the lens of the aspirations and capabilities framework and assessing the underlying structures, i.e. freedoms and constraints that shape their migration decisions. In addition, as already highlighted in the first part of this paper, it is also of interest to shed light on non-movement phenomena as a result of both voluntary and involuntary immobility.

6.1.   Regional delimitation and temporal frame

Modern migration between Yemen and the Horn of Africa goes back more than a century, predating even the former Yemen Arab Republic and People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. This left many families in the region with ancestral and ethnic ties or at least a family history of migration across the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, which in turn led to subsequent migration as well as return-migration among the communities in the region (de Regt 2014; de Regt 2017; Peutz 2019). Twenty-first century migration can in part be traced back to earlier movements like those, albeit only to a limited extent. A multitude of factors and developments in the area have resulted in what is today referred to as Eastern Corridor migration and presents the focus of this paper. The Eastern Corridor is one of the three main migratory routes in the greater Horn of Africa region. While the other two, namely the Northern Route and the Southern Route include movements that remain on the African continent and are directed towards Egypt and Libya or South Africa, respectively, migration along the Eastern Route takes migrants across the Gulf of Aden, in an attempt to get to the Gulf states (IOM 2020a: 3). As shown in Figure 5 there are two main sub-routes, with one leading from the port city of Bossaso in Somaliland across the Gulf of Aden to the southern coast of Yemen and the other crossing from the Djiboutian city of Obock to the important Yemeni coastal city of Aden in the southwest.
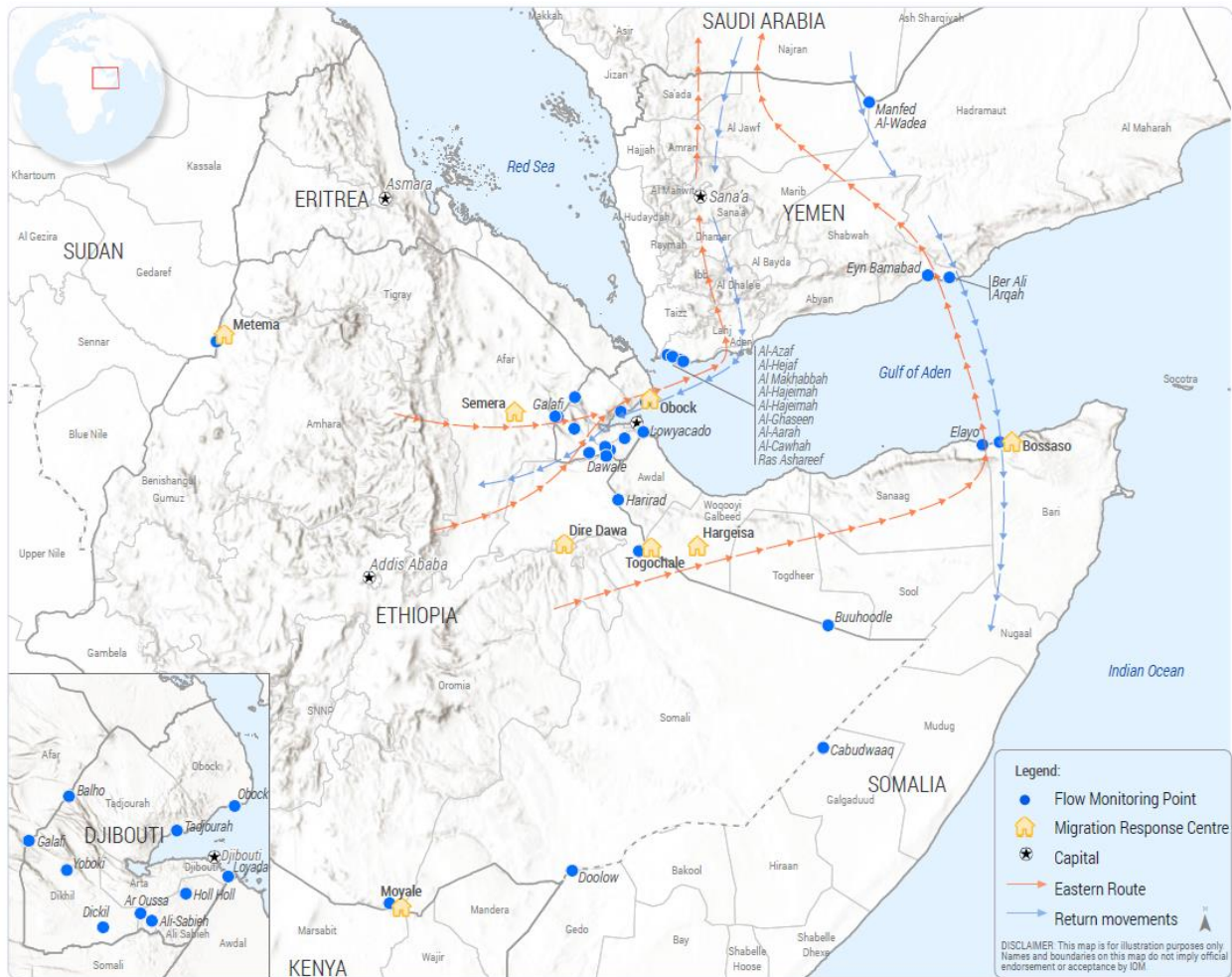
Figure 5 Map of the migration and IOM monitoring centers along the Eastern Corridor (IOM 2022).

The routes illustrated above present "one of the busiest and riskiest migration corridors in the world travelled by hundreds of thousands of migrants" (IOM 2022). As can be seen on the map, the pathways connect the origin countries of Ethiopia, Somalia and Djibouti to the destination region of the Arabian Peninsula. And while Yemen serves both as a country of origin and transit, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the other Gulf states represent destinations for the majority of migrants, making the KSA and the UAE among the top six countries in the world in terms of immigrant populations (UNDESA 2017: 6). Interestingly, as can be observed in Figure 6, too, migration flows along the corridor are bi-directional, an aspect that will be further explored in the following chapters.

With regard to the temporal frame, I have selected the period from the uprising in 2011 up until the recent start of the CoViD-19 pandemic in 2020. The latter would provide an important

point of interest too, as it undoubtedly contributed largely to aggravate the already dire situation in Yemen. However, due to the scarcity of recent data and not to go beyond the scope of this paper, it will be left for others to examine the effects of this global crisis in that particular region. The decade before the pandemic should serve as an appropriate amount of time to capture the migration phenomena that occurred as the complex crisis in Yemen unfolded. Due to the variedness in both quantity and quality of available data, a detailed year-on-year analysis and comparison will not be pursued in this paper, however, exemplary investigations at different points in time should provide valuable insights into the overall developments during this most recent decade in Yemeni history.

6.2. Yemen as a country of origin

As of the end of 2010, the eve of the uprising, Yemen as a whole was in a very bad shape. As Lackner (2016: 17-20) described it, the country had been suffering, among others, from a deteriorating poverty rate, while the water crisis had left individuals with less than ten percent of what the WHO said to be necessary for adequate living standards, and over one million children had been estimated to be malnourished. A likely conclusion that onlookers might have draw at that point with regard to migration is that, with the outbreak of the civil war in 2015 at the latest, Yemenis should be leaving their country by the millions. This follows the notion of migration as a function of push and pull factors, where "economic hardship, political oppression, human rights violations, violence, conflict and state failure in developing countries create more asylum seekers" (Neumayer 2004: 163). Such a mass exodus, however, has not occurred, in fact, quite the opposite was the case, as will be shown below. In the following two chapters I will explore the impact of the past developments – from the popular uprising in 2011 to the beginning of the civil war in 2015 and the years of conflict that followed – on Yemenis' migration patterns and behavior and try to explain, among other things, why so few have left the country.

6.2.1. Internal migration and displacement

As already indicated above, "the conditions in the country are such that significant cross-border movements might be expected" but in comparison, quite few have sought refuge abroad (IDMC 2020: 1). To begin with, in 2011 Yemen already counted more than 300,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) due to the series of wars between the government and the Houthis in the north of the country between 2004 and 2009 (NRC 2013: 24; Semnani & Sydney 2020: 8). During the popular uprising and the violent clashes between the government and opposition forces in both the

north and south of the country, the number of IDPs rose as civilians were trying to escape the violence (Thiollet 2014: 282). Additionally, natural disasters such as flash floods, drought and land erosion had also caused people to leave their homes (IDMC 2012: 1). Depending on the data source, the number of IDPs by the end of 2011 ranged from 347,000 (UNHCR 2022b)[7] to over 550,000 (Semnani & Sydney 2020: 10). The latter divergence between the reported number of IDPs highlights not only the difficulties in gathering data in such conflict zones and estimating the true extent of displacement movement, but also potential differences in data collection methodology and the terminology used to identify groups of interest. Concerning the former, Semnani and Sydney (2020: 10) acknowledge that "restrictions in access to areas affected by conflict over the years mean the true scale of the displacement involved is unknown". In addition to this, it has also been noted that "the counting of IDPs in Yemen has come under some political pressure due to the associated interest of different groups presenting high or low numbers" (RMMS 2012b: 5). That being said, the numbers presented here are not meant to give precise accounts of the amount of people displaced, rather, they serve the purpose of indicating trends and tendencies that should serve as a base for further investigations.

With the transitional agreement in the form of the GCC Initiative in place and some of the violence in the south subsiding, numbers stabilized or even decreased on average in 2012. Reported cases from that year ranged from around 385,000 (UNHCR 2022b), over 430,000 (NRC 2013: 22) to roughly the amount of 2011 with around 540,000 stated by the government (Thiollet 2014: 282). Divergence in available data increases again for 2013 when the UNHRC (2022b) only registered about 306,000 IDPs, while others observed a more moderate decrease to around 400,000 (Semnani & Sydney 2020: 10) and the NRC (2014: 22) still reported numbers as high as 545,000 for the same year. The former could be supported by the fact that fighting between separatist groups and the government in the south ebbed away and allowed a significant portion of southern IDPs to return to their homes also balancing new displacements in the north (Thiollet 2014: 282). Underrepresentation, however, could be an issue, as already pointed out above, and reports also highlight that "insecurity continues to hinder returns to their villages of origin" (NRC 2014: 22). On the eve of the 2015 coup d'état, reports indicated a slight increase in IDPs on average, ranging

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[7] The denomination in the datasheets reads "IDPs of concern to UNHCR" which refers exclusively to "conflict-generated IDPs to whom the organization extends protection and/or assistance", therefore it is likely that the numbers underrepresent IDPs that have potentially moved due to other factors than direct security threats and/or have not received protection or assistance through the organization (UNHCR 2022a).

from 334,000 (UNHCR 2022b) to 440,000 (Semnani & Sydney 2020: 10). In either case, these numbers would then be dwarfed by what followed the escalation into a civil war and the intervention of the Saudi-led coalition in 2015. UNHCR (2015b: 1) estimated an additional 1.4 milllion people had been displaced only between March and October of that first year of war. This left the country with a total of around 2.3 million IDPs just eight months into the conflict (UNHCR 2015d: 5). Estimates for the years 2016 and 2017 also mention cases ranging above two million (NRC 2017: 5; NRC 2018: 14; UNHCR 2022b) while the Protection Cluster Yemen (2016: 6) assumed that as of March 2016 more than 2.7 million had been internally displaced. The following years exhibited further increases as the conditions in the country had been deteriorating. The UNHCR (2022b) reported stagnation at first, with around 2.1 million IDPs by 2019, which was followed by a stark increase to 3.6 million in 2019 and more than 4 million in 2020. Estimates that go even beyond that state that by 2019, "nearly five million Yemenis – more than 15 percent of the country's population – [had] been internally displaced" while only around 190,000 individuals – Yemenis and third-country nationals – had sought refuge in neighboring countries (Peutz 2019: 357–8). However, before I turn to focus on the staggeringly low number of emigrants, I will take a closer look at the distinct configurations of potential aspirations and capabilities as well as the underlying structures that have left us with the extent of internal displacement described above.

Revisiting the data aspect for a moment, it has to be stated that, even though numbers concerning migrants, and IDPs in particular, are more often than not rough estimates rather than exact measurements and therefore inherently inaccurate. Nonetheless, they can serve multiple purposes from research over resource allocation to policy making. In the case of Yemen they serve to demonstrate very clearly, among other things, that movement is the response of a minority, while the vast majority, that is roughly 97 percent in 2011 and 85 percent, in 2019, respectively, have not shown in any migration statistic. This corresponds to similar ratios in countries like Afghanistan or Iraq that have also been experiencing severe conflicts (Williams 2009: 10).[8] And this does by no means entail that such a 'minority' deserves less interest or dedication, quite the opposite is the case, given the heightened vulnerability of people on the move, however, it shows that there is an enormous faction of the population that, while being potentially exposed to the same threats as their counterparts, has not packed up and left. Therefore, I see great potential in the twofold attempt to counter the mobility bias in migration studies and at the same time shed light on the situation of

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[8] Williams noted that 90 percent of Afghans and 82 percent of Iraqis had not been on the move at the time of writing.

those who stayed in order to benefit both research and the people that are concerned. That being said, the following section tries to explore not only why the millions of IDPs in Yemen remained inside the country but also why a much larger group of people has not moved at all.

First, I will focus on economic drivers of migration. While it has been established by Semnani and Sydney (2020: 13) that conflict events presented the primary trigger for a vast majority of IDPs in Yemen, economic factors help to better understand who and how they moved. Yemen's economy had been struggling already before the outbreak of the civil war in 2015. In the transition period, more than half of the population lived below the poverty line and 30 percent suffered from food insecurity (Greenfield & Milbert 2014: 1). Within this context, various authors have noted that internal migration is the form of migration that the poorest families tend to engage in, instead of migrating to high-income countries (de Haan & Yaqub 2010: 190). In this regard, Raleigh (2011: 90) also states that "there is a strong relationship between poverty and the inability to leave a conflict zone". The conflict zone in this case being large parts of the country and leaving it would most likely require emigration. That the latter is unaffordable for most is a finding that is supported by the interviews conducted by the IDMC (2020: 2) among IDPs, where three quarters of the respondents said that "cost was a barrier to cross-border movement". As a consequence, constrained in their capabilities to move any further, individuals remain where they are, if the security situation allows it, or typically "migrate to urban or peri-urban areas" (Raleigh 2011: 90). Non-movement or only limited movement as in the latter case, can also have additional economic reasons that are related to the type of assets and economic prospects people have in their current location and that they could aspire to keep or return to as soon as possible. This is supported by Williams (2009: 93) who found that "working a salaried job and owning land, both of which are location-specific and non-saleable, decreased the likelihood of migration after violent events". Those who did in fact decide to move, because security threats became inacceptable and moving was perceived as a viable option, often experienced the effects of a vicious cycle. On the one hand, population displacement has potentially dramatic economic consequences "including unemployment, declining household income, lack of access to schools, malnutrition and so on" further aggravating the financial disposition of individuals who might aspire to leave the country (Thiollet 2014: 282). On the other hand, large population movements into one area that could be potentially safe can completely overwhelm the infrastructure and exhaust the resources available there. For instance, between 2014 and 2018 the population of the relatively safe central province of Marib rose from around 350,000 to more than 1.5 million, with schools and hospitals unable to provide

for everyone's needs (Weissenburger 2018: 35). At the same time, the heightened demand for accommodation, especially through middle class families "severely pushed up rent prices, adding to the strain on the local population" (ibid.). Finally, with the majority of migrants staying put or merely moving within the country, Yemen's population is losing a significant portion of household income. As Thiollet (2014: 283) stated, emigration and more precisely remittances had presented "an important vector of economic and financial stability for the country". The gravity of this loss of income becomes evident when viewing the results of interviews conducted with 3000 Yemenis in 2018, where 70 percent of respondents stated that "the amount remitted accounted for more than 50 percent of the family's income" (IOM 2018: 5). With such significant losses, the prospect of eventually being able to afford to leave the conflict zone fades as the economic situation in the country further deteriorates.

At the same time, even for individuals that potentially can produce the money necessary to finance emigration, there are significant political obstacles that further constrain people's abilities to leave the country and therefore increase immobility among Yemenis. In Arango's (2000: 293) words, "nothing shapes migratory flows and types more than admission policies" and the admission policies of the GCC countries and the global community have had a severe impact on who would be able to leave Yemen in the past decade, confining the majority of Yemenis within their borders. Throughout Yemen's recent history as a formally democratic state, Saudi Arabia, like other GCC countries, has been suspicious of the developments in the only democracy on the Arab Peninsula, with a growing concern "about potential Yemeni influence on its own nationals" with regard to democratic ideology (Lackner 2014: 3). It is therefore little to no surprise that policy makers in the KSA had tried since the early 2000s to implement "physical, technical and administrative measures to regulate what and who enters their space" (Rossiter 2018: 29). With their involvement in the final Houthi wars in 2009, the Saudi view of the border with Yemen shifted in the sense that "it was now a frontline to defend rather than simply a border to manage" (Rossiter 2018: 35). With the reinforcement of border structures, through fences and guard towers as well as its militarization, the KSA was able to combine safeguarding their country against potential Houthi threats with efforts to curb unwanted immigration and 'Saudize' their labor force as part of the *nitaqat* program (Carapico 2014: 45; IOM 2018: ii). With all the restrictions, obstacles and controls in place in Saudi Arabia, Ahmed (1997: 183) is proven right in his statement that "one key determinant of the size and scope of South to North immigration remains the state in the north". In addition, the border to Oman has been virtually closed to Yemenis. While the

construction of a wall has commenced in 2013, the US have co-financed the militarization of the border (Petersen-Smith 2018). The situation worsened in the aftermath of the November 2015 Paris terror attack, when "Oman closed two of its border crossings with Yemen in January 2016 due to fears of militant attacks" through AQAP (Baabood 2018: 75). With neighboring doors tightly shut, Yemenis could, in theory also fly to other countries, however, this has been made impossible by the fact that it was only now in 2022 that the first commercial flight took off from Sana'a after a no-fly zone had been in place since 2015 (Abed 2022). But even before the escalation of the conflict and the closure of the airport, there were only 33 countries in the world that allowed access to Yemenis without a visa, placing the country "103rd in the Henley Passport Index's list of countries with visa-free access, just before Pakistan, Somalia, Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan" (Semnani & Sydney 2020: 22). From there the escalation of the conflict, with perceived and real threats by militias and terrorist groups has only made it even more difficult for Yemenis to seek refuge in a potentially safe haven abroad. On top of the already limited opportunities, there were also discriminatory policies targeting Yemenis specifically, as for instance the anti-Muslim travel ban put in place by the Trump administration, barring Yemeni nationals from flying to the US (Petersen-Smith 2018). Or take the United Arab Emirates (UAE) that aimed at "allowing a few highly skilled Yemenis into the UAE, while avoiding mass in-migration" (Lackner 2014: 3). And even if there were more official ways for Yemenis to emigrate, such opportunities are further constrained given that, according to NRC (2018: 14), many displaced families lost their identity documents, leaving them stranded in the country. All the above contribute to an abundance of structural constraints that take away people's ability to realize any migration aspirations beyond a local or perhaps regional back and forth.[9]

Quite the opposite of moving back and forth can potentially be observed with those who have deemed it the best option not to move at all. It is important to note here that compared to the above cases where the economic standing of individuals or their location-bound assets have prohibited them from moving, in this latter case it is the rather deliberate choice of people to stay where they are in order to not expose themselves to risks awaiting them elsewhere. This becomes a reasonable mode of action or rather inaction given the uneven distribution of security threats across Yemen. As already discussed earlier, conflicts typically display spatial patterns including "chronic zones, hotspots, frontlines and contested areas" with varying degrees of violence and

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[9] In this regard it can be added that around one third of respondents in Semnani and Sydney's (2020: 16) study stated that they had been displaced more than once.

security threats present (Raleigh 2011: 85). That being said, individuals who choose to stay rather than move elsewhere, might do so with the very same aspirations that others have when leaving their homes behind, namely, to stay away from perceived threats. Depending on the presence of actual security threats and viable alternatives to staying, these people could be characterized as either exercising their mobility freedom of staying, in the case that alternatives would be available, or, at the other end of the spectrum, as being trapped, albeit in a less dangerous environment than what the surrounding areas present. And while there is to my knowledge no data available that would allow for such differentiations at this point, it presents an interesting perspective as it highlights to what extent even those that do not exhibit any movement could in fact be making active use of their mobility freedom to remain where they are.

In relative terms, all of the above, with the exception of the last case, could be considered instances of involuntary immobility:[10] the internal migrant that cannot get out of the country as well as the individual that could not even leave their village even if they wanted to (Schewel 2019: 344). Now, I would like to turn to yet another form of mobility that might be helpful in explaining why some people potentially do not leave, and that is a complete lack of the aspiration to move paired with the inability to do so, even if they wanted to. This case of what Schewel (2015) termed 'acquiescent immobility' and that was later adopted by de Haas (2021) describes the specific circumstances of Yemenis that have accepted that they are constrained in their movement and have internalized it to the extent that no aspirations to move are discernable. One possible explanation that could apply to both IDPs and those who have not moved at all, stems from the nature of the Yemen crisis. As Raleigh (2011: 85) aptly said, "conflict is often viewed as a sudden shock to an otherwise placid system, and resultant mobility as a reaction to that shock". However, and this is particularly true for Yemen, civilians have often faced "persistent insecurity regardless of the degree of 'formal' violence within their state" (ibid.). The available data paints a clear picture in this regard: Already in 2012, almost 40 percent of the 25 million Yemenis were food insecure and 60 percent of children malnourished with the economy struggling already for years (NRC 2013: 22). The numbers did not improve during the transition period and by 2014 an estimated 15.9 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance (NRC 2015: 16). Therefore, by the outbreak of the

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[10] Relatively speaking, Yemeni IDPs can also be seen as experiencing involuntary mobility, given that the option of staying perhaps was not available. However, since they barely have any means of leaving the country, and the focus lies on the question of why so few have left the country, highlighting the fact that they are highly constrained in their mobility appeared more appropriate at this point. At the same time, foregrounding this dual mobility categorization serves to underscore the contingent nature of migration phenomena.

civil war in 2015, people had already been experiencing multiple forms of deprivation for several years. In the case of northerners – given the concentration of the Houthi related conflicts there before the uprising – and long-term IDPs, they might have even been living under extreme constraints for more than a decade. In the face of such limitations to personal freedoms that perhaps entail the inability to migrate "individuals could react by subconsciously subduing their migration aspirations" (Carling & Schewel 2018: 958). Once they have internalized that their capabilities are extremely limited, even the escalation of the conflict potentially did nothing to spark migration aspirations, as they have entered a "state of resignation to their hostile environment" (Ahmed 1997: 184).

Finally, turning to yet another distinct case of non-movement in an international context, it has been noted by different authors that individuals may exhibit a distrust towards foreign lands and thus do not aspire to leave even in the face of various threats at home. In this regard, Peutz (2019: 358) speaks of the "reluctance of many Yemenis to leave their homeland" as one of many potential reasons behind the comparatively low number of international refugees. In part, this could be explained by psychology and, even though it was formulated in an economic context, the argument put forward by Fischer *et al.* (1997b: 83) that "most people have a (locational) preference for what they know well and thus tend to exaggerate risks abroad as greater than those at home". This is further underscored by Ahmed (1997: 184), who – acknowledging that certain groups are severely limited in their ability to leave – notes that "most people stay although economic, political and other reasons exist which commend exit" and further reasons that "they do it out of loyalty or support for the regime, because of socialization and the influence of the nation-building process". Similarly, Semnani and Sydney (2020: 24) observed a strong attachment of some Yemenis to their country, with one respondent in a survey quoting their mother, who did not want to leave the country, stating: "If we die, I'd rather die together". And while this serves only as anecdotal evidence, it hints at the abundance of potential reasoning and complex aspirations behind the migration decisions of Yemenis that remained in the country in the face of this crisis. After exploring numerous such configurations of aspirations and capabilities among internal migrants, I will now turn to those who were able to cross the border and successfully emigrated from the country.

6.2.2. Emigration and return migration

While Yemen shares a long migration history with the Horn of Africa, the Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat for East Africa and Yemen did not report any Yemenis involved in mixed migration flows[11] from the Arab Peninsula to the HOA region between September 2011 and February 2015.[12] This corresponds to the data provided by the UNHCR (2022b) which shows only 121 Yemeni refugees and asylum seekers in 2011, with the majority of them registered in Ethiopia (89) and the remainder divided equally between Djibouti (16) and Somalia (16). This distribution largely remained the same over the years, only featuring a slight increase in numbers to a total of 174 in 2014, with Somalia losing some of its significance, hosting only five Yemeni refugees, while Djibouti received 25 and Ethiopia 144 (ibid.). Then, in 2015, things changed drastically as the Saudi-led bombing campaign prompted a new phase in the history of migration across the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, with thousands of Yemenis fleeing to Somalia, Djibouti or Ethiopia (de Regt 2017: 26).

Before I take a closer look at the observed refugee movements triggered by the escalation of the conflict, it is necessary to address a terminological issue that has been re-occurring throughout the research for this paper. In the literature, refugees from Yemen are repeatedly called 'Yemeni refugees' and more often than not no clear distinctions are being made whether this denomination refers to Yemeni nationals or merely individuals fleeing the country Yemen.[13] This has resulted not only in ambiguous reporting but potentially also the perceived inflation of refugee numbers. Such an example can be found in the RMMS (2017b) report, where, at first, there is mention of "10,519 Yemeni refugees living in Somalia" by the end of 2017, only to be later contradicted by an overview of "Yemeni refugees in the region" with "40,044 in Somalia". And the numbers do in fact add up, as the first 'Yemeni refugees' supposedly refers to Yemeni nationals, while the second 'Yemeni refugees' includes refugees of all nationalities fleeing Yemen, a distinction that should have been made clear in this and other instances.[14] That being said, I have reviewed and filtered the numbers presented here to the best of my knowledge in order to correctly show the types of population that are indicated and of interest to this investigation.

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[11] These include asylum seekers, trafficked persons, smuggled economic migrants, and refugees (RMMS 2015a).

[12] See RMMS (2012a; 2012b; 2014b; 2015a).

[13] This is based on observations during the review of articles and reports such as RMMS (2017b: 2), Baabood (2018: 75) and Peutz (2019: 357–8).

[14] Unless stated otherwise, in this paper 'Yemeni refugees' refers to Yemeni nationals that have sought refuge abroad.

As already pointed out above, 2015 brought a substantial change in migratory behavior and consequently Yemeni refugees began to also show up in the reports done by the RMMS for East Africa and Yemen. Their reported numbers after four months of open conflict indicated a total of more than 11,000 Yemenis seeking refuge in the HOA, with the vast majority registered in Djibouti (85 percent) and the remainder in Somalia (RMMS 2015b). Until the end of that same year, these numbers increased to a total of almost 23,000, also introducing Ethiopia as a host of more than 1,000 Yemenis (RMMS 2016). Compared to the data presented by UNHCR (2022b), there appears to be a similar divergence to the one observed among IDP data in the previous chapter, with the UNHCR repeatedly providing a lower number than the RMMS. In addition, the UNHCR numbers also indicated a shift regarding destination choices, away from Djibouti and towards Somalia, while Ethiopia remained relatively stable throughout. By the end of 2015, Djibouti still hosted the largest share of the total of over 12,000 Yemeni refugees registered by UNHCR (2022b), however, arrivals there appeared to decrease and stabilize around 4,000 and 5,000 in the following years. In Somalia, on the other hand, UNHCR (ibid.) observed a steady increase from over 8,000 in 2016 to more than 12,000 and 13,000, respectively, in the years that followed. The total number of Yemeni refugees thus also differed quite significantly between the two data sources. For 2016 reports ranged from nearly 14,000 (UNHCR 2022b) to over 27,000 (RMMS 2017a). And while the UNHCR (ibid.) numbers further increased to about 16,000 and 19,000 in 2017 and 2018, respectively, they peaked at a little over 20,000 by the end of 2019, still quite a stretch from the high levels reported by RMMS years earlier. There are various possible explanations for this, none of which I was able to verify, however, there is one observation that I would like to share in order to potentially enhance understanding of the reporting done by RMMS. As it turned out, RMMS appeared to be accumulating and adding year-on-year data in the sense that new arrivals were added but tracking of past migrants was somewhat limited. This led to reporting, where perceived refugee populations were in fact much smaller than presented, because migrants who had moved one were not removed from the register.[15] It could be concluded that the RMMS is perhaps inflating refugee counts while the UNHCR, as already mentioned earlier, might be underrepresenting actual refugee movements, with the actual number of Yemeni refugees in the HOA maybe lying somewhere in between. However, just like with the numbers of IDPs used before, the data used here should help to illustrate trends and indicate the rise and fall of refugee influx rather

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[15] See for instance the number of Yemeni refugees in Djibouti as reported in RMMS (2017b) compared to the data provided by UNHCR (2017).

than provide precise accounts of the number of individuals arriving in these countries. The latter is particularly true for Yemen's immediate mainland neighbors, Saudi Arabia and Oman, that I will now turn to.

Migrant data for Saudi Arabia is inherently scarce, as Saudi authorities, according to De Bel-Air (2014: 6), are not eager to share such information in official publications "for fear that the numeric domination of some nationalities would encourage socio-political claims". The situation is similar in Oman, where almost no official data on Yemeni refugees is available, as the government does not publicly report any such numbers and the activities of international organizations in the country are limited (al Shaibany 2017). Nonetheless, there are numerous indications and also some data that show that Yemenis have crossed into those two countries, with the KSA outnumbering Oman as a destination country by several digits. As an historic indicator for the period between 1978 and 2008, there were almost 3.5 million arrests of illegal migrants made at the Saudi border, and more than 98 percent were Yemeni nationals (Alsharif 2017: 167). This is later reflected in another report that estimates that there were between 800,000 and 1,000,000 Yemeni nationals present in the KSA as of November 2013 (De Bel-Air 2014: 7). And while this does not tell us anything about the actual migration rate for the period of 2011 to 2013, it is in fact a strong indicator that Yemenis had been crossing the Saudi border at significant numbers before the crisis. Finally, a report by the UNHCR (2015d: 4) that specifically focused on the Yemen crisis and the migration that has resulted from it stated that as of November 2015 there had been roughly 30,000 Yemeni arrivals in the KSA and around 5,000 in Oman. Fast forward to 2019, the UNDESA (2019b; 2019a) reports only around 200 refugees in the KSA and about 700 in Oman, with no explicit mentioning of the share of Yemeni nationals. However, there are reports citing the UN stating that "2 million Yemeni people fled the country to Saudi Arabia" because of the conflict (ECDHR 2022). And while none of these numbers paint a clear picture of the extent of recent Yemeni migration towards Saudi Arabia – not to speak of annual rates etc. – all of the above are indicative of the irregularity of Yemenis' movements towards the KSA in the face of security threats on the one hand and severe mobility constraints on the other.

Without being able to pinpoint exact migration rates, it is still highly relevant to explore the driving factors behind this south-north migration. Yemeni migration along the Eastern Corridor during the first decade of the 21st century typically entailed moving north to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. These countries were traditionally hosting large numbers of Yemenis, who worked through different migration channels or were staying irregularly (UNHCR 2015d: 7). It

was a win-win situation for both. For Yemenis emigration presented an important pillar of economic and financial stability given their dependences on remittances (IOM 2018: ii; Thiollet 2014: 283). Therefore, labor demand in Saudi Arabia became one of the most important drivers of migration decisions among Yemenis at that time (de Haas *et al.* 2019: 897). And while this helped the Saudi economy by providing cheap foreign labor, the tides should begin to turn after 2011. With the Arab spring in full blow, the Saudi government sought ways to curb unemployment among Saudi nationals, which led to the introduction of the *nitaqat* system aimed at "reducing the number of foreign workers in the country" (Alsharif 2017: 163). In 2013 this program expanded into "a multidimensional campaign against workers and residents in irregular situation[s]" (De Bel-Air 2014: 5). Over the course of those years, Saudi Arabia was "one of the most active countries in the region implementing policies to restrict migration" including the reinforcement and militarization of border structures as well as mass deportations of irregular migrants (RMMS 2014c: 9). Yemen was the country most affected, given that "by the end of 2014 almost 600,000 Yemenis had already crossed the border back into Yemen" (IOM 2018: ii). Obtaining official work permissions had long become increasingly difficult and also risky with a sponsorship system in place called *kafala*. Migrant workers' residence and work permit would be tied to "employers, whose written consent is required for workers to change employers or exit the country" which in the past has led to reports of "forced confinement, food deprivation, and severe psychological, physical and sexual abuse" (RMMS 2014c: 9). With all the administrative but also physical barriers in place, as well as accounts of inhumane treatment abound, it is a telling observation that, according to a survey among 3000 Yemenis expelled from the KSA, nonetheless "more than 90 percent of returnees affirmed that, given the opportunity, they would go back to Saudi Arabia, with almost half indicating they would be willing to use irregular channels to do so" (IOM 2018: 5). To some observers it appears that, along these lines, Yemeni migrants are "engaged in a circular process of clandestine entrance, work, detection and deportation by authorities followed by repeated attempts or successful re-entry into the Kingdom" (RMMS 2014c: 16). As it seems, the perceived conditions in the KSA – with all the risks involved in the migration process as well as the illegal status there – must be more promising than the situation in their homeland. In addition, Yemenis opting for irregular channels also present an example of 'categorical substitution' where migrant reorient themselves towards other and sometimes illegal pathways before abandoning their migration aspirations (de Haas et al. 2019: 908). While the reasons for this behavior can be manifold, one explanation comes through Yemeni return migrants from the KSA, who stated in interviews

that they opted for irregular migration due to the costs of getting a visa or work contract necessary for legally crossing the border (IOM 2018: 6).

At the same time, with aspirations to escape the dire situation in Yemen remaining high, the serious constraints and risks involved in a migration project to the KSA may also lead to spatial substitution (de Haas *et al.* 2019: 907–8). And while the border to Oman has become increasingly militarized, too, with wall constructions having commenced in 2013, more and more Yemenis abandoned the idea of getting to the Gulf states and opted for the Horn of Africa instead (Akumu & Frouws 2016: 4). This is exceptional, since "the countries on the Horn of Africa are not attractive" as a destination for Yemenis, given their manifold internal struggles (Schiocchet *et al.* 2019: 34). Djibouti is an "arid and resource scarce" country where "harsh climatic conditions and the El-Niño droughts contributed to displacement in 2015 (NRC 2016: 22). At the same time, "an estimated 4.9 million people in Somalia were in need of life-saving and livelihood support and 1.1 million remained internally displaced" while "inter-clan conflict and militia group blockades in rural areas disrupted trade flows, causing market deficits and leading to an increase in food prices" (NRC 2016: 11). Meanwhile, "persistent droughts and violent conflict led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands in eastern Ethiopia, nearly doubling the number of IDPs in the country and adding to the weight of over 720,000 refugees present in Africa's largest refugee hosting country (NRC 2016: 31). It is therefore and interesting question, who and under which circumstances migrates into such a region that is marred by numerous problems and grievances.

To begin with, the poorest families tend to migrate less to high-income countries but instead engage in south-south migration (de Haan & Yaqub 2010: 190). That being said, it is worth noting that movement across the Gulf of Aden still comes at a cost and "only those with a certain amount of financial or social capital" would be able to move, already limiting the number of prospective migrant families (REF 2017: 36). At the same time, comparing the options available to those with some form of capital, crossing the sea from Yemen to Djibouti or Somalia in 2016 was on average more than seven times cheaper than trying to make it north into Saudi Arabia (ibid.: 41). In addition to these considerations regarding cost, respondents in interviews conducted in Djibouti also cited access as a key determinant for their choice of route and destination (ibid.: 40). As a consequence, "the largest group of Yemeni refugees fled to Djibouti, which for many refugees, especially those from around Aden, Taiz or Bab el Mandeb, was the closest country to flee to" (Akumu & Frouws 2016: 4). However, proximity was not the only reason that made people choose this route. There were also "close cultural, social and linguistic links" as well as the "open

door policy of the Djiboutian government" that contributed to the influx of Yemeni refugees (UNHCR 2015d: 5). As opposed to the severe immigration restrictions put in place by the Saudi government, Yemenis that came to Djibouti were allowed to stay for thirty days without a visa and were given the chance to either get a visa afterwards, apply for refugee status or leave the country, conditions that Yemenis also exploited by simply overstaying without registering with the UN-HCR (Akumu & Frouws 2016: 4). This also puts into perspective the refugee data presented earlier, as there were only 1,278 Yemenis officially registered in Djibouti city as of 17 April 2016, however, agencies in the city assumed that there had been another 13,000 non-registered individuals in the area (ibid.: 5). While registration was required in order to get access to the camp and receive assistance, many refused to go there. People were looking for opportunities to earn a living and in some cases support their families in Yemen, which was difficult given the conditions in the camps (UNHCR 2015d: 5). The north of Djibouti, where the camps are located, offered only limited livelihood opportunities and, in addition to that, "environmental conditions in the camp are harsh, with temperatures rising to highs of 51 degrees in the summer coupled with violence and storms" (Akumu & Frouws 2016: 5). After a while, news about the situation in Djibouti had potentially also spread to Yemen and the harsh weather conditions as well as high living costs in the city might have been dampening migration aspirations among some who had been planning on leaving in the future (UNHCR 2015d: 5). Given these circumstances, many Yemenis in Djibouti stated that they were planning on leaving the country rather sooner than later, however, limited financial resources and a lack of diaspora networks severely constrained this objective (Akumu & Frouws 2016: 5–6). In addition, Yemeni refugees also expressed an intention to return to their homeland as soon as the conflict would be resolved, indicating strong ties with their country that could not even be withered by the ongoing crisis (ibid.: 5). As a result, Yemenis have been observed to increasingly return from the HOA to Yemen, and while there are no exact figures available, UNHCR estimated that about 1,700 had moved back by mid-2016 (ibid.: 6). In complete opposition to those who returned stands a group of Yemenis, for whom the escalation of the conflict served more as a catalyst for longstanding emigration aspirations. An interesting phenomenon that I will now turn to.

In this regard, Peutz (2019: 358) attempted to find more answers to the question of why some Yemenis fled the country "when, in many cases, their relatives and neighbors had fled internally". Putting capability related issues such as financial costs or mobility restrictions aside for the moment, she was able to discern another dimension in terms of migrants' aspirations that led to

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their decision to leave Yemen. Besides the security threats, which she acknowledges to be the primary reason for Yemeni emigration, she found that there was a sub-group of third-generation migrants – the offspring of mixed ethnicity grandparents that had once moved from the Horn of Africa to Yemen – that decided to seek refuge in Djibouti in order to escape "their lifelong feelings of abjection and alienation" in Yemen (ibid.: 358). In interviews, these migrants talk of the discrimination and hardships they faced because of their mixed descent and migration history and the fact that, before the war, they would not have been recognized as refugees and therefore would neither have been accepted nor supported by the international community (ibid.: 357, 367). And while this perhaps only applies to a specific group of Yemeni migrants in the Horn of Africa, it sheds light on the complexity and nuanced nature of the people's aspirations that eventually led them to migrate in the direction and manner they did.

Turning to the other maritime neighbor, Somalia, Yemenis have been recognized there as refugees *prima facie* almost immediately after the outbreak of the conflict, as long as they were able to provide some form of documentation (Akumu & Frouws 2016: 6). And while this potentially presented an obstacle for those that had to leave everything behind or lost their belonging en route, it also facilitated access to immediate relief for others. Another facilitator enabling Yemenis to make the journey from the Arab peninsula to Somalia were the charitable organizations that chartered boats and would cover the costs of usually around $100 for the crossing (Akumu & Frouws 2016: 7). Once settled, however, Yemenis would soon discover that living conditions were difficult, as they found themselves in a country battling its own crises. As of 2016, "over 73 percent of the population lived below poverty line" which corresponds to about $1.25 per day, leaving half the population in need of humanitarian assistance and livelihoods support (NRC 2017: 6). These numbers would not improve in the following year, as continued droughts and ongoing conflicts resulted in over 3.1 million people put into emergency dispositions and around 6.7 million people in need of food assistance (NRC 2018: 5). Stranded in these conditions, Yemenis received assistance and monthly allowances from the UNHCR but many interviewed stated that it was not enough to support their subsistence (Akumu & Frouws 2016: 7). As a result of these diminishing living standards, Yemenis in Somalia have indicated – similar to the cases in Djibouti – that they are increasingly willing to return to Yemen in spite of the danger and risks they may face there (REF 2017: 58). And while there are no concrete figures available, officials suggest that "around six to seven families go back every week" (Akumu & Frouws 2016: 7). These refugees, opting for a return to Yemen rather than a prolonged stay in the HOA exhibit a mindset and corresponding

migratory behavior similar to a much larger group of people that I will now turn to, namely the African migrants that have decided to attempt to navigate through the crisis in Yemen and try to move north along the Eastern Corridor.

6.3.   Yemen as a country of transit

Given its establishment as a migration corridor, south-north movement from the Horn of Africa through Yemen and into the Gulf states has also turned into longstanding area of interest among migration researchers and institutions involved in assisting those on the move. As the situation in Yemen worsened and open conflict began to spread, many of these observers expected the number of people moving to and through Yemen to decrease and were surprised that, instead, arrivals have been continuing almost unabated (Akumu & Frouws 2016; NRC 2016; UNHCR 2015d; UNOCHA 2016). As will be briefly addressed later, certain drivers of migration in the Horn of Africa remained undoubtedly strong factors in maintaining this migrant flow, however, in the face of the deteriorating conditions in Yemen some outsiders might evaluate such movement as an unreasonable jump out of the frying pan and into the fire. That this presents more often than not an oversimplification that does not do justice to migrants' decision making, will be addressed in the following chapters. First, however, in order to get a quantitative overview, I will look at where the migrants came from and in what numbers they arrived on Yemen's shores throughout the past decade.

As with all numbers presented above, there are various limitations as far as data availability, collection methods, quality and transparency are concerned. Therefore, I am not solely relying on one data source, but aim to present and contrast different accounts in order to get an idea of the range of estimates and calculations available on the migrant populations in this region. As before, the goal is not to derive exact numbers or specific changes in quantity but rather illustrate tendencies while acknowledging caveats and imprecisions entailed in migrant data collection. That being said, when protests started to erupt in Yemen in 2011, the country was hosting, according to official sources, around 500,000 foreigners from a number of nations both in Africa and the Middle East (Thiollet 2014: 271). This is more than twice the 193,000 refugees and asylum seekers put forward by the UNHCR (2022b) for the same year. While the UNHCR dataset is undoubtedly more selective, another partial explanation for this discrepancy could be the fact that many of the incoming migrants "try to reach the Gulf states directly, without going through registration either by the UNHCR or the Yemeni authorities", a factor that the higher estimates could be trying to

account for (Thiollet 2014: 280). Then, in 2011, approximately 103,000 arrivals were registered at Yemen's coast, representing twice the number of 2010, with Ethiopians being the largest group of immigrants (RMMS 2012a: 1). Due to people continuing to Saudi Arabia or otherwise disappearing from the register, this left the country with a total of around 220,000 refugees, more than 90 percent of which were of Somali origin (UNHCR 2022b). With regard to nationality, there are different factors that may partly explain the divergence between the ratio of incoming migrants and the one of recorded immigrant populations present in the country. One such factor could be that Somali refugees in Yemen, as opposed to Ethiopians, are recognized as such *prima facie*, thus having easier access to resources allocated for refugees, have access to documentation and are granted relatively unhindered freedom of movement (Mahecic 2012). Consequently, they present the most likely group to officially register and claim assistance. At the same time, it may be possible that, while upon arrival migrants state their real nationality, at a later point, when trying to claim refugee status, they might opt for the most promising one instead.[16] In this regard, Thiollet (2014: 281) also adds that "the ascription of nationality is sometimes haphazard and questionable", further putting the reported numbers into perspective. Nonetheless, the data still provides useful insights, as it reflects to some extent people's movement in general and at the same time highlights the dynamics that migration processes exhibit in the face of asylum policies and the presence of both government and non-government institutions.

In 2012, the influx of recorded migrants rose slightly to around 107,000, with 78 percent arriving from Djibouti, which presents the shortest maritime crossing in the region (NRC 2013: 8). Total numbers of the refugee populations for that year range from about 244,000 (UNHCR 2022b) to 270,000 (NRC 2013: 23) and even up to 600,000 or 800,000 according to the transitional government in Yemen (Thiollet 2014: 278). The latter results from the assumption that "most Africans arriving in Yemen opt for 'spontaneous settlement' or undocumented livelihood in the main urban centers, hoping to cross over to the Gulf countries, and thus avoiding registration and the Yemeni authorities" which leads some to believe that around 85 percent of the refugee population remains in the country illegally (ibid.: 278, 280). The following year experienced a drop in new arrivals to around 65,000 (REF 2017: 27) also reflected in only a small increase in the hosted refugee population to approximately 249,000 registered by the UNHCR (2022b). This may in part be traced back to the mass deportation irregular migrants from Saudi Arabia during the same year,

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[16] See Campbell (2013) for a discussion on the limitations in determining migrants' nationality solely based on potentially false oral information.

which perhaps had a deterring effect on prospective migrants from the HOA (MMC 2019: 105). At the same time, the Ethiopian government "has temporarily[17] banned its citizens from traveling abroad to look for work" (BBC 2013). In either case, the effects were not longlasting, as arrivals climbed back up to almost 92,000 in 2014 (REF 2017: 27) and registered refugee numbers increased to 266,000 (UNHCR 2022b).

As already illustrated through the examples of Yemeni movement, the escalation of the conflict and "the Saudi-led bombing campaign in Yemen, which began in March 2015, ushered in a new phase in the history of migration" in the region, with tens of thousands leaving the country for the Horn of Africa (de Regt 2017: 26). This left observers with the curious case of port cities such as Obock in Djibouti that see "migrants passing through in both directions: a steady movement of people towards war-torn Yemen continuous without pause, while at the same time people fleeing the war arrive, seeking safety" (UNOCHA 2016). In addition, the quantities of migrant flows did not behave as some might have predicted. While there was a dip in arrivals on Yemen's coast during the months following the March 2015 escalation, numbers quickly returned to pre-conflict levels in September of the same year (Akumu & Frouws 2016: 13). And while reports of extreme violence undoubtedly played a major role in the temporary decrease, it is also worth mentioning that most maritime movements in the region happen in autumn as "the favorable winds of late August and early September mark the beginning of the 'season of migration'" (Thiollet 2014: 281). In total, the number of more than 92,000 arrivals in 2015 was even slightly higher than the year before, showing no sign of the drop expected by some observers (REF 2017: 27). Not only that, the number was even higher than the ones fleeing from Yemen to the HOA: In the year following the escalation in March 2015, there were around 114,000 Ethiopians and Somalis registered at Yemen's shores, while only 86,000 people fled in the opposite direction (Akumu & Frouws 2016: 2). Ironically, the majority of those fleeing during that period were Somali and Ethiopian return migrants, rendering the entire observation seemingly absurd (ibid.). From then on, arrivals in Yemen even increased, reaching a total of 120,000 by the end of 2016, with more than 80 percent Ethiopians and the remainder mainly Somalis (Weissenburger 2018: 33). This increase also materialized in the peak in the refugee population reported for 2017 by both UNHCR (2022b) and NRC (2018: 14) who spoke of more than 280,000 and almost 300,000, respectively. In 2018, arrivals then increased again to unprecedented 160,000 before returning to a moderate increase – compared

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[17] The suspension was eventually lifted again in early 2018 (Powell & Botti 2021: 12).

to 2017 – to 127,000 people in 2019 (MMC 2020: 7). As a result, there were between 274,000 (MMC 2020: 7) and 279,000 (UNHCR 2022b) registered refugees in Yemen by the end of 2019. While return migration to the HOA during these past years has slowed, Saudi Arabia launched repeated mass deportations in 2018 and 2019, forcefully returning hundreds of thousands of migrants (MMC 2019: 105). In this regard, reports suggest that between March 2017 and December 2019 about 340,000 Ethiopians had been returned from Saudi Arabia (MMC 2020: 7).

With regard to on-migration into the KSA from Yemen, we are facing similar data issues as already addressed above with the case of Yemeni emigrants. It has been established that the KSA "hosts unrecorded but large numbers of irregular migrants" (RMMS 2014c: 9). Given the Saudi government's reluctance to share information on its foreign migrant populations, estimates regarding these figures are scarce.[18] One estimate already mentioned above, stated that as of 2013 between 800,000 and 1,000,000 Yemenis and 150,000 to 700,000 Ethiopians were assumed to be present in the KSA while there was no data regarding Somalis (De Bel-Air 2014: 7). Regarding influx at that time, Saudi officials claim that "patrols catch as many as 70 people – from Yemen,, Ethiopia, Somalia, Bangladesh – trying to sneak into the country each day" (Carey 2013). In 2017, estimates on the total Ethiopian migrant stock similarly range from 150,000 to 500,000 (Ayanie *et al.* 2020: 44). For 2019, reports suggest that "as many as 1,000 migrants cross into Saudi Arabia from Yemen on a daily basis (MMC 2020: 7). Why and under what circumstances migration to and through Yemen has been taking place, even in the face of the ongoing crisis, will be addressed in the following chapters.

6.3.1. Migration aspirations towards a nation in crisis

Against the odds put forward by observers, hundreds of thousands of migrants have aspired and were able to move north into Yemen during the past decade, the ongoing crisis. The fact that migrants are continuing to embark on the perilous journey points to a complex set of migration drivers including "political, conflict and security, demographic, economic, environmental and social factors" that foster aspirations to move even within contexts of insecurity and other livelihood threats (UNHCR 2015d: 7). Given the limited scope of this thesis, not all aspects will be explored, however, a selection will be addressed that was perceived to be particularly relevant for the case

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[18] For instance, the UNHCR (2022b) officially only reports a few dozen refugees from the HOA in Saudi Arabia between 2015 and 2019, which can hardly represent the actual numbers.

study at hand, as it illustrates how migration aspirations can prevail or perhaps even grow in the face of a crisis that looms along the route.

With regard to the Eastern Corridor, economic drivers have undoubtedly been among the strongest factors in shaping the migration aspirations of people in the HOA. In the decades before 2011, Yemen had become "a country of immigration for people whose living conditions are even more desperate than those of Yemenis" (Lackner 2014: 26). Said people predominantly came from the Horn of Africa which "despite its rich endowment in human, social and natural capital […] has been plagued by a complex history of weak governance, insecurity, increasing environmental degradation, entrenched poverty, and a range of persistent developmental challenges (UNHCR 2015a: 2). Under such circumstances, the livelihood opportunities of the residing population are likely to be severely limited, making emigration to a country where a more stable economy and overall more favorable conditions prevail, a sought-after prospect. This is reflected in both Somali and Ethiopian migrants' aspirations expressed in various studies throughout the past decade. At first, there were primarily Somalis, who came to Yemen after the collapse of their central state in the early 1990s and who occupied a favorable legal position compared to other refugees, as they were "entitled to work and have access to the few services available to Yemenis" (Lackner 2014: 26). In the past decade, however, the demography and aspirations of immigrants started to change as instability in Yemen increased and Ethiopians began to make up a growing portion of the migrant populations. As the conditions in Somalia deteriorated in 2011, droughts and the ensuing famine triggered a large exodus of Somalis, who were initially displaced internally but moved north "hoping to make their way to the GCC countries via Yemen" acknowledging that hope for a better future might be futile in Yemen but possible in Saudi Arabia and beyond (Thiollet 2014: 281). In a similar vein, most Ethiopians in a UNHCR survey stated they had "left home because of a lack of economic and livelihood opportunities" (Mahecic 2011b). For them, however, Yemen was never a destination really. As respondents in another study indicated, 87 percent intended to move on to Saudi Arabia, while only five percent were hoping to find work in Yemen and the remainder was planning to seek asylum there" (REF 2017: 27). Besides the instability in Yemen, another aspect potentially influencing these migration decisions was the fact that, opposed to Somali nationals and their *prima facie* refugee status, the situation was profoundly different and more difficult for Ethiopians, with the majority of them evading contact with the authorities to avoid detention and deportation (Mahecic 2012).

Over the course of the years, motives among Ethiopians migrating towards the KSA have barely changed. In 2019, the primary driver behind migration aspirations was still "to move out of poverty, improve family standards through remittances, and secure family business" (Ayanie *et al.* 2020: 44). Exploring the poverty dimension further, this can for instance relate to individual livelihood improvements as with the women who "are concerned with increasing their access to employment and earning income abroad through skilled or unskilled labor or domestic work (Powell & Botti 2021: 13). This can be particularly true for minority groups who face difficulties finding employment in Ethiopia as there is "the perception that the best jobs are reserved for particular groups of people or elites [...] and not available to young people from rural backgrounds or marginalized groups" (REF 2017: 9). With regard to family standards or family businesses, it has to be stated that often there are "strong familial pressures to migrate put on young Ethiopians by their family, peers and their community" with some instances of "parents telling their children to migrate" (RMMS 2014a: 4). In this regard, the Gulf states have presented a preferred destination to cater for such economic needs for decades and the fact that migration aspirations have persisted in the face of the crisis in Yemen as well as the difficulties upon entrance to the KSA indicate that the economic needs outweigh concerns regarding the dire and potentially dangerous conditions along the migration route. To what extent security issues have influenced migrants' aspirations will now be addressed in greater detail.

In addition to the economy being in a weak to crumbling state, people in the HOA have also been exposed to various types of security threats that have remained endemic in the region (UNHCR 2015a: 2). In this regard, both Somali and Ethiopian migrants cite conflict and fear of persecution or insecurity as having had a strong influence on their migration decision (Mahecic 2011b). The types of perceived threats range from domestic abuse to violence and persecution perpetrated by governments, or non-state actors, pointing at the complex and sometimes individual experiences of migrants, with women often being particularly exposed (Powell & Botti 2021: 13). That such insecurity in origin countries can both trigger and constrain movement has been elaborated above with regard to Yemenis being displaced or trapped within the country. What is of additional interest here are the ways in which perceived threats in the transit or destination country shape migrants' decision making.

In this regard, the NRC (2016: 8) reiterated that the flow of migrants from East Africa aspiring to cross through Yemen and into Saudi Arabia had remained active, despite the presence of obstacles and threats such as the risk of capsizing, smuggling cartels, blockade along the Saudi

border and airstrikes in the country, which raises questions about awareness among migrants. As of 2011, immigrants claimed that they had been "unaware of the situation in Yemen and the conditions they would be facing" (Mahecic 2011a). However, by 2014 and also during the years that followed, numerous reports suggest that migrants mostly knew of the security threats involved in their migration project (REF 2017; RMMS 2014a). More precisely, they were "aware of, but not dissuaded by, the risks and dangers" as "the known risks do not outweigh potential benefits of migration" (REF 2017: 14). This pondering of security threats against the prospect of a successful migration project reflects people's willingness to sustain certain levels of violence which Raleigh (2011: 85) also referred to when he said that "migration occurs when threats to security increase beyond an acceptable level". Putting the automatism debate aside for a moment, this statement could be adapted to explain that 'migration may be deterred once threats to security increase beyond an acceptable level'. When such a threshold should be reached naturally depends on each individual, however, the RMMS (2014a: 5) found, among other things, that one in three respondents in Ethiopia would be willing to tolerate extortion, robbery, moderate physical abuse, starvation, deprivation of sleep, degrading treatment and verbal abuse. Moreover, individuals have been found to prepare for certain risks taking "precautionary steps, such as arranging for family members to set aside money to pay ransoms" or "taking contraceptives to avoid pregnancy if raped" (REF 2017: 14). Yet another type of reaction towards the security threats present along the Eastern Corridor was found among young Somalis who even attempted to benefit from the dangers. They were not only aware of the risk of kidnapping, abuse and torture but they assumed that these threats would help them leverage payment from family members (REF 2017: 14). As many of the Somalis interviewed lacked the funds to pay the smugglers, they did plan on telling their families that they would be leaving, feeling sure that "their relatives would feel compelled to pay the costs of the journey on their behalf, for fear that they might be subjected to torture and abuse if they did not" (ibid.). This last example illustrates one scenario in which the migrants in the HOA even draw benefits from the security threats present on the route to and through Yemen, a phenomenon that I would like to explore further.

Insecurity has predominantly been characterized as a factor triggering migration aspirations or constraining abilities to pursue any such endeavors. As in the example presented above, however, there are other instances where an insecure context can even facilitate migration and allow irregular migrants "to pass through the country undetected" (REF 2017: 9). To explain this, it is worth revisiting the protests in Sana'a that erupted in 2011 with thousands in the streets

complaining loudly about the grievances their country is facing. One of the often-repeated complaints was '*ma bish dawl*' which can be translated to 'there is no state', referring to regular power cuts, rubbish in the streets, or overcrowded schools (Hall 2018: 109). They further claimed that there was neither law nor order in Yemen and instead "the country was dragged down by corruption and chaos" (ibid.). As a consequence, following the Arab spring in 2011 many in the HOA felt encouraged to "take advantage of the government's competing priorities to move into and through Yemen with relative ease" (Akumu 2016: 2). They assumed that "authorities that are distracted or weakened by conflict may be less vigilant or concerned with irregular migration" giving them better chances of passing through undetected (REF 2017: 58–9). This perceived increase in capabilities, however, does not necessarily occur to prospective migrants naturally, in some cases they are led to believe by smugglers that the conditions in the country lend themselves for a swift passage (ibid.: 9). The latter brings us to another dimension of the 'missing state' conditions, namely the increased presence and proliferation of actors involved in smuggling and trafficking, which had a significant impact on future migrants' migration decisions (RMMS 2014a: 4).

One factor seems to be that "many brokers propagate false and misleading narratives about migration to the KSA […] by downplaying risks and failures, and overstating the perks of migration" undoubtedly feeding into people's assumed migration opportunities (IOM 2020a: 18). Particularly Ethiopians have been found to be targeted by traffickers, as they were "perceived to be able to pay ransoms more readily than their Somali counterparts" (Akumu 2016: 5). As a result many Ethiopians have been convinced to migrate via Yemen under the pretense that it is an easy way to reach Saudi Arabia, while kidnappers were waiting upon arrival (de Regt 2015: 2). Another trap that Somalis reportedly tended to fall for is "the 'leave now, pay later' scheme increasingly adopted by smugglers to entice would-be migrants" (REF 2017: 11). It is then only in retrospect that migrants can evaluate the information received earlier as mostly inaccurate, with the costs increasing alongside the length of the journey (IOM 2020a: 18). The latter also points to the fact that migrants typically have false or little to no information on the duration of the journey, notoriously underestimating how long it will take, rendering them overly optimistic and potentially unprepared for what awaits them (RMMS 2014a: 4). In general, the increased presence of brokers and smugglers has led to the manifestation of a set of beliefs among would-be migrants that suggests that irregular migration is cheaper, less bureaucratic and time consuming, and more rewarding, which has prompted many to embark on a journey that would turn out to be quite different than expected (ibid.: 6-7).

Finally, the crisis and related security threats have potentially impacted migration decisions among individuals in the HOA in a way that is comparable to de Haas' (2011) notion of substitution effects caused by policy changes. The observation was that in the first half of 2019 almost as many Ethiopians had arrived in Yemen as during the entire year of 2018, with around 76,000 (IOM 2020b) and 80,000 (IOM 2019a) arrivals, respectively. One possible explanation could be that since there was an announcement of a ceasefire agreement for 2019, it may have influenced movements towards Yemen, as migrants in Djibouti and Somalia were postponing their migration project (MMC 2019: 21). The conditions in Yemen thus have not resulted in people abandoning their aspirations altogether but rather time their attempts according to certain developments in the country. Another example, this time perhaps a form of spatial substitution in the face of localized security threats and policy changes, could be observed with regard to sea crossings in the region. In 2016, observers noted a shift away from the ports of Djibouti towards the Somalian coast as a starting point for the crossover (Akumu 2016: 6). Among the possible reasons for this change in migration behavior are on the one hand alleged crackdowns on Ethiopians by the Djiboutian government and on the other the increased military presence on the western shore of Yemen including reports of air strikes hitting arrival areas in Yemen (ibid.). Finally, there have also been reports of Somalis attempting an entirely new route that leads through Yemen but then crosses the Red Sea to Sudan, perhaps in response to the limited opportunities in Yemen and the immigration restrictions put in place by the Saudi government (REF 2017: 7). In either case migration aspirations have not withered in the face of security threats or other potential migration constraints, rather, prospective migrants simply made adjustments to their migration plans (REF 2017: 40). With aspirations prevailing and capabilities being limited but existent, many Africans have arrived in Yemen in the past decade. In the final chapter, I will look at how the Yemen crisis has impacted those navigating through the insecurity and chaos of this disintegrating state.

6.3.2. Migration to and through Yemen

As already pointed out in various instances above, it has been surprising observers or at least deemed remarkable by many that the migration flows towards Yemen "continued unabated, despite the ongoing armed conflict in Yemen, the deteriorating security and humanitarian situation and border security and enforcement measures put in place by some states" (Akumu & Frouws 2016: 2–3). While the impact of the crisis on migrants' aspirations and perceived capabilities has

been addressed above, I now want to turn to the effects the conditions in Yemen have had on migrants that succeeded to cross the sea and attempted to make their way north to Saudi Arabia.

Starting with the Arab Spring, it has already been mentioned that "the political crisis of 2011 led to a weakening of the Yemeni state" which ensued the loosening of state led border controls and "has turned Yemen even more fully into a transit country with regard to migration" (de Regt 2014: 300). By 2015, the monthly arrival rate of migrants and refugees from the Horn of Africa, predominantly Ethiopians, had risen to around 10,000 people with the goal of transiting to the KSA (Akumu & Frouws 2016: 12). This number would then rise even further, reaching 11,500 in 2019 and making the "Eastern Route the busiest maritime migration path on earth (UN 2020). Furthermore, it has also been established that migrants are mostly aware of the situation in Yemen, however, it was observed that Ethiopian migrants sometimes only find out about the dire conditions upon arrival at the ports from where they would cross the Gulf of Aden, too late for most to abandon their migration project and head home (Akumu & Frouws 2016: 10). Another perspective to this issue comes from the finding that while most of the migrants are aware of the conflict, they do not believe that it will affect them (Wilson-Smith 2019: 6). However, quite the opposite is the case, as reports have repeatedly shown the heightened vulnerability of migrants in times of crises (IOM 2020a: 10). And while the living and working conditions of immigrants had been already far from ideal by the time of the uprising in 2011, the political and economic events that took place in the years that followed made matters only worse (de Regt 2014: 298).

To begin with, migrants, irregular ones in particular, often do not have access to basic services such as shelter, water, food or healthcare as regular citizens have (UNHCR 2015c: 1). In Yemen, with even the latter often being deprived of their basic needs, the situation is proportionally worse. However, what is more, the people moving through the country are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, with an abundance of reports describing the inhumane treatments that migrants often have to endure on their journey north (UNHCR 2015b: 2). In general, sentiments against immigrants are not surprising in any context. In most cases, there are certain 'costs' that the presence of refugees potentially inflicts on the hosting population, including "rising food and commodity prices, the depression of local wage rates, fiscal pressures, and increasing environmental degradation" which typically outweigh the recorded economic benefits brought about by the presence of refugee camps[19] (UNHCR 2015a: 3). Given the dire conditions in Yemen with the

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[19] At the time of this writing, al-Kharaz has been the only official refugee camp in Yemen since 2001 (UNHCR 2021).

economy in shambles and a large population of internally displaced Yemenis, the additional burden of refugees is likely to result in protection risks for those on the move. However, suspicion and threats are not directed at all migrants equally. While Somalis were granted immediate refugee status, "Ethiopians have routinely been rounded up, detained and deported, sometimes without even being given access to asylum procedures" (Betts 2013: 172). That the underlying reasons are in part political stems from the fact that while Yemen has received "significant praise and financial assistance for its hospitality toward the Somalis", the government of Ethiopia had provided incentives "not to accommodate its citizens in exile" (Betts 2013: 172). And even though clear figures are not available "it is estimated that at least 2000 to 3000 [Ethiopian] migrants are in detention in Yemen at any given point in time in at least ten different prisons all over the country" (Akumu & Frouws 2016: 13). However, this does not mean that Somalis are free from political prosecution, Somali males in particular were accused by both the government and opposition forces of siding with the other party or belonging to Somalia's al-Shabab and seeking to support AQAP, which led to repeated assaults on migrants, resulting in arrests and killings (de Regt 2014: 299). Since the escalation of the conflict in 2015, discriminate targeting has decreased to a certain extent, as reports have accumulated of "migrants of all nationalities being detained, abused, refused access to asylum procedures, and deported *en masse*" (Wilson-Smith 2019: 4). Avoiding or escaping mistreatment by the authorities, however, is only one of the many challenges immigrants in Yemen face.

In this regard, the partial collapse of Yemeni state structures and the outbreak of full scale civil war have added "a myriad of dangers to a migration-transit country already fraught with risk" (Wilson-Smith 2019: 4). The main reason for this is that in the absence of state control criminal gangs have thrived taking advantage of the newly arrived migrants by detaining and extorting them under physical, sexual and mental abuse (de Regt 2014: 300). As an integral part of the industry, smuggling activities have also expanded throughout the country and across the sea to the Horn of Africa, which allows them to successfully coerce migrants into using their services much earlier in the journey already (REF 2017: 12). Consequently, with more middlemen involved, cost of passage rises even further, putting additional financial pressure on migrants, which might constrain them later on in their ability to continue the journey (Thiollet 2014: 276). However, financial harm due to higher smuggling costs is only part of the problem. Once migrants arrive on the Yemeni shore, smugglers and traffickers pay the boat crew for each individual, only to reclaim higher sums later on from the Africans they have detained. Those who cannot or refuse to pay are then

forcibly taken to what the migrants themselves refer to as 'torture camps' (HRW 2014: 6). The gruesome practice there involves abuse and torture "in order to extort money or contact information of relatives, who are then pressured into sending money in exchange of the release of the captive" (Weissenburger 2018: 33). Interviews among returnees have shown the shocking array of the resulting protection risks witnessed and/or experienced by migrants on their way to or through Yemen. To exemplify[20], there were reports of "extreme physical abuse, including burning, gunshot wounds, suspension of food for days by brokers, smugglers and traffickers" (70%),[21] "criminal kidnapping for ransom" (75%), "exhaustion, dehydration, starvation and deprivation of sleep" (93%), and "sexual abuse including rape" (49%). However, these experiences were not limited to said camps or detention centers; migrants, and women in particular, have confronted "a range of severe protection challenges emerging from a constellation of poverty, uncertainty, insecurity, conflict and flight" with gender-based violence presenting a pervasive challenge in the entire region and particularly in areas of conflict (UNHCR 2015a: 4). The fact that much of the above happens in an environment of relative impunity points to another problematic aspect, namely state involvement.

While criminal networks could thrive in the absence of any real state authority, they also benefitted from the cooperation with state officials at various points in the smuggling process. State collusion includes "officials from the police, military and intelligence services as well as border guards, coast guards and customs authorities" whose activities range all the way from merely "turning a blind eye to irregular migration in exchange for bribes, to active involvement in facilitating smuggling and trafficking, and even participation in trafficking, abuse and torture of victims" (REF 2017: 13). In addition, authorities only halfheartedly engage in activities that are meant to stop trafficking, while "officials have more frequently warned traffickers of raids, freed them from jail when they are arrested, and in some cases, have actively helped the traffickers capture and detain migrants" (HRW 2014: 5). Given that some traffickers do in fact get occasionally sent to prison, it is even more telling that there seems to be total impunity for security forces involved in trafficking, as in 2014 the "interior ministry and other officials could not point to a single case of disciplinary or legal action against officials for collaborating with traffickers" (ibid.: 9). To make matters worse, affiliations with corrupt officials even extend beyond the northern border into Saudi Arabia. This means that even those who successfully crossed into the KSA might

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[20] A comprehensive overview is given by the RMMS (2014a: 46–7).
[21] Percentage of respondents witnessing and/or experiencing said abuses.

be apprehended by Saudi border officials who would then turn them over to Haradh-based traffickers (HRW 2014: 12). Haradh is a border town in the northeast of Yemen, where the trafficking 'business' is so lucrative that a government official estimated that it makes up about 80 percent of the economy there (HRW 2014: 2). Its lucrativeness may in part also explain the heightened interest of the people in charge in cashing rather than reining in on the business.

For migrants the consequences are severe. On their perilous journey from the southern coast to the northern border they run the repeated risk of being detained, extorted and released, with their financial assets being drained a lot quicker than they have probably calculated. In addition, the fact that even officials are entangled in the criminal networks, there is not much reason to trust anyone. And while this heavily constrains their abilities of onward movement, their aspirations seem unaffected as most migrants "prefer to continue with their journey rather than return to their country of origin no matter the consequences" (REF 2017: 14). This mindset coupled with the various constraints resulting from the conditions in Yemen and at the Saudi-Yemeni border results in many migrants being stuck in the north (de Regt 2014: 301). Some of them perhaps have anticipated such a scenario, however, observations have indicated that most Africans have been stuck for much longer than they expected (Thiollet 2014: 280). Those who ran out of funds typically have to "work or wait for funds to be transferred so that they could continue on their way (REF 2017: 40). And there are, in fact, reports of migrants working in agriculture and possibly being able to earn money that would take them further (Akumu & Frouws 2016: 12). However, work opportunities for migrants overall had been diminishing already in the years before the escalation of the conflict and in the face of the deteriorating economic conditions finding a job may pose an insurmountable challenge (Mahecic 2011a). And even if cash is available, successful migration is not guaranteed. In 2015, heavy fighting in the border region made crossings difficult, "due in part to the withdrawal of people smugglers from the area" (Wilson-Smith 2019: 4). This also highlights the immense dependency of migrants on smugglers, who may present the only realistic way of entering into the KSA, given the rigorous immigration policies in place (Thiollet 2014: 280). The actors in the smuggling business thus "make clever use of the aspirations of potential migrants, which is the main reason why irregular migration continues" (de Regt 2014: 301). At the same time, the "growing migrant numbers, substantial profits, and an operating environment of relative impunity has led to an increase in the scale and scope of smuggling activities" (REF 2017: 12). The undeterred aspirations of migrants from the Horn of Africa coupled with the lucrativeness of

the business form a vicious cycle that, given the developments in the past, is not likely to be broken any time soon.

7. Conclusion

Migration along the Eastern Corridor has been a phenomenon involving decades of primarily south to north movements of people from the Horn of Africa towards the Arab Peninsula. In this context, Yemen has served as an intermittent host, but mostly as a gateway to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, where migrants were hoping to find the opportunities they were missing in their home countries. When the Arab Spring in the MENA region came about, Yemen also experienced a popular uprising that should bring lasting change to the country and its people. A failed transition, weak authorities, armed opposition, secessionist movements, terrorist activities and eventually international military intervention should plunge the fragile state into a full-scale civil war resulting in the collapse of most state structures. The ensuing economic and humanitarian crisis has been catastrophic for the livelihoods of Yemenis but also the migrants present in the country. With the escalation of the conflict, observers were expecting a significant shift of migratory behavior in the region. On the one hand, it was expected that there would be high numbers of refugees trying to escape the situation in Yemen and on the other, movements from the Horn of Africa towards the war-torn country were assumed to significantly decrease. However, neither of the two should materialize as expected. Heightened emigration from Yemen did occur following March 2015, however, numbers would only maintain a higher level for a few months and decrease again after that (REF 2017: 30). Regarding immigration, the number of arrivals between March 2015 and March 2016 turned out to be the highest in years, despite a temporary decrease during the first months after the escalation (Akumu & Frouws 2016: 14). Describing the paradoxical situation, Henry Glorieux, IOM's Head of Mission in Djibouti, said that "Obock is one of the few places in the world that sees migrants passing through in both directions: a steady movement of people towards war-torn Yemen continues without pause, while at the same time people fleeing the war arrive, seeking safety" (UNOCHA 2016). The fact that immigration has continued almost unabated while the number of refugees has not grown further served as the starting point for this thesis, as it appeared to present a conundrum to migration studies. However, it turned out that the puzzling nature of the phenomenon had not so much to do with the observed patterns of migratory behavior, but it rather with an apparently outdated approach to studying migration. Traditional concepts, such as the functionalist and historical-structuralist paradigm, which have undoubtedly dominated the field,

have failed to adequately describe and explain the nature of migration processes in this specific context. For one, they have been unable to provide answers to the question of why only such a small portion of the population has left the country in response to the worsening conditions. In fact, those who stay behind are typically excluded from conventional theories altogether. Taking the example of the functionalist push-pull model, most Yemenis should have already left the country in the face of such heightened threats to their livelihoods within the country. While no explicit attention is put towards the decision-making processes that lead to non-migration, staying could, in theory, only be the result of the absence of any push or pull factors, an argument that hardly holds water given the conditions in the country. Not paying heed to the fact that it is typically the majority of people that stays within the country, even in the face of crisis, is indicative of the limited scope of these conventional theories. Turning to those on the move, traditional approaches also fall short of providing adequate reasoning for the complex and sometimes counterintuitive migration behavior observed in modern migration and the specific case of Yemen and the HOA. This could in part be traced back to the fact that these theories often grant only little to no agency to the migrants themselves and instead perceive them as mere pawns that are either pushed around by external forces or respond in an automated fashion to certain impulses, not leaving any room for individual experiences, aspirations, capabilities, opportunities and migration decisions. Highlighting the latter is a core element of de Haas' (2021) aspirations and capabilities framework which served as a fruitful approach to analyzing and interpreting the migratory behavior in the case study above. First, it became apparent that the aspiration to emigrate has been high among many more Yemenis than just the ones that have actually left the country. At the same time, however, these people's capabilities to engage in migration projects have been severely constrained by a multitude of factors including financial and social resources as well as the presence of protection risks and restrictive migration policies. With regard to migrants from the HOA, it could be concluded that migration aspirations appeared undeterred from the dire conditions in Yemen while their perceived capabilities have in fact increased as they saw the chaos in the country as a chance to pass through undetected, which explains the stability and even increase in arrivals on the Yemeni coast in the years following the escalation of the conflict. That their migration opportunities have been in fact severely limited became apparent once many of them were stranded in the transit country due to exhausted resources or constraints that resulted from the ever worsening conditions in the country, including the proliferation of criminal networks exploiting migrants and corrupt officials reining in on their aspirations to move north. Nonetheless, even those reported to be stuck

just before the border to the KSA still pertained a degree of agency, that they might not have been granted by other conceptual approaches. In the face of the seemingly insurmountable set of challenges and obstacles separating them from their destination country, many of them decide to rather keep trying instead of turning around and abandoning their migration project. In a similar vein, some of their co-migrants might have decided to do exactly that, head home or maybe look for an entirely different migration route. Either way, they exercised their, albeit highly constrained, agency as individuals with distinct sets of aspirations and capabilities. With these concrete findings some of the central assumptions in the aspirations and capabilities framework could be confirmed, which can be summarized on a broader level as follows: 1) in order to fully understand migration processes it is highly relevant to also focus on non-movement behavior; 2) migration behavior should be seen as a two-step process including the aspiration to migrate and the realization of that wish depending on the individual's capabilities; 3) even though there are undoubtedly various drivers of migration that exert great influence on migration decisions, we should not fall prey to deriving any kind of automatisms, as context matters greatly and, with few exceptions, migrants will always maintain a certain level of agency.

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Eidesstattliche Erklärung

Hiermit versichere ich,

- dass ich die vorliegende Masterarbeit selbstständig verfasst, andere als die angegebenen Quellen und Hilfsmittel nicht benutzt und mich auch sonst keiner unerlaubter Hilfe bedient habe,

- dass ich dieses Masterarbeitsthema bisher weder im In- noch im Ausland in irgendeiner Form als Prüfungsarbeit vorgelegt habe

- und dass diese Arbeit mit der vom Begutachter beurteilten Arbeit vollständig übereinstimmt.

Wien, am 23.09.2022