

Mixed Migration, Fragmented Protection:
Refugee and Migrant Protection in the 'Field' of Mixed Migration

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by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of the social world – or *field* – born of UNHCR and IOM’s operational responses to refugees and migrants. I argue that we can better understand UNHCR and IOM as existing relationally, as entangled within a single field of practice in which both agencies are engaged in a struggle to give shape to the refugee and migrant categories and respond to them on the ground. Rather than considering each organisation in isolation, I make a case for considering what their relational existence within a field – the ‘mixed migration field’ – means for them institutionally and those they are meant to protect. Moving beyond institutional mandates, I show that the formal ‘differences that distance’ UNHCR and IOM from one another are impossible to maintain on the ground (Bourdieu 1996b: 242). This results in blurred institutional boundaries between UNHCR and IOM and blurred categorical divisions between refugees and migrants.

Paying close attention to the dynamics of the mixed migration field along the Central Mediterranean route in Tunisia and Libya, I explore who is made into an object of protection and to whom, and I interrogate the shape this protection takes at the interface of UNHCR, IOM and ‘their’ persons of concern. I argue that in the mixed migration field, the unmixing of refugees and migrants represents little more than a form of symbolic differentiation, for I show that through their struggle in the field, UNHCR and IOM have emptied the refugee and migrant categories of substantive difference. In exploring the transformative effects of the field, I identify a new field-specific logic and practice of protection enacted toward refugees and migrants, which I argue is fundamentally transforming the fabric and identity of UNHCR and IOM.

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INTRODUCTION

This is a study of a social space, a space that encompasses at its core the dynamic interface between the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), as well as that between IOM/UNHCR and the individuals the two agencies present themselves as protecting. The mixed migration setting in Tunisia and Libya, both positioned on the 'Central Mediterranean route', along which refugees and migrants are considered as moving together, is the arena in which I explore the relational nature of UNHCR and IOM's response to refugees and migrants on the ground. While each organisation has often been treated as distinct from the other, in the context of mixed migration, as will be set out, UNHCR and IOM are bound together within a single field of practice. This is what I call, drawing on Bourdieu's field theory, the 'mixed migration field' – in which each agency exists and positions itself by taking the other into account. The relational social space born of the mixed migration field forms the object of my inquiry.

This work draws from two starting points. Firstly, and borrowing from an often-argued position in forced migration studies, the refugee and migrant categories are not social realities that exist 'out there' in the abstract, but are constructed through socially, politically, and historically contingent social processes (Hamlin 2021; Crawley and Skleparis 2018; Zetter 2007). How the line is drawn in a particular setting is not a given. Rather, it is the product of contestation and negotiation, most often between those with the power to categorise and those being categorised. In the context of mixed migration, the picture takes on a more complex dimension. With no clear line dividing refugees from migrants, individuals considered part of mixed migration are seen as potentially of

concern to both UNHCR and IOM. The processes of categorisation of one agency risk coming into collision with the other. These competing processes require a consideration of the boundary drawing at play between the two agencies and *their* 'persons of concern', instead of being considered in isolation from each other.

Secondly, and building on the first point, where and how the line is drawn matters. It matters, most obviously, to those being categorised, with potential implications on their legal status and entitlements. Also, and of significance to this research, it matters institutionally to UNHCR and IOM. As observers of UNHCR and IOM have noted, each agency has been able to justify important operational and institutional developments on the basis of evolving (and often increasingly expansive) interpretations of their populations of concern (Morris 2021). This allows them to justify their operations and secure their share of funding. In the context of mixed migration, however, the potential for institutional expansion is finite as each agency strives to take position and fashion the limits of themselves and of their respective population groups. UNHCR and IOM must, therefore, take each other into account as they struggle to position themselves in relation to the individuals potentially of their concern. It is through this struggle that UNHCR and IOM constitute themselves as institutions (i.e. justify their presence and funding), while simultaneously and dynamically contributing to redrawing the limit of the refugee and migrant categories.

Put differently, and bringing the two 'starting points' into dialogue, if research in the field of forced migration has evolved so as to deconstruct the refugee and migrant categories and emphasise their unfixed and unbounded character, then there is good cause not to study UNHCR and IOM as bounded, fixed, and fully constituted social universes either. As will be seen, UNHCR and IOM

are necessarily entangled within a single space and field of practice. Emblematic of this are contexts of mixed migration, where both agencies are engaged in a struggle to legitimately carve out, protect, and manage their populations of concern.

We can better understand UNHCR, IOM, and the refugees and migrants who inhabit this social space by viewing them relationally. In this work I propose a Bourdieu-inspired field study of the social structures that have emerged from UNHCR and IOM operationally responding to refugees and migrants in Tunisia and Libya. Drawing on a relational Bourdieusian lens, this study, therefore, considers not each institution in isolation, but what their existence within a common field – the *mixed migration field* – means for them as institutions as well as for those they are meant to protect.

A journey to the 'field'

In the previous section I framed this thesis and the need for a relational approach by drawing from conceptual starting points. My actual journey to Bourdieu's field theory, however, was grounded in the complex and often contradictory empirical reality of fieldwork. In this section I briefly map out this journey to the 'field', then, in the next section, situate it within debates on UNHCR/IOM and refugees/migrants. Finally, I re-embed these within Bourdieu's theoretical lens.

When I first embarked on my fieldwork in Tunisia in July 2019, my original aim was to research the refugee protection framework and what I perceived as the neglect of a particular group within it: Libyan refugees. At that point, the civil war in Libya had been raging for years and, with General Haftar's offensive on Western Libya starting in April 2019, the violence was only increasing.

Although there were no official statistics, hundreds of thousands of Libyans were thought to live in Tunisia, many of whom had left Libya in earlier phases of the conflict (El Taraboulsi-McCarthy et al 2019; Bradley et al 2016). Despite the renewal of violence in Libya, only a few Libyans were officially registered with UNHCR Tunisia at the time, and they appeared nowhere in official UNHCR discourse. I was intrigued that UNHCR, who in Tunisia and neighbouring Libya, was responsible for registering asylum seekers,¹ had not 'made' Libyans into refugees, especially since elsewhere, in Malta for instance, the agency was registering and recognising their international protection needs.² I, thus, initially, set out to explore the politics of their neglect within the refugee protection system.

Through this initial lens, I risked replicating some of the assumptions outlined in the previous section, not least the notion that there were groups who, by virtue of existing, naturally 'belonged' to UNHCR. Once in the field, I was further confronted with the difficulty of researching something that was not visible. As others have pointed out, invisibility is often deliberate – something that is either sought out by those who attempt to make themselves unknown or by others who wield the power to 'render invisible and unspeakable' (Polzer and Hammond 2008; Bigo 2011: 231). As my questions about the presence of Libyan refugees in Tunisia remained unanswered, I turned my gaze to the 'visible' – that which was *meant* to be seen – and to unpacking the framing against

¹ Although Tunisia is signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, UNHCR was responsible for identifying refugees via its registration and refugee status determination function. Libya, in contrast, had not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention and had not officially recognised UNHCR's presence in the country. UNHCR nonetheless continued to register asylum seekers and perform its refugee status determination function. How these functions played out on the ground will be explored in depth in Chapter 4.

² At the time, just across the Mediterranean in Malta, for example, Libyans numerically formed the most significant nationality of persons with international protection.

which the varying forms of recognition and protection were set. When faced with the tapestry of varying and sometimes contradictory forms of institutional recognition and non-recognition that played out on the ground, I realised that one form could only be appreciated in relation to the others. In this case, in relation to the contrasting forms of visibility and protection enacted by UNHCR *and* IOM.

Indeed, in Tunisia, UNHCR had established a framing of the context, the *mixed migration* context, which appeared to enforce a hierarchy of who was considered worthy of protection. This, in turn, appeared to give rise to varying shades of protection and neglect, of which Libyans represented only one form. In stark contrast to the relative absence of Libyans from the dominant narrative was the visibility of groups of *non-Libyan* 'third country nationals' crossing the border from Libya into Tunisia. Entering irregularly either by the southern borders or having been intercepted at sea, these groups, understood as the 'people on the move' became the face of the highly visible *mixed migration context*. This framing defined UNHCR's operation in Tunisia. As with other countries along the Central Mediterranean route, and in particular in neighbouring Libya, the 'mixed migration context' was centre stage. It defined the operational context and set the framing while everything else and *everyone else* was pushed to the periphery. It is against the backdrop of trans-African migration that UNHCR and IOM were engaged in Tunisia and Libya, as argued by Perrin (2018: 79), in a 'platform for the selection and distribution of migrants'.

This produced highly fragmented and hierarchised forms of institutional visibility and protection, which juxtaposed the protection/visibility/control of the 'people on the move' – a label employed by my UNHCR and IOM interlocutors to describe individuals travelling within mixed movements

– to the relative invisibility/neglect of those perceived as *not* on the move in the same way. This observation redefined my line of questioning and with it, doors opened. Actors previously reluctant to discuss the ‘invisible’ became eager to engage with the ‘hypervisible’ of mixed migration. And for good reason. Mixed migration was high on the agenda of UNHCR and IOM, both of which, all along the Central Mediterranean route across the African continent and into Europe, had been mobilised to sort, respond, and respectively manage these highly visibilised ‘people on the move’, composed of the refugees, migrants, and various subsets of other categories derived from them. Together these represented the ‘mixed migration’, ‘mixed movements’, and/or ‘mixed flows’ (Pastore 2019).

These labels, which emphasise the mixed nature of migration, have the potential, as some scholars have pointed out, to capture the fuzzy empirical reality of individuals with changing and overlapping backgrounds, motivations, experiences, and needs moving along migration routes together (Van Hear 2011; Crawley and Skleparis 2018). Yet, the contradiction was that this empirical reality, on the ground, was seized upon to *frame* operational responses and created the institutional impetus for UNHCR and IOM to impose strict categorical divisions onto an otherwise complex phenomenon. This, invariably, not only failed to capture the latter’s complexity and fuzziness, but created a terrain rife for struggle between the two agencies. The widescale struggle that I observed between UNHCR and IOM over the appropriation of ‘people on the move’ provided a stark contrast to the institutional response offered to other groups, such as Libyans. Broadening my own research scope allowed me to situate the varying forms of institutional protection and neglect within the space created from the intertwinement of UNHCR and IOM –

the mixed migration field – and the resulting struggle over making or not making individuals into objects of protection within that setting.

Shifting my gaze to the relationality of the various forms of protection set me on path to redress two of my initial blind spots. The first was the assumption that UNHCR's protection mandate was delimited over of a clearly defined group, the 'refugee', over whom it *should* extend protection. How these boundaries were drawn, however, could not be understood with reference to the production of the 'refugee' alone, but in relation to the increasingly dizzying patchwork of other labels and forms of institutional visibility playing out against this landscape, not least that of 'person of concern', 'asylum seeker', 'migrant', 'vulnerable migrant', and 'other'. These boundaries were also shaped by the institutional incentives involved in giving them meaning by affixing them to certain individuals on the ground. Through these, UNHCR was actively retracing the boundaries of the refugee category, rendering it, on the ground, virtually unrecognisable from its legal point of reference in the 1951 Refugee Convention.

Second, and closely tied to the first, was the assumption that UNHCR's *non-recognition* then resulted in the production of a catch-all category of 'migrants', who could, in turn, be considered operationally 'of concern' to IOM. Rather, against the backdrop of mixed migration, IOM was also actively constituting its own population of concern: the 'vulnerable migrant', for the purpose of protection interventions. This resulted in uneven forms of IOM institutional visibility and protection, too. And, at the meeting point of IOM's 'vulnerable migrants' and UNHCR's 'persons of concern', it produced an increasingly narrow and overlapping space between UNHCR and IOM.

Who was made an object of protection and to whom, therefore, could not be understood only in relation to the line dividing refugees and migrants, but in relation to the many 'shades' in between and beyond. Importantly, it had to be understood in relation to how UNHCR and IOM constituted themselves as institutions by giving shape and meaning to these categories on the ground and, further, how within this relational space, UNHCR and IOM constituted themselves as institutions in relation to the other and in relation to their broader social world. A relational approach was called for in order to unpack the dynamic and mutually constitutive nature of the boundaries of refugees/migrants and UNHCR/IOM, and to understand how protection itself was shaped at the intersection of these dyads. I turned to Bourdieu's field theory, which will be more fully laid out in the following chapter, as a set of heuristic tools to capture the social space, the mixed migration field, produced by UNHCR and IOM's intertwinement in Tunisia and Libya. This is, thus, not a study of an institution as subject, or in this case *institutions*, but of a system, a social universe; of the actors within it, and the spaces and relations taking place in between.

Using this field lens as a way of 'seeing', I explore the relationality of UNHCR and IOM's response to refugees and migrants on the ground through the following research questions: Firstly, how does 'mixed migration' and its 'issue framing' structure a field of practice between UNHCR and IOM? Secondly, how does the mixed migration field shape who is made into an object of protection? And finally, how does the mixed migration field shape understandings and practices of refugee and migrant protection? I consider these research questions more closely in relation to field theory in the following chapter, which sets the theoretical and methodological foundation for the thesis. For now, I turn to situating my research within the literature on forced migration studies.

Before moving forward, a brief word on terminology. Much of this thesis interrogates the categories and the processes of bounding at play in the mixed migration field. I draw heavily on categories and labels as they are used in their emic sense by UNHCR and IOM, including 'refugee', 'person of concern', 'migrant', and 'vulnerable migrant'. Far from wanting to reify such categories, which I instead approach as 'legal fictions' (Hamlin 2021), throughout the following chapters I instead juxtapose their emic use with the contradictions inherent to the processes of bounding on the ground.

Further, in order to contrast the fragmentation in visibility and protection across different groups, as considered above, I use the label 'people on the move', to denote the mobility and irregularity that is *perceived* by UNHCR and IOM as inherent to those within mixed movements. I draw, here, on UNHCR's own definition of mixed movements, which, according to the agency, refers to '*people on the move*, travelling generally in an irregular manner, over the same routes and using the same means of transport, but for different reasons' (UNHCR 2021, italics my own). This 'type' of person on the move is juxtaposed to asylum seekers and refugees under UNHCR's mandate *who have moved*, that is, who have crossed an international border, but who remain relatively 'sedentary' in their country of refuge. In opposition to the latter, the 'people on the move' are made up of individuals perceived as engaging in continuous and irregular movement.³

³ Although UNHCR has previously used 'people on the move' to describe *all* displaced persons (i.e. refugees, asylum seekers, IDPs), it has been re-purposed in the context of mixed migration to denote, in a literal manner, those on the move. There is, of course, the possibility of perceived fluidity between the two

Finally, I have also adopted my own labelling, that of 'refugees-and-migrants', which I will discuss further in Chapter 1 in relation to my Bourdieusian field approach. I propose that we understand refugees-and-migrants as denoting the sum total of all the categories named above *before* they are submitted to the work of bounding and unmixing of UNHCR and IOM. I emphasise, here, the hyphenated categorisations (refugees-and-migrants) to stress the indeterminate nature of where one category begins and the other ends and the possibility for struggle between UNHCR and IOM in drawing the line between the two.

UNHCR/IOM, Refugees/Migrants

Scholars have long brought attention to the problems inherent to the refugee-migrant dichotomy from a conceptual (Richmond 1993; Crawley and Skleparis 2018), legal (McAdam and Wood 2021), and practical (Van Der Klaauw 2010; Derderian 2009) perspective, and have advocated for conducting research beyond these fixed policy categories. Dominant strands of scholarship considering UNHCR and IOM from an *institutional* perspective, however, continue to study these institutions as distinct universes, bounded around refugees, on the one hand, and migrants, on the other.⁴ This neat division finds echo at the global level, for example with the Global Compacts on Refugees and Migrants, which recognise the need to provide protection, albeit via *separate*

categories, a fluidity that UNCHR seizes upon to better position itself within the field. Thus, asylum seekers and refugees in refugee camps and in first countries of refuge are not presented as 'on the move' in the same way, but 'at risk' of or 'vulnerable to' being on the move, justifying the need for further assistance in first countries of asylum. Conversely, those 'on the move' are presented as having the potential of being made sedentary with further assistance from UNHCR *in situ*. This will be considered in Chapter 4.

⁴ There are some exceptions, notably the work of Green and Pécoud (2022) and Scheel and Ratfish (2014), from which I draw in later sections.

frameworks, to what is presented as clearly distinct groups of individuals (Jubilut and Casagrande 2019; Oelgemöller 2021).

The purportedly distinct universes of the 'UN Refugee Agency' and the 'UN Migration Agency' come into collision when faced with the reality of *operationally* enforcing the refugee/migrant binary, however. In 2021, in a special issue considering the impact of the Global Compacts, Oelgemöller (2021: 185) called for 'thinking critically about the idea of protection and taking seriously the messiness of mixed mobility'. How UNHCR and IOM enforce these parallel forms of 'protection' against the 'messiness of mixed mobility'; what it means for the two agencies as well as those they are meant to protect, merits further inquiry. Going beyond the dichotomy reflected at the macro level by the Global Compacts and, more broadly, by the historical development and distinct legal frameworks around 'refugees' and 'migrants', it is essential to explore the ground-level social space born of UNHCR and IOM's entanglement.

In taking this relational approach, I bring together two bodies of literature within forced migration studies. The first relates to institutional studies of UNHCR and IOM, while the second concerns processes of labelling and categorisations. Through this I make a case for relationally understanding the boundaries between UNHCR and IOM, on the one hand, and that between refugees and migrants, on the other. By bridging the two I further argue in favour of understanding each of these dyads (UNHCR/IOM, refugee/migrant) as mutually constitutive of the other and, therefore, in relation to each other. Finally, I situate my work within broader discussions of the politics of protection and migration control, which form the backdrop against which my research is set. For the boundaries of UNHCR and IOM, of the 'refugee' and 'migrant',

are not constituted in isolation, but against the real-world dynamics of the politics of protection and migration control.

UNHCR and IOM

There is a wealth of existing literature on UNHCR and a more recent, growing body of work on IOM (on UNHCR see, for example: Loescher 2003; Betts et al 2012; Morris 2021; on IOM see: Bradley 2020; Geiger and Pécoud 2020). I draw heavily on these works in Chapter 2, where I trace the parallel and entangled institutional histories of both since their inception in 1951. To gain a greater appreciation of the blurred boundaries between the two, in this section I draw out the ways in which UNHCR and IOM have been *compared*. As argued by Green and Pécoud (2022), literature on UNHCR and IOM tends to present the two as either opposing or complementary institutions in the governance of migration. While this literature, as I will show, is useful in detailing the differences and similarities between the two institutions, it tends to emphasise their distinct boundaries, presenting them as fully constituted and ‘distinct’ entities.

The stance of opposition is built upon UNHCR and IOM’s institutional mandates; crucially, the presence of a protection mandate for UNHCR and the absence thereof in IOM’s statute as well as their differing funding models, different institutional trajectories in relation to the UN, and relationship to member and donor states.⁵ In this vein, commentators emphasise the ‘sharp contrast’ between the two agencies, often pointing to IOM’s varying commitment to human rights standards as having allowed it to grow, sometimes *contra* UNHCR, in popularity with states and

⁵ I return to the institutional trajectories of UNHCR and IOM in Chapter 2, where I situate the mixed migration field within a historical perspective.

donors (Guild et al 2020; Patz and Thorvalddottir 2020). UNHCR is, thus, often presented as the reference point for what IOM fundamentally cannot be: a protection agency (Guild et al 2020). The stance of complementarity, in contrast, has taken a more critical view of UNHCR. Koch (2014), in her work on migrant returns, for example, has emphasised the moral legitimacy that UNHCR has lent to IOM returning migrants. IOM fulfilling *its role* in migration management, in that sense, is seen by UNHCR as critical for it to be able to fulfil its own role of refugee protection.⁶ However, even work that is critical of UNHCR's engagement with migration management has often portrayed refugee protection and the 'refugee' as a hard core that remains relatively unchanged, despite UNHCR's forays into supporting mobility control for *migrants* (Scheel and Ratfisch 2014: 930).

A mere consideration of the two agencies' mandates overlooks several 'blurry' areas of their work on the ground. It overlooks, firstly, the clear rationale of mobility control underlying the implementation of refugee protection and UNHCR's own history of 'protection failures and moral fiascos', which has, at different junctures, put the 'protection' of 'refugee protection' in question (Bradley 2020: 24; Franke 2009; Garnier 2014; Hyndman 2000). Scholarship focusing exclusively on UNHCR, in that sense, has provided a detailed account of these protection failures, often situating them within a broader politics of migration governance and control (See for example Goodwin-Gill 1999). I will return to some of this material in Chapter 2. Secondly, IOM, although not formally

⁶ A recent example of the official 'complementary' stance taken by UNHCR and IOM is a 2020 joint UNHCR and IOM position papers, which calls on states to do more to return individuals found not needing international protection: 'Significant, coordinated efforts are required to return people found not in need of international protection, or within an alternative basis to remain. This is critical to rebuilding public confidence in asylum systems, and migration management...' (UNHCR and IOM 2020: 12).

a 'protection agency' and in the absence of a formal protection mandate, has carved out an important position for itself *in practice* within that space. IOM now considers protection one of the main pillars of its work and the implications of this should be taken seriously (Bradley 2020: 24; Moretti 2021; Pécoud 2020). Closer consideration must, therefore, be given to the fact that UNHCR and IOM do not work within clearly defined spaces of either opposition or complementarity. They co-exist along blurred and overlapping institutional lines of protection and migration control, the configuration of which has shifted and changed over time.

As Moretti (2021) shows us, the potential for overlap has proven especially true when responding to 'refugees and migrants' in contexts of mixed migration, in which both agencies have a legitimate claim to intervene over 'their' respective populations of concern. Central to each agency's ability to carve a role for itself within operational interventions is the qualification of the movement itself. The labelling applied to population movements has in recent decades fragmented and multiplied, making way for a patchwork of categories, statuses, and evermore ambiguity concerning each agency's legitimacy to intervene in a particular response (Zetter 2007).⁷ Acknowledging the presence of both refugees and migrants in a setting and labelling a population movement as that of mixed migration prepares the terrain for each agency to intervene. It does not determine, however, what weight each is given within that response,

⁷ For example, in the context of displacement from Venezuela, UNHCR has put forward the labelling of 'Venezuelans displaced abroad', a category distinct from Venezuelan refugees and asylum seekers, described as 'persons of Venezuelan origin who are likely to be in need of international protection', while IOM instead refers to the Venezuelan refugee and migrant crisis' (UNHCR 2022; IOM 2022). Each of these labels emphasises either UNHCR or IOM's role in responding to the needs of those displaced, but comes, also, with significant implications on displaced persons' legal entitlements and the forms of protection to which they are entitled).

creating the possibility for struggle over how the line between refugees and migrants, and between responsibilities, is drawn on the ground.

Labelling refugees and migrants

The blurred institutional line between UNHCR and IOM is further exacerbated, therefore, by that of the ambiguity and blurriness of the categories of people over whom they act. Observers of UNHCR and IOM have pointed to the difficulties of distinguishing, on the ground, between refugees and migrants in the context of mixed population movements (Green and Pécoud 2022). Few studies have, however, taken a more granular lens to understanding who, within mixed movements, is ultimately made into an object of protection to whom, how, and what that means for the institutions making the categorisation. This is crucial for the labelling at stake in the tug-of-war of mixed migration plays out at the ground level in the encounter between the refugee/migrant and the institutions wielding the power to categorise them. UNHCR and IOM, in other words, shape their own institutional boundaries and positioning by giving life to the refugee and migrant labels through processes of categorisation.

In addition to institutional studies of UNHCR and IOM, I further draw from a rich body of literature in forced migration studies on processes of labelling and categorisations. As a starting point, I draw from Hamlin's (2021) understanding of the refugee and migrant categories as 'legal fictions', which do not accurately depict reality, yet create the reality upon which we act.⁸ These legal fictions, in part the product of the refugee protection framework – itself the result of historically

⁸ Hamlin borrows the concept of 'legal fiction' from Fuller (1967)'s seminal work on the topic.

and politically contingent processes – have consolidated the association between refugees, politically compelled forced migration, and deservingness, on the one hand, and that of migrants, economically motivated migration, and *underservingness*, on the other. This dichotomy, as the critique goes, fails to capture the complexities of migration and the lived experiences of those who migrate (Hamlin 2021). This perspective builds on a well-established critique, to which I adhere, of the refugee/migrant and forced/voluntary binaries, which has theorised migration as a dynamic process in which voluntary and forced migration are situated along a continuum, and in which individuals can shift between, or simultaneously embody, different categories (Richmond 1993; Long 2013; Crawley and Skleparis 2018).

To be sure, although these binaries are presented as ‘legal fictions’, the categorisations that arise from them engender real world implications, with often *binary effects*. For individuals being categorised, for instance, being recognised or *not* as a refugee marks the difference between being formally protected or not.⁹ For states, the refugee/migrant binary reveals the contrast between being accountable to those claims and incurring international obligations or not (Crawley and Skleparis 2018). And for UNHCR and IOM, the refugee/migrant categorisation determines who is made into an object of concern to which agency, from which the legitimacy and positioning of each within the governance of migration is, in part, established (Moretti 2021). The stakes of drawing the dividing line across this binary, therefore, are high. This means that these categories, although representing an initial manipulation of reality, are often subject to further manipulation

⁹ For example, being protected against refoulement and being able to make certain claims on the state, in the least a claim against refoulement.

in their application through a 'politics of bounding' (Crawley and Skleparis 2018: 61; Cole 2016). This, as Crawley and Skleparis (2018: 61) suggest, calls for us to 'focus more explicitly on the politics and relations of power that underpin the bounding process' – a call that I heed.

In line with this, it is sometimes assumed that UNHCR's expansionist and protection-oriented logic pushes the agency to widen its responsibilities, activities, and competence over all individuals considered in need of international protection (Loescher 2001; Cole 2018; Slaughter and Crisp 2009). In other words, if there are refugees 'out there' to protect, then it is assumed that UNHCR will attempt to extend its protection over them, often summoning its own creative forms of labelling to push back against the politics of states.¹⁰ UNHCR's ability to 'produce' refugees, and crucially, its power *not* to, through registration and refugee status determination, must also be situated within the 'politics and relations of power' called for by Crawley and Skleparis (Bourdieu 1991: 221).¹¹

UNHCR's refugee registration does not occur in a vacuum, however, and the agency is not the only party with a vested interest in the process (Franke 2009). In the context of mixed migration, these relations of power should be considered in relation to UNHCR *and* IOM for the latter, too,

¹⁰ Janmyr (2018), for example, describes how, in the face of the Lebanese government's restrictions on the registration of Syrians, UNHCR began 'recording' Syrians in their database in order to continue the delivery of protection services. Similarly, while no formal asylum procedure exists in Malaysia, UNHCR nonetheless registers refugees, granting them a form of 'unofficial' official status (Ansems de Vries: 2016).

¹¹ One example is Crisp's (2017: 95) work on UNHCR's evolving approach to urban refugees, in which he notes how UNHCR's exclusion of urban refugees from registration (and, by extension, from protection more broadly) had been 'influenced by competing entities within the institution, by the interests of different external stakeholders, and by broader operational and intellectual trends'. This suggests the need to understand processes of UNHCR categorisation, too, as embedded within relations of power and broader political interests (see also Crisp 1999; Fargues 2013; Walkey 2019).

has established its own population of 'vulnerable migrants' over whom it carries out what it understands as protection (Bradley 2020: 85). From that perspective, mixed migration is particularly fruitful ground for the categorical manipulation and politics of labelling previously alluded to, not least because of the ambiguity inherent to the term, the recognition of the 'complex composition' of such movements, and the practical difficulties of distinguishing between abstract categories on the ground. These, together, add to the indeterminacy of where and how the line dividing refugees and migrants is drawn.

By placing the two dyads of UNHCR/IOM, refugee/migrant, and the literatures with which they are associated in dialogue, my aim is to emphasise the malleability of the boundaries within each, a malleability in relation to what UNHCR and IOM 'are' beyond their mandate and over whom they extend protection. The dynamic and shifting boundaries that divide each pair dialectically and dynamically contribute to shaping the boundaries of the other. By bringing the two together, I aim to present a different view of how UNHCR and IOM constitute themselves in relation to the other, and through that, give shape and meaning to the production of the 'refugee' and 'migrant' on the ground.

Protection and the politics of protection

While the scholarship, considered above, on the competition and complementarity between UNHCR and IOM has contributed to our understanding of the overlapping areas between the two organisations, this picture tells us little about how actors of the field and 'protection' itself may have been shaped by the coexistence of UNHCR and IOM within these overlapping spaces. Considering the permeability of the boundaries between UNHCR and IOM, the blurred lines of

what they do in practice, and the expanding space taken up by IOM in the realm of protection, it is necessary to consider not only whether UNHCR and its associated refugee protection have been sidelined within these overlapping spaces, but how the meaning, practices, and understandings of protection may have been shaped through the competition and struggles that are inherent to them. We must view protection not as the 'signifier for an eternal, unchanging value', but consider how protection may have dynamically been shaped through the existence of UNHCR and IOM within the same space (Bigo 2016: 67).

That 'protection' is susceptible to change has been well noted in the literature on UNHCR, which has traced, over time, important shifts in UNHCR's own interpretation of its mandate. Observers note, amongst other shifts, a move away from legal rights and entitlements toward a doctrine of 'preventative protection' and material assistance, often pointing to a wider 'politics of protection' underlying shifts in practices and understandings of protection (Goodwin-Gill 1999; Betts et al 2012; Hammerstad 2011). As Stevens (2016: 275) notes, "protection' is a fluid concept with a tempo-spatial and human dimension", requiring an investigation into how it is given life and meaning on the ground. The rise of IOM as a 'protection player' and the proximity of the two agencies working in parallel, across blurred lines, in the context of mixed migration, provides further reason to investigate the shape protection has taken, not least because the blurriness of mixed migration potentially challenges the core of UNHCR's international protection. Indeed, it challenges over whom UNHCR takes protection responsibility and how it carries out this responsibility on the ground.

By examining the form protection has taken in this setting, my work further contributes to a critical body of scholarship of humanitarianism that inscribes the work of humanitarian organisations within a logic of power (Fassin 2011; Agier 2011; Scheel and Ratfish 2014; Cuttitta 2018). Humanitarianism, as a form of governance, cannot be understood outside of power and the systems of discipline and dominance that underpin it. Much of this extant work has drawn from Foucauldian approaches to power, which have emphasised, *inter alia*, how humanitarianism produces 'disciplined subjects' (Ticktin 2011; 2006). In exploring the shape protection has taken at the intersection of UNHCR and IOM, I share with such scholarship the notion that 'protection' itself is not disinterested, but always underpinned by disciplinary and control-oriented rationalities. It is also, however, highly situational, with disciplinary rationalities working unevenly across space, time, and within a particular setting. Taking seriously the situated nature of protection and control, I adopt an approach to power, which, understood within the perspective of Bourdieu's field theory, provides a different way of 'seeing' its workings, which I will discuss further in this introduction.

My research finally builds on and situates this 'protection' within the literature on the 'humanitarianisation' of migration control and externalisation. Observers have identified a turn towards the 'humanitarian border' (Walters 2010), 'humanitarian borderwork' (Pallister-Wilkins 2015; 2017), and 'humanitarianized border management' (Cuttitta 2018). Such work has observed how institutions and policy-makers have appropriated humanitarian discourse and rationales to justify restrictive measures against migrants, including increasing interceptions at sea and cracking down on smugglers. I explore how, in the context of mixed migration, UNHCR and IOM and their 'protection' work are also inextricably embedded within this logic, profoundly reshaping the

interface of UNHCR/ IOM, refugees/migrants, and protection. In that sense, by providing a grounded and detailed account of the interplay between this interface and the wider political and economic forces at play in the field, my work speaks to the literature on externalisation through international organisations (Brachet 2015; Brachet 2016; van Dessel 2019; Boyer 2019; Lavenex 2016; Cuttitta 2019).

Studying the 'field'

Building on the previous section, here I briefly make a case for the Bourdieusian relational approach as a way of seeing and understanding institutional responses to displacement and the work of UNHCR and IOM differently. In the next chapter, I set out the full conceptualisation of the 'mixed migration field', which I situate, along with my research questions and methodology, in relation to Bourdieu's field theory.

The key advantages of drawing from Bourdieu's field theory for the study of organisations such as UNHCR and IOM are threefold. The first concerns Bourdieu's approach to bridging the structure-agency debate, which has been central in the study of international organisations (Barnett and Finnemore 1999). From Bourdieu's perspective, action is neither determined nor completely agential. UNHCR and IOM are instead understood as acting within a certain grammar, a 'space of possibles'. This space is constituted by their historical trajectories and dispositions, which forms their '*practical* reason', on the one hand, and the struggle for capital and 'rules of the game' that emerge from the field, on the other (Calhoun 1995; Bigo 2011). These shape the possibility of action of each actor within the space, a space within which each actor draws on its own disposition, historical trajectory, and 'feel for the game' in order to act. From that perspective,

UNHCR and IOM are neither entirely 'free agents' within the international order, nor are they 'empty boxes' acting exclusively and without agency in the service of external forces (Barnett and Finnemore 1999; Lavenex 2016). Their action is, rather, structured by, and at once contributes to structuring, the field through their own practical sense, their feel of the game, the nature of which is, ultimately, constantly in the making.

Central to this is also the notion of field 'autonomy', which can contribute much to our understanding of how UNHCR and IOM simultaneously interact in relation to each other and in relation to the wider political and economic environment. Bourdieu views the interpenetration of wider political and/or economic interests, considered the 'heteronomous pole', as determinative of the autonomy of the field. Fields are never fully autonomous, but situated on a continuum, along which high levels of heteronomous interpenetration may shift the distribution of power internal to the field. This more nuanced view of agency-structure, on the one hand, and of autonomy in relation to wider political interests, on the other, provides crucial conceptual tools for understanding how UNHCR and IOM draw on their own grammars to act within a structured space, and how that space is itself susceptible to change through the influence of broader political and economic interests. These notions provide us with a novel approach to understanding UNHCR and IOM's autonomy vis à vis donors, and will allow me to paint a different picture of the *mechanics* of externalisation.

Second, and closely tied to the first strength, is the centrality of power. Fields, according to Bourdieu, are a 'structured space of positions', structured by the struggle of actors over the various 'species of capital'. Crucially, through this struggle for capital, actors strive for domination of the

field and the ability to impose their 'vision and division' over it (Bourdieu 1993b; 73). Importantly, these forms of capital are those which are given meaning and considered 'effective in relation to a particular field'; they can be economic as well as *non-economic*. As will be more fully considered in the following chapter, I conceive of refugees-and-migrants as the capital *specific* to this field, in circulation with other forms of capital such as economic and political (Bigo 2011). The position of actors within the field, therefore, is largely structured by the struggle for this capital and, ultimately, the differentiated distribution of the forms of capital among them.

The accumulation of capital, even the *non-economic capital*, is not disinterested. UNHCR and IOM 'making' individuals into objects of protection by categorising them as 'refugees' and 'migrants' should be considered within this situated struggle. The 'protection' that justifies their categorisation, in that sense, is not disinterested (that is, 'protection for protection's sake') either, but situated on a continuum in which protection is always embedded with other rationalities, such as mobility control (Morris 2021). This understanding allows us to distance ourselves from the 'purity' of a legalistic and normative understanding of protection, and instead understand how protection takes different shapes and forms on the basis of the depth of interpenetration of the political and economic poles. At the core, therefore, Bourdieu's idea of the field allows us to understand relations of domination, firstly, between the actors of the field, secondly, between actors of the field and the actors of the field of power, such as states, and, finally, in relation to the appropriation of the capital active within it. When used as a heuristic tool to understand displacement settings, it promises to produce a situated view of the inner workings of power and domination.

The third strength is that the actors are, through their existence within the field, also changed by it. This relational approach calls for not being 'blinded by looking into the light of the "subject," or the individual actor as 'autonomous points' of the field, as Bigo reminds us (2011: 236), but instead being attentive to how 'agents are shaped by the relations in which they engage'. In other words, UNHCR and IOM are not immutable, and should not be presumed as 'fully constituted' actors, but forever changing and being remade through the friction born of their relations (2011: 236). This understanding of relationality provides a crucial conceptual tool for overcoming the 'siloes' lens often applied to UNHCR or IOM, whose institutional boundaries are often presumed already fully constituted, as seen in the last section. Instead of viewing the two as merely coexisting within these overlapping spaces, we can understand their very fabric; who they are and what they do, as constituted by and constitutive of the relations within the field, contributing to shaping the logic of practice of the field.

Research questions and thesis outline

In the chapters that follow I examine how the binding of UNHCR and IOM into a single field, and the struggles for framing, capital, and recognition to which this binding has given rise, a redrawing of the refugee/migrant categories has emerged and, from there, a field-specific logic and practice of protection. I do this through three interrelated research questions and arguments.

Firstly, I ask: How does 'mixed migration', and its 'issue framing', structure a field of practice between UNHCR and IOM? I consider this question in Chapters 1 to 3. In Chapter 1, I set the theoretical foundation for the thesis by conceptualising the 'mixed migration field', drawing from Bourdieu's field theory, as the space of structured positions that emerged from UNHCR and IOM

responding to refugees and migrants operationally. In Chapter 2, I situate the conditions of emergence of the mixed migration field within the historical and global trajectories of the two agencies. I identify IOM's more recent involvement in the provision of assistance to migrants on the ground, framed as a protection response, as an important shift, which prepared the terrain for the emergence of a field between the two. Then in Chapter 3, I move to the framing of the field as that of 'mixed migration' and begin to trace the 'field effects' of that framing in Tunisia and Libya. I argue that the mixed migration framing varyingly functioned as a strategic form of position taking, with structuring effects on the distribution of capital within, and the boundaries of, the field.

Secondly, I ask: How does the mixed migration field shape who is made into an object of protection? Paying close attention to the struggle for capital within the field, in Chapter 4 I show that the tension between the different forms of capital gave rise to a field-specific hierarchisation of the worth and visibility attached to refugees and migrants. Actors did not pursue an infinite accumulation of refugees-and-migrants. Rather, I argue that it was the resulting valuation of political and economic capital within the field that shaped a new and hierarchised form of worth attached to refugees-and-migrants. In Chapter 5, I delve into a central governing 'logic' of the field – the logic of vulnerability – which made possible the hierarchisation of refugees-and-migrants considered in Chapter 4. In the field of mixed migration, vulnerability took on a specific understanding centred around the notion of *vulnerability-as-mobility*, which projected all people on the move as vulnerable. This, in turn, naturalised the field-specific practices of protection designed to respond to them.

Finally, I ask: How does the mixed migration field shape understandings and practices of refugee and migrant protection? I consider this question in Chapter 6 in which I explore the new space of possibilities produced through the struggle of the field. This new space of possibilities involved treating all persons on the move, including UNHCR's persons of concern, as migrants. While there was a continued institutional imperative for UNHCR and IOM to maintain the rigid bifurcation that divided and channelled 'persons of concern' and 'migrants' into separate 'protection tracks', I argue that the substantive difference in the meaning of these categories and forms of protection allocated to them were in effect erased.

I ultimately argue that in the struggle for capital between UNHCR and IOM in the mixed migration field, the two organisations emptied the 'refugee' and 'migrant' categories of the very meaning the agencies purported to safeguard and turned the notion of protection itself on its head in Tunisia and Libya. With UNHCR and IOM projecting themselves toward and competing for the heteronomous political and economic capital of the field, embodied by donor interests, the range of acceptable protection possibilities shifted, creating a field-specific logic of protection. Protection became foremost a question of protecting European borders than of enacting meaningful forms of protection toward refugees and migrants. Through their struggle in the field of mixed migration, therefore, I argue that UNHCR and IOM's fabric as institutions was also transformed. For in blurring the boundaries of the refugee and migrant categories on the ground and with the field-specific logic of protection that emerged from this struggle, UNHCR and IOM blurred their own institutional identities and boundaries, remaining the UN 'Refugee Agency' and the UN 'Migration Agency' in name only.

CHAPTER 1 – THE MIXED MIGRATION FIELD

In this chapter, I set out the theoretical and methodological foundation for the thesis, sketching the main conceptual elements that form the foundation of the 'mixed migration field'. I propose that we understand this mixed migration field as the differentiated social space in which UNHCR and IOM are responding operationally to refugees and migrants on the ground. Through their struggle for the specific capital of 'refugees-and-migrants', I argue that UNHCR and IOM are bound together in a structured social space in which 'they produce effects on each other from afar' (Bourdieu 1998: 131). It is the nature of this social space and the ways in which it produces field-specific understandings and practices of protection, that I interrogate throughout the thesis.

Before turning to the conceptualisation of the mixed migration field, I begin the chapter by setting out the main elements and strengths of Bourdieu's field theory. Contrasting it to other meso-level conceptual lenses, I argue that the 'field' offers a comprehensive conceptual framework which allows us to account for relations of power and relationality within the field as well as bridge notions of subjectivity/objectivity and agency/structure. Then, taking the field's conceptual 'building blocks', I apply the framing and concepts to my conceptualisation of the mixed migration field as well as to my research questions. In doing so, I consider the mechanics of the field and interrogate the potential of these concepts, when placed in interaction with each other, to shape a particular logic of practice among the actors of the mixed migration field.

Finally, considering the inextricably linked nature of theory and empirical research in any field-inspired research agenda, I end the chapter with a discussion of my own methodology. Since a Bourdieusian lens of the field is as much a way to think about empirical research and a guide to

the *practice of research*, as a theoretical lens through which to view the world, we must pay particular attention to the process of putting into practice, through fieldwork and empirical research, the thinking tools this lens provides. In this final section, therefore, I discuss the iterative and reflexive process through which I constructed my research 'object' and the ways in which I carried out my research in the 'field'.

Bourdieu's field theory

This field-inspired study builds, firstly, on Bourdieu's conceptual tools of the field and its associated concepts. It, secondly, draws from works of organisational sociology that have transposed Bourdieu's field lens to *organisations* through the notion of 'organisational fields'. The social world, according to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 51), is not a 'unified cosmos'. Instead, it is 'made up of a set of intersecting but increasingly self-regulating fields, each with its dominant and its dominated'. Fields, then, are social arenas structured by the state of the relations of power and the struggle over the different forms of capital specific to the field. They are, in Bourdieu's words, 'structured spaces of positions', which are configured by the relations between the different positions and the struggle for domination that takes place within the structured space (Bourdieu 1993b; 72; Emirbayer and Johnson 2008; 6). From this perspective, the social world is constituted by an infinite number of meso-level fields. Each is constructed around a particular area, issue, or activity, which is itself defined and given meaning by the struggle for capital – of what is at stake in the field – that is effective in relation to *that field*, and within which plays out the struggles for power and domination between the actors of the field. What binds social actors within a field, therefore, is what is at stake in it, meaning the forms of capital specific to the social space. Actors

attempt to appropriate these forms of capital in order to favourably position themselves in relation to others and in relation to that capital (Bourdieu 1993b).

By applying this lens to different social spaces, including to higher education (1988b), the bureaucratic field (1994), and the fields of art and culture (1993a), among others, Bourdieu identifies certain socially defining principles, or 'general laws' of fields and, importantly, a structural homology across fields. This allows us, in turn, to analytically think through other social spaces by borrowing from Bourdieu's conceptual toolbox (Bourdieu 1993b: 72). For instance, from the consolidation of any field develops laws or 'rules of the game', a *logic of practice*, characteristic of that particular space, which interacts with, structures, and is continuously structured by the practical sense or practical knowledge of the individual actors of the field. It is the interplay between these two elements (that is, the collective, macro field-level structures and the individual micro-level dispositions) that contributes to reproducing the field, while dialectically and dynamically shaping the rules of the game and the actors' practical sense of it (Thomson 2012).¹² Across all different social fields, individual actors, therefore, draw on their own practical sense, their 'feel for the game', in order to act within a set of possibles, determined by the structures of the field and their individual dispositions.

Two of these socially defining and traversal principles, alluded to in the last paragraph, and forming part of the interdependent 'thinking tools' of Bourdieu's field theory are that of habitus

¹² For instance, to draw from Bourdieu's own empirical application of field theory, the academic field could be conceived of as a hierarchically organised space within which actors are vying for specific academic capital, their endowment in which determines their position, allowing them to establish their domination and prestige within the field. Through this, a certain order is produced in which the actors of the field act according a certain 'collective unconsciousness'.

and capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1989:50; Thomson 2012). While I return to some of these concepts in more depth in later sections of this chapter, a brief summary, at this stage, of how they relate to each other allows us to more fully appreciate the relevance and strength of Bourdieu's theory. According to Bourdieu, action is best understood as the result of the interaction between one's habitus, a property of individual actors considered a 'system of generative schemes' or 'dispositions', and each actor's positioning within the field, meaning their position in relation to the capital of that field (Bourdieu 1990: 55). The disposition or habitus is at once *structured* because it is shaped by the individual actors' past and current circumstances, but it is also *structuring* insofar as it contributes to generating practice, which, placed in the context of each actor's position in the field, contributes to shaping the space of possibles within it. Understanding this interplay requires being attentive to the historical trajectories of individual actors, as well to the dynamic, shifting, and structuring nature of relations of power within social spaces. These concepts offer a rich and multidimensional account of relational spaces, which allow us to bridge micro and macro levels of analysis, as well as to overcome debates on objectivity/subjectivity by situating practice at the intersection of individual trajectories and the ever-evolving structures of the field.

Despite his wide range of work on fields, Bourdieu gives little explicit consideration to the study of organisations in his own work (Hallett and Gougherty 2018). His concept of the field nonetheless had a profound impact on organisational sociology, notably through the notion of 'organisational fields', from which I borrow in order to construct the object of study of the mixed migration field. DiMaggio and Powell, themselves explicitly borrowing from Bourdieu as a starting point, first contributed the term to the study of organisations in 1983 by defining this type of field

as organisations active in a 'recognised area of institutional life' (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Wooten and Hoffman 2008; Emirbayer and Johnson 2008: 2).¹³ The notion of organisational fields, while originally grounded in Bourdieu's analytical approach to fields, subsequently served as a building block for new institutional theory, now a dominant lens of analysis within organisational sociology studies (Emirbayer and Johnson 2008).

New institutional theory, notably through the later work of DiMaggio and Powell, parted with notions of power and competition integral to Bourdieu's field and focuses, instead, on institutional isomorphism, cooperation, and norms through which the behaviour of social actors within an organisational field is mediated. Notions of power relations and struggle over capital remain central to Bourdieu's concept of the field, however, and I consider these central to any understanding of the positions of UNHCR and IOM in the mixed migration field (Hamadache 2015). I, therefore, borrow from the notion of 'organisational field', as originally proposed by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), while approaching this space from Bourdieu's theoretical lens of the field. This follows Emirbayer and Johnson's (2008) call to return the notion of the field and the study of organisational fields to Bourdieu's accompanying concepts of capital and habitus (which will be considered more fully in this chapter) only through which the full utility of applying field theory to the study organisational fields can be realised.

From a conceptual perspective, my work, therefore, is situated within a growing body of scholarship that has applied Bourdieu's field theory to the social spaces of organisations working

¹³ Confirming the Bourdieusian roots of the notion of organisational fields, DiMaggio emphasises that the latter should be conceived of "in the dual sense in which Bourdieu uses 'champ', to signify both common purpose and an arena of strategy and conflict" (1983: 149).

in a particular issue area. These works conceptualise their fields as composed of *organisations* – each endowed with its own institutional habitus considered the product of its respective historical trajectory and current positioning within the structures of the field – that are engaged in a struggle and competition over the issue and capital at stake within that particular arena. Scholars such as Emirbayer and Williams (2005), for example, have used this lens to understand competition and struggle over capital in the field of homeless services in New York, while Hamadache (2015) applies it to the study of the pharmaceutical orphan drug field in the US. Closer to the topic at hand, Krause’s (2014) application of field theory to the study of humanitarian organisations provides the tools to draw out the *practical logic* of humanitarian work beyond the symbolic divisions of different humanitarian organisations. As a whole, these works have shown the potential of applying field theory to the relational spaces in which organisations and institutions act.

Building on this, my work takes the meso-level inter-organisational space that is structured by UNHCR and IOM responding to refugees and migrants on the ground in the context of mixed migration as its unit of analysis. Considering this configuration of actors from a relational perspective will allow me to draw out the ways in which UNHCR and IOM, often viewed as static and distinct social actors, ‘belonging to the same gravitational field, produce effects upon one another from afar’; in other words, how UNHCR and IOM position themselves within this interorganisational field in relation to the other and in relation to the individuals they are meant to protect (Bourdieu 1996b: 131; Emirbayer and Johnson 2008: 6; Warren 1967). The intent is for this relational analysis to provide new insight into the social space that governs responses to

refugees and migrants and the implications of this relationality on how, ultimately, individuals are protected.

The objective of this work, therefore, is not to test or implement the concept of the field as a 'wholesale importation', but to draw from the theory's conceptual strengths as an 'instrument of vision' in order to see and understand the work of UNHCR and IOM differently (Vaughan 2008: 68; Duval 2015: 165). Drawing on field theory is thus a question of, 'what can one see by analysing this space as a field that one would otherwise not see?' (Dubois 2015: 209). I consider this briefly in the following section in relation to other meso-level conceptual lenses often applied to the study of organisations.

Meso-level lenses

Firstly, the constructivist notion of epistemic communities, considered as a network of 'knowledge-based experts' or knowledge actors 'with recognised expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area', has been much drawn upon to describe the circulation and transmission of norms, ideas, and practices within a particular social arena (Haas 1992:3). It has been fruitfully applied elsewhere in the study of migration-related policies and norms. Fresia (2014), for example, borrowing from the lens of epistemic community, considers the development of refugee protection norms and agenda setting within UNHCR's Executive Committee. Closer to the topic at hand and broadening the lens to the interaction between multiple institutional actors, Kortendiek (2021) examines the influence of international and non-government organisations on the governance of mixed migration by borrowing from the notion of 'transnational expert

networks' and their 'epistemic practices'. Kortendiek argues that IOs, including IOM and UNHCR as well as NGOs, 'exert considerable influence over policy implementation' through the creation of practical guidelines through which they make 'mixed movements known and governable' (Kortendiek 2021: 321).

The strength of the notion of epistemic community, in the above example, is to identify the mechanisms and dynamic processes through which disparate actors are brought together around the common policy issue of mixed migration. While the concept of epistemic community could be applied to the generation of norms and approaches between IOM and UNHCR in the context of mixed migration, it falls short of conceptualising the centrality of power and struggle over resources that take place across social spaces (Madsen 2011; Dubois 2015). The elite experts engaged in mixed migration not only generate and disseminate knowledge about mixed migration, but are also an integral part of governing it, through *practice*, including by responding operationally to refugees and migrants on the ground. They are thus not only involved in generating norms in the pursuit of a 'benevolent normative goal' (arguably no knowledge-generating process is) (Betts and Pilath 2017: 786). Rather, through this knowledge generation, they attempt to define the issue, set the 'rules of the game', and position themselves in relation to the broader constellation of actors within the social space.

Field theory, while maintaining the lens on a particular field of activity or issue – here, mixed migration and the actors making up its field – comes with a more comprehensive set of conceptual tools. These, in contrast, allow us to re-embed these knowledge practices within the relations of power as well as the struggle for resources and legitimacy that structures any field of practice, and

which ultimately gives rise to inner logics and taken-for-granted knowledge within it. Furthermore, it allows us to broaden the lens, from knowledge generation and transmission as the focus of investigation with epistemic communities, towards the broader structures and set of positions that situate actors in a struggle in which knowledge generation is but one stake in the game. From that perspective, the ability to produce legitimate knowledge should be seen both as at the product of access to capital within the field and a tool of 'symbolic power' through which actors position themselves in order to maintain or subvert the structure of positions within it. Field theory, therefore, offers an all-encompassing approach to conceptualising the social world and structures that are inherent to it, through which practices, taken-for-granted knowledge, and norm transmission can be grasped.

Secondly, the notion of international regimes, also borrowed from international relations, has previously been drawn upon as an approach to understanding the presence of multiple social actors within the same arena of migration governance (Betts 2010). Regimes are broadly defined as 'principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actor expectations converge in a given issue-area' (Krasner 1983:2). The 'refugee regime', understood as the set of norms (for example, refugee convention and other legal instruments) and institutions (for example, UNHCR) in the realm of refugee governance, has been an important area of research in forced migration studies, in which scholars have considered the emergence of the refugee regime, its normative gaps, and its impact on refugee governance and state behaviour.

More recently regime scholarship has moved beyond considering regimes in isolation, with scholarship acknowledging the impact and importance to the refugee-regime of external subject-

areas and regimes. Betts (2010) considers the increasing overlap between separate regimes, such as the travel, human rights, and humanitarian regimes, and the refugee regime. No longer forming discrete issue areas and with other 'regimes' now having authority over refugee-related issues, Betts (2010: 13) argues that the increasing density of regimes has led to a 'refugee regime complex', in which 'different institutions overlap, exist in parallel to one another and are nested within one another'. Clearly, the literature on regime complexity, first put forward by Alter and Meunier (2009: 15), who, in turn, borrow from complexity studies, provides an interesting lens through which to grasp the relationality of the refugee and migrant protection regimes and the ways in which this complexity in organisations and norms 'affects the strategies and dynamic interactions of actors'. From that perspective, it could be considered whether UNHCR and IOM, in the context of mixed migration, are bound by a single regime complex.

While the notion of regime complexity, set out above, offers an interesting line of inquiry and appears well-suited to meso-level analyses of migration governance, I privilege field theory over that of regimes for two reasons. First, regime analysis is less a theory than a concept, one that can only be understood and deployed if grounded in a broader theoretical framework. Most scholarship on regimes has thus employed regime analysis from within dominant frameworks of neorealism, institutionalism, or neoliberalism in the field of international relations. Accompanying this scholarship, and characterising much of the literature on the refugee regime, is the liberal assumption that regimes, with the cooperation and order they generate, are necessarily a good thing for the international order.

While it is possible to move away from this assumption by drawing on critical theoretical frameworks, such as in the case of Keeny's (1990) Foucauldian analysis of international regimes or Gale's (1998) work on international regimes and institutionalised hegemony, it remains that embedding the notion of regime within a broader framework is necessary because regimes, on their own, lack any explanatory power. It is thus only by combining regimes with a critical theoretical approach that we begin to understand the internal struggles, power relations, and practices to which the existence of social actors forming a regime or regime complex gives rise. Like the concept of regime, in Bourdieu's field theory, social actors at the meso-level are also engaged in a differentiated area of activity and practice. Yet field theory, when deployed with its associated concepts of capital, habitus, and with its emphasis on historical trajectories, yields a more comprehensive sociological approach in which power relations and relational analysis already form an integral part.

Second, the concept of regime, regardless of broader theoretical questions, risks overstating the importance of institutionalisation, institutions, and norms. The focus of regime scholarship is on the development of norms, rules, and institutions as 'a prime determinant of what actually happens' (Gale 1998: 261). This emphasis risks coming at the expense of the various other ways in which social actors engage in contestation and struggle, both within specific institutions and between actors of a regime (Strange 1982). The everyday practices, beliefs, and struggles of actors that make up particular institutions are key to understanding the dynamics that shape and structure regimes. Yet, regime analysis, which often treats institutions as monoliths within a broader social arena, does not bridge micro- and meso-level social processes and dynamics. Further, solely focusing on normative developments risks obscuring the ways in which norm-

making represents but one potential manifestation of a social space; that actors can be bound together in the absence of explicit norms and principles. In contrast, from a field perspective, what binds UNHCR and IOM in the context of mixed migration is not the development of institutionalised behaviour and norms, but their relationship to the capital at stake within the field and the forms of struggle to which this gives rise.

In sum, a Bourdieu-inspired field theory approach offers a multi-dimensional framework for relational analysis in which the actions of actors cannot be understood outside their positions within the structures of the field. This requires paying close attention to the history and dispositions of individual actors making up the field as well as the structures and forms of capital at stake within it. These, in turn, shape the possibilities for action and practice of each actor (Calhoun 1995). It is by applying the full breadth of these concepts within a single analytical framework that we can begin to grasp how UNHCR and IOM, with their distinct histories and dispositions, interact within a single field of practice of mixed migration, itself structured by the struggle over the capital that is at stake between them, producing situated forms of understandings and practices of protection. In the following section of this chapter, I consider more closely the central elements of the field in relation to my proposed 'mixed migration field'.

The mixed migration field

The mixed migration field, as I propose, is constructed around the differentiated activity, issue, and stake of responding operationally to 'refugees-and-migrants' on the ground, with UNHCR-IOM-refugees-and-migrants forming the 'hard core' or 'inner core' of the field (Dubois 2015; Emirbayer and Johnson 2008: 13; Mangez and Liénard 2015). This approach, which I will discuss further in the methodology section, follows Dubois's (2015) work on the field of public policymaking, which isolates as a starting point a 'hard core' from which to reconstruct the broader field by tracing its 'field effects'.¹⁴ 'It is here', as Emirbayer and Johnson (2008: 13) point out, 'that one typically encounters the contestations that ultimately prove most significant for the contours and dynamics of those fields as a whole'. My proposed starting point or 'hard core' serves a similar function.

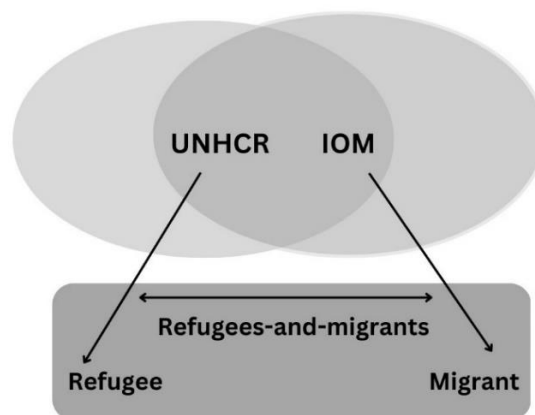


Figure 1: The 'hard core' of the mixed migration field

¹⁴ Bourdieu, in his study of housing policy, identifies 'efficient agents' from which, on the basis of institutional positions, he reconstructs the field. Drawing on this, Dubois reconstructs the field of public policy with 'ad hoc committees set up to address a particular problems' as his starting point. Elsewhere, Emirbayer and Johnson (2008:13) point to the 'inner core' of the fashion industry as the 'great *ateliers* of couture houses'. My starting point or 'hard core' of IOM-UNHCR-refugees-and-migrants serves a similar function.

With UNHCR and IOM at the helm of operational responses to refugees and migrants, respectively, and as the 'dominants' of the field of practice, it is relevant to isolate this core as the starting point of my analysis. Indeed, and as I will show in the following chapter, considering the historical trajectories of UNHCR and IOM and the fact that both have uniquely positioned themselves as providers of protection to refugees and migrants, respectively, each possesses a 'quantum of social force, or of capital, such that they are able to enter into the struggles over the monopoly of power' within this sphere of activity (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 220–30). In other words, they form the elites of the field who, by virtue of their position, are largely responsible for the interpretation of legitimate beliefs and actions within the social arena, making them a unit 'pertinent to isolate' (Hilgers and Mangez 2014; Duval 2015: 170).

Inherent to Bourdieu's field is the notion that through their orientation towards the field-specific capital social actors are forced to take each other into account, forming an arena of struggle and competition over this particularly 'valued resource'. I argue that UNHCR and IOM are bound together through their response to refugees-and-migrants on the ground, with the latter representing what is at stake in the field and the form of non-economic capital specific to it. Chapter 2 lays bare this process by considering how the historical trajectories of both organisations have positioned them over population groups of refugees and migrants, which, in the context of mixed migration, constitute a unique form of capital and resource. The orientation of social actors towards the field's capital, and, as a by-product of that, towards each other, gives rise to competition over positioning, recognition, and visibility.

By taking UNHCR-IOM and refugees-and-migrants as the core and starting point of the investigation, as depicted in the diagram, I, throughout the thesis, follow the field effects, the 'threads' that emanate from the field, which link the system to other social actors. While the diagram, shown above, depicts an obvious simplification of the social reality, it nonetheless forms a sound point from which to begin the analysis insofar as it allows me to escape the siloed view often taken of institutions/social actors and, instead, consider the two forms of protection (refugee/migrant protection) and two institutions (IOM/UNHCR) as positioned within a broader social universe in which these elements are in tension, competition, and struggle with each other, as opposed to self-contained. Far from wanting to recreate this siloed view at a broader scale (for example, by treating UNHCR-IOM as a self-contained unit), this approach will allow me to reconstruct the field, from the inside out, by considering the interlinkages as experienced and understood from within the system.

Forms of capital

The structure of the field, according to Bourdieu (1987: 3-4), 'is given by the distribution of the various forms of capital, that is, by the distribution of the properties which are active within the universe under study – those properties capable of conferring strength, power and consequently profit'. This capital, as Emirbayer and Johnson further remind us, cannot be solely understood in terms of material resources, but should be conceived of as a 'wide variety of different species of resources, convertible...both as weapons and as stakes in the struggle' (Emirbayer and Johnson 2008; 11). These can include both economic forms of capital and 'immaterial forms of capital' – most often conceived of as 'cultural, symbolic, and social' in the work of Bourdieu (Calhoun 1995: 70). Social agents are thus in a constant state of struggle over the distribution of the forms of

capital at play within the field, forms of capital that are 'effective in relation to a particular field' (Bourdieu 1993; 73).

Different forms of capital, including the field-specific capital of refugees-and-migrants, political capital, economic capital, and symbolic capital, that are at times in tension and at odds with each other, are in circulation in the mixed migration field. It is the interplay of the distribution of these different 'species of capital', combined differently across social actors, that structures their positioning within the field. While a sufficient possession of each of these forms of resources is necessary to ensure a dominant position within the field, and therefore are also to some extent mutually reinforcing, UNHCR and IOM are positioned to access the different forms of capital in varying amounts. For example we might consider UNHCR as holding more symbolic capital, while IOM is often perceived as having greater political capital. This is briefly touched upon in this section, but more thoroughly explored in the next chapter when considering the distinct historical trajectories of each agency.

The first form of capital, I posit, is the field-specific capital gained from UNHCR/IOM carving out responsibility over groups categorised as refugees and migrants. Refugees-and-migrants in the context of mixed migration form the foundation of the field and the capital specific to and at stake within it. It is only through 'possession' of this capital that agencies can justify an operational response. It is thus through the determination of their presence that either agency is able to 'wield a power, or influence, and thus to exist' within the field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 98). IOM and UNHCR, therefore, are engaged in a struggle to establish their authority to act over these

refugees-and-migrants. Throughout the thesis I present this capital as 'refugees-and-migrants' in order to emphasise the indeterminacy of where the line is drawn between the two.

It is by establishing the presence of refugees or migrants in a given setting that either agency is able to enter the 'game' and attempt to establish their dominance within in. Through this, and as will be discussed in Chapter 3, UNHCR and IOM are in constant struggle over how to define and frame the field and how to 'construct the issue' at stake to ensure their advantageous position within it (Hamadache 2015). An important part of this process takes place over the definition of the migratory movement (for example, refugees/migrants/mixed migration) and at the level of the micro-processes of individual and group recognition that result in some being seen as migrants and others as refugees. Both processes are considered in Chapters 3 and 4. For now, however, it bears noting that how a migratory movement is defined is not a given, but the product of a continuous struggle to construct and frame the issue at hand, itself heavily influenced by the actors' 'symbolic power', or authority within the field, as will be seen.

How persons on the move are categorised is crucially tied, and, in part, converted into the economic capital of the field. The carving out and enumeration of population groups is inherently linked to the economic capital of the field insofar as UNHCR and IOM's counting and bounding of their respective population groups allows them to justify their funding and presence in an operational setting. The importance of this practice of counting of this 'valued resource' to the positioning of individual agencies, notably to UNHCR, has been well-established by such scholars of forced migration studies as Harrell-Bond et al (1992) and Crisp (1999). In work emblematic of the more recent turn in scholarship which explores the commodification of refugees by states and

humanitarian organisations, Morris (2021), identifies the profitability that UNHCR has extracted from refugees through its own institutional 'refugee expansionism' (see also Ramsay 2019; Tsourapas 2019; Bardelli 2018). It is clear, therefore, that each agency's ability to establish responsibility over an ever-evolving group of individuals has been central to the operational expansion of both UNHCR and IOM.

However while gaining entry into the field depends on establishing responsibility over refugees or migrants, gaining a *dominant* position in the field is not a simple matter of accumulation of refugees or migrants, that is, of establishing responsibility over an ever-expanding group. Indeed the material resources, or economic capital, available in the field does not necessarily grow commensurately with the increase of refugees or migrants, but with the actors' ability to *convert* the presence of refugees and migrants into a cause worth funding. As suggested by scholars of forced migration studies, the amount of voluntary funds made available in any forced migration situation in part 'depends on the political nature of the crisis' and the ability of actors to tap into the broader stakes of this crisis (Vayrynen 2001; Thorvaldsdottir et al 2021). For closely linked to the need for economic capital within the field is the political capital at stake within it. And, as will be seen, political capital in the field is converted into economic capital through the funding that flows from successful framing and positioning of the issue and through the implementation of projects considered salient to donor states. As will be discussed in the following chapter and as an example of the latter, IOM has a longstanding and strong endowment in political capital, gained both from donor countries and host states, which created the basis for its exponential growth, including in the realm of protection activities (Moretti 2021).

The presence and importance of 'heteronomous' political and economic forms of capital in the field, meaning the orientation of UNHCR and IOM towards political actors including donors and host states, indicates that it is not only a question of how many individuals require protection but also *how* these individuals are protected. As will be further explored in Chapter 3, an integral part of this struggle for positioning is conducted by the agencies projecting themselves to donor states as partners in the management of mixed migration. 'Protection' programming is presented not as an end in itself, but as a means through which to manage migration. In the following chapters, I will show that, with mixed migration discursively associated with concepts of irregularity and onward movement to Europe, UNHCR and IOM gain in political capital by presenting themselves as capable of ordering and stemming migration through their protection work. To justify funding and ensure positioning within the field the agencies must show the added value of their protection response to managing migration. The agencies thus gain in political and economic capital by orienting themselves towards the issues and political actors who have a stake in the field and presenting themselves as capable of responding to their needs too.

In this context, therefore, more refugees or migrants does not necessarily mean more funding. Rather, as will be seen, UNHCR and IOM are incentivised to provide services to a certain *type* of refugee/migrant: those projected as 'on the move' or at risk of being on the move. As will be seen, the two forms of capital (political capital and the refugees-and-migrants capital) are thus, at times, in tension with each other. The two agencies in the pursuit of political capital thus make certain individuals 'persons of concern', while pushing those who fall outside the relevance of the struggle for political and economic capital at the periphery of their protection work. Ensuring political capital within the field can therefore mean forgoing the accumulation of capital associated with

establishing responsibility over individuals of concern. The hierarchy of protection to which this gives rise is explored in Chapter 4.

How UNHCR and IOM undertake protection is further circumscribed by the struggle over the form of authority, or symbolic capital – a concept devised by Bourdieu (2005: 2) to ‘explain the logic of the economy of honour and ‘good faith’ – gained from being recognised as a legitimate provider of protection. Thus how individuals are protected is not only dictated by the pursuit of political and economic capital, but is also carried out within the frame of what is considered an acceptable and ‘good’ practice of protection. Symbolic capital, as Emirbayer and Johnson (2008: 12) argue, is often ‘attached to the most venerable establishments within the field rather than to the newcomers, challengers, or upstarts’. As illustrated in the next chapter, UNHCR, with its mandate-enshrined protection role and accumulated ‘habitus’ of protection, has traditionally been endowed with greater symbolic capital, contra IOM, whose presence in the realm of protection has often been viewed with suspicion given its proximity to and longstanding endowment in political capital. With an amount of all forms of capital necessary in the field, UNHCR and IOM can thus only go so far in acquiring political capital, for they risk sacrificing the symbolic authority associated with providing protection in line with the standards and rules of the game.

These forms of capital are not necessarily gained in isolation from each other, but are linked, reinforcing, and convertible. The relation of UNHCR and IOM to the capital at stake in the field, as will be seen, is central to understanding the strategies and position-taking that each agency adopts with regards to mixed migration. How UNHCR and IOM position themselves, over time, in

relation to these forms of capital and how they attempt to strike a balance between them to ensure a dominant position within the field are explored in the following chapters.

Field autonomy

While I take UNHCR and IOM as the starting point or 'hard-core' of my field study, by no means is this configuration a neatly bounded social universe. Rather, as stated in the previous discussion on the capital at stake in the field, the actors of the field are also competing for forms of capital that are themselves heavily dependent on external field actors, such as political and economic forms of capital. The distribution of this capital within the field is influenced by such actors as donors and host state institutions. The extent to which external actors influence the distribution of capital within a given field directly relates to Bourdieu's notion of relative field autonomy, central to which is the understanding that all fields vary in their degree of dependency on external social actors and fields (Krause 2018).

Bourdieu describes two poles at play in the field: an autonomous pole (for example, those engaged in the production of 'art for art's sake', in Bourdieu's words) and a heteronomous pole, linked to the broader structures of society, most often to political and/or economic considerations embodied by Bourdieu's notion of field of power (Bourdieu, 1996: 216). As detailed by Mangez and Liénard (2015) in their account of Bourdieu's work on the field of art, there isn't 'such a thing as 'pure' art', for there is always, to some degree, a level of interpenetration into the field from the heteronomous pole. Similarly, the notion of 'pure' protection or humanitarian care has been dispelled by scholars such as Fassin (2011) and Agier (2011), who have long insisted on the rationales of control closely tied to political capital, which underpins humanitarian assistance and

care. Mangez and Liénard (2015: 184) further describe the types of forces at play in the field, with the tension between them producing the field's relative autonomy: 'on the one hand, the forces linked to the exercise of power within the field itself; on the other, the forces linked to the exercise of power in other fields and especially within the field of power'.

The strength of field theory, thus, is that it allows for a more nuanced account of the social processes through which other actors/fields influence the distribution of capital within the mixed migration field, and the ways in which UNHCR and IOM, in turn, orient themselves towards these changing incentives. The mixed migration field, hence, is deeply interconnected and influenced by the positioning of donor states and host countries, among other social actors, who have, as will be seen throughout the thesis, a structuring effect on the distribution of capital within the field. In Bourdieusian terms, these actors form part of the broader 'field of power (champ du pouvoir)' and contribute to externally imposing a hierarchisation on the positions within the field. Understanding the field's relationship to the broader field of power is central to grasping the structure and dynamics of the field under consideration (Schmitz et al 2017).

By narrowing in on the relationality of UNHCR-IOM and refugees-and-migrants as the core, I am better able to explore, from there, these 'field effects': the interlinkages that penetrate within and emanate from the field of mixed migration through the heteronomous pole towards the field of power. As will be shown, how the actors of the field of mixed migration position themselves, and the ways in which this shapes the practice of protection within the field, is closely linked to how IOM and UNHCR orient themselves in relation to donors and in relation to each other. Through

this they expand the boundaries of the field of practice of mixed migration and shift the structure of positions within the field (Hilgers and Mangez 2014).

Field stability and inner logics of the field

While rejecting the rational actor model often applied to the study of organisations, Bourdieu provides a more nuanced account of how social actors pursue their interests from within the structures of the field and the dispositions they inhabit.¹⁵ This is not merely a structuralist account of the social world, however. Organisations, by acting within an institutional habitus, itself the product of their historical trajectories, dispositions, and encounters with past fields, in turn contribute to shaping the structures of the field and defining what is at stake within it. As Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 108) remind us, social agents within the field are ‘bearers of capitals and, depending on their trajectory and the position they occupy in the field ...they have a propensity to orient themselves actively either towards the conservation of the distribution of capital or towards the subversion of that distribution’.

The field, while marked by competition over resources, is not necessarily characterised by open conflict, deliberate contestation, or attempts to subvert the field itself. As will be seen, actors of the field, particularly those who dominate the capital of the field, such as UNHCR and IOM in Libya, have an ‘objective complicity which underlies all the antagonisms’: they have shared interest and common investment in its reproduction and the reproduction of their positioning within it

¹⁵ ‘Interest’, here, is not understood in a utilitarian perspective. Rather, as Bourdieu (1993b: 76) emphasises: ‘sociology cannot dispense with the axiom of interest, understood as the specific investment in the stakes, which is both the condition and the product of membership of a field.’

(Bourdieu 1993b: 73). In contrast, social actors in a less dominant position often attempt to modify or subvert the terms of the field through subversion strategies. As will be seen in Chapter 3, UNHCR's attempt to consolidate a framing of the mixed migration field in Tunisia can be interpreted as an attempt to subvert the 'framing' in order to ensure a space for itself within migration governance structures and to access the resources at stake. This contrasts with the situation in neighbouring Libya, where both IOM and UNHCR have an active stake in maintaining the structures of the field.

Further, their existence in the field and the relations of power that bind them to one another give rise to an internal logic specific to the field. This is the 'doxa', according to which actors come to recognise the underlying values within the field and gain practical knowledge of its functioning. Through this process emerges an 'unquestioned common sense in the field', governed by a shared language, and a common understanding of 'what is at stake' in the field and how to interact within it; the 'rules of the game', to borrow from Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1993b: 26; Barman 2016: 447). Literature drawing on Bourdieusian field theory suggests that fields develop inner logics unique to them, their own doxa, in parallel with the crystallisation of their autonomy vis à vis other fields, for example the field of economics or the political field (Buchholz 2016: 37). As the boundaries of the field solidify, therefore, so too does an autonomous taken-for-granted 'common sense' of the field, the inner practical sense of the game and how to play it (Bourdieu 1993b). As previously discussed, field autonomy is rarely 'pure', but always situated on a pole in which external influences, in particular those emerging from the field of power, to varying degrees shape inner logics of a given field (Duval 2015).

The mixed migration field and research questions

Having discussed in the last two sections the conceptual building blocks of field theory and of the mixed migration field, I now consider my proposed analytical framework in relation to my three research questions.

First, how does 'mixed migration', and its 'issue framing', structure a field of practice between UNHCR and IOM? The field emerges historically through the 'social and symbolic labour of agents' and the definition of specific stakes, itself a process of power insofar as social actors strive to 'construct' and 'frame' the issue or context of mixed migration to favourably position themselves within it (Mangez and Liénard 2015: 189; Dubois 2015). The process of field construction is a constant process of struggle for the definition and redefinition of the 'issue' and its stakes, through which it becomes differentiated from other spheres. This follows Hoffman's (1999: 352) conception that an 'organizational field is formed around the issues that become important to the interests and objectives of a specific collective of organizations'.

The issue around which the field crystallises, however, is not a given, nor is it a historical necessity. Rather it is the product of power relations 'constructed and then legitimated through the struggle between agents possessing different capitals' (Hamadache 2015: 101; Mangez and Liénard 2015). Through this process is imposed a particular 'vision and division' that construes its law (or logic) of competition' and that differentiates it from other social spaces (Buchholz 2016: 37). A closer look at the process through which this structuration happens over time and space, and the struggles to which it gives rise, provides insight into how and why a particular issue becomes central to field construction (Hamadache 2015). This exercise is all the more important considering

that a field is never fixed. Rather, the field and its boundaries are always a reflection of the 'temporary state of power relations among the agents engaged' (Hamadache 2015: 100).

With attention to temporality in mind, in Chapter 2, I contextualise and historicise the contemporary manifestation of the mixed migration field. I begin by considering the separate historical trajectories of UNHCR and IOM since their inception in the 1950s. Through this I look at how UNHCR's endowment in a growing number of 'persons of concern' has propelled its operational expansion across the globe. In contrast IOM's proximity to donor states and its willingness to take on projects for them has underpinned its role in migration management. Each agency's historical endowment and proximity to these differing capitals has positioned them as dominant social actors over the refugee protection and migration management field, respectively, as separate fields with their distinct underlying logics. I then consider how these historical and global developments have created the conditions for the emergence of the mixed migration field, which bind UNHCR and IOM in their operational responses and creates a structure of relative positions between them (Mangez and Linéard 2015).

In Chapter 3, turning to the operational context of Tunisia and Libya, I consider how the *framing* of mixed migration functioned to structure the field of practice, a 'specific domain of activity', that, on the ground, encompassed UNHCR, IOM, and their persons of concern, and placed them in competition for what was at stake within the field at this meso, operational level (Mangez and Liéard 2015: 189). By considering these structuration processes in Tunisia and Libya, I explore how the issue-framing of mixed migration functioned as a position-taking strategy. As will be seen, in these different settings, UNHCR and IOM varyingly mobilised the mixed migration framing

in order to assert their relevance and existence as legitimate and funding-worthy social actors within a migratory setting. While UNHCR's attempt was contested in the case of Tunisia, in Libya it led to the 'consolidation of a distinctive set of 'institutions' through which autonomous principles of vision and division became objectified and perpetuated' (Buchholz 2016: 38).

Second, how does the mixed migration field shape who is seen as an object of protection? Here I am interested in how the struggle for capital shapes who is seen as an object of protection by UNHCR and IOM. My initial starting point, as raised above, is that the migrant and refugee categories are not categories that exist in the abstract, but are constructed through socially, politically, and historically contingent processes of negotiation. Embedding these processes within a relational frame of analysis allows for an understanding not only of how each of these categories is shaped in relation to the other, but also, through these processes of categorisation, how UNHCR and IOM dialectically attempt to shape themselves in relation to the other and to the capital of the field. The struggle over this field-specific form of capital speaks directly to the 'struggles for categorisation that they (social actors) create and reproduce', requiring an investigation into 'what they render invisible and unspeakable (the doxa) through the symbolic violence they exert as categories' (Bigo 2011: 231).

At the heart of this, therefore, is the question of categorisation and the struggle for capital that underlies any such process in the field. As previously mentioned, and as will be shown in Chapter 2, refugees and migrants composing mixed migration form the foundation of the field and a form of capital at stake within it. Chapters 3 and 4, thus, pay closer attention to what (who) is rendered invisible by the social processes through which UNHCR and IOM, in their struggle over this capital,

make certain individuals into migrants and refugees worthy of protection, while rendering others invisible, thereby falling outside the scope of their respective forms of protection. Narrowing in on these processes as a form of struggle over capital in the field allows us to bridge micro and macro analyses of UNHCR and IOM's work. These have, on the one hand, provided insight into processes of categorisation at play on the ground, and, on the other, have engaged with macro-level institutional interactions between UNHCR and IOM; two bodies of work that rarely engage with each other.

Central to this is the importance of considering the practices and meanings, held among social actors, that produce and reproduce these categorisations. This follows Bourdieu's call to question social categorisations, which, according to the sociologist, 'hide as much as they reveal, and can reveal only by hiding' (1988a:774). Through his reflexive approach, considered further in the methodology section, Bourdieu provides an avenue for questioning taken-for-granted categories that too often form the foundation of social science research and policy, such as the refugee/migrant and mixed migration categories (Bigo 2011). Going beyond the often-assumed notions of UNHCR and IOM as, respectively, the UN 'refugee' and 'migration' agencies, then, is the question of what practices, meanings, and processes take shape, among the social actors of the field, for this assumption to be given effect through the dynamic and ongoing social categorisations on the ground of individuals as refugees and migrants.

These processes should not be treated as a struggle over meaning-making and categorisation in isolation, however, but situated within the broader struggle for capital, one in which actors attempt to position themselves within the structures of the field. As previously mentioned, field

are structured around forms of capital that are unique to them, in this case the refugees-and-migrants. In relation to this field-specific capital, Bigo reminds us that 'the crux of the question is the significance of this capital, its relation to other forms of capital' (2011: 245). Of importance here, hence, is how the struggle for and distribution of this capital, manifested through processes of social categorisation, in relation and tension with the other forms of capital in the field, shapes who is seen as an object of protection. As will be seen in Chapter 4, a shift towards the greater valuation of political and economic capital in the field over that of the accumulation of field-specific capital, produces a fragmentation of protection and hierarchy in the forms of visibility afforded to individuals of 'concern' to UNHCR and IOM, where greater worth is attached to some individuals over others.

Third, how does the mixed migration field shape understandings and practices of refugee and migrant protection? Finally, I am interested in the shape, or inner logic, 'protection' takes when refugee and migrant protection is carried out within a single social world of mixed migration. In other words, I am interested in what protection looks like when UNHCR and IOM, with their distinct trajectories, their respective 'organisational habitus' (their 'systems of dispositions'), and the practices which have emerged from these come into collision with each other as the two agencies attempt to position themselves as legitimate providers of protection for 'refugees' and 'migrants' (Vaughan 2008). Understanding what form protection has taken in the mixed migration field, thus, necessarily involves unravelling the forms of taken-for-granted truths and rules that have emerged from the struggle of UNHCR and IOM within a single field of practice. This calls for paying close attention to the practices and understandings of social actors on the ground in the mixed migration field.

Central to this is how the distinct logics of protection of UNHCR and IOM interact and influence each other when placed within the relational structure of the field, thereby producing a logic and set of practices specific to the mixed migration field. These logics and practices, forming part of the doxa of the mixed migration field, should not be considered as exclusively the 'sum-total' of logics previously held by each actor. As will be seen, pre-existing practices and understandings certainly play an important role in interactions in the field, yet the coming together of the different social actors, and the unique struggle for the merged capital of refugees-and-migrants to which this gives rise, in turn, contributes to shaping understandings and practices that are grounded in and specific to the mixed migration field.

Further, and as previously mentioned, depending on the level of relative autonomy of the field, logics from other fields can exert influence on the taken for granted rules of the game in a particular field. These are in turn naturalised as the rules of the game of that field. As will be seen, the emergence of the mixed migration field, with its issue framing discursively constructed around the risk of onwards movement and irregularity, functioned as to open the boundaries of the field of practice, shifting outwards to donors the power to define the symbolic capital of the field, and with that shifting the rules of the game. Indeed, as will be seen, the proximity of donor states, treated as 'partners' in designing protection practice, generated a redistribution of the forms of capital and the configuration of positions within the field. This shifted the range of acceptable practices and approaches taken to protect refugees and migrants, giving rise to a field-specific practice of protection (Hamadache 2015).

Methodology

I end the chapter with a discussion on methodology. Bourdieu's field approach is foremost a theory of *practice*, which, accordingly, only has meaning when put into practical application through empirical research (Grenfell 2012). To Bourdieu 'theory without empirical research is empty, empirical research without theory is blind' (Bourdieu 1988a:774–785). Given the inextricable links between theory and empirical research, I have decided to include the discussion on methodology as a necessary extension of the theoretical framing of the field. In the next sections, therefore, I discuss my approach to putting into 'practice' the thinking tools of field theory.

A reflexive and relational approach

The researcher, according to Bourdieu, is not immune to the effects of their own positioning within field structures, but rather situated within an academic field structured by its own relations and structures. These relations and structures are, according to Bourdieu, closely interlinked with the field of power, producing forms of situated and taken for granted truths, which often contribute to the 'maintenance of the established order' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 51). Research produced about a given object is thus written from the situated perspective of that particular academic field, with its relation to the field of power, and, indeed, of the person's position within it. To counter the 'scholastic fallacy' to which this gives rise, Bourdieu invited his peers to practice a 'reflexive sociology' and a form of 'participant objectivation' that would allow them to turn the field lens onto themselves and their academic field, an exercise that the sociologist conducted throughout his career by meticulously scrutinising the academic field and his own personal

trajectory within it (Bourdieu 1988b; Bourdieu 2008). Only through this ongoing and reflexive process could researchers begin to the 'break with the 'pre-given of the world', embedded within the individual as well as the collective habitus of the academic institution (Grenfell 2012; 215). The form of epistemic reflexivity called for, therefore, is that of objectifying the field from which research arises – to 'objectify the objectifying subject' – and, from there, to continuously struggle against the pre-givens of that field (Hardy 2012: 241). It is, accordingly, less a question of individual or subjective reflexivity – of *personal* awareness, than of interrogating the structures from which knowledge is produced, the 'scholastic point of view' (the objective 'perspective without history') – and the place of the researcher within those structures (Kenway and McLeod 2004: 529; Bourdieu 2002; Grenfell 2012).

Although rarely articulated through these thinking tools of the 'field', scholarship in forced migration studies has, to varying extents, critically engaged with questions of relations to power. To highlight but a few examples, Bakewell (2008) compellingly argues against policy-relevant research, which, as he maintains, ultimately privileges the worldview of those in power. Similarly, recent work by Brankamp (2021:46) situates academic work produced 'in the humanitarian arena' within the power structures within which this production is necessarily embedded, arguing that 'scholars in refugee and forced migration studies have been engulfed in a tightening "humanitarian embrace"'. Seminal work in the field has gone further in denaturalising and deconstructing the labels of 'refugee', 'forced migrant' – labels that originally formed the very foundation of the academic field – interrogating how categorisations employed in scholarship enforce a particular social organisation of the world (Turton 2003). Others, still, unravel the ways in which knowledge produced by international institutions such as UNHCR and IOM has

contributed to taken-for-granted truths within academic scholarship, which, often inadvertently, continue to perpetuate these institutions' positions of dominance (Chimni 1998).

The question of relation to power within the field of forced migration studies, therefore, is not new. Yet a field reading provides an understanding of its mechanics, particularly of how economic and political poles (tied to research funding or proximity to policy-makers, think tanks and international organisations) permeate the field of research and contribute to a distribution of economic, social, and symbolic capital which might favour those closely oriented towards the field of power, represented in this case by decision-makers, private foundations as well as UNHCR and IOM. This means that challenging, in this field, the dominant 'vision and division' of the social world leaves the researcher uniquely vulnerable to professional retaliation from dominant institutions such as UNHCR and IOM, a contrast to research conducted on the dominated, the 'refugees' or 'migrants', who have limited power to influence the distribution of capital within the field, often leaving such research unchallenged.

Therefore any attempt at incorporating reflexivity within a research program must question the 'presuppositions created historically' (Grenfell 2012: 225). The application of the Bourdieusian relational lens to UNHCR, IOM, refugees, and migrants in my research represents, in that sense, a theoretical and methodological effort to overcome some of these presuppositions. For, by looking at the relation, rather than the object, by investigating the 'point' not as an autonomous point 'but points in relation to other points' and, in doing so, by being attentive to how, in Bigo's (2011: 236) words, the "'middle'" (that is, the relation) forms the extremities (the points), not the reverse', I have worked towards deconstructing and denaturalising UNHCR and IOM's exercise of power

through 'protection'. At the same time I have denaturalised some of my own deeply entrenched taken-for-granted truths, notably regarding UNHCR and its protection of refugees. As mentioned in the Introduction, I began my research by considering the refugee regime and the protection of a particular group within it, a research agenda that risked replicating the presupposed boundaries of UNHCR and, with that, naturalising its power over certain groups. This, crucially, meant not presupposing 'the existence of fully constituted agents', which is a trap often fallen into when formal institutional boundaries are used as the starting point of inquiries on UNHCR and IOM. The fact that institutional boundaries are unquestionably taken as the starting point of research is undoubtedly a reflection of the power relations between fields and the ways in which institutional interests and the symbolic differentiation between UNHCR and IOM continue to be articulated through academic research (Bigo 2011: 237).

As Bourdieu (1977: 164) wrote in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 'every established order tends to produce...the naturalization of its own arbitrariness'. The relational approach, as will be seen, has allowed me to engage more critically with the arbitrariness of UNHCR's and IOM boundaries and with the arbitrariness of their exercise of power over refugees and migrants. The latter has often been 'misrecognised' as a pre-given truth within the academic field of forced migration studies, with the implication of replicating the particular 'vision and division' set by those with the symbolic power to do so and taking their 'protection' as a form of taken-for-granted good (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Brankamp 2021). The reflexive mission, then, is to 'necessitate conducts, to tear them away from arbitrariness by reconstituting the universe of constraints which determine them, without justifying them' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 50). By considering not the subject, but the structure of relations around it as well as the subject's position in the system of relations, I

attempt to situate UNHCR and IOM within the structures of their social space – of their universe of constraints – and to deconstruct the symbolic differentiations that distance them from each other, and the ‘refugees’ and ‘migrants’ over whom they exercise power (Emirbayer 1997).

Case study and ‘core’ approach to the field

As discussed in the Introduction, I began my fieldwork in Tunisia with the intention of ‘following the thread’ of Libyans’ invisibility within the refugee protection system of Tunisia (Shore and Wright 1997:3; Marcus 1995). I was quickly confronted with the fact that this ‘thread’ also wove through, with varying forms of visibility, other groups, some of whom had been categorised by UNHCR as ‘refugees’ and others by IOM as ‘migrants’. What is more, the reach of the thread of visibility/invisibility extended far beyond the boundaries of the Tunisian nation-state into what actors responding to the context called the ‘Central Mediterranean route’. Indeed, what I was seeing in Tunisia was deeply connected to the institutional interests involved in managing the mobility of those perceived as on the move across the African continent and into Europe. Following the thread meant abandoning my narrow view in favour of a lens which was inherently more relational and open.

Although I came much later to Bourdieu’s field theory as a lens of analysis, my method was in and of itself ‘Bourdiesian’, insofar as, by following the ‘thread’, I was inadvertently following the ‘effects of the field’, meaning the effects of the distribution, circulation, and struggle over capital within that particular social space. I began my fieldwork with a ‘core’ of UNHCR Tunisia/Libyans only to find that this core represented an arbitrary delimitation, which risked obscuring the real struggle over power and capital taking place within the social space. What was really at stake

within the field was UNHCR and IOM's struggle over the capital specific to it, 'refugees-and-migrants', and more specifically the struggle over managing a particular group among them, the 'people on the move', who were discursively constructed as moving along the Central Mediterranean route with the ultimate aim of reaching Europe. The field was not limited to Tunisia, therefore, but existed spatially all along the Central Mediterranean route, itself a spatially unfixed and unbounded area constructed around institutional interests in responding to migration. It was all along this 'route' that UNHCR and IOM were engaged in struggles over responding to 'people on the move' and of securing their share of the same economic and political capital at stake in the field.

The boundaries of the field could not, therefore, be predefined to the national context of Tunisia, but had to be constructed through an iterative practice of following the effects of the capital in circulation in the field and of reconstructing and refining the contours of the field. Taking as an example Vaughan's (2008) seminal field study of NASA as an 'organisational field', I allowed the boundaries of the field to grow as my knowledge of the field, and its effects, deepened. This eventually led me to expand the scope of my investigation to the struggles taking place in neighbouring Libya too, given the interlinked and interdependent nature of the dynamics I observed through my fieldwork on the ground.

By considering the field of mixed migration in Tunisia and Libya, I am not, however, proposing two case studies, nor a 'comparative analysis' of the two countries, but an investigation of the struggles taking place across two localised sites of the same field, defined by the same forms of capital in circulation and at stake within it. While a comprehensive field study could have brought

me to further widen the scope of my investigation to the Central Mediterranean route at large, the scale of such an investigation would not have been possible within the limited time afforded to fieldwork in the scope of a DPhil. Nonetheless, I believe that a consideration of the interlinked struggles for the same forms of capital taking place between UNHCR and IOM in Tunisia and Libya provides key insight into the inner dynamics of the field, the shape these struggles take on the ground, and the varying strategies UNHCR and IOM adopt based on their positioning within structures of the field.

The act of constructing the 'research object' is a continuous and never final one. As Bourdieu reminds us: it 'is not something that is affected once and for all, with one stroke, through a sort of inaugural theoretical act...it is a protracted and exacting task that is accomplished little by little through a whole series of rectifications and amendments' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1989: 51). It is through this iterative process of 'constructing the object', of 'tack[ing] back and forth between the construction of the object and the production of the data necessary for the construction of the object', that my initial core of UNHCR/Libyans was broadened to that of considering the social space borne of UNHCR-IOM-refugees-and-migrants, which, in turn, became the 'hard core' of my investigation (Emirbayer and Johnson 2008: 33). In the next two chapters of the thesis, however, and with the hard core of UNHCR-IOM-refugees-and-migrants as my starting point, I explore the construction and boundaries of the field by considering the 'field effects', for these cannot be taken-for-granted, but considered in relation to the empirical data to which I am confronted, and which will serve to broaden the boundaries and scope of the field.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, UNHCR and IOM serve as the foundation and hard core of my analysis due to their unique and dominant positions over refugees and migrants, respectively, particularly in contexts where both are responding operationally on the ground through protection responses. This is considered further in the next chapter when discussing the emergence of the field. I thus approach UNHCR and IOM as the 'dominants' within that particular space given their unique positioning over the field-specific capital of 'refugees-and-migrants'. Narrowing in specifically on the 'dominants' for a field investigation represents a sound and often-pursued field research strategy, given their 'powerful influence on the field' (Hardy 2012: 241). Dominant actors are those likely to have an influence over the distribution of capital within the field. They tend, moreover, to reproduce the structures of the field and, with it, of its doxa (Emirbayer and Williams 2005). Understanding the logic of practice of the field, therefore, means understanding how the dominant actors within it have contributed to shaping through their habitus and have been shaped by, a particular logic of practice.

This does not mean that UNHCR and IOM are acting alone in the field. On the contrary, the mixed migration field is occupied by a range of other actors, which I will consider when relevant throughout the thesis. However, I am particularly interested in UNHCR and IOM, the effect they have on each other as well as on those they are meant to protect, given the unique positions they occupy within the field in relation to refugees and migrants and in relation to each other. They are by no means, either, the only dominant actors affecting the distribution of capital within this space. Throughout the thesis, therefore, I prod and reconstruct the boundaries of the field, ultimately showing how, within the space of their struggle for capital, UNHCR and IOM have made way for donors to take a central role in shaping the logic of practice of the field. The set of practices

of the field, hence, cannot be understood without considering the role the field of power has played in influencing the distribution of capital in the field. With that in mind, the interlinkages with the field of power, embodied by donors and host states, are interrogated and questioned throughout the thesis, in which I continuously reconstruct the boundaries of my research object, the 'mixed migration field', and the social actors composing it.

Empirical fieldwork with the actors of the field

I conducted thirteen months of fieldwork drawing on an ethnographic-inspired methodology in Tunisia from September 2019 to October 2020. Researchers applying a Bourdieusian lens are prompted to draw on multiple research methods and, importantly, to adjust them to their specific field sites, rather than systematically and dogmatically apply a set of methods as a 'recipe' (Bigo 2011: 245).

This follows other anthropological fieldwork traditions, such as that espoused by Malkki (1995: 47) in which the 'tools and techniques' of data collection must always be adapted to the fieldwork context. Given the small scale of my own field site, as well as my emphasis on the dominant actors within those sites, an ethnographic-inspired data collection approach and 'polymorphous engagement', which privileges 'collecting data eclectically from a disparate array of sources' was best suited to my analysis (Gusterson 1997:16; Vaughan 2008). This is not least because it was only through extensive 'hanging out' and networking with the actors of the field that I was able to build the prerequisite trust and depth of relationships, which large-scale surveys would have likely run counter to (Geertz 1998, Monsutti 2005).

I divide my fieldwork into three broad phases. In the first four months, I conducted fieldwork in the south of Tunisia, where I met with implementing partners of UNHCR and IOM, officials of the UNHCR Zarzis field office, and visited their reception centres in Medenine and Zarzis. Back in Tunis, still in the initial four-month period of my fieldwork, I regularly visited UNHCR Tunisia's main implementing partner, the Tunisian Refugee Council, where I was granted access to observe their pre-registration procedures and other regular activities carried out in their office, as well as interview employees of the organisation. It was during this period that I realised that the invisibility of Libyans, which I initially set out to explore in relation to the refugee regime, could only be understood in relation to varying other forms of visibility and protection, not least the visibility of the 'people on the move' making up the mixed migration. From this period onwards, I shifted my gaze to the relational nature of this visibility and protection.

With mixed migration high on the policy agenda of UNHCR Tunisia, I was able to secure an internship with the office based in Tunis, from January to July 2020. This is what I consider the second phase of my fieldwork period, during which I deepened my knowledge of the mixed migration field through the lens of UNHCR Tunisia. Through this arrangement with UNHCR Tunisia, I was offered an official position within the institution as a 'Protection intern', as well as official approval and access to conduct interviews with any staff of the agency in Tunisia.¹⁶ Day-to-day, I participated in the protection activities of the institution, ranging from supporting the asylum seeker registration activities, drafting internal protection documents, taking part in

¹⁶ With, of course, their individual approval and consent, discussed later in the 'interview' sub-section.

protection meetings, and liaising with partners of UNHCR Tunisia. Outside of working hours, I was able to conduct interviews with the UNHCR employees with whom I interacted on a regular basis, which I describe in the following sections.

Humanitarians have elsewhere been considered as a 'closed tribe', and, indeed, there were limits to UNHCR's research latitude (Smirl, 2015, 12; Fresia 2018). Gusterson (1997: 116) reflects on the particular difficulty of conducting participant observation and ethnographic fieldwork in 'elite' contexts, where 'ethnographic access is by permission of people with careers at stake, where loitering strangers with notebooks are rarely welcome, and where potential informants are too busy to chat'. As an illustration of the many complexities that can be encountered when 'studying up' and scrutinising the powerful, and as a result of confidentiality agreements imposed through the formalisation of my internship, my research data is circumscribed to that collected while outside the function of the internship, through participant observation carried out in southern Tunisia before the start of the internship as well as via interviews conducted during and after my internship with the explicit consent of my UNHCR interlocutors. Despite some of the official restrictions, the time spent with UNHCR Tunisia during the second phase of my fieldwork was instrumental in building the network of interlocutors with whom I engaged as well as deepening my knowledge, from the 'inside', of how the different actors engaged with the Tunisian migratory context.

During the third phase of the fieldwork, after having completed my internship with UNHCR Tunisia in July 2020, I turned to deepening my data collection in relation to IOM Tunisia, which I had begun in the initial phase of my fieldwork. Given my involvement with UNHCR Tunisia within the

context of my internship, I naturally had greater access to and interacted with more employees of UNHCR Tunisia than IOM Tunisia. With regards to the former, I identified most of my interlocutors during my daily interactions with them at the UNHCR office in Tunis, while for the latter I proactively reached out by email to certain IOM officials based on their position within the organisation. I found that field-based IOM officials and employees of its main implementing partner in Tunisia, the Tunisian Red Crescent, were more cautious in their engagement, with some refusing to be interviewed.¹⁷ I was more successful in securing interviews with higher level officials of IOM Tunisia and from there, drawing on a snowball sampling method, I was put in touch with other IOM Tunisia officials with whom I was able to engage in interviews.

Ultimately, this meant that the depth and breadth of my engagement with UNHCR Tunisia officials was greater than with IOM Tunisia officials. This is a reflection both of UNHCR's relative openness to my research, my sustained engagement with officials of UNHCR Tunisia, as well as my own focus on the forms of protection carried out by UNHCR. As I earlier mentioned, it was by following the 'thread' of UNHCR protection and invisibility/invisibility that I widened my lens to IOM, who was also inextricably involved in the mixed migration field and the production of its own 'persons of concern'. UNHCR and its practices of categorisation and protection nonetheless remained the point from which I explored the effects of the struggles within the field, and the ways in which these struggles shaped a field-specific practice of protection. As I consider in the following chapter, protection and category-based differentiation (that is, the production of the

¹⁷ This is possibly due to negative publicity IOM Tunisia had received in the press during this period in relation to its migrant reception centres in southern Tunisia.

'refugee' or 'person of concern') have long been the preserve of UNHCR, which I identify as longstanding rationalities of its role within the refugee protection field. For that reason, and in order to understand the structures of constraints and possibilities of the practice of protection within the mixed migration field, much of the data presented in the following chapters is ultimately weighed towards UNHCR.

In parallel with this, in the last six-months of my fieldwork, I also followed the thread 'horizontally' towards the struggle that was taking place in neighbouring Libya. Considered an 'academic researcher' with the added social capital tied to the academic institution from which I came, I was able to access the UNHCR-IOM social circles of Libya, *based in Tunisia*, relatively easily and conduct extensive interviews with officials of both organisations at different levels of the professional hierarchy. My interlocutors introduced me to others in their social circles, allowing me to grow my network of interlocutors organically. I supplemented my network of interlocutors by reaching out directly to key officials who I wouldn't have been able to access through these social circles, in part due to the highly hierarchical nature of the UN professional structure.

Expanding my network of interlocutors was helped by the pre-existing social relations I had with certain UNHCR Libya interlocutors and the deeply overlapping nature of these circles. Most international employees of UNHCR and IOM were based in the affluent suburbs of northern Tunis where they mingled with each other in restaurants, bars, and spent weekends together at the beach. I found that officials of the two agencies, especially UNHCR and IOM Libya, at many levels, inhabited the mixed migration field together. This does not mean that competition did not exist, for this mingling was indeed taking place against the backdrop of broader institutional struggle

for capital within the field, but that many UNHCR and IOM officials shared a similar vision of the social world, characterised by a common 'feel for the game' and an understanding of their role within it. .

The sense of a shared social space was strongly felt with UNHCR and IOM officials 'working on' Libya. With the security situation in Libya requiring, at the time of my research, most UN personnel to work remotely from Tunis, the city was a hub for managing the humanitarian response to the situation in the neighbouring country. Staff of international agencies went back and forth between Tunis and their Tripoli compound. The same affluent suburbs of Tunis, teeming with officials from IOM and UNHCR 'working on' Libya, were where, again, UNHCR and IOM staff mixed intensely with each other. In Tripoli, UN officials, including that of UNHCR and IOM, lived in the same highly securitised compound, where they were sent on 'rotation' for several weeks at a time before regaining the comfort of their Tunis lives. This created a deep sense of shared experience among those sharing the 'compound life'. This was often replicated in Tunis through intense socialisation, socialisation that I was able to participate in via pre-existing social connections. This allowed me to expand the scope of the research further to other Tunis-based UNHCR and IOM Libya interlocutors. Throughout the period of my fieldwork I was deeply involved in these social circles and, on the basis of this involvement, was able to identify interlocutors with whom I engaged regularly in in-depth interviews.

Having conducted more extensive participant observation and been physically present in Tunisia means that my research data is also weighted more heavily with regards to Tunisia, as opposed to Libya. Considering the ongoing security situation in Libya, however, I would not have been able

to obtain the necessary university approvals to conduct fieldwork in Libya, hence limiting the scope of my data collection to interviews, documentary analysis, and 'hanging out' with officials of UNHCR and IOM Libya in Tunisia (Geertz 1998). That said, my Libya data collection was guided and supplemented by my knowledge of the Libyan context gained through my professional experience of working for Médecins Sans Frontières as a Protection Coordinator in 2021, based in the western Libyan cities of Zuwara, Zawiya and Tripoli. While this was strictly outside the scope of the empirical fieldwork conducted for the DPhil research, the intimate knowledge gained of the context, the actors of the field, and their practices of protection were instrumental to informing my formal data collection and my thinking about the mixed migration field in Libya. My knowledge of the structures of the field, from being in the field, provided a crucial counterweight to the ways in which dominant actors such as UNHCR, IOM, and the EU Commission attempted to construct their framing of the issue and ensure the reproduction of their dominance within the field.

Participant observation

I spent the first months of fieldwork in Tunis conducting regular participant observation with the Conseil Tunisien pour les réfugiés (CTR), a Tunisian NGO and the main implementing partner of UNHCR in Tunis. In the south of Tunisia, where UNHCR and IOM were active in responding to 'mixed migration', I also hung out with officials of CTR and the Tunisian Red Crescent (TRC). These were the two organisations involved in the initial classification (on behalf of their respective funding partners, UNHCR and IOM) of individuals as 'refugees' and 'migrants', using filtering processes (in the south) and pre-registration processes (in the north). I was able to observe and probe them on these processes. Then, as mentioned, a few months into my fieldwork, I formalised my relationship with UNHCR and began a six-month internship with the protection team of the

agency's Tunis office. In this role, I was closely involved in the daily and ground-level 'practice of protection' of the Tunis-based UNHCR office. By working alongside officials of UNHCR, my practice embodied Russell's (1994:342) understanding of participant observation as 'getting close to people and making them feel comfortable enough with your presence so that you can observe and record information about their lives'.

Indeed, being part of the protection team, I was involved in multiple aspects of 'protection work', including the registration procedures, identification processes for 'vulnerable' people of concern as well as relations with partner organisations and government institutions. During this six-month period, I took part in a range of internal and external meetings and discussions, through which I gained an intimate view of what drove UNHCR officials in their position-takings internally and vis-à-vis external organisations such as IOM, partner organisations, and donors. Moreover, being part of the UNHCR country office, based in Tunis, meant that I was in close contact with UNHCR interlocutors in the field offices of Zarzis and Sfax, themselves closely involved in responding to 'mixed migration'. This allowed me to engage with them regularly over questions of processes of registration and assistance. Crucially, many of the individuals encountered in the course of my internship with UNHCR became, through this process, my interlocutors for the purpose of more formal interviews.

In parallel, outside of 'work' with UNHCR Tunisia, I immersed myself in the social world and circles of UNHCR and IOM officials involved in responding to 'refugees-and-migrants' in Tunisia and Libya. As previously mentioned, many of these officials formed a close-knit social circle characterised by regular social gatherings and events. I attended dinner parties, went on weekends

away, and attended events involving the broader 'field of power', such as embassy-hosted events, allowing me to build rapport with my interlocutors. The informal, 'backstage' discussions and interactions held in these circles contributed to informing my understanding of the power relations and constraints faced by the institutions as well as the individuals working in them, and provided me with insight necessary to pursue the 'field effects' linked to the circulation of capital within the field (Gusterson 2008; Nair 2021).

Importantly, however, I decided early on to use insights gained in social settings as a guide to my inquiries and interviews, but to only include data gathered in more formal interactions with my interlocutors, primarily through interviews and discussions. As part of the many ethical difficulties involved in navigating fieldwork, I felt, firstly, that it would be impossible to include such information while, at the same time, preserving the anonymity of my interlocutors. Secondly, and in line with this, it became clear that the insider/outsider line, which originally separated me from my interlocutors and their social world, became more ambiguous over time; that individuals were speaking to me in confidence as one of them more than as a researcher, and that the information disclosed, if not treated with care, could put them and their position within their professional field at risk. Considering how difficult it would have been to ensure anonymity and guided by the rationale of honouring the trust upon which these relationships were built, I opted for a more cautious approach. Hence, in the thesis, I make explicit reference only to interview material and information gathered with explicit consent as well as to interviews and discussions clearly held within the scope of my research.

Interviews

My 'hanging out' and participant observation, as mentioned, allowed me to pursue the twofold objective of identifying interlocutors for interviews and deepening my understanding of the dynamics and practices of the field to inform the substance of my formal interviews. Indeed, the observations made within the scope of participation observation and informally hanging out with my interlocutors provided key material to 'bring into' the interviews, allowing me to 'see' practices and processes that would otherwise have remained unknown, and, through my interviewing, to probe and situate them within the dynamics and structures of the field (Auteserre 2014; Nair 2019). Interviews with my interlocutors were, therefore, embedded within an immersive approach to fieldwork, characterised by my engagement with UNHCR Tunisia and my parallel, sustained social involvement with officials of UNHCR and IOM Libya, which, to a large extent, made me an insider to the networks of officials of the field in Tunisia and Libya.

In total, I conducted 76 formal interviews with 44 interlocutors from UNHCR, IOM and their main implementing partners. Twenty-four interlocutors were from UNHCR, including thirteen UNHCR Tunisia interlocutors, five UNHCR Libya interlocutors, three UNHCR Office of the Special Envoy for the Central Mediterranean interlocutors, and three from UNHCR headquarters in Geneva. Most were international officials of UNHCR, with the exception of six Tunisian interlocutors of UNHCR Tunisia who were closely involved in the delivery of protection and assistance on the ground. Seven interlocutors were from IOM, including four from IOM Tunisia, all of whom except for one were Tunisian national officials, and three international officials of IOM Libya. I also interviewed eight interlocutors from UNHCR's main implementing partners in Tunisia and two from its

implementing partners in Libya, as well as three interlocutors from IOM's implementing partner in Tunisia.

Since I was primarily interested in the 'practices of protection', I interviewed officials of these organisations involved in, firstly, 'doing' protection at the ground level and, secondly, those, at more senior professional levels,¹⁸ involved in the 'making' of this protection. This meant interviewing the protection officials involved in, for example, registration processes and the provision of assistance who worked directly with the 'refugees-and-migrants'. It also meant interviewing mid-level and senior professionals in Tunisia and Libya, who were more involved in designing policies and projects and in negotiations with government officials, donors, headquarters in Geneva, and who were tasked with overseeing all or, in some cases, more specific aspects, of the protection work.

Many of these interviews took place within the context of sustained research relationships, which involved repeated interactions, that developed in depth over the course of my fieldwork as I continued to build rapport with my interlocutors. I maintained a more sustained relationship with a group of twelve interlocutors, spread across UNHCR and IOM Tunisia and Libya and the former's main implementing partner in Tunisia, who I was able to interview at least twice, some as many as four times over the course of the field research period. For example, I conducted multiple interviews over time with individuals working with UNHCR Tunisia during the six-month period of my research internship, as well as after the internship ended. The interviews carried out with

¹⁸ Understood as, on the UN professional category scale, P-2 to P-5 level field-based officials.

UNHCR and IOM Libya interlocutors also took place within the context of prolonged social relationships with most of my interlocutors. This echoes Auteserre's (2014: 277) experience of ethnographic fieldwork with peacebuilders. Auteserre found that 'getting beyond the discourse manufactured for outsiders...required months of repeated interactions. Most useful in this regard were not only my formal interviews, but also...the countless informal discussions I had after meetings, over drinks, during dinners, and at parties'. In my case, my sustained informal interactions with a number of interlocutors meant that I had already developed a rapport with them and a level of trust and openness prior to formally interviewing them, allowing for greater depth of discussion during the interviews. This approach also allowed me to situate our conversations within pre-existing knowledge of my interlocutors' professional trajectories, their understandings of the field dynamics, as well as more granular aspects of their work and daily lives.

As part of following the 'field effects', I also conducted interviews 'outwards' with representatives of other organisations working in the field in Tunisia and Libya, and followed the field effects 'upwards', to the field of power, by interviewing representatives of donor embassies who, as became evident in the course of my fieldwork, were also closely involved in the design and implementation of protection work. I conducted interviews with interlocutors from five non-implementing partner NGOs in Tunisia and Libya, as well as representatives of 2 donor embassies.

All interviews were conducted in either English or French, without intermediaries, in an open-ended and semi-structured format. Through my interviews, I probed my interlocutors about their daily work, their practices, and constraints. It is through this iterative process of participant

observation, hanging out, and sustained interviewing that I sought to gain insight into the 'practical knowledge' of my interlocutors and to better understand the shared practices and understandings that were emerging from the field of mixed migration.

This more sustained engagement with the core group of my interlocutors also meant that I could conduct interviews in more open and unstructured ways; over a meal or coffee in my home, or at a café, for instance, leading to relaxed and open exchanges. As Covid-19 related restrictions were put in place in Tunisia in March 2020, my in-person interactions became limited to a small number of people, including a small group of UNHCR Tunisia and UNHCR Libya interlocutors. In addition to continuing my engagement with these interlocutors, I turned to conducting interviews remotely. During this period, I conducted interviews with UNHCR Tunisia officials based in the field offices of Zarzis and Sfax, as well as UNHCR officials based in headquarters in Geneva. Having had a prolonged engagement with UNHCR Tunisia officials based in other field offices in Tunisia in the context of my internship with UNHCR helped ensure a level of trust and openness for the interviews conducted remotely. This level of depth was more difficult to ensure in relation to other interviews conducted remotely on a one-off basis, for instance with officials of UNHCR headquarters in Geneva.

Given the sensitive and highly political nature of my field site, a pre-condition for obtaining consent to interview my interlocutors was ensuring their anonymity. My interview data were therefore completely anonymised to protect the identity of my interlocutors. In the same vein, in order to maintain an open discussion during interviews, I opted for taking as detailed as possible hand-written notes during the interviews, which I completed immediately after the interviews with

additional notes to describe the interaction and the environment in which it took place. This was preferable to recording, which would have risked the discomfort of my interlocutors and severely limited the scope of our discussion (Spradley 1979). Interviews were immediately followed by a close revision, digitised re-transcription and editing of the notes.

Considering the challenges of taking notes by hand, in particular the difficulty of keeping up with the conversation, some interactions and moments were more closely hand recorded than others (Spradley 1979). During the interviews, I carefully recorded interactions that related directly to the practices of protection, understandings of protection, and dynamics within the field and ensured that I noted the specific expressions, phrases and terminology related to these practices and understandings employed by my interlocutors. Longform quotations from individual interlocutors in the thesis were therefore selected based on their relevance, as well as the level of detail captured through my note taking and discussion with my interlocutors. The longform quotations presented in the thesis are therefore the result of careful notetaking during the interviews, complemented with a more expanded account immediately following the interview. In some places, I lightly smoothed the text of the interviews during the re-transcription to ensure greater readability and comprehension.

Fieldwork data analysis

While my UNHCR and IOM interlocutors could have been considered 'knowledge experts' in their domain, I approached them, and the interview material, not as experts per se, but as individuals who, by virtue of existing in the field, at any level within the structures of the field, had acquired

a practical sense of it, a particular 'feel for the game', with a set of taken-for-granted rules and truths. Social actors, as Bourdieu (1988b: 25) reminds us, are not:

Particles subject to mechanical forces, and acting under the constraint of causes, nor are they conscious and knowing subjects acting with full knowledge of the facts.... (They are) active and knowing agents endowed with a practical sense that is an acquired system of preferences, of principle, of vision and...schemes of actions.

Rather than receive their knowledge as a form of taken-for-granted truth about the social world, I treated my interview data as a form of situated truth; as a manifestation of my interlocutors' practical knowledge of the field, their own positioning within it, and of the organisational processes and dynamics within which they were embedded (Krause 2014). By considering the institutional trajectories of each agency, the position of each institution in relation to the other and in relation to the capital at stake in the field, and the practices and understanding of each within the field, I sought to uncover and make sense of this particular 'feel for the game'.

In analysing my fieldwork data, I was looking, firstly, to 'construct' the field as a shared social space and follow its field effects (research question 1). In doing so, I, secondly, sought to consider the specific logic of practice that emerged from this shared social space, focusing on uncovering the field-specific logic of classification around 'refugees' and 'migrants' and a field-specific practice of protection (research question 2 and 3). This meant being attentive not to the ways in which the actors existed as concrete entities, but the ways in which they exist as positions within the field, 'as bearers of different types of dispositions from within a space of dispositions' (Emirbayer and Johnson 2008: 34). This involved making sense of my research data by thinking through actors' positioning within the field as well as their position-taking and ground-level practices.

In order to draw this out, I manually sifted through my fieldwork material. I first identified recurrent patterns and themes around the production and understanding of the 'refugee' and 'migrant', the specific narratives and practices of protection, the positioning of each organisation in relation to the other, and linkages to actors beyond UNHCR and IOM. I secondly identified passages from my interview materials that illustrated these themes and patterns.

Documentary research

As part of my 'polymorphous engagement', I complemented my fieldwork data with documentary research (Gusterson 1997: 16). I primarily drew on two forms of documentation: firstly, public reports and webpages that described UNHCR and IOM's activities and relationship to refugees and migrants in Tunisia and Libya, and, secondly, reports and documents related to their relationship to donors and funding. For the former, this includes UNHCR and IOM's respective country-specific webpages, country-specific statistical dashboards and operational updates, and public reports or documents that describe and frame their protection-related activities, for example UNHCR documents related to the Central Mediterranean route (see, for example UNHCR 2017a) and IOM webpages related to the EU-IOM Joint Initiative (see, for example, IOM 2021). For the latter, I was able to draw on a wealth of documents submitted by UNHCR and IOM to the European Commission with regards to reporting on funding received from the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Stability and Addressing Root Causes of Irregular Migration and Displaced Persons in Africa (EUTF), which are publicly available through the EUTF web portal and its archiving website (see for example European Commission 2016a to European Commission 2020b) as well as funding reports or proposals made to other donors, such as individual European members states. I limited the scope of these documents to the period between 2016 and 2021,

with the former marking what I identify as the emergence of the mixed migration field in Libya and Tunisia from 2015-2016 onwards, as will be discussed in the following chapter, and the latter the beginning of my data analysis and writing up stage.

I approached this documentary research as an additional source of material through which to situate UNHCR and IOM and the strategies of representation and framing they adopt within their struggles in the field. It served two specific purposes. Firstly, the material produced for donors (project proposals to the European Commission and funding proposals) allowed me to bring into relief the position-taking strategies that UNHCR and IOM adopted in relation to the 'field of power'. As such, these represented an important source of information about how the two agencies attempted to frame themselves and their work in relation to the forms of political and economic capital at stake in the field. In many instances, moreover, I was able to bring the written 'artefacts' of their respective knowledge practices into discussion with those who had produced them and reflect, together, on their decisions behind their particular framing and position-takings (Riles 2006: 2).

Secondly, UNHCR and IOM's ability to produce knowledge outputs, which contribute to a wider 'taken-for-granted' truth within the field of mixed migration is a manifestation of the symbolic power, as 'soft forms of domination', that uniquely belongs to dominants of the field (Sayer 2017). 'Strong discourses', in that sense, are often supported by the force of economic and political interests and capital. The forms of 'truths' that are set out in these documents represent both an attempt at enforcing a particular 'vision and division' of the social world, as well as reflect the specific understandings and interpretations of the social world that have found grounding within

the field. They are often perpetuated or contested by each actor's attempt to maintain (or enhance) their position of dominance within it (Bourdieu 1991: 181). I make use, therefore, of the external materials produced *à propos* of refugees, migrants, and the protection activities UNHCR and IOM enact towards them as a way to understand the evolution of particular perspectives and understandings related to protection within the field and identify the narratives that have taken root within the mixed migration field. These forms of discourse are both reinforced and made necessary through the logic of practice from which they stem.

I understand the discourse and meanings produced by the actors within the field from the perspective, as Sayer (2017:115) proposes, of the 'field as a material as well as a semantic space'. In that sense, I understood the forms of discourse, and the interactions to which they give rise, within the frame of the positions that each field actor occupied and broader contestation over the symbolic power held by each actor within the field (Bourdieu 1991; Sayer 2017). I therefore approached my documentary material similarly to the interview material in attempting to situate the narratives and understanding that emerged in relation to the positioning of its actors and the forms of capital at stake within the field. In order to do so, I manually sifted through the pre-selected documents, described above, and identified specific recurrent patterns and trends in the text in relation to the main forms of capital at stake in the field, that is, in relation to refugees-and-migrants, on the one hand, and institutional donors and the field of power, on the other. The aim, here, was to identify and understand how 'refugees' and 'migrants' were framed in the mixed migration field, as well as how UNHCR and IOM framed themselves and their activities in relation to these categories, as well as towards donors.

These documents and narratives, too, I often brought into discussion with my interlocutors as a way to probe how they made sense of the particular vision that was being enforced through knowledge production within the field. These documents, thus, also formed part of my 'encounter' with my interlocutors, reflecting my realisation that they also mediated social interactions between and among actors of the mixed migration field (Cole 2018). Through this, I was able to move beyond the 'text' to the ways in which institutional actors engaged with the (sometimes competing) framings and meanings having arisen from the struggle for capital within the field.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I sketched the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological foundation of the thesis, which will ground the chapters that follow. Building upon Bourdieu's conceptual tools of the 'field', I propose the 'mixed migration field' as the object of my study. I conceive of this field, like all social fields, as a differentiated social space, which, in this case, emerged from the particular issue area of UNHCR and IOM's operational response to refugees-and-migrants on the ground. More specifically, I argue that it is through their struggle for refugees-and-migrants, the form of capital specific to the mixed migration field, that UNHCR and IOM are bound together within a single, structured field of practice.

As a conceptual and methodological starting point, I isolate UNHCR, IOM – the dominants of the field of practice – along with 'refugees-and-migrants' as comprising the 'hard core' of the field, from which I iteratively reconstruct the broader field and its boundaries by tracing its 'field effects'. I argue that it is especially pertinent to isolate this constellation, for in this context, the two agencies inevitably produce effects upon each other and can only exist relationally by taking each

other into account. The two are, moreover, uniquely positioned as field elites, which inextricably links them in a struggle for the monopoly of power and the imposition of legitimate understandings and practices within the field. Understanding the logic of practice specific to the field, therefore, means being attentive to the historical trajectory and habitus of each agency, along with the current positioning of each within the structures of the field and in relation to the capital at stake within it.

It is the orientation of social actors towards the field's capital, and, as a by-product of that, towards each other, that gives rise to competition over positioning, recognition, and visibility. The field-specific capital of refugee-and-migrants is not the only capital at stake in the field, however. The actors of the field are also in competition over other forms of capital, including political, economic, and symbolic forms of capital. The uneven and changeable distribution of these forms of capital, the higher valuation attributed to some forms of capital over others, and the influence of the field of power on the distribution of this capital also contribute to shaping practices within the field. This brings to light notions of field boundaries and field autonomy that will be questioned throughout the following chapters.

The interaction of the various concepts set out in this chapter provides a lens, as I previously argued, through which to understand differently the work of UNHCR and IOM in relation to each other, the 'refugees' and 'migrants' they are meant to protect, and the broader social world. In the following chapters, I apply these concepts to the empirical landscape of Tunisia and Libya, both situated along Central Mediterranean route. This, I hope, will provide a situated understanding of

the field-specific logic of protection, and the practice of protection, that have emerged from the structures of constraints and possibilities of the mixed migration field.

CHAPTER 2 – SITUATING THE FIELD

That UNHCR and IOM are now both involved in providing protection, UNHCR to the broad category of its 'people of concern' and IOM to 'vulnerable migrants', was not foreseen when the two organisations were founded in 1951. Yet, despite not having been foreseen, I argue that it is this contemporary manifestation of their roles as parallel providers of protection that has produced a singular form of struggle between the two agencies. Understanding the field, as it exists today, therefore calls for a historicisation of its emergence. It calls for situating the existing structures of the mixed migration field within time and space, and within the separate, but intertwined, institutional trajectories of the two agencies.

In this chapter, I trace the historical trajectories of UNHCR and IOM. I historicise the emergence of the mixed migration field in the Central Mediterranean from three angles: firstly, by providing a general overview of their entangled and overlapping *global* trajectories since their inception. Through this, I consider how UNHCR and IOM have coexisted in areas of proximity, overlap, and intertwinement, with IOM's most recent incursion into responding to the needs of migrants on the ground further blurring the separation between the two.

Secondly, by considering how their respective 'logics' of refugee protection and migration management have shifted over time. I focus, here, on status-based differentiation, protection/migration management, and state cooperation as lenses through which to contrast the shifting rationalities that have driven the work of each agency. Indeed, while the two are frequently portrayed as entirely different or opposing agencies, often on the basis of UNHCR's protection mandate and absence thereof for IOM, I aim, on the contrary, to point to convergences between

the two as well as the permeability and changeability of those rationalities over time (Guild et al 2020).

And thirdly, I situate these developments within my empirical context of the Central Mediterranean route. Through this, I consider the ways in which key historical and institutional developments have intersected with local dynamics to create the possibility for the emergence of the mixed migration field, central to which was IOM's entry into the realm of protection. The outcome of the 'field' and its dynamics on the ground, however, is not predetermined. This calls for empirical research into the shape, structure, and struggles that define the field as it materialises on the ground, subjects I will explore in the remaining chapters. My aim, in this chapter, though, is to consolidate the conceptual and empirical foundation of the 'mixed migration field' and with that, set the stage for the chapters to come.

A brief background of UNHCR and IOM's entangled trajectories

A closer consideration of the institutional foundation and trajectories of UNHCR and IOM shows, I argue, the extent to which the refugee protection and migration management fields from which they have arisen have been situated within a history of intertwinement. I consider these distinct institutional trajectories by tracing their evolution across three periods since their inception. These represent points at which UNHCR and IOM have existed within proximate, parallel, and overlapping spheres. The shifts and changes over time show how global institutional developments have been key to shaping, at the macro level, the conditions of emergence of a mixed migration field between UNHCR and IOM.

Proximate spheres of activity

UNHCR and IOM first emerged from a single field of activity born of the post-Second World War period and the International Refugee Organisation (IRO) that was first created to address the population movements caused by the war. UNHCR and IOM's predecessor, the Provisional Intergovernmental Committee for the Movement of Migrants from Europe (PICMME), renamed the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM), were created following the dissolution of the IRO in 1947. As a result of political disagreements and struggles between the US and the UN system, the IRO's functions were separated. PICMME (a predecessor of IOM) was established and tasked with the transportation of displaced populations, while UNHCR was given responsibility for the legal rights of European refugees (Karatani 2005).

Although born of a common institution and historical moment, their foundation was grounded in very different rationales. UNHCR, as a direct successor of the IRO, was established under the auspices of the United Nations system to respond to European refugees. However, with states, and in particular the US, seeking to limit their financial burden and commitment to receiving refugees, UNHCR was given more limited scope than the IRO that preceded it. It was conceived as a *non-operational organisation* focusing exclusively on the legal rights of refugees and was, at the time of its creation, entirely reliant on a limited 'administrative annual budget granted by the UN General Assembly' (Élie 2010: 348). Thus, enshrined in UNHCR's mandate, as provided by its statute and confirmed by UN General Assembly resolution in 1950, was UNHCR's core task, defined as 'providing international protection ... and of seeking permanent solutions for the problem of refugees'. This was, at the time, understood as a function of advocacy and coordination of the provision of rights and solutions by states.

PICMME was established at the same time in 1951, with the support of the United States, to provide logistical solutions for what was considered a 'surplus population' on the continent (Karatani 2005). In contrast to UNHCR, PICMEE was formed as an inter-governmental organisation outside the UN system. It was conceived as the 'UNHCR's operational, United States-controlled counterpart' and was given an exclusively *operational* character, with the task of addressing the logistics and transportation of migrants, including that of refugees (Guild et al 2020; Pécoud 2020). In 1953, with the adoption of a formal and permanent constitution, PICMEE was renamed ICEM. The constitution confirmed the organisation's status and role primarily as a provider of transportation for migrants and of logistics services for states. The definition of ICEM as a provider of logistical services for states laid the groundwork for IOM taking position within the migration management field, but this wouldn't fully emerge until several decades later.

At this juncture, UNHCR and PICMME were not responsible for entirely distinct populations. Their distinctiveness, as institutions, was instead partly understood by the *separate functions* they enacted, rather than the individuals over whom they acted. During this period, for instance, UNHCR and PICMME carried out distinct, though complementary *activities*, including over the same 'refugee population' (Élie 2010). Emblematic of this was ICEM's involvement in refugee responses during the 1960s and 1970s. In 1956, during the Hungarian refugee crisis, for example, UNHCR and ICEM jointly managed the response, with UNHCR designated as the lead agency

(Carling 1982).¹⁹ As Élie (2010: 355) points out, by 1974, close to 90 per cent of ICEM's resettlement beneficiaries were considered refugees, with ICEM developing 'expert standing in matters of international humanitarian transportation' (see also, Georgi 2010). This period was marked by cooperation and coordination, but also by suspicion, especially by UNHCR, who viewed ICEM as potentially diverting resources away from its own (Élie 2010). UNHCR and ICEM were thus closely engaged during this period. In the decades immediately following their foundation, with ICEM's continued focus on transportation, the two agencies were, for the most part, engaged in close but separate spheres of practice, and in this way maintained their proximate, though distinct, positions.

Refracted fields of refugee protection and migration management

By the 1970s, as migration from the global south to western Europe increased in step with advances in transportation and communication methods, the attention of western states, along with that of UNHCR and ICEM, turned to regions of origin outside of Europe. With increasing numbers of individuals seeking asylum from outside Europe, observers began pointing to the blurred character of emerging migratory movements. According to some, the line separating refugees from migrants was no longer clear (Barnett 2002). In response, greater barriers and restrictions to entry were erected across western states, while increased focus was placed on distinguishing 'genuine' refugees from those portrayed as economic migrants (Barnett 2002;

¹⁹ Based on this agreement, and according to Élie (2010), 'UNHCR would concern itself with the legal and political protection of the refugees and facilitate the local integration of those who could not emigrate...and ICEM...would deal with the registration, documentation and movement of the refugees from Austria to other countries either for temporary asylum or permanent resettlement'.

Chimni 2000). With that, states began implementing an infrastructure aimed at reducing 'unwanted' migration, while, at the same time, directing funding towards relief and assistance for a sub-section of those individuals: refugees.

The context of growing restrictionism provided an opportunity for UNHCR and IOM to take up leading operational roles in the field of refugee protection for UNHCR and migration management for IOM. This consolidated the distinctiveness of the two fields and of IOM and UNHCR's respective positions over them. Indeed, in keeping with efforts to curb migration, and with greater attention on the conflicts and population displacement in Africa, flowed increased funding from western states for UNHCR to respond to humanitarian needs and provide 'protection in regions of origin' (Slaughter and Crisp 2009: 4). As will be considered later in this chapter in relation to UNHCR's evolving understanding of protection, from the 1970s onwards, UNHCR continuously expanded the scope of its activities, leading it to take on an increasingly operational protection role, characterised by the provision of assistance and relief. With that it shifted away from its core legal protection mandate (Betts et al 2012). By the 1990s, UNHCR oversaw a 'network of huge camps' for refugees for which it had taken on responsibilities resembling that of a surrogate state (Slaughter and Crisp 2009).

In parallel with this, and by the end of the Cold War, the notion of migration management, driven by the rationale of making 'migration into a more orderly, predictable and manageable process', was elaborated and consolidated across the UN, governments, and INGOs (Geiger and Pécoud 2010: 2). While the practices associated with the notion of migration management are rooted in more longstanding notions of migration control at the state level, the reframing and elaboration

of the concept allowed international actors, spearheaded by IOM, to position themselves as key players within a new field of practice which aimed at managing migration, as a whole. As Georgi (2010) argues, the International Committee for Migration, renamed the IOM and given a broader mandate in 1989, expanded significantly in the 1990s by mobilising western states' fear of irregular migration. IOM presented itself and its heterogeneous services, articulated under the agenda of 'managing migration for the benefit of all', as the solution to the perceived disorderliness of migration (Geiger and Pécoud 2010:6). IOM succeeded in framing migration as something that could and should be managed and positioned itself at the helm of this burgeoning field of governance.

The institutional structure of IOM, with its project-based funding model, incentivised the organisation to take on a growing range of activities on behalf of states, which included activities as diverse as supporting the establishment of new government institutions regulating migration, running detention centres and managing offshored camps in Australia as well as engaging in the direct return of migrants through its 'voluntary return' programme (Ashutosh and Mountz 2011; Pécoud 2018; Koch 2014; Klabbers 2021). From its humble beginning as a provider of transportation services, the emergence of the migration management field, which was in many ways driven and consolidated by IOM, allowed the latter to become a key actor in the realm of migration policy and practice. IOM's proximity to states and its involvement in the implementation of control-oriented projects on behalf of its member states has drawn severe criticism from observers, however, who on numerous occasions have accused IOM of contributing to the violation of migrant rights (Georgi 2010; Ashutosh and Mountz 2011). Critics have concluded that IOM's activities have 'made it more difficult for people in need of protection to seek safety'

(Moretti 2021: 39; Hirsch and Doig 2018; Brachet 2016; Andrijasevic and Walters 2010), noting that IOM 'operate(s) in the interest of the protection of states over asylum seekers' (Ashutosh and Mountz 2011:28). Importantly, here, is the fact that, *contra* UNHCR with its protection mandate, migrants themselves were never conceived as IOM's main beneficiary, nor an object of the organisation's direct responsibility. Rather, with its service-oriented institutional design, states were conceived as the principal recipients of IOM services, with projects implemented to suit *their* needs.

As the above suggests, during and immediately following the Cold War period, both UNHCR and IOM experienced significant growth, which for the most part followed very different directions into refugee protection, on one hand, and migration management, on the other. Given IOM's heterogenous and expanding portfolio, however, areas of overlap, competition, and cooperation remained and developed between the two. These have, at times, been cooperative and complementary. UNHCR's protection activities in refugee camps, for instance, were never carried out in complete isolation of IOM, as IOM continued to play a pivotal role in UNHCR's resettlement programmes via the transportation of refugees. The complementarity that has developed between the two has also been more controversial, for example, in the area of migrant returns. Against the backdrop of increased restrictions to asylum, UNHCR's promotion of the return of migrants and failed asylum seekers was framed as essential to the preservation of asylum and the protection of refugees (Koch 2014). During this period, the complementarity and interlinkage between the two spheres rested on UNHCR perceiving refugee protection as more effective with IOM, in parallel, fulfilling its own migration management function.

An emerging field of practice

The 2010s marked yet another shift in the definition and positioning of these two fields, characterised by UNHCR and IOM henceforth being conceived as closely positioned, parallel institutions with responsibility over separate, but defined populations. This shift took place against the backdrop of the European migration 'crisis' of 2015, which will be considered in the final section in relation to Tunisia and Libya. This pivotal moment contributed, firstly, to western states' increasing interest in regulating migration via international institutions. Secondly, it contributed to placing the question of migrant vulnerability and protection on the agenda, giving an opportunity for IOM to consolidate its position as a provider of assistance and protection to migrants. As will be seen, these global developments prepared the terrain for the emergence of a single differentiated field encompassing UNHCR and IOM in their operational response to refugees and migrants.

In 2016, in the context of UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants, IOM formally joined the UN as a related, although *not a full member*, organisation (Bradley 2020).²⁰ Its entry into the UN system was accompanied by the agency's public rebranding as the 'UN Migration Agency', closely mirroring UNHCR's self-representation as the 'UN Refugee Agency' (Pécoud 2020). With the UN-IOM agreement, and emblematic of the consolidation of IOM's influence at a global level, the

²⁰ As a 'related organisation' it is not a full member of the UN system (Pécoud 2020). Commentators have debated the implications of this, for example, whether IOM, as a 'non-normative organisation', is bound by the UN Charter and the same human rights obligations as full-member UN agencies. Guild et al (2020: 47) have raised concerns over the 'serious incompatibility between the IOM Constitution and the protection of migrants' rights under international human rights law'. For more on the content of the UN-IOM agreement and debate on IOM's human rights obligations, see Guild et al 2020 and Bradley 2020.

agency was assigned a lead role in developing the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, while UNHCR took the lead on the separate development of the Compact on Refugees (Hamlin 2021). These institutional and global developments served to consolidate, at least symbolically, the notion of parallel institutions 'responsible' for refugees and migrants: UNHCR as the 'UN Refugee Agency' and IOM as the 'UN Migration Agency'.

With precedents tracing back to earlier institutional developments, IOM was able to position itself as a key player in humanitarian responses to crises and displacement during this period. This position was, in part, facilitated by operational developments in which IOM stepped in to fill gaps and respond to needs on the ground and was, in part, supported by the agency's contribution to global knowledge production on protection, with a growing number of reports and publications on migrant vulnerability and protection (Bradley 2020). Thus, despite IOM long having been criticised for its proximity to states and perceived involvement in the violation of migrant rights, the agency has emerged as an important humanitarian and protection actor, marked by its presence, for example, in the Global Protection Cluster and Inter-Agency Standing Committee (Bradley 2020). The work of IOM is now couched in a vocabulary of protection, vulnerability, and 'solutions', vocabulary traditionally attached to UNHCR; and the agency has, at a global level, put in place various policies concerning human rights and the protection of migrants (Guild et al 2020; Green and Pécoud 2022).

Bradley (2020: 20) provides one of the few reviews of IOM's involvement in humanitarianism by exploring its impact on the agency's institutional development. As Bradley points out, IOM's response to crises and humanitarian emergencies, led by its Department of Operations and

Emergencies (DEO), has grown in proportion such that IOM's Department of Migration Management has been relegated to a 'subordinate position' within the organisation (Bradley 2020: 31).²¹ IOM's protection work emerged from its operational developments in the field; a reverse trajectory to that of UNHCR's, whose 'operationalisation' of protection stems from the agency's international protection mandate. The substantive content of this protection and the individuals over whom IOM is meant to extend protection have been subject to haphazard operational development. This suggests, moreover, a potential shift towards embedding traditional migration management activities in a 'humanitarian framework', reminding us of the clear migration management lineage underlying IOM's entrance into the realm of protection (Pécoud 2020).

These developments, I argue, have significantly contributed to blurring the boundaries between UNHCR and IOM's fields of practice, drawing the two agencies into a differentiated field of practice responding to the presence of refugees and migrants on the ground. Thus, while IOM's institutional expansion previously depended on the agency positioning itself as a provider of migration management solutions to states, an activity viewed as complementary to refugee protection, its entry as a provider of protection to migrants brought IOM into a sphere of activity that had hitherto been dominated by UNHCR. Hence, in the context of mixed migration, IOM is now closely involved with UNHCR in the provision of protection and assistance on the ground, engaging them both in a struggle for positioning in relation to the other.

²¹ According to Bradley (2020), an Emergency Response Unit was first established in IOM's HQ in 1992, following IOM's involvement to responding to needs of displaced populations during the Gulf War. It went through various iterations before being rebranded as the DEO.

The parallel nature of their roles with regards to refugees and migrants, and the potential for struggle that this created, was brought into stark relief in 2019 in the context of the agencies' operational response to the displacement of Rohingyas in Bangladesh. UNHCR and IOM were thrown into a struggle to establish institutional responsibility over the displacement. IOM initially secured the lead role from the government in the response to the displacement of Rohingyas from Myanmar, and characterised their displacement as a movement of undocumented migrants, despite UNHCR labelling the movement as a 'clear-cut' refugee movement. In the face of widespread criticism, IOM eventually conceded to the 'mixed' character of the movement before finally sharing operational responsibility with UNHCR.²² According to some of my UNHCR and IOM interlocutors, responsibility over camps for displaced Rohingyas was then 'divided in half' between the two agencies. This incident confirmed the need for clarity between the two agencies (for more on this response, see Moretti 2020).²³ The two eventually came to an understanding in 2019 through a bilateral agreement that set the 'distinct roles and responsibilities of IOM and UNHCR', enabling the 'right operational responses for positive engagement between the two organizations' in the context of mixed migration (IOM and UNHCR 2019: 1).

A crucial turn with this 2019 IOM-UNHCR agreement was the recognition of responsibility of each agency over 'their' populations of concern, representing an attempt to trace a clear line over

²² IOM's response took place within the context of the Bangladeshi government's 'National Strategy on Myanmar Refugees and Undocumented Myanmar Nationals in Bangladesh' and the Bangladeshi government's reluctance to recognise and treat Rohingyas as refugees (IOM 2017). More comprehensive accounts discuss the labelling of the Rohingya crisis, for example Moretti's (2020).

²³ With IOM attempting to establish itself as a protection agency on par with and as a substitute to UNHCR, the tension and competition between the two agencies resulted in a 'turf war' in Bangladesh with lines, quite literally, drawn to delimit 'their' territories, or camps (Brabant and Patel 2018: 4). This was found to undermine the effective protection and assistance of those seeking safety (Moretti 2020).

distinct population groups. As the agreement emphasises, 'both organisations will retain responsibilities for those identified to be of their concern'(IOM and UNHCR 2019: 1). Indeed, the agreement recognises that 'refugees and those in need of international protection, as defined under international refugee law, fall under the mandate of UNHCR', while 'UNHCR recognises IOM's lead in support of migrants in vulnerable situations' (IOM and UNHCR 2019: 1). The position of each agency over 'their' respective population group was consolidated at a global level.

Thus, while UNHCR and IOM were initially conceived as complementary institutions engaging, respectively, in refugee protection and migration management, their subsequent institutional developments suggest that a particular form of struggle was born of IOM positioning itself as a humanitarian actor and protection agency, destabilising the 'rules of the game' and forcing a redrawing of the field. While the institutional histories of UNHCR and IOM have long been characterised, as we have seen, by competition, intertwinement and, at times, complementarity between the two, I argue that there is something uniquely *characteristic* about the struggle taking place within the mixed migration field. For the ability of UNHCR and IOM to carve out *their* population groups, respectively, appears to have pulled both into a zero-sum game over the definition of themselves and of those they are meant to protect, as we will continue to unravel.

Evolving logics of refugee protection and migration management

With the broad lines of UNHCR and IOM's institutional trajectories laid out, I now consider the rationalities, or logics, that have evolved from their trajectories within the interlinked fields of refugee protection and migration management. I identify and briefly trace the evolutions of three logics specific to these institutions that have served as historical through-lines underpinning the

work of each: differentiation, protection/migration management, and state cooperation. I argue that we can better understand the trajectories of the two agencies – as well as the differences and similarities between them – by being attentive to how they have evolved in relation to these logics over time.

My goal is not to provide a full review of these. Rather, I hope that by highlighting a few of these distinct rationalities, in later chapters we might better appreciate how the field-specific practices of protection are not wholly new, nor do they represent a complete rupture with the past. Instead, what emerges from the mixed migration field should be understood as grounded in the pre-existing rationalities of each agency; a legacy that inhabits each of the actors of the field, the convergence of which contributes to shaping a new space of possibilities for both within it.

Category-based differentiation

The history of refugee protection is essentially a history of differentiation: differentiation between refugees and the broader set of individuals who migrate as well as differentiation in the treatment which they should be afforded. While the notion of refugees requiring specific forms of protection predates the creation of UNHCR and has, over time, led to the carving out of specific refugee populations, the establishment of the 1951 Refugee Convention, with UNHCR as its guardian, has served to consolidate a particular sphere of practice of refugee protection. The differentiation of refugees and their 'privileged' status has been a central 'rule of the game'.²⁴ Indeed, UNHCR considers that while all those on the move are rights bearers, not all require nor deserve the rights

²⁴ For an account of the historical developments pre-1951 Refugee Convention see: Orchard 2017; Grahl-Madsen 1966: 281; Zetter 2007.

enshrined in the refugee legal framework. This has justified the continued distinction between refugees and migrants, a distinction considered crucial to preserving the 'asylum space' (Feller 2005).²⁵

At the same time, UNHCR has also attempted to expand the interpretation of who could fall under its 'privileged' 'protected category' and has, over time, successfully incorporated new categories of individuals under its mandate, understood under the banner of 'persons of concern' to UNHCR. The motor of UNHCR's institutional development has been the continuous expansion of the *differentiated* category of those requiring its protection, whether refugees or persons of concern more broadly (Crisp 2009). Thus, from the initial temporally and geographically bound conception of the 'refugee' under the 1951 Refugee Convention, UNHCR now deploys a much broader understanding of the refugee category, which extends to:

All persons who are refugees within the meaning of the 1951 Convention as well as those who are outside their country of origin or habitual residence and unable to return there owing to serious and indiscriminate threats to life, physical integrity or freedom resulting from generalised violence or events seriously disturbing public order, and who, as a result, require international protection.

UNHCR has also claimed protection responsibility for other categories of individuals, incorporating under its mandate internally displaced persons (IDPs) and stateless individuals, sometimes in the absence of an accompanying normative framework, as is the case for IDPs. Importantly, UNHCR's ability to position itself over ever-growing categories of displaced and/or

²⁵ In order to preserve that space, the agency has called for greater migration management and returns of migrants found not requiring protection.

stateless individuals through this three-fold process of removal of the 1967 geographic/temporal limitation linked to the 1951 Refugee Convention, the gradual adoption of a more expansive refugee definition, and the incorporation of IDPs under its mandate, along with its parallel rebranding as an operational provider of protection, has allowed for the agency's significant operational growth (Nirmal 2010). This growth has, among other forms of operational expansions during this period, justified the creation and maintenance of large-scale relief and assistance operations for displaced populations across the globe, including in countries of origin.

As argued elsewhere, it is based on this process of classification of 'new categories of refugees' that UNHCR has been able to redefine itself as the world's largest humanitarian organisation (Nirmal 2010: 191). The process of establishing the boundaries of who falls within the realm of UNHCR's protection is thus inevitably tied to the economic capital of the field (Morris 2021; Crisp 2009). With now over 20 million refugees under its 'protection' and more than 17,000 personnel under its employ as of 2019, the agency has an active stake in ensuring that the category of those requiring protection is reproduced, expanded, and, crucially, that its accompanying operations are funded and supported.

In contrast, IOM's operational expansion and evolution has, for the most part, not depended on carving out specific populations but on the agency's framing of migration, in all its dimensions, as a phenomenon that can and should be managed 'for the benefit of all', with IOM presenting itself as the bearer of solutions for states (Bradley 2020). It was only in more recent years, when IOM was responding operationally to crises and large-scale displacement on the ground, that IOM began positioning itself as a provider of protection to migrants. Thus, like UNHCR, much of IOM's

more recent expansion into the realm of humanitarian action has been contingent on the organisation crafting a population over whom it would have legitimate authority to act. By intervening in conflicts taking place in Kuwait, Lebanon, and more recently, in Syria and Libya, IOM was able to carve out a specific target for its protection activities: 'migrants in crisis' and 'vulnerable migrants'. Through this, it has not only established its operational 'turf' but also its 'moral authority' over this particular group (Bradley 2020: 60).²⁶ This label, too, has gone through various shifts proposed by IOM: from 'vulnerable migrants', to 'migrants in a vulnerable situation', to 'migrants vulnerable to violence, exploitation or abuse'. The latter is currently championed by IOM at the time of writing.

Thus, while category-based differentiation represents a deeply rooted logic with UNHCR in the field of refugee protection, it is one that has also emerged more recently with IOM as it attempts to position itself as a key player in protection responses. IOM's emerging logic of differentiation has, in part, served to legitimate its presence and access to a new realm of practice (and capital) that involved the provision of protection-related services to migrants on the ground. Hence, despite the differences, the two agencies have ultimately followed a very similar logic of establishing themselves over specific populations by carving out legally ambiguous groups requiring protection: 'people of concern' for UNHCR and 'vulnerable migrants' for IOM. As will be discussed in the following chapters, the operationalisation of these logics of differentiation will open a space for struggle over the forms of capital in circulation in the field.

²⁶ For example, IOM convened the 'Migrants in Countries in Crisis Initiative', following its operational experience evacuating migrants from Libya and neighbouring countries in 2011.

Protection and migration management rationalities

UNHCR's refugee protection has been subject to considerable change since its inception. The agency has interpreted its mandate to 'provide international protection' in line with changing circumstances and interests. Bigo (2014: 210) reminds us that 'some dispositions have a long history and are considered the 'property' of a specific institution'. International protection, originally understood as legal and political protection for refugees, has been the foundation and core of UNHCR's existence, its 'property', rooted in the interpretation of the agency's statute and its role as the 'guardian' of the 1951 Refugee Convention. The exact meaning of this 'international protection', however, was not fleshed out in UNHCR's statute. While a full review of the evolution of UNHCR's protection work falls outside the scope of this chapter, it suffices at this point to consider some of these shifts in order to better appreciate the permeability and malleability of protection.

Firstly, as previously mentioned, the interpretation of UNHCR's mandate was originally grounded in ensuring states' provision of legal and political protection for individuals considered as refugees (Loescher 2003; Betts et al 2012; Zieck 2010). This interpretation subsequently evolved into an 'action-oriented', operational one, including the 'delivery' of protection on the ground.²⁷ This was accompanied by UNHCR's global expansion into the provision of assistance in, or in countries surrounding, the point of origin of refugee movements. In line with the agency's operational expansion, UNHCR's conception of international protection was reinterpreted to include material assistance and other 'services' afforded to persons of concern to UNHCR. A recent Excom (2016) conclusion, for example, describes the measures

²⁷ A 2003 Excom conclusion specifies, for example, that 'international protection is both a legal concept and at the same time very much an action-oriented function' (ExCom 2003).

that make up international protection as encompassing: 'the principle of non-refoulement, as well as the importance of providing assistance and seeking comprehensive approaches towards the implementation of durable solutions...'. While scholars have suggested the misuse of UNHCR's terminology of international protection, now being conflated with all activities of assistance destined to displaced persons, UNHCR's own logic of protection has continuously shifted through a re-definition of its international protection function, opening new possibilities for legitimate action in the realm of protection (Stevens 2013; Puggioni 2016; Goodwin-Gill 1999).

Past scholarly work has detailed the exogenous as well as endogenous dynamics and influences that have led UNHCR to shift and adapt its work overtime, often pointing to the influence of state political interests and internal considerations of regime survival (Betts et al 2012; Hammerstad 2011). Put differently, and in relation to field theory, UNHCR's attempt to position itself and expand its access to capital (political, symbolic, field-specific) appears to have driven multiple shifts in its own protection logic. In this case, western states' increasing interest in funding assistance to refugees *in situ* from the 1970s onwards, as seen in previous sections, coincided with UNHCR's existing disposition to establish responsibility over populations in need of protection, and through that, to reinforce its symbolic authority as a legitimate institution and provider of protection.

The above historical juncture can, secondly, serve to draw out the rationalities of control and migration management underlying, to various degrees and at different points, UNHCR's protection work. As echoed in the previous chapter, 'pure protection', that is, protection without external rationalities of control, is an illusion. As we will see, depending on the degree of interpenetration from the field of power, this embedded rationality of control has oscillated between controlling in order to protect and protecting in

order to control. Control rationalities, in their most benign form, are therefore viewed as part and parcel, and in the service of, UNHCR's protection.²⁸ This, however, has been known to slip into more control-oriented forms, notably in instances of greater interpenetration from the field of power, for example by host states. This has led UNHCR to take responsibility for and provide 'protection' in refugee camps, often physically territorialising individuals to spaces where they are deprived of their ability to move.

Yet, as will be further explored in later chapters, this logic is at risk of being inverted in cases where the political capital of the field weighs heavily in the overall struggle for capital within the field. One salient example relates to the expansion of UNHCR's mandate to include IDPs and, in the 1990s, the provision of assistance in conflict zones, such as in the former Yugoslavia under UNHCR's politically popular agenda of 'pre-emptive assistance' and 'preventive protection'. In the shift towards assistance as preventative protection, protection was no longer viewed as the end, but as the means through which to prevent further refugee outflows from conflict areas. This follows Goodwin-Gill's (1999: 225) observation that 'there was an increased emphasis on an international presence in countries of origin in order to encourage people to remain; and international assistance to the internally displaced, wherever this could have 'a preventive impact'; that is, not just humanitarian relief, but relief with a purpose'. Here, and as Goodwin-Gill notes, UNHCR's involvement in the prevention agenda, with its clear migration management rationality, contributed to curtailing the right of individuals to seek asylum, undermining the very international law and mandate to which UNHCR was bound.

²⁸ For example, the shift away from legal protection towards assistance and relief, described in this section, marked a need to count, track, and through that, to 'numerically territorialise' refugees (Franke 2009). UNHCR justifies the enumeration of persons of concern through registration procedures as necessary to the fulfilment of its mandate, necessary both in terms of carrying out the practical delivery of assistance, as well as to justify its operations and funding.

Thus, while IOM is justly associated with migration management and control, it is useful to view UNHCR's protection logic, also, as situated along a continuum ranging from controlling in order to protect to protecting in order to control, depending on the competing forms of capital within the field of refugee protection and the degree of interpenetration from the field of power. This historical view of UNHCR's protection logic offers the possibility of moving past dichotomous representations of UNHCR and IOM and situating the overarching logic of protection that will be observed in the subsequent chapters within UNHCR's own range of possible actions.

State cooperation and influence

Historically, state cooperation has been a defining logic of both refugee protection and migration management. It is built into the institutional design of UNHCR and IOM, making way for significant influence from the field of power and the heteronomous poles of capital of the field. While the literature on international organisations has long attempted to establish the possibility of IO autonomy (Barnett and Finnemore 1999), field theory points to the *relative* autonomy of all fields, suggesting that complete autonomy, free from all external influence, does not exist. To that effect, the question is not whether UNHCR and IOM are autonomous, but the degree to which they have been influenced by the field of power, calling for empirical investigations into how field dynamics play out on the ground.

UNHCR and IOM's respective institutional designs and funding models point to institutional logics of state cooperation embedded within each. As will be seen, this lays the groundwork for significant interpenetration from the field of power that manifests itself differently across space and time. That UNHCR and IOM, as IOs, are formed by and composed of member states has been

much discussed in the literature, with a significant body of work – in particular on UNHCR and more recently, IOM – showing that, despite their state membership, IOs are able to retain autonomy in influencing policy and shaping their mandates (Barnett and Finnemore 2005; Bradley 2020).

Here, given my interest in the *practice* of protection, I shift the focus to elements of the logic of state cooperation/influence that directly impact the operationalisation of protection on the ground. The first element is found in the institutional design of each organisation. Article 1 of UNHCR's statute tasks the agency with providing international protection and solutions 'by assisting Governments', while urging states to 'co-operate with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the performance of his functions' (UN GA 1950). As we have seen, while UNHCR subsequently expanded its scope of action into the operational delivery of protection, refugee receiving states have continued to retain the primary responsibility, under international law, for guaranteeing the rights of refugees on their territory. Under its mandate of 'assisting Governments', UNHCR has thus found itself in the situation of having to provide protection operationally when host states cannot or will not fulfil their obligations towards refugees (Zieck 2010; Janmyr 2014). This disjuncture frequently places UNHCR in the position of having to negotiate difficult, if not conflictual, relationships with host states, who attempt to limit the scope of action of UNHCR on their territory. This at times gives rise to compromised forms of protection, as was seen in the case of encampment raised above.

IOM's institutional structure, in contrast, provides for the 'projectisation' of IOM's operations. This means that with its 'projectized budgetary model', most recently enshrined in the 2015 IOM-UN

agreement, IOM carries out projects that have been requested, endorsed, and specifically funded by states. State cooperation, from that perspective, is *sine qua non* to most IOM projects. This has earned IOM the title of state 'subcontractor', and fuelled the continuous and entrepreneurial expansion of its operational portfolio into a vast array of migration management services for states (Pécoud 2020: 13). Like UNHCR, state cooperation, and in particular donor state cooperation, is thus a logic that is deeply embedded within the constitution and structures of IOM and a logic that is inherent to migration management itself. However, while for UNHCR this cooperation is necessary to the fulfilment of its protection mandate, for IOM it has provided the very structure from which it carries out its services for states.

Associated with this, and closely connected to their respective institutional structures, is the funding model of each agency, an element further shaping their degree of state cooperation. From the above section on IOM, it is clear that the projectisation model lays the groundwork for significant donor oversight on projects conducted on their behalf and shapes IOM's entrepreneurial 'get projects or perish' attitude (Bradley 2020: 40). As Bradley contends, under this model, 'declining contentious but lucrative work is effectively disincentivized, particularly as there is little formal reward for scrupulously advocating and upholding protection standards' (Bradley 2020: 41). IOM's donor-orientation, together with its lack of normative framework, has shaped the conditions of possible action, allowing it to take on projects that have been considered contrary to the rights of migrants.

In contrast, UNHCR is able to cover approximately 2 per cent of its operating costs through core UN budget financing, in addition to a certain amount of unrestricted financing (17 per cent in

2017). While this is thought to mitigate complete donor dependency, a significant proportion of UNHCR operations are funded with earmarked funding at the national or programme level. Since the mid-2000s this tighter earmarked funding has formed the majority of UNHCR's funding, causing UNHCR to continuously appeal to donor states for operational funding and to frame itself, and the needs of its persons of concern, to attract donor attention (Patz and Thorvaldsdottir 2020). According to Thorvaldsdottir et al.'s (2021) study of UNHCR funding allocation, this does not *necessarily* impact the agency's ability to carry out its mandate, except when a crisis of geopolitical interest to donors, in particular European donors, directs funding to that crisis and away from others. This suggests that the degree of interpenetration from donors varies across space and time, according, *inter alia*, to the geopolitical salience of a crisis to donor states.

This section aimed to show the extent to which state cooperation and state influence have formed part of both UNHCR and IOM logics. These are constituted, in part, through their institutional structures and funding models and, in that sense, contribute to shaping their internal grammars, that is, how they understand the structures through which they act and the range of possible action when it comes to refugee protection and migration management. State influence from the field of power, therefore, is not merely something that is imposed 'from the outside'. Rather, it finds its footing within the structures of the respective fields and shapes differently how UNHCR and IOM understand their roles against the broader social world. The outcome is not predetermined, however. The different logics come together, interact, and together shape the ways in which each agency contends for the capital at stake in the field, including the political and economic forms of capital.

The mixed migration field and the Central Mediterranean route

In this final section, I set out the empirical context of the Central Mediterranean route, which forms the backdrop to my work. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the 'field' is a spatially and temporally situated structure of relations, the conceptualisation of which must be grounded in a historical understanding, as well as detailed empirical knowledge. In order to observe the emergence of the structures of the mixed migration field in *this context*, therefore, I draw out specific historical junctures that have brought UNHCR and IOM together in a shared social arena, allowing us to observe the consolidation of the mixed migration field in Tunisia and Libya.

An unprecedented mixed migration crisis

In the first few weeks of the Libyan revolution, starting in February 2011, hundreds of thousands of individuals began moving across the Libyan border to Tunisia and Egypt, and other neighbouring countries. In less than three months, over 800,000 people were thought to have fled to neighbouring countries, the majority fleeing to Tunisia, where the land border was kept open to those fleeing the conflict for the duration of the crisis (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2012; Eyster and Paoletti 2015). The movement was labelled as 'unprecedented' by UNHCR. Not in size, for UNHCR had dealt with similarly large crises elsewhere, but in its location on the southern Mediterranean and the composition of individuals fleeing. This, according to UNHCR, was an unprecedented 'mixed migration crisis' involving what the agency later classified as three categories of individuals: third-country migrants, third-country refugees, and displaced Libyans, together representing over 120 nationalities (Ambroso et al 2013; Eyster and Paoletti 2015).

While today, UNHCR and IOM are two of the largest humanitarian organisations in the region, this has not always been the case. At the start of the Libyan revolution, the two organisations had a relatively limited presence in Tunisia and Libya. UNHCR was already registered in Tunisia, where it carried out limited operations, whereas in Libya UNHCR's presence was not formally recognised by the authorities – giving way to a precarious relationship from which it has continued to suffer until today.²⁹ IOM, in contrast, had been more active in the region since 2001 when it opened its first office in Tunisia, which was followed by a host state agreement with Libya in 2004. IOM had, moreover, been implementing migration management programming in the region since 2006.³⁰

The Libyan revolution marked an opening for significant institutional development in the region. The scale of the displacement on the southern shore of the Mediterranean warranted an influx of funding from international donors and, with that, UNHCR and IOM took over the operational response on the ground. UNHCR, IOM and a range of other humanitarian actors descended upon countries neighbouring Libya, particularly Tunisia and Egypt's border area, to where most had been displaced. The initial response to the displacement in 2011 in Tunisia was characterised by a blurring of the roles of UNHCR and IOM. As will be briefly considered, with both agencies

²⁹ UNHCR has operated in Libya in the absence of a formal agreement with the authorities. In 2010, UNHCR was briefly expelled from the country, but was able to return in 2011 with the new Libyan government. While at different points UNHCR has worked with the Libyan authorities, the absence of formal agreement has made its presence more precarious. In contrast, Tunisia recognised UNHCR's competence to operate within the country, including by delegating registration of asylum seekers and refugee status determination to the Refugee Agency, a function the agency has been fulfilling in the Country since 1992. This role was renegotiated and reconfirmed in 2011 through a new agreement with the post-revolutionary Tunisian state (Badalič 2019).

³⁰ IOM had been engaged in the region since the 1990s, when, according to Bradley (2020), it first began eyeing migration trends in North Africa, 'setting its sight on the region as an area for expansion'. In 2006, IOM launched its flagship EU-funded Assisted Voluntary Return programme (Brachet 2016; IOM 2015).

scrambling to set up an appropriate response, the two blurred the limits of their respective roles and, for UNHCR, its mandate. With this blurring, they extended their respective scope of action into realms that had previously been viewed as 'complementary', but distinct: protection and migration management.

In Tunisia, camps were set up along the border with Libya. UNHCR took charge of coordinating assistance and managing the country's largest camp, Choucha, near Ras Jdir. At the peak of the influx from Libya, on average 18,000 displaced people were arriving at Choucha camp daily (Natter 2015). Those who fled across the border and took up residence in the camps were largely categorised under the general umbrella term 'third country nationals' (TCNs), a label used to denote the broad and varied group of non-Libyans who had crossed. In the early stages, with over 120 nationalities represented in the movement, very little differentiation was made as to whether those individuals constituted migrants or refugees, marking a departure from UNHCR's longstanding logic of differentiation.

Despite not having been characterised as a 'refugee movement', UNHCR took charge of the coordination and management of the main camp, while other actors such as IOM, alongside UNHCR and other organisations, provided services and assistance to its residents. 'TCNs', regardless of status, were thus afforded a space and limited assistance from UNHCR and its partners in the camps (Eyster and Paoletti 2015). Within this context of assistance, IOM extended its work into the protection of TCNs, a group it would subsequently begin to frame as 'vulnerable migrants', 'vulnerable foreign workers', and 'migrants in crisis', via the provision of assistance (IOM 2012: 13). In neighbouring Libya, IOM was able to organise the evacuation of migrants who had

been caught up in the violence. This would subsequently allow IOM to further expand its role in the country. In the initial stages, UNHCR's and IOM's contribution to protection as assistance on the ground was thus the provision of large-scale evacuations and, along with other organisations, the provision of humanitarian assistance to help meet the needs of those who had been displaced, regardless of status.

That few differentiation procedures had been put in place perhaps reflects the responses' main operational priority at this stage: evacuations and 'decongesting' the border area. In a further blurring of UNHCR's role and the boundaries of its mandate, the agency drew upon its good office in order to lend support to IOM's 'humanitarian evacuations', which allowed over 136,000 'TCNs' to return to their country within the first three months (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2012). This unprecedented crisis of mixed migration also gave rise to what UNHCR evaluators described as an 'unprecedented level of cooperation between the two organisations'. According to this evaluation report, 'the High Commissioner for Refugees and the IOM Director-General announced that they *would merge their operations* to conduct a humanitarian evacuation programme for third country nationals (TCNs) who fled from Libya and were congesting the Tunisian and Egyptian borders' (Ambroso 2013: 22; italics my own).

By leveraging the humanitarian discourse of evacuations, UNHCR became directly involved, along with IOM, in the return of third-country nationals, with some pointing to the lack of rigorous procedures to ascertain whether those returned might face persecution (Garelli and Tazzioli 2017b). As with the mandates of UNHCR and IOM, the line between refugee protection and migration management was blurred from the onset of the operation, and ultimately involved

UNHCR chartering over 100 'UNHCR flights' from Tunisia for third-country nationals broadly deemed as 'migrants' to return to their countries (Ambroso 2012; Scheel and Ratfish 2014). With return considered the preferred 'solution' for third country nationals by host and donor states alike, more than 200,000 individuals were sent back to their country of origin under the joint 'UNHCR-IOM Humanitarian Evacuation Programme' (Ambroso et al 2013; Eyster and Paoletti 2014).

Identification and differentiation procedures were eventually put in place by UNHCR. A limited number of those among the 'TCNs' were recognised as refugees and eventually resettled to third countries via UNHCR's coordinated Global Resettlement Solidarity Initiative, launched in 2011. Resettled individuals represented a very small proportion of all those who fled Libya, only 3,500 having been resettled through the initiative. Given the lengthiness of UNHCR registration, RSD, and resettlement procedures, Choucha camp remained open for asylum seekers and refugees until 2013, well after the evacuation programme for those considered as migrants had come to an end. A very small minority of those who could not be resettled were eventually 'integrated' into the urban areas of Tunisia. For the vast majority of TCNs, however, the solution was, one way or another, their managed migration out of Tunisia. Despite the small number of individuals recognised as refugees³¹ and resettled, this shift is important as the establishment of identification procedures marked the inception of 'profiling' procedures in the context of mixed migration. These became a defining feature of the mixed migration field (Eyster and Paoletti 2015).

³¹ Approximately 4,000 individuals were reported to have been given refugee status in Tunisia (Natter 2015).

I aimed to highlight several points in this section. First, was the blurring of the roles between UNHCR and IOM. While UNHCR and IOM had previously been at the helm of refugee protection and migration management respectively, with the 2011 displacement crisis from Libya, the two agencies took on increasingly merged roles and responsibilities, with UNHCR having 'stepped beyond its mandate' to provide 'solutions' to those typically not understood as of the agency's 'concern' (Eyster and Paoletti 2015: 159). Over whom each agency would establish responsibility, in that sense, was further blurred when IOM stepped in to provide services understood as protection to TCNs, regardless of nationality. Second, this experience laid the groundwork for many of the structures, struggles, and practices that would later evolve into the defining characteristics of the mixed migration field in Tunisia and Libya. This included the preoccupation with managing the mobility of third-country nationals 'on the move', whether through repatriation or resettlement, the 'unmixing' of populations through profiling procedures, and IOM's framing of migrants as vulnerable and 'in crisis'.

A year after the fall of Qaddafi the crisis had, for the most part, subsided. Many displaced individuals had been repatriated to their country of origin, some resettled, and others still, including foreign migrant workers and Libyan nationals, returned to Libya. A portion of both TCNs and Libyan nationals remained in Tunisia and fell largely off the radar. The operational response to the crisis, and the resulting cooperation between UNHCR and IOM, was considered a successful example of crisis management, which left IOM especially in good standing within the field's emerging structures. Notably, with IOM's operational experience evacuating migrants out of Libya during the first year of the conflict in 2011, in which 250,000 TCNs in Libya were evacuated by land to Niger and Chad, IOM gained credibility vis à vis donors and the Libyan authorities, planting

the seed for the operational expansion that would follow in the country (Brachet 2015; Perrin 2018; Beqiraj 2016; Bradley 2020). This experience, moreover, consolidated evacuations as the most appropriate and efficient humanitarian and protection solution for migrants, in particular 'stranded migrants' and 'migrants in crisis'.

With the return to relative calm, the world's attention turned away from Libya (Koser 2011). This was short-lived, however. For the NATO-led overturn of Qaddafi and subsequent consolidation of armed groups, smuggling networks, and widespread abuse perpetrated towards refugees and migrants in Libya would lay the groundwork for renewed international attention as well as the consolidation of the mixed migration field on the ground.

The 2013 Lampedusa crisis

Two years later, in 2013, Libya was again at the forefront of the international agenda when a boat that had departed from the shores of Misrata, in western Libya, sank by the Lampedusa coast, killing 366 individuals who had attempted the crossing to Europe (Tamimi et al 2020: 197). The Lampedusa shipwreck renewed the attention on migration from Libya. Attention shifted to the risk of, and risks associated with, irregular migration by boat as well as to the situation *in* Libya, which was viewed as pushing third-country nationals to flee. Initial European policy responses were framed around the discourse of humanitarianism: preventing deaths at sea by cracking down on smuggling networks, while providing protection and assistance to vulnerable refugees in Libya (European Parliament 2013).

The EU responded by creating a dedicated task force focused on 'prevent[ing] migrants from undertaking dangerous journeys', and in parallel, leveraging the tragic event to push forward the

implementation of border surveillance systems and other control-oriented measures (European Commission 2013b; Smits and Karagianni 2019; Beqiraj 2016). At the same time, the EU channelled additional funding to UNHCR and IOM operations in Libya. In the immediate aftermath of this event, and with the creation of the task force, a strong differentiation continued between refugees and migrants as objects of protection and migration management.

According to European Commission (2013a: 7) statements at the time, 'particular attention will be placed by the EU on the need by Libya to ensure respect of the rights of persons in need of international protection'. In parallel, the EU Commission continued to point to the need to increase the return of migrants, in which IOM's central role was recognised, too. Between 2011 and 2013, UNHCR was *the* recognised protection actor and the sole implementer of the EU-funded Regional Protection Programme in Tunisia and Libya. This reflected UNHCR's singular role at that time in providing protection responses to displacement (Perrin 2018). 'Protection' at this juncture was, therefore, articulated in relation to refugees specifically, and the existing EU funding under the Regional Protection Programmes (RPPs) for North Africa, focused almost exclusively on the protection of refugees until 2014.³²

Between 2011-2013, UNHCR had been carrying out limited activities in Libya. Due to its continued lack of a formal agreement with the Libyan government, however, UNHCR's ability to access and provide protection to asylum seekers and refugees remained extremely limited (Eyster and

³² RPPs have been a longstanding EU funding and policy tool, implemented across different regions of the world, primarily in countries of 'origin' and 'transit', and largely directed towards UNHCR and NGOs working in the field of refugee protection. In North Africa, the programme targeted Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt, and was implemented by UNHCR along with its implementing partners in each country (ECRE 2015).

Paoletti 2015; Perrin 2018). IOM, in contrast, enjoyed relatively broad access to Libyan territory, including to detention centres. In 2013, the migration agency was able to resume its 'voluntary' return activities, which had been briefly interrupted due to the conflict affecting the security situation in the country. Detention centres became a central node in which individuals were identified for the purpose of Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) (Brachet 2015). Given the dire conditions and mistreatment in detention centres as well as the arbitrary and indefinite nature of this detention, IOM reframed its return assistance as aiding 'stranded migrants', specifically targeting migrants in detention. This became one of the few ways out of the inhumane and indefinite conditions of the Libyan detention centres.³³ By 2017, the activity had been rebranded 'Voluntary *Humanitarian* Return' and was subsumed under IOM's Department of Operations and Emergencies (DEO), as mentioned in previous sections (Bradley 2020). This activity, for the most part, represented a mere continuity of IOM's regular voluntary return programmes, which it began carrying out in Libya with EU funds in 2006 (Brachet 2015; Perrin 2018).

A shift occurred soon after – a shift closely connected to successive shipwrecks in the Mediterranean – according to which 'the RPP (and more broadly, protection in the region) (were) increasingly viewed as a policy tool that can help address *mixed migration flows* to Europe' (ECRE 2015:8, Italics my own). The language of protection was gradually introduced in EU Commission (2014: 30) documents in relation to migrants within mixed movements, which from 2014 onwards mentioned the need 'to strengthen the protection for asylum seekers, refugees, and vulnerable

³³ These formed part of a migration control infrastructure that had been upheld by Italian and European funding since 2008 (IOM 2015; Perrin 2018; Beqiraj 2016; Paoletti 2010).

persons within a mixed migration context'. A 'broader initiative' was therefore called for by the Commission in 2015. The EU's protection programming was no longer targeting exclusively refugees, but also explicitly refugees *and* migrants. Seizing upon the climate of continued instability in Libya and the emerging discourse of migrant vulnerability, IOM was thus able to position itself as a key provider of migration management services to European states, on the one hand, and a provider of assistance and protection to vulnerable migrants, on the other (Brachet 2015).

The 2015 Mediterranean Crisis and a consolidated division of labour

This 'broader initiative' was adopted the following year, in the wake of the 2015 Mediterranean 'migration crisis' and the Valletta Summit that followed, resulting in the adoption of new funding instruments, most importantly, the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF).³⁴ The EUTF formally aimed to address the 'root causes of instability, forced displacement and irregular migrations and contribute to better migration management' (European Commission 2021). This was one of a series of tools the EU deployed to externalise migration control through third countries, international organisations, and NGOs in Tunisia and Libya as well as further south along the 'migration route' (Pastore and Roman 2020: 142).³⁵ Because of its scale and scope, the EUTF is one

³⁴ The RPP, which became the Regional Development and Protection Program in 2015, was nonetheless maintained through funding from the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). It is much more limited in scope, however, with EUR 67,300,000 in projects funded between 2015 and 2022. Nonetheless it is interesting to note that the aim of the program is now to 'assist third countries to address the protection and developmental needs of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers' (European Commission 2022a).

³⁵ A full review of the EU's actions to externalise migration control in the southern Mediterranean falls outside the scope of this chapter and has already been well documented and considered elsewhere. For example, for more on the EU's embrace of the 'migration route' through its 'Global Approach to Migration' see Casas-Cortés et al 2015.

of the most significant funding mechanisms adopted by the EU, having allocated EUR 5 billion to 26 countries across Africa between 2015 and 2022.³⁶

With regards to the implementation of the EUTF North Africa's protection programming, IOM and UNHCR became the main beneficiaries of the EU funding. UNHCR and IOM were also part of a broader configuration in which the states along migration routes were the recipients of EU border management funding, which strong incentives to put in place restrictive approaches to migration in view of preventing further onward movement.³⁷ Just as the EU's agenda was clearly guided by a logic of containment and externalisation, Tunisia and Libya were driven by a securitised logic, and, hence, were broadly aligned with EU interests on various levels. While they willingly benefited from EU support on border management, both proved reluctant to implement meaningful reforms to their asylum systems.³⁸ The European funding mechanism that supported 'protection' in the region – the EUTF – was thus the same one that funded 'integrated border management',

³⁶It is also noteworthy due to some of its more controversial structural features, including that it allows the EU Commission to circumvent regular public procurement procedures, as well as the fact that the Fund was itself financed mainly through the repackaging of EU development aid (Spijkerboer 2022).

³⁷ For example, the 2017 EU-backed Italy-Libya deal provides 'assistance' to the Libyan security forces – including the Libyan Coast Guard, itself responsible for the interception and return of 'people on the move' to Libya, where many have faced serious human rights violations, including arbitrary and indefinite detention (Balwin-Edwards and Lutterbeck 2019). UNHCR and IOM, in turn, receive funding to implement 'protection activities' for the EU in these very same detention facilities.

³⁸ Libya, most importantly, has refused to reform law no. 19 of 2010 on combatting illegal immigration. The law defines illegal migration and sets out penalties with which the transgression is associated, including detention with the possibility of forced labour (Perrin 2018). Tunisia, despite having ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention, has stalled the UNHCR-led process of establishing a legal framework governing asylum. Both countries have rejected the notion of becoming 'host countries'.

including support to the Tunisian and Libyan coast guards, sometimes through projects also implemented by IOM (Hebert 2022).³⁹

Important for any understanding of the emergence *in situ* of a field of mixed migration between UNHCR and IOM, is the fact that over 50 per cent of the EUTF North Africa funding is said to be directed towards 'protection programming'. Despite the clear control-oriented nature of the other pillars of the EUTF, including those which benefited Tunisian and Libyan authorities, the share of EUTF funding allocated to protection allowed the EU to present this funding mechanism as 'by-far the largest protection instrument in Libya' (European Commission 2020).⁴⁰ That share of funding was largely implemented by UNHCR and IOM for the protection of refugees and migrants. In an important turning point related to the forms of economic capital at stake in the field, this broader funding instrument represented a *merging of the funding* within the field available for refugees *and migrants*. It was, therefore, entirely up for grabs by the two agencies, with the potential of redefining the struggle for capital at stake within this space.

³⁹ These EU funding mechanisms and EU-Tunisia/Libya agreements are supplemented by bilateral agreements with European Member States, such as France, Italy and Germany, some of which include readmission agreements to Tunisia (Badalič 2019).

⁴⁰ EUTF 'North Africa' Trust Fund Manager, Mirco Kreibich, specified in full: 'I would like to in fact tackle a few misperceptions quoted and shared about Libya specifically and the EUTF, let me start by saying that the EUTF is by far the largest humanitarian and development action instrument in Libya; we have over the past five years approved actions worth more than 455 million, and this is very important: more than half, about 230 million, of these actions are in the area of protection. So, the EUTF is by far the largest protection instrument in Libya...it has to be recognised also by NGOs, the media, and so on, that the EUTF also, and mainly actually, supports Libya with humanitarian action.' Here, 'protection' was, in and of itself, discursively deployed as an intrinsic good, allowing the EU to ward off broader accusations linked to its interventions in border management and mobility control in the region.

Signalling the crystallisation of IOM as a protection actor for migrants and the consolidation of a shared field between UNHCR and IOM, Green and Pécoud (2022: 2) identify a semantic shift that coincided with the 2014-2015 Mediterranean crisis and IOM's increased involvement in Libya. They point to a shift towards the emergence of the 'refugee and migrant' label, which bridged the distinct 'semantic clusters' with which the two agencies were previously associated, bringing them closer together in several areas.⁴¹ They note, in relation to Mediterranean migration and Libya, for example, an increased use by IOM of the vocabulary of 'protection' and 'vulnerability' – two discursive areas that have long been associated with UNHCR's refugee-focused activities. While this signalled the definite entry into the field of IOM as a protection actor, the overlapping nature of these discursive areas also signals the increasingly blurry space within which the two agencies operated in responding to refugees and migrants from 2015 onwards.

In stark contrast to this *discursive* blurriness, these institutional developments paved the way for an entrenched and clear 'division of labour' between the two agencies, as observed by van Dessel (2019) in relation to Niger. The first key structural feature of this division of labour was the gradual crystallisation of the structures of UNHCR-IOM's 2019 'mixed migration agreement', which followed in the wake of their 2019 'turf war' in Bangladesh, mentioned in the first section. The two agencies established a division of labour between one another all along the Central Mediterranean route, through which, across large swathes of the region, they engaged in the implementation of joint protection programming under the EUTF. Through this, they jointly coordinated the response

⁴¹ This period, as Green and Pécoud (2022) note, marked a greater usage of 'refugees and migrants', at the expense of the 'refugee' label that had previously been in effect in the context of migratory movements by sea.

to refugees and migrants through 'Mixed Migration Working Groups' and taskforces at country and regional levels. In Libya, UNHCR and IOM unequivocally established themselves as co-leads of the response. For instance, the two put in place the Refugee and Migrant Platform and, as Bradley (2020: 85) explains, developed 'standard operating procedures that divide[d] up responsibility for tasks such as assisting migrants and refugees upon disembarkation from intercepted vessels, in detention, and in the context of voluntary repatriation'.

Whereas previous operational responses involving UNHCR and IOM were characterised by the lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities between the two agencies, there was no such ambiguity here: IOM was made responsible for migrants and UNHCR for asylum seekers and refugees. This marked the re-entrenchment of the logic of differentiation within the structures of the mixed migration field, and consolidated parallel structures of protection for UNHCR's people of concern and IOM's migrants. This division of labour reinforced the role of UNHCR and IOM as parallel providers of protection to refugees *and* migrants. At the same time, the merging of the economic capital available for refugees and migrants created the potential for further struggle between them. With the merged capital of persons on the move and the merged economic capital made available from European donors to 'protect' them, regardless of status, UNHCR and IOM were thrown into an open struggle over how to draw the line between the two and over the definition of protection. This laid the groundwork for the parallel and fragmented forms of protection that will be explored in this thesis.

Conclusion

In this Chapter I explored the emergence of the mixed migration field from three perspectives. First, a broader historical perspective allowed us to view the non-linear nature of this trajectory. UNHCR and IOM's predecessors were born from the same organisation and endowed with complementary responsibilities. Subsequent historical and political developments allowed each agency to expand significantly into the separate but interlinked areas of refugee protection and migration management. With IOM's entry into the UN system and its increasing positioning as a humanitarian and protection actor, however, we observed the increased area of overlap between the two, and the adoption of activities by IOM framed as 'protection'. This process consolidated the responsibility of each agency over a distinct population: IOM firmly established itself as the UN Migration Agency, mirroring UNHCR's existing position as the UN Refugee Agency.

Second, a consideration of the separate dispositions of UNHCR and IOM, as seen in this chapter, shows how the two agencies have, at times, functioned along similar lines and rationalities, despite the stark contrast that is often made between them. Looking at the logics of differentiation, protection/migration management and state cooperation, it is clear that the two agencies, to varying extents, have evolved institutionally based on the permeability of these dispositions and their malleability within the structures of their social space. Indeed, the logics of carving out a specific population in need and the logics of migration management and state cooperation have shifted over time and across actors, also contributing to shaping the conditions of possible action for both agencies.

Finally, these developments have also played out at the operational level in Tunisia and Libya, where, against the empirical background of the Central Mediterranean route, IOM's expansion into the realm of humanitarian action and protection allowed it to secure EU 'protection'-related funding and, with that, to position itself as a provider of protection towards migrants on par with UNHCR for refugees. As illustrated, these developments allowed for the gradual emergence of the mixed migration field at the local and operational level, centred around UNHCR and IOM responding to refugees and migrants on the ground. The implications of this will be considered throughout the remaining chapters.

CHAPTER 3 – THE FRAMING OF MIXED MIGRATION

In the previous chapter, I detailed the institutional – historical and global – trajectories of UNHCR and IOM. The trajectories, as was seen, created the possibility for the existence of a field comprised of the two, structured around responding to the presence of refugees and migrants on the ground. The separate, but intertwined trajectories of the two agencies situated them within a single social space, or field, in which they could only exist by taking the other into account. In this chapter, I take the question of field emergence further by exploring how, at varying times, the issue-framing of mixed migration was deployed by UNHCR and IOM, producing structuring effects on the field at the operational level.

Central to this was the *framing* of mixed migration, in which actors attempted to position themselves in relation to each other and in relation to the capital at stake in the field. The framing of the mixed migration ‘context’, I will show, was not necessarily a given based on the empirical reality of the situation, but strategically *constructed* – and sometimes contested – within the broader struggle for positioning of each actor. The mixed migration framing thus enabled UNHCR and IOM, at different times, to access new forms of capital or to maintain their position in relation to existing capital. As I will show, this framing also had the effect of opening the boundaries of the field itself, redrawing the limits of the field and redefining the forms of capital given value within it. In this chapter, I explore this framing process and begin to unravel its material effects on the structures and boundaries of the field.

In the first two sections, I explore the ‘social and symbolic labour’ involved in deploying the mixed migration framing. Bringing mixed migration ‘into focus’, I first establish the prominence of the

mixed migration narrative in Tunisia and explore the ways in which the framing was deployed through the selective visibility of 'people on the move'. The figure of the 'person on the move', and its associations with irregularity and onward movement, formed the foundation of framing. It simultaneously obscured the presence of other groups, including registered refugees who were not considered 'at risk' of onward movement. To contrast the visibilities and invisibilities produced by the framing and the forms of contestations to which it gave rise, I focus on the micro-dynamics behind the production of this narrative. This, as will be seen, reveals the strategic nature of the mixed migration framing and its importance within the actors' struggle for positioning within the field.

Having set out the selective and deliberate nature of the framing, I consider, in the third section, its material consequences. I will show that the framing was varyingly used by UNHCR and IOM to position themselves in relation to the political and economic capital of the field – in particular, that of EU donor states. This, I argue, contributed to a loosening and redrawing outwards of the boundaries of the field, pulling UNHCR, IOM, and donors inward toward each other, and with that, shifting the ability to define the symbolic capital of the field outward. This, as will be explored throughout the thesis, contributed to shaping how protection was understood and practiced in the field.

Encountering the mixed migration framing

A few months into my fieldwork, I travelled to the south of Tunisia to Zarzis, a town in the border area with Libya. Like many other border areas, that between Libya and Tunisia has long been characterised as one of exchange, mobility, and circulation between the inhabitants of the two

border areas (Hoffman 2018). This mobility between Libyans and Tunisians was very little discussed, however. The type of mobility that had gained in visibility, in contrast, was that of *third-country nationals* entering Tunisia from Libya. This had been the case since the start of the Libyan conflict, in 2011, when hundreds of thousands of Libyans and third-country nationals fled Libya into Tunisia (Boubakri 2013; Dourgnon and Kassar 2014). As discussed in the last chapter, Choucha camp was established in the proximity of Zarzis to house incoming third-country refugees and migrants and with it, hundreds of humanitarian aid workers were mobilised and descended upon the town, filling upscale resorts and setting up offices in Zarzis (Garelli and Tazzioli 2017a). By the time of my fieldwork, the camp had long been emptied out: Most of the residents of Choucha had gone, having been repatriated or resettled, and with them, most aid workers had shifted their attention to crises elsewhere.

Despite that, my research pointed to the enduring strategic importance of what little third-country movement remained between Libya and Tunisia. UNHCR Tunisia maps continued to paint the area of southern Tunisia in a large red circle, indicating an important presence of 'persons of concern' in the south of the country (UNHCR 2019d). Further, despite the much smaller number of third-country migrants and refugees entering Tunisia from Libya, the continued, albeit fluctuating, movement of these 'mixed migrants' appeared to justify the continued presence of humanitarian actors in the south of Tunisia, with both UNHCR and IOM both maintaining field offices in Zarzis. The relevance of mixed migration, as a narrative and issue framing, came into clear focus upon spending time with interlocutors of UNHCR and IOM in Zarzis.

On my first day in Zarzis, I showed up to the UNHCR office – a barbed wire enclosed compound in the *zone touristique* of Zarzis – only to be met by the agency’s Emergency Coordinator, also at the time the acting Head of Office, who I was to interview that day. I was invited to join him on a field visit for the day and was promptly shuffled towards the UN car. Accompanying us on the visit, and sitting at the front of the car, was a UNHCR officer from Zarzis who had many years earlier worked for the Red Crescent, during which time she had been involved in Choucha camp. Her presence was an opportunity to bring the mixed migration context of 2011 in conversation with that of the present.

On our way to our first stop, we casually discussed her memories of Choucha camp. What was striking was the nostalgic tone with which the ‘mass mixed migration influx’ of 2011 was discussed. The action, chaos, resources, and scale of the response of 2011 were all remembered quite wistfully. As we drove through the city’s touristic area, she carefully pointed out the beachside resorts that UNHCR and other INGO staff had taken up. Her account of the camp was punctuated with personal anecdotes and stories. I thought little of it at the time. This, after all, had been her first exposure to a ‘refugee response’ and marked the beginning of her career within the humanitarian sector. It seemed only natural to remember it with some amount of nostalgia.

Later, when I interviewed other UNHCR officials in Zarzis, however, the possibility of a future influx from Libya was mentioned with a similar sense of longing. The slightest movement of third-country nationals from Libya into Tunisia seemed to be considered a ‘sign’ that ‘more would surely come’, as one official put it. Instead of anticipating this with dread, the possibility was met with

excitement. One international official explained her decision to stay in Zarzis a while longer and prolong her contract on the basis of this:

I could have gone home after an initial period, but I decided to stay here because the situation is becoming interesting. The recent arrival of Eritreans to the south suggests that things will change here and that we will see more movement from Libya. The situation is rapidly evolving, and I think there will be a lot going on soon.

This, as many in the south insisted, was ‘an emergency situation’. Yet, with fewer than 200 new arrivals per month of what UNHCR called ‘third-country nationals’, it was unclear what emergency they were referring to.⁴² Against the relatively limited number of individuals under UNHCR’s care, the large red circle painting the area around Zarzis on UNHCR’s map seemed to take on an aspirational dimension. Nonetheless an emergency coordinator was in place and a contingency plan in the event of another mass influx from Libya was being kicked into gear. It seemed like the hopes of many was for it to be triggered. Perhaps, it seemed, this would turn what appeared to be a sleepy operation into an emergency one.

Although mass influx had not yet materialised, what limited ‘mixed migration’ actually did come into Tunisia from Libya was met with clear indications it would be managed by UNHCR and IOM. Signs of mixed migration were everywhere present. Upon entering UNHCR’s office in Zarzis, my eyes were drawn to a large banner with the words ‘Refugee Protection in the context of Mixed

⁴² At its peak, in November 2019, UNHCR recorded that ‘194 third country nationals reached Tunisia’. This number was lower in previous months, at 158 individuals in October 2019, and ‘almost no new arrivals’ in September 2019. Interestingly, these statistics record the total number of ‘third country national’ arrivals, rather than of asylum seekers or refugees. Of that number, 65% per cent are thought to have asked for asylum in 2019, by way of indication of how many of those would fall under the agency’s protection (UNHCR 2019a, UNHCR 2019b, UNHCR 2019c).

Migration' written upon it. With each visit to different institutional partners of IOM and UNHCR, I was met with similar mixed migration paraphernalia: pictures of NGO directors at mixed migration management trainings, pictures of NGO staff training civil society and local authorities, certificates of attendance from workshops held on the topic by IOM and UNHCR, and plaques of recognition for their role in migration management with the logos of UNHCR and donors adorning the wall. That physical manifestations of this mixed migration discourse were everywhere in the south came as little surprise, however: it mirrored the pervasiveness of mixed migration in public UNHCR discourse on Tunisia.

This was my first interaction with the mixed migration narrative. Already by this first visit, it was clear that actors could gain some sort of recognition by projecting their response to refugees and migrants within the frame of mixed migration. I would later understand this as a form of position-taking in relation to the struggle for capital within the field. A closer consideration of UNHCR Tunisia's 'mixed migration context', to which I turn in the next two sections, will allow me to unravel this position-taking. For, to understand what was at stake within this framing as well as the 'field effects' produced by its deployment it is important to unravel how mixed migration was framed and represented on the ground. This next section, therefore, moves to the ways in which mixed migration was made visible as *the* operational framing through UNHCR representations of its context.

The mixed migration framing

A newcomer to the Tunisian context, or to any refugee context for that matter, might be tempted to glance at UNHCR figures and documents to get a quick grasp of the situation. After all, UNHCR holds a particularly privileged position when it comes to creating knowledge on its 'subject' (Garnier 2014; Cole 2018). One of UNHCR's many knowledge-products is its *Global Focus* online portal – a one-stop-shop for everything, from statistics, situational updates, and maps – which conveniently presents digestible and standardised information on operations and situations worldwide. From my desk in Oxford, and in preparation for fieldwork, I was able to easily seize the 'refugee issue' presented by UNHCR Tunisia in relation to its operational context. The 'mixed migration context' dominated UNHCR's representation of its operations in Tunisia. This depiction – like other products of social categorisation and selective framing – 'hide as much as they reveal, and can reveal only by hiding', as Bourdieu reminds us (1988a:774).

As has been observed elsewhere, UNHCR representations and schematisations, as those of other UN agencies, are presented as depoliticised truths that are external to it, as if UNHCR were merely observing an existing reality, in this case, that of mixed migration (Hyndman 2000; Landau and Achiume 2017). Yet, and as will be seen in subsequent sections, the production of these representations was also integral to UNHCR's position-taking in the field of mixed migration. In this section, I heed Bourdieu's call to question taken-for-granted representations, as it is only by unravelling these representations that we can grasp how they serve as the foundation of actors' position taking and struggle over capital within the field. As will be seen, UNHCR's depiction of the context represented the agency's attempt to project itself towards, and draw into the field,

political and economic capital that would otherwise not have been available and, with that, to reposition itself within the field.

This section briefly considers what was made 'salient' and what was kept hidden in the framing of mixed migration. 'To frame', as argued seminally by Entman (1993: 70), 'is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient [...] in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described'. This *selective* framing, the essential elements of which I will draw out, was an integral part of the issue construction around mixed migration.

Expanding on several themes brought to light through my initial encounter with the mixed migration narrative, in the following paragraphs I consider how mixed migration was constructed and deployed as 'the issue' for UNHCR through a selective and partial process that involved the 'narrowing of vision' on a certain 'type' of movement (Scott 1999: 11). Applying such a granular lens to the mixed migration framing in the case of UNHCR Tunisia will allow me to bring into clearer focus what has been made salient and what was invisibilised in the process of framing. Unpacking the discursive framing of mixed migration will be crucial to understanding, in subsequent sections, its structuring effects on the boundaries and forms of capital in the field.

Focus on onward movement and irregularity

From the online portal, the 2020 UNHCR Tunisia page opened with the following description of the working environment: 'Refugees and asylum-seekers arrive to Tunisia in the context of mixed population movements from neighbouring countries and from sub-Saharan Africa' (UNHCR 2020a). Other documents available on the page similarly stressed the ubiquity of cross-border

land and sea movement to the Tunisian context. The Situation Map (see below), for example, showed the map of Tunisia marked with large arrows ostensibly depicting the movement of ‘mixed flows’ from Libya to Tunisia and then onward from Tunisia to Europe. The movement of the arrows appears to emphasise the mobility and potential for continued movement of refugees.

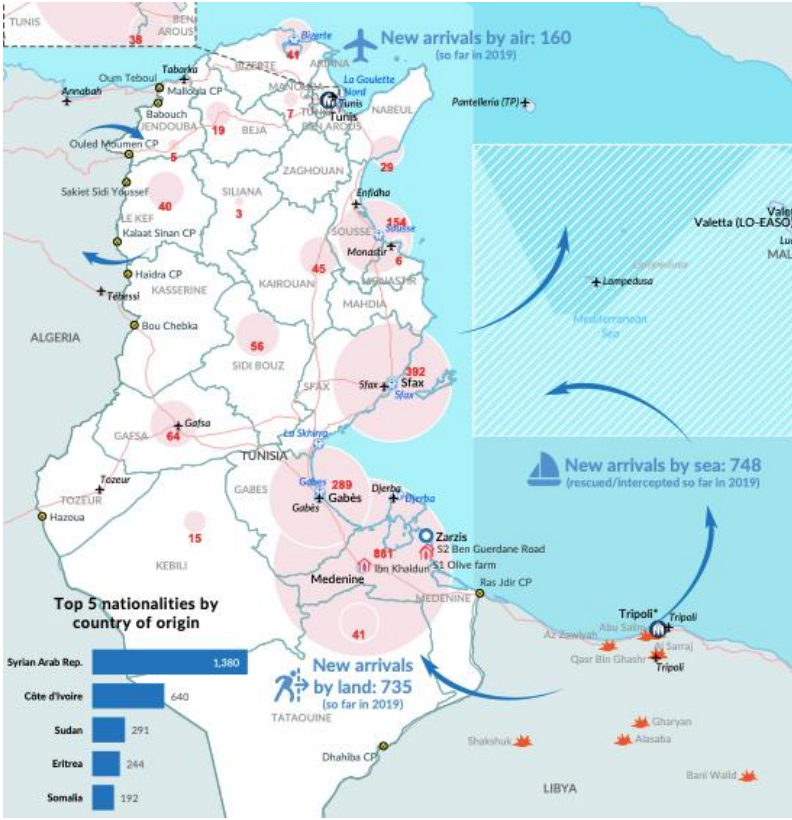


Figure 2: UNHCR Tunisia Situation Map (2019d)

In line with that, UNHCR Tunisia’s monthly ‘Mixed Movement Dashboard’ further presented Tunisia as ‘primarily a transit country for most migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers’ (UNHCR 2019h). That a ‘Mixed Movement Dashboard’ was one of the few regular ‘knowledge outputs’ of UNHCR Tunisia was indicative of its attempt to position itself, despite, as we will see, the relatively small number of individuals making up this ‘mixed migration’ in the country at the time. A 2019 document in which UNHCR presented the need for its EU-funded activities in Tunisia, among

other North African countries, was further telling in that regard. It emphasised that 'even though the number of people in mixed movements reaching Europe have significantly decreased in the last two years, the situation on the African continent has not changed and still large numbers of persons are trying to reach Europe by crossing the Mediterranean' (European Commission 2019a). The claim of 'large numbers' irregularly attempting to cross the Mediterranean was not supported by any data or statistics, yet it served to establish the association between mixed migration and the 'potential' for irregular onward movement to Europe. This portrayal of 'large numbers' both obscured the numerically limited presence of people perceived to be part of mixed movements and the fact that, as will be further explored, most individuals of concern to UNHCR did not attempt onward movement to Europe (Hess 2012; Düvell 2010).

This portrayal also firmly established the association between mixed migration and irregularity, which was reflected not only in UNHCR Tunisia documents, but more broadly in UNHCR representations on migration in the Central Mediterranean region. Indeed, the perceived irregular nature of mixed movement was oftentimes implicit, with UNHCR Tunisia emphasising that individuals arrived 'within mixed migration movements, by sea or land to/from Libya', with both modes of entry (land and sea) generally considered as means through which individuals would irregularly enter Tunisia and leave Tunisia on their outward journey to Europe. This association was more explicit elsewhere, however. UNHCR Libya, for example, frequently referenced 'irregular mixed migration flows', often automatically qualifying 'mixed migration' as irregular (UNHCR 2020g). Further establishing this association, in the context of the broader Mediterranean situation response, UNHCR has referenced mixed movements and 'the irregular flows of migrants, refugees,

and asylum seekers linking Africa and Europe' and has defined mixed movements as '*people on the move*, travelling generally in an irregular manner' (UNHCR 2021a).

Gaze on the south and Libya

Despite its faded importance and decline as a humanitarian 'hub' following the closure of Choucha camp, the border area with Libya continued to figure prominently in UNHCR's framing of the situation. Indeed, much of the documentation produced by UNHCR Tunisia focused on the southern region, in particular the border area with Libya and the coastal area of Sfax. Its focus was twofold. Firstly, it stressed the continued (although limited) presence of migrants and refugees who had entered from Libya. Secondly, and in the absence of a sizeable population of actual people on the move in southern Tunisia, it emphasised the *risk* of a greater influx, echoing what I had heard during my visit to the south of Tunisia.

In describing the population trends for 2019, for example, UNHCR noted in particular the 'increasing trend' of entries 'from Libya' of nationals from 'Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia Sudan'. These groups of individuals, who were presented as having entered from Libya and, therefore, forming part of the mixed movement or, 'people on the move', represented a total of 757 individuals, only a small minority of the agency's registered population of concern in Tunisia. Indeed, according to UNHCR population statistics, these nationality groups represented 23 per cent of the 3,248 individuals registered with UNHCR at the time of my fieldwork in 2019 (UNHCR 2020h). Only 1,082 new 'mixed migrant arrivals' by land and sea were 'profiled' by UNHCR and IOM in 2019, of which

around 65 per cent asked for asylum.⁴³ Nonetheless, from the ubiquity of the narrative one could easily assume the mixed migration phenomenon was widespread. As I sat at my desk scrutinising UNHCR documents, it became clear that what was understood as mixed migration represented only a small proportion of UNHCR's population of concern in Tunisia: those who came into Tunisia irregularly from neighbouring countries, and primarily third-country nationals coming from Libya.

Mirroring what I observed on the ground, the narrative focused on the 'spectre' or risk of greater influxes from Libya in the future. In a 2019 description of UNHCR's operational context, UNHCR warned of a risk of 'further deterioration of the situation in Libya and risk of mass influx' (UNHCR 2020a). While this influx did not materialise in 2019, the 2020 description continued to maintain that a 'major influx from Libya cannot be ruled out'. And for 2021, the agency further emphasised that 'the political unpredictability in Libya could not only trigger an influx of people of concern and migrants, but also create several security and military risks'. It remained, however, that at the time of my visit the numbers of non-Libyan refugees and migrants entering Tunisia from Libya was nowhere near those of the years following 2011.

Mixed migration tunnel vision

UNHCR Tunisia's *Global Focus* page reported a 147 per cent increase of its population of concern in Tunisia in 2019. In 2020, UNHCR Tunisia further doubled its population of concern. From its *Global Focus* page, the trend of increasing registration figures was projected into the future with

⁴³ This figure represents the total of individuals profiled, before they are registered with UNHCR or 'referred' to IOM. The figure presented here is to give an idea of scale, in opposition to the hundreds of thousands recorded in 2011, however as will be discussed there are reasons to doubt the reliability of profiling data.

the following projection of the 2021 operational context: 'In 2021, Tunisia will continue to be a *regional hub for mixed movements* and witness a *steady increase in new arrivals*. This is largely driven by insecurity in Libya and migration towards Europe [...]' (UNHCR 2020a, italics my own).

Over the course of 2019 and 2020, UNHCR's population of concern did, indeed, increase significantly. Rather than being caused by an increase in arrivals from Libya – or linked to what was perceived as mixed migration – this increase was happening elsewhere, in northern Tunisia, with groups such as Syrians and Ivorians, that were not associated with mixed migration. The agency itself, elsewhere, explained this increase by 'enhanced registration capacities' and an 'increase in registration requests... namely from Ivorian and Syrian nationals' (UNHCR 2020i: 1). The apparent increase, despite UNHCR's framing, in fact had little to do with mixed movement or insecurity in Libya. However, and as will be seen in the next chapter, while UNHCR Tunisia was well 'endowed' in this form of field-specific capital of people of concern in northern Tunisia, the valuation of field-specific capital was such that those perceived as making up mixed migration were accorded greater value, as we will see (Emirbayer and Johnson 2008). Instead of attempting to subvert the valuation of capital within the field, UNHCR Tunisia strategically leveraged it, overemphasising the presence and visibility of its people on the move.

Indeed, UNHCR, through its visual and textual representations, clearly attempted to frame its operational context as that of responding to mixed migration. Through that, the 'people on the move', considered at risk of onward movement, were 'marked and transposed to a different register of visibility', made more salient, relegating most others to the rank of the unnoticed (Brighenti 2010: 32) Not only were some groups (for example, Libyans who entered along with

third-country nationals) entirely absent from the narrative, but other groups (Syrians, Ivorians), most of whom had entered legally by air, could not easily be subsumed into a phenomenon that was associated with irregular migration from neighbouring countries. It was not that Syrians and Ivorians, who in fact formed the majority of persons of concern to UNHCR Tunisia, were entirely invisible in UNHCR discourse, but they did not appear to 'fit' how the agency was positioning itself and framing the issue to which it was responding in the country. This exposed how the presence of a minority of individuals perceived as irregularly on the move was made more visible as to form a framing of the operational context around responding to mixed migration (Entman 1993: 70). As we will now see, this framing of the context represented a strategic positioning attempt within the struggle for capital in the field.

Constructing and contesting the mixed migration framing

Having brought UNHCR's mixed migration framing into focus, I now consider the 'social and symbolic labour' involved in its production. I do so by taking a close-up lens to Tunisia's monthly 'Mixed Movement Dashboard'. Throughout my fieldwork, I was able to bring the Dashboard into conversation with those who produced it, at various levels, and with others who contested it. The Dashboard came to symbolise the struggle over the definition of the field and what was at stake within it. In that sense, it represented more than an 'artefact' or a product of mixed migration, but a lens through which to view and understand the 'symbolic strategies aiming to modify positions by manipulating the representations of positions' within the field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2013: 295).

Constructing the mixed migration framing

UNHCR Tunisia's 'Mixed Movement Dashboard', published monthly on the *Global Focus* page, aims to present the migratory picture of Tunisia by representing profiling data of arrivals by 'land, air, and rescue at sea'.

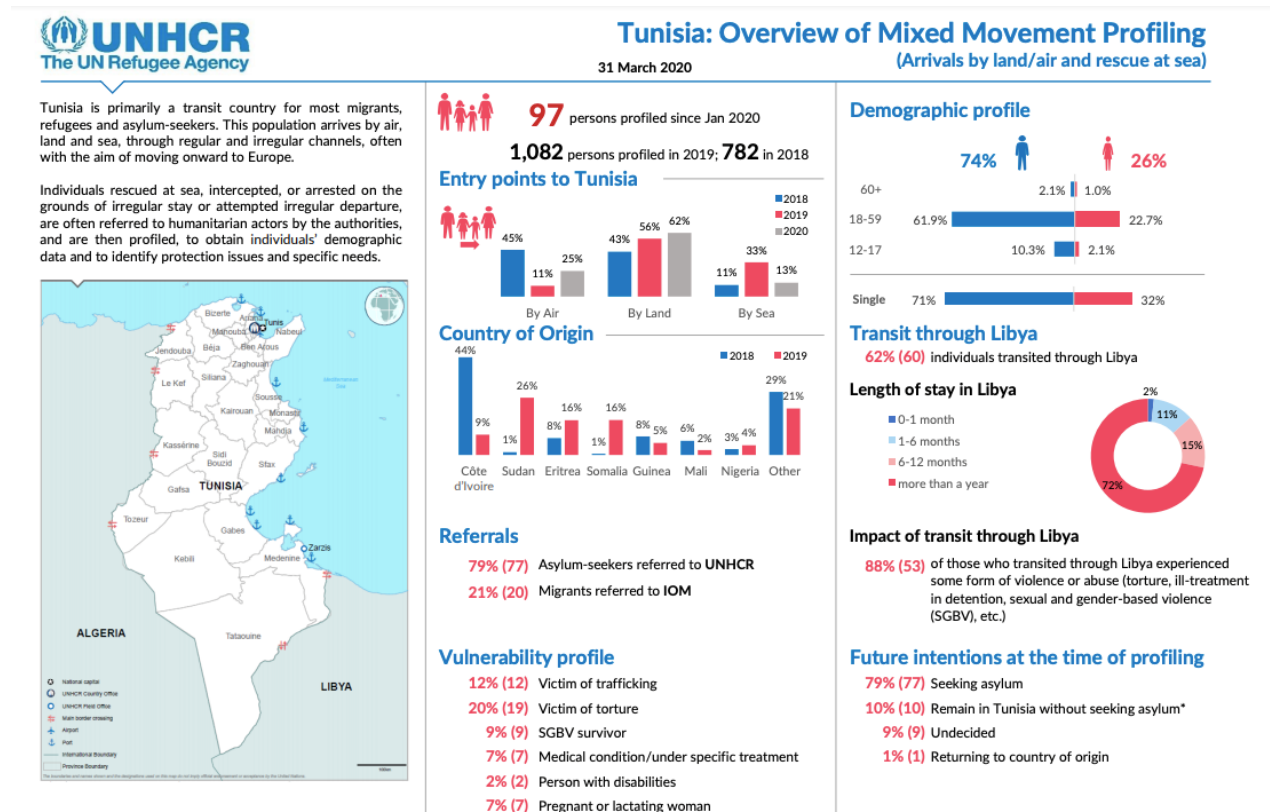


Figure 3: UNHCR Tunisia Mixed Movement Profiling Dashboard (2020e)

As illustrated in the above image, this description gives the impression that arrivals are being profiled regardless of whether they entered Tunisia by land, air, or sea; in other words, that all

forms of arrival are schematised in the Dashboard.⁴⁴ Interviews with UNHCR interlocutors closely involved in the profiling process, however, revealed that the profiling process was much more selective and represented only a partial image of the arrivals to Tunisia. Indeed, the Dashboard reflected the results of UNHCR narrowing its gaze to a specific 'landscape' of Tunisia, with profiling only being deployed in specific areas of the country, in Zarzis and Sfax. These two areas, located in the south of the country and along the coast, were considered areas 'vulnerable' to mixed migration flows by their proximity to Libya and their positioning in receiving boats that were intercepted at sea.

In my interviews with officials of the agency, I often asked why profiling wasn't being carried out in the north (Tunis and northern governorates). The answer, without fail, was that there was no mixed migration in the north of country. This was because most individuals of concern to UNHCR in the north (Syrians, Ivorians) arrived by air travel. From this emerged a logic, also brought to light in the previous section, in which mixed migration was associated with and preoccupied by a particular form of migration: irregular migration by land and sea. The fact that individuals who had arrived by air (legally) represented a negligible proportion of individuals profiled (11 per cent in 2019 for example), did not mean that they formed the minority of arrivals, but that they fell outside what has been construed as mixed migration and therefore were not represented at all in

⁴⁴ Profiling is a procedure introduced by UNHCR in the context of mixed movements. It is a 'process that precedes any formal status determination procedures and aims to identify the needs of, and differentiate between, categories of persons travelling as part of mixed movements' (UNHCR, 2017b). Practically speaking, profiling is a procedure through which individuals, often through the use of a questionnaire, are meant to be identified as 'migrant' or 'asylum seeker' and channelled through the appropriate procedures. This process of categorisation raises obvious issues, which will be considered in the next chapter.

the Dashboard. UNHCR people of concern located in the north, in fact, formed the majority of those under UNHCR's mandate, yet were under-represented in schematisations such as the Mixed Movement Dashboard. From this emerged a rationale according to which UNHCR constructed the reality it aimed to represent. Narrowing in on a particular type of person of concern allowed it to confirm and deploy the importance of this group of 'people on the move' and frame the context of its work in Tunisia.

The same logic applied to the nationalities that were made visible through the Dashboard. Individuals from countries such as Eritrea, Sudan, and Somalia figured prominently in the Dashboard for 2019 not because they were numerically more significant, but because their presence was made 'more salient' and, therefore, more visible (Entman 1993). As one field UNHCR officer explained, 'We don't do the profiling for Ivorians, Syrians or Libyans [...] we are supposed to profile all those arriving my land, sea, and air, but in practice we are mostly only doing the profiling for those intercepted or rescued at sea or having crossed'. The selective profiling produced a particular narrative that presented most individuals as having transited through Libya and entered Tunisia irregularly. This narrative was partial, however, as it obscured groups that were not associated with irregular entry. While mixed migration was made visible by a geographically and numerically limited phenomenon, this phenomenon came to represent UNHCR Tunisia's wider operational context by allowing the agency to draw on these statistics and schematisations.

What is at question here is therefore not the presence of third-country nationals who entered from Libya by land or sea, but the disproportionate visualisation of their presence through

UNHCR's framing. This tunnel vision contributed to other conclusions drawn by the Dashboard. Indeed, the first line of the Dashboard's narrative describes Tunisia as 'primarily a transit country for most migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers'. This description was puzzling, given that Tunisia was known to host a significant population of Libyans and other groups including Algerians, Moroccans, and many others for whom Tunisia hardly appears as a country of transit. Yet, I found through interviews with field staff conducting the profiling that among the 45-minute-long questionnaire posed to individuals being profiled, individuals were questioned about their future intentions and had to propose a country of destination they wanted to go to. Encouraging individuals being profiled to choose a destination, regardless of whether they had plans to move onward or not, invariably contributed to and reinforced the notion of Tunisia as a transit country. Nonetheless through profiling a select group of individuals, UNHCR made 'real' maps and narrative descriptions that emphasised the presence of 'people on the move', who aimed to move onward to Europe, while simultaneously obscuring the more settled presence of others.

Contesting UNHCR's mixed migration framing

This chapter has, thus far, focused solely on the role of UNHCR in constructing the framing of mixed migration. If UNHCR had a quasi-monopoly on the creation of knowledge and visibility when it came to *refugees*, or its persons of concern, this was certainly not the case when it came to migration, more broadly. Indeed, in the broader landscape of responses to migration, UNHCR was but one institutional player among a range of others, in particular IOM (Élie 2010; Bradley 2017). This was particularly the case in settings described as mixed migration where, in UNHCR's words, 'due to the different profiles of the individuals involved, responses also do not fit solely

within the mandate or expertise of UNHCR or any other organization' (UNHCR 2017b: 14). It only made sense, then, to explore how UNHCR's framing played out in relation to IOM.

It was in trying to understand UNHCR's narrative from the institutional perspective of IOM that the notion of mixed migration as a strategic form of positioning-taking, and, ultimately, as a contested framing, took shape. One interaction in particular contributed to this understanding. Several months into my fieldwork, I accompanied a senior IOM official to a food voucher distribution in downtown Tunis. In the car on the way downtown, I began introducing my research topic to her. My introductory spiel, by then, had become quite routine. I had almost come to anticipate the reactions of my interlocutors before giving it. When I started telling her about my interest in mixed migration, however, she interrupted me with a raised hand and candidly said, 'I hate that term', before launching into a discussion of *UNHCR Tunisia's* framing of mixed migration: 'The concept in general and the framing of this concept in Tunisia is harmful. UNHCR should not be framing their work this way, but this is what they think will get them funds, European funds' she says. Clearly, UNHCR's attempt to define the field was not well received by IOM.

Contestation had, in fact, taken place over UNHCR's framing in the Dashboard. As we recall, UNHCR's narrative text in the Dashboard specified that 'Tunisia is primarily a *transit country for most migrants*, refugees, and asylum-seekers' (UNHCR 2020e, italics my own). My IOM interlocutor took exception to UNHCR portraying Tunisia as a transit country for *migrants*.⁴⁵ In reference to

⁴⁵ This position is perhaps surprising considering that IOM is thought to have first 'pushed' the concept of 'transit migration' on the broader policy agenda in the first place (Düvell 2010). Yet, at the ground level, and in the Tunisian context, IOM was working in the advantageous position of responding to migration from the 'country of origin', as well as to this supposed transit migration, the latter of which formed only a portion of its work.

the Dashboard, she said 'Who are these migrants they are talking about? They profile only a tiny proportion of people and only very specific groups in the south and still they talk about the intentions of 'migrants' as if they are all one group. This is the problem with the context of mixed migration'.

More than being a contestation over the existence of mixed migration, this was one of whether mixed migration could be seized upon to frame the broader migratory landscape and with that, to define the main 'issue' to which the actors were responding in the field. As Hamache reminds us, the issue around which the field is formed is ultimately the product of power relations and 'the struggle between agents possessing different capitals' (Hamadache 2015: 101; Mangez and Liénard 2015). For IOM, Tunisia could only be understood as a country of *origin* for (potential) Tunisian migrants and, to a lesser extent, as a destination country for migrants, most of whom did not actually attempt onward movement to Europe. Indeed, IOM's bread and butter in Tunisia was its work with Tunisian returnees as well as Tunisian communities considered 'at risk' of migrating to Europe. This allowed it to tap into European funds explicitly dedicated to migration management (European Commission 2019b). The small number of third-country national migrants, forming '*its*' part of mixed migration, was hardly worth depicting as a *field-defining* issue. In relation to the Dashboard, and getting animated about the topic, the IOM protection officer eventually said, 'I should write to UNHCR to tell them to remove the mention of "migrants" from their external publications'.

The Dashboard, while peripheral to the actual work carried out by either agency, again became central to understanding the struggle over the definition and framing of the field as well as the

dynamic and open-ended nature of that struggle. A few weeks later, I returned to UNHCR Tunisia's *Global Focus* page and found that the monthly Dashboard had changed. While the schematisations of the statistics and general framing remained the same, the narrative text had shifted. The sentence that my IOM interlocutor had taken exception to was entirely removed. Gone was the reference to Tunisia being a transit country for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers (UNHCR 2020f). I, of course, thought back to my interaction with the IOM official and wondered whether this was the cause of the change in narrative. Eventually, I was able to discuss this with a UNHCR interlocutor working on communications for UNHCR Tunisia who confirmed that she 'had to' remove this passage at IOM's request. IOM did not want 'their' migrants represented within this framing. This interaction over a simple document, however mundane, illustrated the subtle, at times microscopic, struggles taking place over the framing of the field, with important implications, as we will see, on actors' ability to access capital within it.

Indeed, the contestation over the framing suggested there was something at stake in the naming and making of the mixed migration field. One way to understand this is to look at how UNHCR made visible its role in the mixed migration context. In 2019, in describing its population trends, UNHCR stated that 'an estimated 65% of people profiled within mixed movements expressed an intention to seek asylum and were referred to UNHCR, a 25% increase from 2018' (2020a). This reflected the statistics that were presented in the 'referral' section of the Dashboard, which provided a breakdown of the number of individuals referred to IOM versus UNHCR as a result of the profiling exercise. It is hard to surmise anything from this purported increase in asylum seekers. It could be attributed to an actual increase in the demographics of those coming across or, quite

likely, could have been caused by a shift in the profiling 'methodology'. For example, the fact UNHCR, for the most part, stopped profiling certain groups such as Ivorians.

Questions of methodology aside, this figure quite consistently displayed a significantly higher number of individuals being referred to UNHCR rather than IOM, thereby falling under the mandate of the former. By way of indication, at the time of writing, the latest Dashboard for September 2020 indicated that only twenty-three per cent of individuals were 'referred' to IOM. Considering that the Dashboard gave the impression of representing the data for land, air, and sea arrivals, this percentage allocated a minor role to IOM. It remained, however, that the 'humanitarian component', as some interlocutors put it in relation to mixed migration, represented only a small proportion of IOM's work in Tunisia. The more significant part of IOM's work in the country related to Tunisians themselves.⁴⁶ This is not to say that IOM did not embrace the mixed migration framing elsewhere, for it had, and has benefited from this framing significantly, as will be seen in relation to Libya, but simply that it did not have to do so in Tunisia.

UNHCR's mixed migration framing, however, appeared to reinforce the visibility of UNHCR as a central partner in managing mixed migration given the proportion of people on the move who ultimately fell under the agency's care. This framing should not necessarily be understood as deliberately constructed against IOM's – and if anything, the changes to the Dashboard indicated

⁴⁶ It bears recalling, as set out in Chapter 1, that Tunisia is primarily considered a sending country of Tunisians to Europe. Accordingly, various IOM programmes also target Tunisians. For example, with funding from the EU Emergency Trust Fund for North Africa, IOM Tunisia implements a EUR 2.5-million-project to enable the assisted voluntary return of stranded migrants and migrants in transit in North Africa' and facilitate the return and reintegration of Tunisian 'stranded migrants' abroad. This is being implemented in the context of a larger joint EU-IOM Initiative, spanning 26 countries along African migration 'routes', in order to enable the return of migrants to their countries of origin (IOM 2021).

a certain flexibility in accommodating IOM, but that UNHCR's attempt to construct a framing to best serve its position-taking strategy conflicted with that of IOM in Tunisia. Nonetheless, in this context, and as will be seen in the following section, UNHCR's construction of the mixed migration framing was the medium through which it attempted to subvert the definition of the field and position itself, in relation to the capital at stake, as a key player within it.

Sharing the migration pie

More than forming disparate 'facts', this framing of mixed migration and its discursive associations with irregularity and onward movement contributed to shaping the contours of the field and the understanding of what was a stake within it. Looking at Tunisia and Libya, I now turn to these 'field effects' to consider the structuring power of the mixed migration field and its framing. I consider, in turn, the strategic nature of UNHCR's position-taking in Tunisia and UNHCR and IOM's complicity in reproducing the framing in Libya. I end the chapter with a discussion on the shifting boundaries of the field.

Projecting the mixed migration framing

To begin unravelling the strategic position-taking involved in projecting the mixed migration framing, I found it useful to come back to the 'microscopic', to the now familiar 'Mixed Movement Dashboard', and to reflect on the process behind the mixed migration framing as well as the interactions to which it had given rise. The Dashboard, and the profiling exercise from which it was produced, however, was rarely discussed among my UNHCR interlocutors. The profiling procedure, in fact, seemed to be of limited value to the operation. While it was meant to help

meet the operational goal of distinguishing between migrants and refugees, allowing each to be channelled through the appropriate procedure, officers involved in the process expressed their frustration about the system in place.

A UNHCR interlocutor in Zarzis who oversaw the profiling and registration process described how impractical and cumbersome the process was; that the questionnaire did not focus on international protection needs, but instead emphasised the route taken and the person's future intentions of onward movement. Questioning the usefulness of the form, he asked, 'Why is this relevant to them asking for international protection?' Then he added, 'We don't even use any of this information for the subsequent steps of registration, it is all for statistics'. The frustration about the profiling procedure was finally expressed during a UNHCR protection staff meeting. As this interlocutor later described it:

During the meeting we explained that the profiling form is very long and most of the data collected not useful for us operationally. We asked whether it would be possible to change the procedure to a shorter and more useful form. They immediately said no. They said that we need to continue the profiling for donors. Donors have apparently demanded this, and so we should not change the process.

My interlocutor's suggestion went nowhere. The profiling conversation ended on that note and the procedure remained firmly in place. It had me reflecting, however, on *for whom* this issue-framing of mixed migration was put in place. What eventually became clear was that the mixed migration framing was strategically *projected* and framed to donors often by drawing on the EU's own securitised discourse of trans Mediterranean migration. This allowed UNHCR to position itself as an attractive partner in the management of mixed migration and to access funds that would

otherwise not be available to the agency (Scheel and Ratfish 2013; Hammerstad 2011). An interaction around another UNHCR document guided me in this reflection.

In March 2020, as Tunisia closed its borders in response to the coronavirus pandemic and went into a country-wide lockdown, refugees, many of whom had previously found employment in the informal sector, were suddenly at greater risk of eviction and destitution. To mitigate this, UNHCR Tunisia launched a funding appeal to increase its cash assistance for individuals who had been adversely affected by the pandemic. Given the earmarked nature of most funding allocated to UNHCR, especially in the Mediterranean region, this was a necessary exercise to liberate funds from donors.

The document, which was eventually made public in May 2020, was for the most part exactly what you would expect: it emphasised the needs of refugees in Tunisia, their socio-economic vulnerabilities, and the risks of continued deterioration in their economic condition. Scroll down, however, and you find a page titled 'Consequences of Underfunding'. Here, the consequences were not exclusively for refugees, but the potential consequences of underfunding *to Europe*:

In Tunisia, where humanitarian assistance provides a stabilizing factor for many vulnerable refugees, a reduction in support may lead to secondary movement and risks across the Mediterranean Sea [...] This is particularly relevant in the case of Tunisia as a transit country and smuggling hub for refugees who hope seeking asylum further afield in Europe and elsewhere (UNHCR 2020c).

I brought up the document over lunch with a UNHCR Tunisia official who played an integral role in preparing the appeal. He immediately laughed, seemingly knowing where I wanted to take the conversation. 'Are you thinking about the "consequences of underfunding" section? Well, we need

to scare them a bit', he said, still laughing. He continued, 'We know that the links to secondary movement are tenuous at best, but we have to play this card with our donors'. While this interaction did not strictly relate to the mixed migration narrative, it was clearly interlinked insofar as it played into the same notion of transit and continued movement from which was constructed the mixed migration framing. By seizing upon the risk of onward movement to Europe, however tenuous, UNHCR was projecting itself as the necessary stabilising force or, in other words, the 'treatment recommendation' to the problem of onward movement it framed (Entman 1993: on the 'nexus' between aid and migration, de Haas 2007).⁴⁷

The notion of *projecting* a certain reality to donors through the mixed migration framing became a central theme in my interviews. There seemed to be an awareness of the political and strategic nature of the mixed migration framing and the symbolic power of evoking the risk of trans Mediterranean migration among my UNHCR interlocutors. As one UNHCR interlocutor put it in relation to European funding, and the EUTF in particular:

The EUTF is very clearly about containment, they are not interested in international protection, they are interested in stopping people from going to Europe. In some ways, we have to also 'sell' containment in such a way that, instead of advocating for a change in their views or policies, we have to frame our activities and programmes to fit within their framework and context [...] They hope to put money into organisations to stop people from moving. Whether they achieve anything or not in this department is questionable, but we let them think they can in order to receive the funding and carry out our activities.

⁴⁷ Examples such as this one abound upon closer inspection of UNHCR documents. For instance, UNHCR's 'Risk Mitigation Strategy for the Central Mediterranean Route', which forms part of its broader funding appeal, makes central the notion of risk, yet refrains from clearly defining it. Risk remains diffuse throughout, such that it emphasises the agency's role in mitigating potential harm for refugees, underlying which is also the logic of reducing the risk of onward movement (UNHCR 2019).

Compared with others in the region, the Tunisia operation was tiny with only 5,406 individuals registered with UNHCR as of September 2020 (UNHCR 2020d). If it couldn't 'sell' the operation to donors on the basis of its number of registered refugees, then it would have to do so on the basis of risk: risk of a greater influx from Libya into Tunisia and risk of onward movement from Tunisia to Europe. This was the crux of the mixed migration framing in Tunisia. The overlap between persons of concern to UNHCR and those 'of concern' to European donors was precisely those individuals who were considered at 'risk' of onward movement to Europe. The mixed migration framing, then, tied in all of these elements by making visible the irregularity and mobility of a certain part of UNHCR's persons of concern, the 'people on the move', with the expectation that this might allow UNHCR, despite the limited nature of its operation in Tunisia, to tap into funding dedicated to the protection/management of people in the move. In other words, the mixed migration framing represented an attempt – albeit a contested one – of UNHCR positioning itself in relation to the political and economic capital of the field. In Chapters 4, 5 and 6 we will see the material consequences of this on who was considered as an object of protection and how they were protected.

In that sense, UNHCR's framing of the problem mirrored the broader, securitised framing that came to define the EU's approach to trans Mediterranean migration (Huysmans 2006; on the EUTF and securitisation: Barana 2017). State actors, especially in the EU 'neighbourhood' and countries positioned along 'migratory routes', have long leveraged this asset (Webb 2020; Tittel-Mosser 2018). Most famously, perhaps, and of relevance to this context, is Qaddafi who, at varying times and in order to extract political and financial concessions, visibilised and projected the threat of

migrants in Libya through a 'deceptive' discourse of transit migration (Paoletti 2010; similarly on Niger's transit country framing: Frowd 2020). Here, the mixed migration framing formed part of UNHCR's own 'dangerized' migration diplomacy, in which it 'commodified' individuals making up mixed migration in an attempt to position itself to European donors for greater support (Andersson 2019: 19; Adamson and Tsourapas 2019). Crucially, this was not a '*refugee* commodification', but one of 'people on the move' and the instrumentalisation of the risk they embodied (Freier et al 2021: 2748). Part of this entailed amplifying the risk itself by constructing and deploying an issue-framing of mixed migration.

That UNHCR was somehow 'selling' to donors its role in containing mixed migration to fund its protection activities meant that it had to frame the presence of 'people on the move' in Tunisia as something that needed to be contained in the first place. Over time, I found that many of my UNHCR interlocutors did not necessarily buy into this narrative but felt that the agency *had to* strategically position itself in this way in order to access funding and fulfil its mandate – a delicate balancing act between the need to access political and economic capital with that of maintaining its symbolic capital, traditionally associated with UNHCR doing protection *right*, as seen in Chapter 1. This reflects Hammerstad's (2011: 240) understanding of the securitised turn in UNHCR's discourse in the post-Cold War decades. She notes the unlikelihood of UNHCR incorporating these donor-centric changes, 'unless it thought it could harness this discourse to further the cause of protecting refugees'. The ways in which the material consequences of the mixed migration framing came to shift the very logic and practices of protection will be explored in later chapters. Moving in that direction, the next and final sections begin to unravel the structuring effects of this mixed migration framing.

Structuring the field in Libya

During the course of my fieldwork, and as my interest in the mixed migration framing evolved, I gradually turned my attention to the Libya operation. It was difficult not to. Against the landscape of the Central Mediterranean route, the situation in Libya had secured unparalleled visibility. Not only did the context in Libya dominate the news and political debates, but it was also at the forefront of UNHCR's Central Mediterranean documentation and discourse.⁴⁸ With Tunis itself being a hub for managing the humanitarian response to the situation in neighbouring Libya, the affluent northern suburbs of Tunis were teeming with UN officials 'working on' Libya; they were impossible to miss. This was an opportunity to further explore the operational incentives involved in the framing of mixed migration.

In contrast to the operational framing in Tunisia, I found that, in Libya, both UNHCR and IOM mobilised around the consolidation of this mixed migration framing. Whereas in Tunisia, UNHCR seized upon the mixed migration framing to subvert the existing field definition and shift the distribution of capital in its favour, in Libya, the mixed migration framing was not contested. Rather, it was actively deployed, leading to a distinct 'vision and division' of the field, and to the 'consolidation of a distinctive set of 'institutions'' that governed this division (Buchholz 2016: 38). This is not to say that there was no competition between the two in Libya, for, on the contrary, the struggle for capital continued to define their existence within the field. At this level, however,

⁴⁸ The predominance of Libya in UNHCR documents can be noted, inter alia, in the agency's funding appeals for the Central Mediterranean route. It is also reflected in the operation's budget requirements. The 2018 Supplementary Appeal, for example, sets Libya as the costliest operation of the 19 countries covered by the Appeal at over USD 61 million, representing 84 per cent of the overall budget requirements for the Central Mediterranean route's Middle East and North Africa budget requirements (UNHCR 2018b).

both actors shared a common interest in the reproduction of the field and their ordered position within it, as will be seen (Bourdieu 1993b: 73).

IOM's investment in the mixed migration framing in Libya was clear. Over coffee in a little café overlooking the Mediterranean Sea in one of Tunis' upscale suburbs, I discussed the mixed migration framing with an IOM Libya interlocutor. The framing, from his perspective, was 'a game changer' for IOM. As a senior official, he had been involved in the Libya operation for many years, during which, against the backdrop of the mixed migration framing, he had witnessed the IOM operation balloon into the biggest 'humanitarian' actor in Libya. Seizing upon the framing of mixed migration allowed the organisation to grow exponentially, as he saw it, not only by positioning itself to donors, but by broadening IOM's operational scope in the country. This expansion pointed, very clearly, to the real effect involved in projecting the mixed migration framing in terms of access to capital, whether economic, political, or symbolic.

Indeed, at the time of my fieldwork, both UNHCR and IOM were actively engaged in the deployment of this framing in Libya. The agencies were beneficiaries of substantial support from the EUTF under its umbrella programme of 'Managing mixed migration flows in Libya through expanding protection space', the name alone evocative of the intertwinement of migration management and protection in this context (European Commission 2017).⁴⁹ Falling under the 'protection pillar' of the EUTF, this programme bankrolled the protection work of UNHCR and IOM directed towards refugees *and migrants* in Libya. This, in practice, hinged on each agency claiming

⁴⁹ The full name of the programme is 'Managing mixed migration flows in Libya' through expanding protection space and supporting local socio-economic development'.

responsibility over 'their' respective people on the move and working together in 'unprecedented cooperation' to fulfil their mandates (Koser 2014: 279). How they did so, and the 'practices of unmixing' to which this division of labour gave rise, will be examined in the next chapter.

For IOM, the involvement in 'mixed migration' meant an unparalleled expansion into the sphere of 'migrant protection', the turning point of which was the framing of migrants within mixed migration — not just refugees — as subjects worthy of protection, as discussed in the previous chapter (Bradley 2020).⁵⁰ As one senior IOM official explained, the 2013 Lampedusa shipwreck brought 'mixed migration' front and centre, and made clear the need for IOM to protect migrants:

What happened in 2013 with the Lampedusa shipwreck was that all of a sudden Libya was again at the forefront and European states were again interested in the context. Suddenly in 2013 came the realisation that migrants were vulnerable as well. Before we were always talking about refugee protection, but with Lampedusa and the situation on the ground in Libya, it was clear that migrants were vulnerable also and they too needed protection, so we began talking about mixed migration. This completely changed the way of working for IOM. Back then, we had four international staff and we have, since then, become one of the biggest players on the scene.

While there is much to unpack from this perspective (notions of vulnerability and protection will be explored in later chapters), it is worth bearing in mind that here too the mixed migration discourse focused on onward movement to Europe. Furthermore, it appeared that by leveraging this form of framing, centred on risk and vulnerability, IOM was able to shift its own positioning and expand its operations in Libya. As a result, IOM was able to assume a key role in the

⁵⁰ While IOM may have historically carried out protection programming with certain groups of migrants, that is, victims of trafficking, this framing appears to have allowed it to broaden its scope to the more diffuse category of 'vulnerable migrants'.

'protection' of migrants, despite not having a specific protection mandate and despite its historically service-oriented role (Bradley 2020; Brachet 2016; Geiger and Pécoud 2020). The nature of this protection will be explored in later chapters.

Operationally speaking, as was often described, framing an operational context as that of mixed migration was about mandate and resources. Naming a particular situation mixed migration 'triggered' institutional mandates and responsibilities, drew resources, and allowed certain players to act within a particular response (See for example, IOM and UNHCR 2019). It was about performing a 'division of labour' between UNHCR and IOM, and involved the creation of structures and institutions that would bring this division to life (Van Dessel 2019: 452). Moreover, it meant sharing resources – the economic capital of the field, in particular EU funding, and the field-specific capital of refugee and migrants – between the actors involved. As the same senior IOM official put it, 'The migration pie is big enough for all of us [UNHCR and IOM] in Libya, but mixed migration is about whether or how it will be shared more than anything else'.

At the time of my interviews, many of my IOM interlocutors viewed their agency as having the 'bigger share' of the pie due to what was understood as a higher proportion of migrants versus refugees in Libya. Because of that it was able to draw more funding to respond to them. This, of course, raised questions over the refugee/migration dichotomy and the schematisation that formed the basis of the mixed migration discourse, which will be considered in the next chapter. It also raised questions about each actor's perceived role in Libya and whether one agency's position could really be seen as parallel to the other's. It remained, however, that the particular framing of the context as that of mixed migration was uncontested by the main protagonists, both

of whom who actively participated in its production. If there was 'mixed migration' in Libya, then in theory there was a basis for both UNHCR and IOM to position themselves as worthy actors in responding to that mixed migration and, from there, space for each to work in their respective spheres.

UNHCR, too, substantially benefitted from this framing. Scheel and Ratfish (2013), in the context of Morocco, first noted how UNHCR's mixed migration discourse enabled the agency to expand its activities within the realm of migration management. This was certainly the case in Libya, where UNHCR was involved in capacity building activities with the Libyan Coast guard, including joint trainings conducted with IOM, and the provision of equipment, the details of which are found in UNHCR's appeal for an 'expanded response in Libya' (UNHCR 2017c). Yet, the framing also allowed it to expand its protection activities, in particular its highly publicised evacuation scheme (also EUTF funded) in which asylum seekers and refugees were evacuated to Niger or Rwanda while awaiting 'durable solutions'. This, too, as will be explored in the final chapter, reveals the fuzzy line between protection and migration management as well as the increasingly blurred roles of UNHCR and IOM. It, nonetheless, allowed UNHCR to continue expanding the scope of its activities and remain a central actor on the scene in Libya.

The mixed migration framing, thus, allowed each of the agencies to operate, even expand, within their own 'spheres' or territories, UNHCR over that of its 'persons of concern' and IOM over migrants.⁵¹ A slightly disillusioned interlocutor, who had recently left the Libya operation after

⁵¹ For related accounts of institutional expansion tied to the EUTF and mixed migration in Niger: Jegen 2019; Boyer 2019

several years of coordinating its protection response for UNHCR, put it this way: 'Talking about mixed migration is more about defining the role of each organisation; It allows to have a coordinating mechanism and so to say: Okay, these ones are mine and those ones are yours; it allows them to establish their territory, so to speak'. Central to the vision and division of the mixed migration field was thus the carving out of the field-specific capital of refugees and migrants over which UNHCR and IOM would take responsibility.

In Libya, with UNHCR and IOM actively striving to produce and reproduce the mixed migration field, the field was structured around specific institutions, which at once confirmed their dominance within the field and enabled them to uphold it, from which its structures and principles were 'objectified and perpetuated' (Buchholz 2016: 38). Indeed, as seen in the previous chapter, the two agencies led the main coordination platforms on migration. By drawing on the mixed migration framing, both IOM and UNHCR were able to take centre stage in managing the response, converting the mixed migration field into a structured and coordinated social space. Although these actors have traditionally played a central role in many operational responses, the framing of mixed migration, in line with donor interests, appears to have allowed the two agencies to position themselves as the leads in its management and to implement field structures that, at once, established, depended, and expanded the increasingly parallel role and activities of the two agencies. The implications of this in terms of the *practices* of protection will be explored in later chapters.

The last two sections brought to light the ways in which the issue-framing of mixed migration was strategically deployed at varying times by UNHCR and IOM in order to favourably position

themselves in relation to the political and economic capital of the field, particularly in relation to that made accessible by European donor states to manage migration. In Tunisia, it was deployed by UNHCR in an attempt to re-distribute and gain access to the economic and political capital in the field. In Libya, the framing was seized upon and reproduced by both actors, consolidating field-specific structures and institutions, which had the effect of maintaining their dominance within the field. In both instances the production of this framing was accompanied by real field effects, particularly on the boundaries of the field and the shifting value attributed to the capital within it, to which I now turn.

Shifting boundaries and symbolic capital

My interlocutors viewed the construction of the mixed migration framing as a key strategy that allowed them to access capital from the heteronomous economic/political pole of donors. This, it was hoped, would enable them to secure funding, funding that would help them carry out their protection activities and, ultimately, respond to the needs of those under their responsibility. What was more subtle, however, was that through this framing, and in their deliberate and strategic attempt to pull additional economic/political capital into the field to position themselves, UNHCR and IOM contributed to loosening and redrawing the boundaries of the field. In the process they drew in the donors to which they were projecting themselves and shifted outward the power to define the symbolic capital of the field and the 'exchange value' of other species of capital. In other words, in attempting to favourably position themselves in relation to the economic/political capital of the heteronomous pole, UNHCR and IOM drew the heteronomous pole further into the

field, shifting the power to redefine the principles of the field and what was valued as legitimate action within it toward donors.

The agencies, in pursuing their protection work, had to show that this protection would respond to the needs of donors, too. As it turns out, this protection was central to donors' engagement along the Central Mediterranean route, with EU-funded activities falling under the label of 'protection' directly targeting refugees and migrants from the southern shores of the Mediterranean to southern Sahel and East Africa. In distinct contrast to how migrants were framed and received *in Europe*, in North Africa and further south, migrants were theoretically to be cared for and protected along with refugees, the implications of which are considered throughout this thesis. What is important to note here, is that funding dedicated to the 'protection' of refugees-and-migrants formed a significant portion of European funding in the region. This funding was disbursed on the basis of protection *projects*, with UNHCR and IOM explicitly understood as implementing partners of these projects.

In Tunisia, donors were closely involved in the situation in the south of country. Back in the Tunisian capital, and upon return from my fieldwork in the south, I met with the Migration Delegate of one of the main European donor embassies in the country. Sitting pool-side in the lush garden of the embassy, we discussed the Migration Delegate's direct oversight over the protection of refugees and migrants in both Tunisia and Libya. I was surprised by his detailed knowledge, not only of the migratory context, but of the very specific and ground-level procedures of IOM, UNHCR, and their implementing partners, and his direct oversight over their work. His role with the embassy involved close cooperation with UNHCR and IOM on elaborating

project proposals, conducting monitoring visits to their relevant sites, and monitoring the progress of their protection activities on the ground. His involvement extended as far as personally counselling refugees and migrants on their 'unrealistic expectations' of going to Europe, as he put it.

The representatives of donor states, stationed at embassies and the EU delegation in Tunis, played an integral role in the design and implementation of protection on the ground. The same Migration Delegate, for instance, explained his approach to working with UNHCR and IOM:

We fund UNHCR, IOM and their partner organisations and we conduct visits to monitor project implementation on the ground. In general, we fund about 50%/50% to UNHCR and IOM, or maybe a bit more to IOM since there are more migrants under their projects than refugees for UNHCR. We just signed on for a new funding period with UNHCR here. The main issue that will be covered will continue to be reception centres in the south. What we do is we ask them to come to us with a project proposal and then we work on it from there.

The conception of projectised protection extended to European funding priorities in Libya, in particular under the large-scale funding programme of the EUTF. Over 50 per cent of the EUTF North Africa funding was directed towards 'protection programming'. EUTF reporting documents boldly report the proportion of protection-focused projects funded by the EUTF, reportedly totalling EUR 237.3 million for North Africa. IOM and UNHCR were the main implementers of this protection programming in Libya (European Commission 2020a).

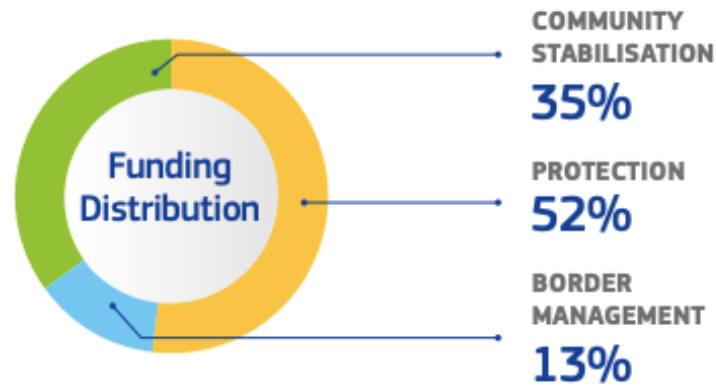


Figure 4: EUTF NOA funding distribution (European Commission 2020a)

In the context of the EUTF, as Spijkerboer (2022) has pointed out, potential implementing partners, including IOM and UNHCR, presented their project proposals directly to the relevant EU delegations, where the initial selection of projects was conducted. Here, too, funding was disbursed based on specific and targeted projects, often merging protection activities for refugees and migrants within a single programme. Under the watchful gaze of their donors, UNHCR and IOM were thus both engaged in implementing ‘protection’ on behalf of the EU.

The two agencies also treated donors as ‘partners’ in the design and implementation of protection and assistance to refugees and migrants. As one UNHCR interlocutor explained: ‘We are looking to treat donors as partners in “designing” how the money should be spent. What that means is that we have to look for an overlap in our interest and we need to show them why it is in their interest to fund us over another agency, for example IOM’. This meant that the protection of refugees and migrants had to be framed as a means to an end, rather than the end itself. This, I argue, shifted the symbolic capital associated with carrying out protection and redefined the benchmarks through which it was achieved by explicitly embedding it within migration management objectives.

Indeed, as a result of having pulled donors into the field, UNHCR and IOM also had to align their protection results with donors' outcome indicators and situate their work within the containment aims of the funding. Another UNHCR interlocutor, who was closely involved in working with donors explained this bargain to me:

All the money we get is because of the interest of donor countries. Why do you think the Swiss are funding us? It's very clear that it is because they don't want people there. The critics are right about the fact that the EUTF is meant to stop migration. It is directly in the contract between the EU and UNHCR that stopping secondary movement is the underlying purpose of the funding. The same thing applies for other contracts we have with individual state donors, for example the Italians. The EUTF is giving to IOM and UNHCR to stop people from going there, but still, from our side, the money will be wisely used so there is no harm in using what the EU is prepared to give us for assistance.

The two agencies thus gained political and economic capital by presenting themselves as capable of ordering and stemming migration through their protection work. At the same time, however, the valuation and benchmarks against which their protection work was measured also shifted. Through the mixed migration framing, the agencies simultaneously gained political and economic capital, while paradoxically, losing relative autonomy. While, throughout my fieldwork, I found that my interlocutors genuinely viewed themselves as capable of balancing donor interest while 'doing' protection, I also found that, through the structural forces of the field, the understanding and practices associated with that protection also shifted. This will be explored in the subsequent chapters.

For IOM, this is perhaps nothing new. After all, as seen in the previous chapter, state-oriented projectisation and migration management rationalities have long defined its work. The mixed migration field, then, and the protection 'needs' to which it gave rise, was but another area in

which to expand these rationalities. What was interesting here, however, was to think through the ways in which the co-mingling of IOM and UNHCR within a single field, and the struggle for positioning and merged capital that emerged from their existence within this space, contributed to shaping new logics and practices of protection internal to the field. The remaining chapters of this thesis are dedicated to these logics and practices.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I moved to the mixed migration field at the operational level, as it emerged in Tunisia and Libya. I argued that central to understanding the boundaries and structures of the field was the issue-framing of mixed migration, around which the field was locally constructed and structured. With the field and its boundaries in a constant state of flux, the actors within it were continuously and dynamically struggling to frame the issues at stake and position themselves in relation to the capital of the field.

Crucial to understanding the structuring power of the mixed migration framing was unpacking the issue-framing itself. Closer attention to the discursive framing of the mixed migration 'issue' allowed me to unravel what was made salient and what was kept hidden within this framing. Through this, the mixed migration framing's association with irregularity and onward movement, in which UNHCR and IOM's 'people on the move' were portrayed as at risk of onward movement to Europe, was brought into clear view. I argued that this framing, in the case of Tunisia, was projected despite the very limited presence of mixed migration and the presence of other groups, who were numerically more important and who did not fit the onward movement/irregularity narrative.

As was shown, UNHCR and, at varying times, IOM projected the framing as a form of strategic position-taking within the field. This allowed them to project themselves towards donors, part of the political/heteronomous pole of the field, to access greater economic capital within the field. For UNHCR Tunisia, this was a strategic attempt to subvert the existing framing and carve out a greater position for itself within the broader funding allocated to migration management in the country. In neighbouring Libya, in contrast, both UNHCR and IOM were complicit in producing and reproducing the framing, from which had emerged institutions and structures that contributed to maintaining their position within the field.

With this framing, UNHCR and IOM were able to secure greater economic/political capital linked to the funding of EU donor states. At the same time, and paradoxically, this contributed to materially altering the structures of the field by drawing donors further into its boundaries, leading to a decline in relative autonomy of UNHCR and IOM and a redefinition of the symbolic capital. Indeed, through a new projectised form of protection, donors were playing a leading role in the design, implementation, and monitoring of the protection projects implemented by UNHCR and IOM. With that, the ability to define the symbolic capital of the field shifted outwards, inextricably imbedding the protection of refugees and migrants within the EU funding's migration management objectives.

CHAPTER 4 – REFUGEES, MIGRANTS, OTHERS

The carving out of refugees and migrants, as I argued in the first chapter, formed the basis of the field, the foundation from which UNHCR and IOM entered the social space and responded relationally to the presence of these groups on the ground. It is in that sense that refugees-and-migrants, and each agency's ability to carve out responsibility over them, represented the specific capital at stake in the field. An assumption might naturally follow that the two agencies would seek to maximise the accumulation of refugees-and-migrants, with each agency attempting to register or take responsibility for a greater number of refugees or migrants. Yet, as I will show, when placed in relation to the other forms of capital at stake in the field, a more nuanced picture of this struggle and who was made into an object of protection will come to light.

Thus, while refugees-and-migrants formed the foundation of the field and the capital specific to it, I argue that equal worth was not attached to all of them. For the field-specific capital was not equally convertible into other 'species' of capital, resulting in a hierarchy of value and a fragmentation among refugees-and-migrants based on their different 'rates of exchange' (Emirbayer and Johnson 2008). In the mixed migration field, worth was attributed based on perceived risk of onward movement, with 'people on the move' considered the worthiest of institutional attention and the specific forms of protection to which the field gave rise. In this chapter, I draw out this hierarchisation of worth by paying close attention to the institutional practices of 'unmixing' born out of the mixed migration field.

I expose this fragmentation by questioning the forms of visibility and invisibility that took shape within the mixed migration field. I examine, firstly, the practices that 'sorted' people on the move

and assigned them to either UNHCR and IOM, and, secondly, the practices that consolidated a hierarchy of institutional worth among those categorised as 'of concern' to UNHCR, but not necessarily 'on the move'. I argue that in the field of mixed migration actors were not pursuing an infinite accumulation of refugees-and-migrants. Rather, the field-specific capital of refugees-and-migrants conflicted with the need for other forms of capital, the struggle resulting in a new and fragmented form of institutional worth.

Making field-specific capital

Refugees-and-migrants represented the form of capital specific to the field. As seen in Chapter 1, it is through the accumulation of a sufficient amount of this capital that UNHCR and IOM were able to 'wield a power, or influence, and thus to exist' within the field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 98). This has two implications on how we understand this type of capital. Firstly, refugees-and-migrants represented an 'objectified' form of capital: they were 'materially represented' and physically existed within the field (Moore 2014: 102). They did not exist in the world in this pre-categorised form, however, but were 'made' into either refugees or migrants by UNHCR and IOM through their processes of categorisation. In their categorised form, they were thus the 'product' of each agency's labour. In that sense, they also represented an *embodied* form of capital. For it was only by drawing on their legitimacy and perceived authority, which represented the culmination of their institutional trajectories and positionings, that UNHCR and IOM could carve out these groups. Once categorised, 'refugees' and 'migrants' should thus be understood as the 'realisation of specific forms of power'. They represented each agency's *embodied ability* to make individuals into refugees/migrants, or conversely, *not* to (Moore 2014: 102).

It is precisely this form of embodied capital that allowed UNHCR and IOM to naturalise the lines drawn between refugees and migrants. UNHCR's statistical representations of the number of refugees under its responsibility tell us little, therefore, of the messier reality of making or not making individuals into objects of protection over time and space. For that reason, as stated earlier, in this chapter I focus on who has been 'render(ed) invisible and unspeakable' and how, by paying close attention to the processes of categorisation and 'unmixing' between UNHCR and IOM. I then focus on the hierarchisation among UNHCR's people of concern by considering how these were shaped by the broader struggle for capital in the field. I will examine and situate these practices against the two contrasting framings of the individuals perceived as 'on the move', on the one hand, and those individuals perceived as 'outside' the mixed migration framing, on the other.

Sharing the people on the move

Before delving into the ground-level practices of unmixing, it is relevant to recall a conversation I had early on in my fieldwork with one of my UNHCR interlocutors, a longstanding Libya protection official, about the categorisation of 'refugee' and 'migrant' in the mixed migration context. He presciently warned, 'Mixed migration is more a question of institutional mandate, than of protection of anyone. What you have now is that individuals are being pre-categorised in advance as being either migrant or refugee, and as a by-product of that falling under the protection of either IOM or UNHCR.' This pre-categorisation eventually came into focus against the backdrop of both Libya and Tunisia, such that it was apparent that the outcome of the practices of unmixing was largely determined by an established pre-categorisation. This contrasts with accounts of 'eligibility' made in other contexts, which highlight the open-ended and indeterminate nature of

eligibility procedures (for example, Cabot 2013). While exceptions were occasionally made around the notion of vulnerability, which I consider in the next chapter, blunt lines were drawn between those perceived as 'migrants' and 'persons of concern to UNHCR', lines which determined who was considered as of concern to UNHCR at all. This will be explored in turn in relation to Libya's 'nationality issue' and Tunisia's filtering mechanisms.

Libya's 'nationality issue'

In late 2019, the internet erupted with images of protests at UNHCR's Gathering and Departure Facility (GDF) in Tripoli, Libya. The GDF centre, which opened in 2018 as a 'transit facility for vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers [...] for whom solutions outside Libya had been identified', had become overcrowded and 'unsustainable', according to UNHCR (UNHCR 2019f; Perrin 2018). While the Centre was originally opened to house refugees pre-identified for evacuation and resettlement, which I will return to in Chapter 6, it became host to several hundred individuals who sought safety and assistance at the Centre, many having fled some of Libya's most notorious detention centres including the Tajoura Detention Centre, where an airstrike a few months earlier had killed at least 53 migrants and refugees. In addition to seeking safety at UNHCR's GDF, many were seeking long-term solutions and making a plea to the international community for evacuation out of Libya. With the centre's 600-person capacity greatly overstretched, reports began circulating of UNHCR cutting food assistance to those arrivals and pressuring them to leave the Centre, making their departure from the GDF a pre-condition to them being registered as 'of concern' to UNHCR.

A few hundred kilometres away, in the safety of Tunis, debates ensued among my UNHCR Libya interlocutors about the right course of action. While UNHCR's method of forcing individuals out remained contentious, most agreed that the GDF had become untenable. One reason for this, according to my interlocutors, was that the GDF was no longer exclusively host to UNHCR persons of concern, but to 'migrants' who had left detention centres and some of Tripoli's most volatile urban areas. 'These are migrants, we cannot do anything for them. The GDF has completely lost its purpose', many of my UNHCR interlocutors echoed, often bemoaning how UNHCR's presence had become a pull factor for migrants seeking a way out of Libya. What was interesting was that many of these individuals were considered 'migrants' before they had even had a chance to ask for registration with UNHCR.

In flyers distributed by UNHCR in the GDF, the agency encouraged individuals to leave the Centre by telling them that 'your individual case can only be assessed outside the GDF' (Creta and Slemrod 2019). Yet, upon leaving the Centre, not all were met with the same ability to register as asylum seekers with UNHCR. In the Libyan mixed migration context, registration with UNHCR was, in effect, open to individuals who had fled pre-determined countries or specific parts of countries that were understood to have generalised violence: 'Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia (Oromo), Sudan (Darfur), Yemen and South Sudan' (UNHCR 2018c; UNHCR 2019j: 10). Individuals from these nine countries were the sole 'refugees' of concern to UNHCR in Libya. They were pre-categorised as 'of concern' while, *de facto*, individuals outside those nine nationalities were categorised as migrants.

While UNHCR's official version of Libya's 'nationality issue' provided that the Libyan authorities only allowed access to the nine predetermined nationalities, most UNHCR Libya officials close to the issue with whom I engaged informally perceived that it was not in UNHCR's interest to advocate for universal access to registration of asylum seekers with the agency. This will be further explored in the final section of this chapter in relation to the institutional incentives tied to the accumulation of field-specific capital. Instead, officials from the operation liked to officially point out the existence of certain built-in safeguards that allowed the agency to identify and register individuals 'in need' who were not from those nine nationalities. 'Migrants' could fill out what UNHCR called a 'Vulnerability Identification Referral', which, pending the consideration of a ground level UNHCR registration officer, might warrant the person's registration with the agency.

The notion of vulnerability here, too, was central and raised questions of where the *locus* of 'refugeeness' was supposed to lie, as will be considered in the next chapter. Despite the existence of this mechanism, however, official registration numbers for UNHCR Libya indicated that very few individuals outside of the nine nationalities actually succeeded in registering with UNHCR. As of 2020, of the 45,255 registered refugees and asylum seekers in Libya, only 256 individuals were of the 'others' category. They fell outside the nine nationalities, but proved themselves 'vulnerable enough' to register with UNHCR (UNHCR 2020j). The difficulty of reversing the 'migrant category presumption', as one of my NGO interlocutors explained, was practically insurmountable. As she put it: 'They say that there is a channel for people not of the specific nationalities to register, in practice though whoever doesn't fall under one of the nationalities is told to go to IOM. In the years that I have worked here, I still haven't seen someone of those 'non-refugee' nationalities being registered.'

This is what my Libya interlocutors referred to as the 'nationality issue', an issue which had become a central point of contention among protection actors in Libya and caused the mobilisation of a number of NGOs against the bifurcated structure of the UNHCR/IOM mixed migration framework. The refugee/migrant line drawn across nationalities made it practically impossible for persons on the move arising from outside those nine nationalities to ask for international protection. In Libya, the right to register as an asylum seeker with UNHCR was effectively circumscribed by a predefined criterion that narrowed the application of the 'refugee label' to individuals who had fled specific contexts. Of the groups considered 'migrants' and not able to register as asylum seekers were nationals of countries such as Niger, Chad, Nigeria, Egypt, and Mali, among a large number of other nationalities represented in Libya.

Returning to the GDF incident, that many of those individuals were understood as migrants by my UNHCR interlocutors had to do, solely, with their nationality, rather than any sort of assessment of 'refugeeness'. In fact, for many, their nationality alone precluded them from having their 'refugeeness' seen in the first place. The practice of unmixing in this context, therefore, was more of a foreclosed one than an open-ended or indeterminate process. Accordingly, individuals of 'migrant nationalities' were told to go to IOM for 'protection', while individuals of 'refugee nationalities' were considered for registration and became 'of concern' upon approaching UNHCR. From the moment they entered Libya, 'people on the move' were immediately categorised and seen as of concern to UNHCR or, conversely, not and categorised as migrants. While this form of pre-categorisation may have found justification in UNHCR's 'identification mechanism', highlighted in the agency's 10-Point Plan of Action (2018a: 13), it reflected practices taking place elsewhere, such as that of 'pre-illegalisation' observed by Tazzioli (2021) in relation to Europe's

'hotspot approach', where some new arrivals are granted access to asylum procedures, whereas others are illegalised on the spot.⁵²

Not being made 'of concern' to UNHCR did not make those categorised as migrants invisible, however. Rather, as we have established, it is the category of 'people on the move', as a whole, that was made visible through the mixed migration framing. Those pre-categorised as migrants were therefore channelled through a parallel 'protection system', where they fell under the so-called protection of IOM. While this may have granted those categorised as migrants access to certain services and assistance, it also 'entitled' them to IOM Libya's privileged protection tool, Voluntary Humanitarian Return (Brachet 2016). The implication of these parallel, and at times converging, 'protection tracks' will be considered in Chapter 6. What is worth retaining at this point, is that within this mixed migration framing, each person on the move was perceived as falling under one institutional mandate or another and 'managed' accordingly, with the potential of leading to considerably different protection finalities for each.

⁵² The practices put in place by UNHCR fit within the approach, established by its 10-Point Plan of Action on Refugee Protection and Mixed Movements, which advocated for the implementation of 'identification mechanisms' allowing for the identification of those requiring international protection (UNHCR 2011: 126). On the basis of those screening procedures, states were encouraged to 'divide persons into different categories' and refer individuals to the 'procedures that best meet their needs'. In contexts where UNHCR is mandated to identify those individuals through its own registration function, these so-called identification mechanisms have translated into bureaucratic practices of unmixing that allow for boundaries to be maintained between different categories and for certain individuals to be identified and made visible to UNHCR.

Tunisia's filtering mechanisms

On 31 May 2019, the commercial ship *Maridive 601* rescued 75 individuals who were stranded off the coast of Tunisia, mainly from Bangladesh, but also from Egypt, Morocco, and Sudan, who had departed by boat from Libya. *Maridive 601* was stranded for over 20 days before the Tunisian authorities allowed them to disembark at the nearest port of Zarzis. Having finally reached Tunisian shores, these 'people on the move' were taken to a reception centre managed by the Tunisian Red Crescent, IOM's main implementing partner in the management of mixed migration in Tunisia (Infomigrants 2019).

In the days and weeks that followed, all but nine of the Bangladeshis rescued were returned to Bangladesh with the assistance of IOM. While IOM portrayed the return of these individuals as voluntary, those remaining in Tunisia argued that the others had been pressured and threatened into leaving Tunisia by IOM and that they too would have been forced to leave if not for their staunch resistance. A struggle then ensued for these remaining individuals to be able to register their refugee claim with UNHCR. Supported by a local civil society organisation, their struggle was finally brought into the public domain, with the associations advocating for their expedited registration with UNHCR (FTDES 2019). UNHCR had no choice but register the nine remaining individuals as asylum seekers and, with this, they passed under the 'protection' of the agency.

This event can be contrasted with an entirely different scenario that took place almost exactly one year later. In May 2020, a boat with 50 individuals, predominantly Eritrean nationals, was intercepted off the coast of Tunisia and disembarked in Sfax. UNHCR and its implementing partner's team was quickly mobilised and, following their two-week Covid-related quarantine

period, the individuals were immediately profiled with UNHCR. Of the 50 individuals profiled, 47 were considered asylum seekers, registered as such with the agency, and immediately placed in UNHCR managed housing centres in Sfax. All 47 were Eritrean.

In Tunisia's mixed migration context, the line between refugees and migrants was, on the face of it, supposed to be drawn in a more subtle and indeterminate way than in Libya. The IOM-UNHCR joint profiling procedure was meant to identify those 'wishing' to seek asylum and channel them toward the appropriate institution to receive assistance and protection. What these contrasting examples bring to light, however, was that the experiences, timelines, and outcomes of the profiling process differed greatly on the basis of the nationality of persons within 'mixed migration flows'. Individuals being profiled had to, at that stage, not simply express their desire to ask for international protection but also had to prove their 'refugeeness'. Here, nationality formed the main basis on which the line was first drawn between the persons 'of concern' and migrant categories.

The more subtle pre-categorisation taking place in the southern Tunisian context came to light through a series of interviews with registration and profiling staff in the south. I discussed the profiling procedure with a UNHCR interlocutor who oversaw the process in Sfax, a main port of disembarkation in Tunisia. As was common among my UNHCR Tunisia interlocutors, he described the contours of who could be an asylum seeker based on those persons' nationality:

The number of asylum seekers follows the nationalities that we see coming by boat. In May, we had a boat arrival where almost all of them wanted to ask for asylum, they were Eritrean. Then, in June, we had a boat of people with 20 individuals. It was mostly Egyptians and three Yemenis and Eritreans. Only the Yemenis and Eritreans were registered. Ultimately, if most didn't ask to be registered, this is probably because of

the counselling we conduct before the profiling. This is the most important part, where we tell them about the possible outcomes of their case with UNHCR. That's why we are seeing that only some groups are seeking asylum. There are very clear nationalities that become asylum seekers, and these are Eritreans, Sudanese, Somalis, and sometimes Ethiopians.

Through the UNHCR, IOM and Tunisian government's tripartite Memorandum of Understanding on responding to disembarkations, IOM was mandated to respond first to rescues and interceptions at sea. Each organisation sequentially performed their own counselling and profiling. IOM staff first conducted what my interlocutors called a 'profiling light', which was to identify those individuals who could be returned to their countries of origin and 'encourage' them to consider this option. This is where the filtering based on nationality first happened. Individuals of 'migrant nationalities', as was described by some of my interlocutors, were counselled on the improbability of obtaining refugee status and the risks of irregularity in Tunisia. From here, individuals opting to return to their countries of origin were transferred to IOM reception centres while awaiting the procedures to unfold. UNHCR and its implementing partner then entered the scene and conducted a further round of counselling directed toward specific nationalities. With the profiling, individuals of the specific 'refugee nationalities', noted above, were *prima facie* considered asylum seekers. Individuals of 'migrant nationalities', in contrast, were *prima facie* considered migrants unless, at the profiling stage, they managed to prove their vulnerability.

The *prima facie* migrants were 'transferred to IOM', as was explained. Theoretically, at any point, these individuals continued to be able to ask for asylum with UNHCR. However, as the case of the Bangladeshis showed, this was not always so simple. Individuals wishing to do so had to, at this stage, provide 'evidence or arguments as to why they want to claim asylum', as one IOM

interlocutor in Zarzis put it. Here again, the deservingness of the individuals *asking* for international protection was considered before the status determination stage. This hinged on the individuals making themselves visible to UNHCR, either through public visibility as in the case of the *Maridive 601*, or through displays of their vulnerability, as will be explored in the following chapter. If successful, this process could take months and sometimes longer, a stark contrast to the way in which certain groups, for example the Eritreans, were automatically placed under the protection of UNHCR. If unsuccessful, those individuals remained invisible to UNHCR, unable to be registered as of concern.

By briefly considering the process of unmixing refugees and migrants as practiced in Tunisia and Libya, I bring into focus two points. Both echo the somewhat cynical comment made by one of my UNHCR Libya interlocutors, also mentioned in the previous chapter, in relation to the operationalisation of mixed migration. According to my interlocutor, responding to mixed migration had become tantamount to UNHCR and IOM saying to each other, 'These ones are mine and those ones are yours'. While crudely put, it is nonetheless interesting to note, firstly, how groups of individuals were *prima facie* seen operationally as either of concern to UNHCR or to IOM, often before they even attempt to register with UNHCR. The mixed migration framework was thus fundamentally predicated on the unmixing of UNHCR's 'persons of concern' – understood as asylum seekers and refugees – and 'migrants'. The praxis of that unmixing, and the categorical manipulation it involved, however, forces one to wonder whether the 'migrant' and 'refugee' categories were left with any particular meaning, beyond facilitating the division of labour and symbolic differentiation between UNHCR and IOM. This question will be further pursued in the final chapter of this thesis.

Secondly, and by virtue of the first point, individuals perceived as 'on the move' were invariably 'cared for' by one agency or the other. Individuals were 'channelled', 'referred', and 'transferred' to either agency, or sometimes between the two, on the basis of that categorisation. This is tellingly described, in relation to disembarkations by UNHCR, 'While UNHCR takes responsibility for asylum seekers and refugees, IOM engages individuals who expressed an intent to return to their country of origin or remain in Tunisia' (European Commission 2019a: 8). From there, they fell into parallel and sometimes converging 'protection tracks', the implications of which will also be explored in the final chapter.

Hierarchisation outside the mixed migration framing

As we have just seen, the mixed migration framing was not merely discursive: the practices of unmixing, imbedded within the structures of the mixed migration field, determined who was seen as of concern to UNHCR among the 'people on the move'. The previous chapter set out how UNHCR Tunisia projecting the mixed migration narrative involved the agency narrowing its gaze on a relatively small phenomenon that was understood as taking place exclusively in the southern regions of the country, in Sfax and Zarzis. The groups settled in the north of the country were not viewed through the same mixed migration lens and were generally not considered 'at risk' of onward movement. If the mixed migration framing, and its people on the move, represented only a minority of persons of concern to UNHCR in Tunisia, then where did that leave those who did not fit the mixed migration framing? Who was made into an object of concern when stepping out of UNHCR's mixed migration framing?

Much of my fieldwork in Tunis itself focused on the mixed migration perceived as happening elsewhere, in the south of Tunisia and in Libya. This reflected the preoccupations of my interlocutors and the resources directed towards responding to mixed migration, more generally. Yet, at the same time, in northern Tunisia, the UNHCR Tunis office had gradually become overwhelmed by the growing number of individuals requesting appointments to register with the agency. In response, in 2019, UNHCR devolved some of its responsibility and tasked its main implementing partner, the Tunisian Refugee Council (TRC), with a 'pre-registration' function. With the responsibility of supporting would-be-asylum-seekers in filling out their registration form and schedule UNHCR registration appointments where individuals' registration would be confirmed, TRC effectively became the gatekeeper of who, outside the mixed migration framing, could be made 'of concern' to UNHCR.

During the course of my fieldwork, I ended up spending quite a bit of time at TRC, an organisation tucked away in a residential area of downtown Tunis. This is where hopeful asylum-seekers would come to pre-register. 'Hopeful', here, is the right term, considering that would-be-asylum-seekers had to prove themselves merely in order to get a registration date with UNHCR. This is where the first level of 'filtering' was carried out. From inside the prefab caravan, where the pre-registration session took place, a hierarchy of who could be seen as of concern outside of the mixed migration context began to take shape. I will bring the different strata of this hierarchy into focus through an account of a day spent shadowing the TRC's reception officer.

Pre-registration filtering

By 9am, as I walked into the courtyard of TRC, a line of would-be-asylum seekers had already formed. These were the individuals who had been given appointments to come for their 'pre-registration'. This was a nebulous step in the asylum process in Tunis in which individuals were invited to submit their refugee claim by filling the UNHCR registration application, but were not given any form of asylum seeker documentation. At the preregistration stage, they remained outside the view of UNHCR, not yet officially considered as asylum-seekers. They officially fell outside the scope of UNHCR's protection. As on most days, most of the individuals waiting for their preregistration appointment in Tunis were nationals of Cote d'Ivoire who had been given a scheduled appointment to come for the session. Many had already been waiting for up to a year for this appointment and the chance to finally pre-register with TRC.

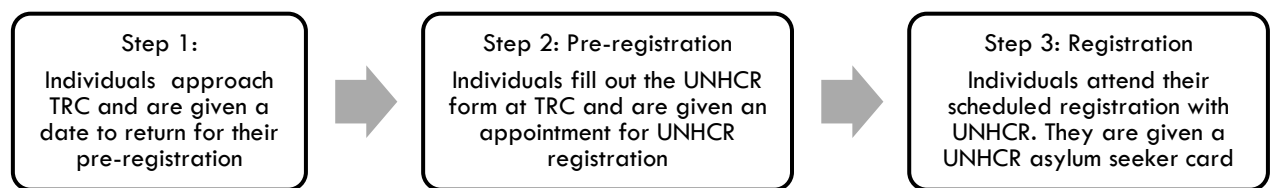


Figure 5: Pre-registration and registration process in northern Tunisia

That day I was shadowing the reception officer in charge of the pre-registration process. Although there were already several people waiting in the courtyard, things started slowly. By 9.30am the reception officer showed me the list of people coming for pre-registration that day. Showing me

the list, and the fact that all were Ivorian, she said that she would allocate them registration interviews with UNHCR for one year later because, as she put it, 'These are non-priority cases'. I followed her to the caravan where these wishful asylum-seekers were sitting and waiting to receive an explanation on filling out the pre-registration form. The reception officer ran through the nine pages of questions with a very brief explanation and then left the caravan again, but not before instructing them that they were not allowed to use their phone or to speak to one another about the answers. Having previously worked in the context of Egypt, where I occasionally supported asylum claimants in filling out the UNHCR form, I was surprised by the brevity of the explanation. The would-be-asylum seekers were given two hours to fill the form. As the reception officer left the caravan, an uncomfortable silence filled the room, which was quickly punctuated by the rustling of pages and, eventually, gave way to chatter as some assisted others in making sense of and filling the form. The woman next to me explained her 'problem' — a land inheritance issue that had resulted in her receiving death threats — to a friend who helped her write out the reasons why she had left her country. In another part of the room, a group of men were huddled together trying to articulate their claim against the political backdrop of Cote d'Ivoire. As I witnessed these individuals figuring out how to frame their experiences, I could not help but think that the framing had already been done for them. These were 'non-priority cases' or as many of the TRC and UNHCR Tunis interlocutors saw it, these were the 'economic migrants'.

About an hour later, into the caravan walked a couple comprised of a Syrian wife and Libyan husband. The reception officer greeted them and, as I followed her back inside the office building, a debate ensued on what to do with the couple. Libyans, after all, were not being registered as

asylum seekers with UNHCR. They decided to put the file in the wife's name and, being Syrian, to pre-register them on the spot. As the reception officer explained, 'We will preregister them because Syrians are priority cases. Syrians don't have to come back for pre-registration, they are seen on the spot and they are quickly referred to UNHCR'. Following this, the reception officer allocated a staff member from the protection team to assist the couple in filling the form. I returned to the caravan with the trio, where I, along with all the other would-be-asylum-seekers, observed the protection officer give one-on-one guidance to the couple filling the form. 'Don't worry' she told them, 'as Syrian you will be registered with UNHCR as asylum seekers, but you will be treated like *real* refugees'. Later, as will be seen in Chapter 6, I came to understand that a hierarchisation of 'refugeeness' was also being formed within the 'person of concern' category, often along highly racialised lines, where not all those registered with UNHCR were equally viewed and treated as refugees.⁵³

At the end of the morning, the reception officer returned to the caravan and collected the registration forms from the would-be-asylum-seekers. Back in her office, she stacked the applications into one pile and quickly flipped through them as she read out to me some of the reasons stated for leaving their country of origin. Most related to the political crisis that had ensued in Cote d'Ivoire in the wake of the 2010 election. While, to me, this indicated that they could not easily be categorised as 'economic migrants', she let out a sigh of exasperation in response to my line of questioning and explained that they see 'these cases' all the time and that

⁵³ See also Tazzioli 2021 for discussion on European hotspot system and Syrians forming the 'yardstick' of refugeeness.

Ivorians 'are not real refugees'. Additionally, she said, 'Since the form did not indicate that they were vulnerable, they would remain 'non-priority'. She returned to the caravan and distributed their appointment slips for UNHCR registration. Their appointments for UNHCR registration were scheduled for one year later, during which time they remained invisible to UNHCR's protection structures and were not considered as asylum seekers.

The contrast between the Syrian/Libyan couple and the Ivorians was unsettling. It was not accidental, however. For the policy was that Syrians, along with other 'refugee groups' as 'priority cases', would be seen on the spot, referred to UNHCR as soon as possible, and registered as asylum seekers. Within the space of a week, it was possible for Syrians to approach TRC, then be registered with UNHCR, whereupon they would be seen as 'of concern' to the agency. In contrast, it could take up to two years for Ivorians to be seen by UNHCR and registered as asylum seekers, during which time they remained outside the protection of the agency. Different timelines were deployed to quickly register 'real refugees', while maintaining in a state of protracted invisibility others who did not fit this conception, giving them little possibility to refute their pre-categorisation. This, as was discussed by some of my interlocutors, would ease the pressure on UNHCR's procedures and resources.

Toward the end of that day, as pre-registration activities wrapped up, and with the situation of Libyans on my mind, I discussed the day's events with the reception officer. What would have happened, I asked her, if the couple had not been mixed Syrian-Libyan, but only Libyan? 'Libyans' she responded, 'are "other of concern", so they wouldn't have been registered as asylum seekers with UNHCR, but instead registered as other of concern'. She added, 'We refer Libyans to UNHCR,

but it is our job first to explain to them that they will not benefit from this and won't get asylum seeker cards or resettlement, so a lot of Libyans choose not to go ahead with the process'. This was my first exposure to the concept of 'other of concern'. Until then, I was not aware that there could be an 'other' category to the persons under UNHCR's mandate. Yet, what became clear during my time with UNHCR Tunisia interlocutors was that specific bureaucratic practices were being deployed that enabled the fragmentation of UNHCR's 'refugee' capital on the basis of the perceived convertibility of this capital into other forms in circulation within the mixed migration field.

Others of concern

As a first step in the registration process with UNHCR, the registration officer opened the agency's online global registration system and created a digital file for each family or individual asking for protection. From the dropdown menu, as was shown to me, the registration staff had to select the status to apply to each case. The statuses were reminiscent of the categories of persons under UNHCR's mandate: refugee, asylum seeker, stateless, returnee. As the person's case progressed within UNHCR's system, so too did the person's status, going from asylum seeker to refugee, for example, or even becoming 'not of concern' when the person's refugee claim was rejected. Scrolling down the menu of options, however, appeared the status category of 'other of concern' at the bottom of the list. While few of my UNHCR interlocutors could offer a universal definition of what the category meant, in the Tunisian context, it was exclusively applied to Libyan nationals. The implications of being categorised as 'other of concern' were significant. Libyans who, at the pre-registration stage, insisted on registering with UNHCR despite the discouragements of TRC

staff, were not given any formal asylum seeker identification document or entitled to any form of assistance or services upon registration. They were, in effect, kept within UNHCR's blind spot: too peripheral to benefit from the entitlements and protection of those who were seen fully as of concern. Considering the limited value of registering with UNHCR as 'other of concern', many Libyans ultimately walked away from the registration process altogether.

Drawing certain parallels with UNHCR Libya's official line on the 'nationality issue', UNHCR Tunisia also officially fell back on the Tunisian government's reluctance to register Libyans to explain their invisibility. Although it was acknowledged by my UNHCR interlocutors that Libyans *should* 'theoretically' or 'in principle', as many put it, be registered and recognised as refugees, the marginalisation of Libyans from the protection system in Tunisia was viewed with relative indifference among my UNHCR Tunisia interlocutors. Throughout my interviews, I was surprised by how little awareness there was among UNHCR staff of the situation of Libyans, their legal status in the country, and the attempts of many Libyans to seek protection with the agency. As another official in the UNHCR Tunis office explained, the policy on Libyans was effectively one of indifference or non-engagement:

I would say that UNHCR's policy is to have a non-policy when it comes to Libyans, even if it's true that they *should* be considered as refugees because of the situation in Libya. But that is if we are talking about the legal approach. We are taking a pragmatic one when it comes to registration. Libyans are simply not at the forefront and not at all considered as a matter of priority. The main approach for now is complete non-engagement with Libyans. They are simply not the priority.

The general perception was that Libyans were fine as they were, that they did not 'need' the protection of UNHCR given their ability to enter Tunisia visa-free and the entitlements given to them through Tunisian-Libyan bilateral agreements.⁵⁴

This perception was disrupted, however, at the ground level, where my UNHCR interlocutors had to deal first-hand with what they perceived as certain Libyans' deservingness to be categorised, unequivocally, as 'of concern' to UNHCR. Here, Libyans who insisted on being registered became visible, even if only briefly, in UNHCR's registration booth. I interviewed one of my UNHCR interlocutors who was working on registration. Day in and day out, she received individuals in an outdoor registration booth. While these individuals usually left their 30-minute appointment having been made into 'asylum seekers', she was visibly upset that she could not secure the same outcome for Libyans. She explained:

I recently had a Libyan woman come in for registration. I explained to her politely that I could only register her and her family as 'other of concern'. She was a single mother who had been living in Tunisia for a few years with her children. She had become completely destitute as a result of the economic situation in Libya. She started crying while I explained to her that she could not register as an asylum seeker. Ultimately, she decided to go ahead with registering as other of concern, but I felt terrible explaining to her that we could not help her beyond this. Another time, an old Libyan man came in. He got so angry with me, he said he had *the right* to be a refugee and threatened to kill himself. I was devastated because ultimately he was right, but I couldn't really do anything.

⁵⁴ While the *Convention d'Établissement* of 1961 and a further agreement concluded in 1973 between Libya and Tunisia theoretically give nationals of the other country certain rights to remain and settle, Libyans in Tunisia faced substantial barriers in accessing residency permits and, in effect, many remained in an irregular status once the three-month visa-free period had elapsed. Indeed, the granting of residency permits was, in practice, usually made conditional to finding employment within the Tunisian labour market, which represented a substantial barrier for many (For more on agreements, see Perrin 2018).

This was a source of constant frustration for registration staff who were the ones faced with having to explain to Libyans that they could not be seen or treated as of concern to UNHCR. A number of registration staff with whom I spoke in fact took it upon themselves to contest the perception of Libyans as 'being fine'. This often centred around the perceived vulnerability of *certain Libyans* in Tunisia, and it was around this line of argument that they were most successful. As will be seen in the next chapter, 'others of concern' were very occasionally, and only on a case-by-case basis, made 'of concern' to UNHCR as asylum seekers when advocated for by registration staff members.

By considering the praxis of unmixing those not considered as 'on the move', I brought to light the differentiated experiences of those asking for protection within the 'operational context' of mixed migration, but situated outside its framing. While within the mixed migration framing, all individuals on the move appeared to be pre-categorised as falling under UNHCR or IOM's mandate, this was not the case for groups who fell outside the scope of the mixed migration framing and were not perceived as at risk of onward movement. From outside the mixed migration tunnel vision, there were some groups, such as Syrians, who were considered to be squarely under the mandate of UNHCR, while this was not necessarily so for others. Various bureaucratic strategies appeared to be employed to fragment and hierarchise the broader category of 'persons of concern', based on the perceived mobility and nationality of individuals seeking to register with the agency. This included lengthy waiting times for Ivorians and the use of 'empty' legal categories that diverted Libyans away from UNHCR's sight and care. This ultimately reduced the numbers of people made into objects of protection by UNHCR.

Moreover, and importantly, unlike the 'people on the move', those outside the mixed migration framing were not transferred, channelled, or referred to IOM. Indeed, being made invisible to UNHCR did not necessarily make them visible to IOM. While some Ivorians and Libyans sought the support of IOM in various capacities, for example to obtain legal or medical support, outside the mixed migration framing, the homologous notion of being of IOM's 'concern', responsibility, or under its 'protection' did not exist.

The fragmentation and hierarchisation of field-specific capital

The previous sections brought to light the stratified forms of visibility that took shape in the mixed migration field and formed the contours of a hierarchy of worth among refugees-and-migrants. Central to this are Bourdieu's notions of capital and convertibility of capital, which allow us to view the production of people of concern in relation to the struggle for other forms of capital in the field. Bourdieu critiqued the opposition between capital, often understood as *economic* capital and inherently linked to profit maximisation and self-interest, and all other forms of non-economic exchange, which was often presented as disinterested (Bourdieu 2006: 105–6). He broadened the notion of capital by emphasising the notion 'transubstantiation', according to which economic *and non-economic* forms of capital – in this case, the field-specific capital of refugees-and-migrants – are in circulation in the field and *convertible*, according to different rates of exchange, into other forms of capital, in particular economic capital (Bourdieu 1986).

The different forms of capital in circulation in the field and their specific conversion rates are key to understanding the struggle over making refugees-and-migrants into 'refugees' and 'migrants'. Indeed, this struggle over capital contributed to shaping a field-specific valuation among them

and resulted in a fragmentation and hierarchisation of refugees-and-migrants according to their perceived mobility. In contrast to the situation of the visible ‘people on the move’, who were theoretically all perceived as requiring protection, individuals outside the mixed migration framing were prioritised based on a resource allocation that reflected their institutional worth. The convertibility of the field-specific capital into other forms of capital was, therefore, central to the ways in which certain groups were shared between UNHCR and IOM, and others left at the periphery. This section juxtaposes these differential forms of inclusion and exclusion in against the visibility and worth ascribed to making some into objects of concern.

Table 1: Hierarchy of visibility and worth

Framing	Form of visibility and worth	Practice of unmixing
People on the move	Hypervisibility	All ‘people on the move’ considered as worthy of institutional resources and placed under the institutional mandate of UNHCR or IOM via ‘unmixing mechanisms’. Partial hypervisibility of UNHCR over certain pre-categorised ‘people on the move’, and the partial hypervisibility of IOM over others.
People outside the mixed migration framing/not ‘at risk’ of onward movement	Visibility (Syrian and other groups perceived as ‘genuine refugees’)	Prioritisation for UNHCR registration and seen as of concern.
	Partial visibility/invisibility (Ivorians, Libyans)	Bureaucratic diversions away from UNHCR registration and line of vision.

The prized capital and hypervisibility of 'people on the move'

From the observations made in the last chapter, we have seen that projecting the mixed migration framing to donors involved UNHCR amplifying the risk and visibility of those perceived as 'on the move'. Less clear, however, was how that would translate into the production of field-specific capital on the ground. Worth was attached not only to the discursive visibility of 'people on the move', but to their material visibility through the production of field-specific capital, resulting in the forms of institutional recognition and, at times, non-recognition. In the next two sections I consider two important phenomena of sorting and fragmentation that were at play when it came to making people on the move objects of protection.

First I consider the merging of people on the move into a single form of valued capital, fragmented from the broader refugees-and-migrants. Second I consider the 'sharing' of that capital between UNHCR and IOM, ultimately shaping who was protected by whom within the bifurcated system of protection. In Chapter 6, we will see how, despite this fragmentation and sorting of 'people of concern' and 'migrants' among the people on the move, the 'people of concern' to UNHCR and 'migrants' were, in effect, protected through homologous practices, which raises the question of the logic behind the continued categorical differentiation. For now, however, it is relevant to consider these two phenomena of fragmentation in relation to the struggle for various forms of capital in the mixed migration field.

Returning to the first, individuals categorised as 'on the move' were by virtue of that categorisation considered a prized form of field-specific capital, fragmented from the broader capital of refugees-and-migrants. In the mixed migration field, not all non-nationals were perceived as

'vulnerable' or at risk of onward movement to Europe and, by virtue of that, not all refugees-and-migrants, even in purported 'transit countries', required equal forms of management and protection.⁵⁵ In the struggle for the political and economic capital of the field, it was advantageous not only to register and sort people on the move, but also to amplify the risk that they represented, as seen in the previous chapter. The 'making' of people on the move into objects of protection was convertible into political and field-specific capital. The main funding schemes of European donors, including the EUTF were explicitly targeted at specific areas and 'at risk groups'. Other individual European donor states also made these 'persons on the move' their main focus. This was the case for some of UNHCR Tunisia's other most longstanding and important donors, Italy and the Netherlands, whose actions in Tunisia were specifically directed towards 'mixed population movements' (UNHCR 2020k; UNHCR 2020l).

The hypervisibility of the 'people on the move' corresponded to Brighenti's (2007) threshold of 'super-visibility', in which the subjects of this visibility were recognised and made into objects of control and care, creating a form of direct convertibility between the fragmented field-specific capital of people on the move and the economic capital available in the field to respond to them. As seen in the previous chapter, in the mixed migration field the hypervisibility of 'people on the move' meant that those individuals were placed under the immediate and indefinite care of UN agencies until 'solutions' were found, reflecting the convertibility of this capital into economic

⁵⁵ For instance, a substantial amount of research was deployed and data collected, supported by the EUTF, among others, on the movements of migrants, such that certain groups of migrants and refugees were perceived as 'more prone' to irregular migration than others. This takes place, for example, through research centres and 'hubs' such as the Mixed Migration Centre and IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix.

capital and into the shifted form of symbolic capital measured against migration management objectives.

The economic capital tied to protecting people on the move shaped in turn who was made into an object of protection to UNHCR and IOM. This had a bearing on how registration was carried out and the forms of visibility that were produced by UNHCR. The expedited timelines deployed to profile, register, and make certain persons within mixed migration 'of concern', from the moment they entered the country, were indicative of the agency's constant attention on the south of Tunisia and the resources made available to UNHCR by donors to profile, register, house, and eventually perform refugee status determination with those individuals. For UNHCR, the practices of hypervisibility could be considered regular and expected manifestations of its mandate to protect asylum seekers and refugees, yet for donors, and in particular the EUTF, these activities fell squarely under the realm of migration management.

The fragmentation of people on the move

During my fieldwork I was consistently surprised by how naturalised the categories of individuals under each agency's care were to those working within the mixed migration field. 'Those are IOM's migrants' or 'those are refugee nationalities' or 'those are persons of concern' (that is, under UNHCR's protection), were phrases consistently repeated among Tunisia and Libya-based interlocutors, suggesting that there were few significant attempts to subvert or question the division that had been drawn between UNHCR's persons of concern and IOM's migrants. One exception, which will be considered in the following chapter, was with UNHCR field staff who,

interacting directly with refugees-and-migrants, occasionally sought to subvert the precategorisation.

It was more common, as an NGO interlocutor based in Libya described, for IOM to automatically turn away requests for assistance for individuals that IOM considered 'people of concern' nationalities and, likewise, for UNHCR to automatically turn away those it considered, based on nationality, as migrants within the broader group of people on the move. This was not, therefore, an open turf war in which each agency was trying to usurp the field-specific capital of the other. The insurmountable obstacles for individuals categorised as 'migrants' to be made into 'persons of concern', as seen in the previous sections, indeed suggests that UNHCR was not, ultimately, pursuing the infinite accumulation of field-specific capital. There was a clear *entente* between the two on where each person on the move belonged within the mixed migration field.

With regards to the second, if the 'making' of people on the move into 'people of concern' to UNHCR and 'migrants' to IOM was so central to the struggle for capital within the field, then we must question why this struggle didn't produce an 'open fight' between UNHCR and IOM for the accumulation of this form of prized capital. It is relevant to understand this in relation to the other forms of capital at stake in the field. Here, I argue that the pursuit of field-specific capital and the logic of UNHCR making persons of concern were in tension with the need for other forms of capital such as the political, economic, and symbolic forms of capital in the field. This suggests, in particular, that the field-specific capital of people on the move was not convertible on a *pro-rata* basis into other species of capital, but that UNHCR, on the contrary, could gain in political and

symbolic capital by ensuring that large swathes of individuals, including individuals among the valued 'people on the move' were *not* made of its concern.

In the mixed migration field, the strict bifurcation of the system and the rigid categorisation between 'people of concern' and 'migrants' was seen as a strategy to manage a perceived pull factor. Although UNHCR presented itself as a 'partner' in the management of mixed migration, it remained that its very presence in Tunisia and Libya was perceived as a pull factor for refugees-and-migrants. Indeed, the existence of certain UNHCR programmes, particularly resettlement, has long been considered a pull factor, often by host states who at times, somewhat counterintuitively, seek to restrict the scope of resettlement out of their countries. What has been given less attention, however, is the ways in which UNHCR *registration*, as a precursor to refugee status determination and the durable solutions that may come of this, may be perceived in the same light, including by UNHCR itself. Neither UNHCR's *Registration Handbook*, nor its *10 Point Plan of Action* allude to this, apart from the latter's mention of the importance of pre-screening individuals within mixed movement to ensure that they were not 'inappropriately channelled into asylum procedures' (UNHCR 2011:126).

A hint of this perception is found on UNHCR's 2017 internet page on 'Registration', which states among its main registration challenges: 'Pull factors if registration appointments are given too soon' and 'mixed asylum-seeker & migrant population' (UNHCR 2017d). From this, we may begin to trace, firstly, a certain malleability in the process of making individuals of concern to UNHCR and, secondly, we may grasp the perceived undesirability of endless accumulation of field-specific capital, unless its convertibility into other forms of capital could be ensured. Here, UNHCR itself

brought to light the use of time and, in particular, the deployment of invisibility through waiting for registration, as an important resource in managing the perceived risk of a pull factor.

The 'pull factor' perception was widespread among my interlocutors in both Tunisia and Libya. And at the centre of negotiating the perceived risk of pull factor appeared to be the many interests and dynamics at play within the mixed migration field. First was the notion of UNHCR's presence, mainly in Libya but also to a lesser extent in Tunisia, drawing persons on the move northwards along the Central Mediterranean route. In Libya, the perception was that migrants would make their way to the country in an attempt to benefit from UNHCR's highly publicised evacuation schemes.⁵⁶ It was commonly held, for example, that, once in Libya, migrants and refugees would put themselves at risk of detention in order to be 'seen' as vulnerable to UNHCR and selected for resettlement or evacuation. On the basis on this, UNHCR, in mid-2020, stopped its mobile registration programmes in detention centres with the idea that this would reduce 'incentives' for individuals to get detained and remain in detention. This is indicative of UNHCR seizing upon its power *not* to make individuals into persons of concern as a central strategy for managing individuals' mobility, and as a by-product of that, a strategy that positioned it favourably within the struggle for symbolic and political capital in the field.

The notion that, as one of my interlocutors put it, 'opening registration to other nationalities would cause an influx of migrants to Libya' was one that was echoed by a number of my interlocutors.

⁵⁶ UNHCR Libya's latest evacuation programme, the 'Emergency Transit Mechanism', also funded by the EUTF, was initiated in 2017 in order to facilitate the evacuation of 'vulnerable refugees' to Niger and Rwanda, from where their case is processed for 'durable solutions' (European Commission 2020b). These individuals were for the most part identified in detention. This will be further discussed in the final chapter.

Many suggested that donors and the Libyan government alike, both forming part of the 'field of power', would push back against this. In line with this, many of my UNHCR interlocutors in both Tunisia and Libya perceived donor interest as a major cause of the nationality-driven precategorisation. As one UNHCR Libya interlocutor, who was previously involved in coordinating the protection response, perceived it:

In practice nowadays and in this particular context, access to asylum is political and it is ultimately up to the donors who gets registered with UNHCR. The reality is that the EU doesn't want more nationalities to be able to register with UNHCR as there is a perception that UNHCR's presence and service creates a pull factor for groups that are able to register. They are afraid of more people coming to Libya and, by that, we mean more people who are getting that much closer to Europe. It is a political issue not only for host states, but now it is especially politicised by donor states who want to restrict who will be registered with the agency.

It is, indeed, interesting to consider how nationality-based restriction played into the interest not only of the host state, but also of donor states. From this we might wonder whether the prospect of a growing number of asylum seekers for whom UNHCR would be responsible and who could not be returned to their countries of origin, would be unattractive to European donors, who indeed might view IOM, with its large-scale 'Voluntary Humanitarian Return' programme, as a more appealing provider of 'protection' in the mixed migration field.⁵⁷

While UNHCR's official version of Libya's 'nationality issue' provided that the Libyan authorities only allowed access to those nine predetermined nationalities, most UNHCR Libya officials close to the issue informally perceived that it was not in donors, nor UNHCR's interest to push back

⁵⁷ In the Libyan context, at the time of writing, refugee status determination is a tool used exclusively by UNHCR for determining eligibility for resettlement, from which very few benefit. Most remain with the status of 'asylum seeker' indefinitely.

against this and advocate for a universal right to seek protection with UNHCR in Libya. As one UNHCR Libya interlocutor explained: 'We don't necessarily *want* to add nationalities to the list of those able to ask for protection, as we would have to deal with way too many asylum applications, so we keep it to countries that are known to normally produce refugees. Otherwise, our system would get clogged'. Most interlocutors understood UNHCR as having much more leeway when it came to registration than it publicly let on, but that various institutional interests did not want to cause an influx of persons seeking international protection, both within its own asylum system as well as to the wider Libyan context.

It is interesting to observe, in that sense, how UNHCR's logic of 'making' individuals of concern in Libya and Tunisia appears to run counter to observations previously made on the expansionist logic of UNHCR (Crisp 1999; 2009). While, previously, more registered 'people of concern' may have indeed meant more funding, this does not appear to hold true with the current 'exchange rates' of the mixed migration field. Krause (2014: 41), considering NGO relief organisations and the inequities that have arisen from the commodification of the 'beneficiary', noted that, 'Some beneficiaries are easier to produce, and some are easier to sell than others, which leads to inequities in the allocation of aid'. Similarly, it would seem that the politically driven nature of funding in the mixed migration field, along with the struggle for symbolic capital aligned with migration management objectives, contributed to driving the worth of making individuals as 'of concern' in the first place despite a clear and greater valuation of all persons on the move.

Value and convertibility of those 'not on the move'

What the greater valuation of *some* people on the move meant, however, was that for those who fell outside the mixed migration 'framing', UNHCR had to make pragmatic decisions, with implications on who fell below the thresholds of relevance and institutional worth. In a context where resources were tightly earmarked and where resources directed towards groups perceived as 'not at risk' of onward movement were scarce, UNHCR prioritised its caseload. This led to a clear hierarchisation among those perceived as 'not on the move'. Indeed, registration of persons of concern entailed a cost, not only in the process itself, but on the subsequent demands that asylum seekers and refugees were entitled to make on the agency in terms of services, assistance, and durable solutions. UNHCR had to ensure that 'making' these individuals into people of its concern would be converted into the economic capital needed to protect them.

Those prioritised, that is, made of concern, were often the groups who were perceived as being 'genuine refugees' to UNHCR, whose visibility became one of 'recognition', often along highly racialised lines as will be seen in the following chapters (Brightenti 2010: 45). These cases were expedited and quickly registered in northern Tunisia. Others, however, were often left to linger at the periphery, as with the Ivorians and Libyans, such that invisibility and the struggle for recognition came to define the experience of many. The 'appropriation of time' as a strategy has been considered elsewhere in relation to asylum systems, where asylum authorities have been viewed as pressured to churn cases out (and issue rejections) *faster* (Gill 2009: 222; Cwerner 2004). Here, however, extended waiting times served to manage asylum seekers' place within the hierarchy of worth; maintaining them in protracted invisibility and diverting them from the system

altogether to ensure that they not become an unconvertible form of capital to UNHCR (on 'control through time' see also: Tazzioli 2018a; Griffiths 2017).

The need to manage the perceived risk of a pull factor also applied outside the mixed migration framing, in the context of northern Tunisia. This, on the other hand, was often described as a question of resources and needing to prioritise certain groups over others. While funds explicitly earmarked to manage mixed migration in the south were said to have been creatively stretched to fund a limited number of registration and refugee status determination officers in the north, there were limits to the ways in which those funds could be stretched and applied to populations who did not fit the scope of European funding. There was, in any case, little to be gained from doing so for all those outside the mixed migration framing. For the groups who did not fit the mixed migration framing by not being considered 'at risk' of onward movement or fitting the clear-cut conception of a 'genuine refugee', that often entailed a strategy of being 'managed' through a policy of non-engagement. Strategies such as prolonged waiting times for registration and categorising as 'other of concern' were viewed as ways to disincentive individuals from attempting to be made into objects of UNHCR's concern in the first place.

Drawing certain parallels with UNHCR Libya's official line on the 'nationality issue', UNHCR Tunisia also fell back on the Tunisian government's reluctance to register Libyans to explain their invisibility. While it was commonly held that 'Libyans were fine as they were', my UNHCR interlocutors also cautioned against registering them by deploying different, but similar versions of 'if you register one Libyan as an asylum seeker, before you know it all of Libya will be in Tunisia'. It was indeed perceived that, given the available resources, registering Libyans as asylum seekers

would go against the interests of UNHCR and of other groups registered with the agency. Many high ranking UNHCR Tunisia officials perceived that no gain would be derived from making Libyans into persons of concern. In other words, that it would be counterproductive to UNHCR's struggle for political and economic capital. Certain interlocutors close to the issue at UNHCR Tunisia floated the notion, however, that if presented with significant funding by the EU to cover protection expenses for Libyans they would certainly push for their registration with the Tunisian government.

The fragmentation of value attributed to different groups of refugees-and-migrants, through which some individuals were made 'of concern' to UNHCR, some 'of concern' to IOM, and others of no concern at all, was situated within the struggle for political, economic, and symbolic forms of capital in the field. It appears that in the mixed migration field both the visibility produced by placing certain 'persons on the move' under the care of UNHCR, and the invisibility produced by placing others into a parallel IOM 'protection track' was productive and convertible into other forms of capital in the field. As seen in the previous chapter, outside the mixed migration framing, the practices of invisibility allowed UNHCR to more effectively direct its resources and manage the convertibility of its capital, while reinforcing the framing of the 'mixed migration context' by making invisible certain groups that did not fit its narrative.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I traced the fragmentation and hierarchisation of the field-specific capital of refugees-and-migrants. Keeping with the notion of refugees-and-migrants as the capital at stake in the field, I argued that we can best understand who was made into an object of protection and

why, by considering the convertibility of this field-specific capital into the other forms of capital at stake in the field. I argued that UNHCR and IOM were not engaged in a struggle for the endless production and accumulation of refugees and migrants under their protection, but for a certain type of field-specific capital: the people on the move, for whom both visibility and invisibility appeared as convertible into other forms of capital. This gave rise to a fragmentation and hierarchisation of worth among the refugees-and-migrants.

I drew this out by paying attention to the practices of 'unmixing' these groups against two framings. Firstly, against the framing of mixed migration, I examined the practices of sorting 'people of concern' from 'migrants', practices in which all persons on the move were, at least theoretically, made into objects of protection and placed under the 'protection' of either UNHCR or IOM on the basis of a rigid nationality-based precategorisation. In this context, depending on their nationality, people understood as 'on the move' were promptly sorted and channelled into separate 'protection tracks', a reflection of the bifurcated protection system that took shape in the mixed migration field. Secondly, those not fitting the mixed migration framing were not automatically considered as objects of protection. In contrast to those considered as 'on the move', individuals outside the mixed migration framing were not rigidly divided between UNHCR and IOM. Some individuals attempting to register with UNHCR were prioritised, while others were diverted away from its protection structures through various bureaucratic practices.

Closer attention to this struggle, which was situated within the wider struggle for capital within the field, brought to light the notion that the logic of producing 'people of concern' and 'migrants', and, through that, accumulating field-specific capital, sat in tension with the other forms of capital

needed in the field. This led to, firstly, a greater valuation of the 'people on the move' on the basis of their convertibility into economic and political capital and, secondly, a hierarchisation outside the mixed migration framing among UNHCR's people of concern.

Not only were UNHCR and IOM not pursuing an infinite accumulation of this field-specific capital, but from the 'people on the move', it appeared equally valuable for UNHCR not to carve out more 'people of concern', but to leave certain groups within the remit of IOM. Rather than an open contestation for the appropriation of refugees and migrants, therefore, this wider struggle for capital appears to have given rise to a form of entente between UNHCR and IOM on the institutional sharing of these valued 'people on the move'. In the next chapter, I move to the logics of vulnerability at play in the mixed migration field, which, as we will see, at once legitimised the fragmentation of people on the move as a singularly vulnerable group, and, at the same time, contributed to unsettling the neat fragmentation and hierarchisation brought to light in this chapter.

CHAPTER 5 – LOGIC(S) OF VULNERABILITY

In this chapter, I explore the central role played by vulnerability as an organising principle in the mixed migration field. I begin to unravel how refugees-and-migrants making up mixed movements – the ‘people on the move’ – were turned into a single category of intervention, seemingly naturalising their fragmentation from the broader group of refugees-and-migrants. People on the move, as I will show, were discursively projected as vulnerable by *virtue of* being on the move, reinforcing the fragmentation and hierarchisation brought to light in Chapter 4. While the logic of vulnerability contributed to naturalising the hierarchisation and worth attributed to the people on the move and created a singularly vulnerable category requiring the protection of UNHCR and IOM, its enactment on the ground, on the other hand, also had unintended field effects.

In the first part of this chapter, I draw out the discourse of vulnerability that emerged in the mixed migration field. I argue that the mixed migration field, in which refugees *and migrants* were seen as objects of protection, gave rise to a field-specific conceptualisation of vulnerability that rested on a discursive shift towards framing *all* people on the move as vulnerable and at risk, regardless of refugee/migrant categorisation and personal characteristics. In a shift away from the humanitarian conception of vulnerability-as-women-and-children, vulnerability in the mixed migration field was articulated in much broader terms – that of vulnerability-as-mobility, which encompassed *all* people on the move. This shift enabled UNHCR and IOM to extend the application of vulnerability and, with that, to widen the scope of protection interventions to previously ‘invisible’ groups.

On the ground, however, the logic of vulnerability gave rise to a certain unruliness, producing not a single governing logic of vulnerability but *logics* of vulnerability, with unintended effects within the field. In the second section, I move to the ground-level practices and perceptions of vulnerability that contributed to unsettling the fragmentation and hierarchisation of refugees-and-migrants and redrawing the categorical lines dividing them. I explore this through the 'borderline case' of 'vulnerable-enough migrants' and 'vulnerable-enough refugees', from which I draw out how vulnerability became a central modality for making some individuals otherwise categorised as 'migrants' or 'other' into objects of UNHCR protection. This individualised conception of this vulnerability, as I will show, gave rise to a fundamental disjuncture between the field logic of vulnerability-as-mobility and the practices and understandings of vulnerability that emerged in interaction with refugees-and-migrants on the ground.

Vulnerable to what, a risk to whom?

In this section, I explore the shift toward discursively protecting all people on the move as requiring protection by virtue of them being on the move. I unravel this discursive shift by narrowing in, firstly on two interlinked notions of vulnerability and risk, and, secondly, on notions of vulnerability and mobility. As will be seen, this framing not only legitimised interventions toward all those considered as 'on the move', but created an *imperative* to intervene through protection responses along the route northwards. Mobility and the potential for mobility were framed as the risk and vulnerability requiring actions aimed at prevention and immobilisation further 'upstream'. This discourse of vulnerability-as-mobility contributed to consolidating the hierarchisation of

capital seen in the previous chapter and, at the same time, grounded field-specific practices of protection aimed at managing it.

Risky routes and risky migrants

In 2020, UNHCR and the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC), launched a highly publicised report on the risks faced by refugees and migrants along the African migratory routes leading to the Mediterranean coast (UNHCR and MMC 2020). At the press conference held in Geneva, the MMC representative explained the methodology underpinning the study, which focused solely on the risks faced by those who had been ‘on the move’ for two years or less. This, as she explained, ‘is because we are focusing on *highly mobile populations and the risks they face* and less on well-settled and protracted refugee situations’ (UN Web TV 2020, italics my own). Central to this was the assumption that refugees and migrants on the move were particularly vulnerable and ‘at risk’ of human rights abuses along their journey northwards. The statement, and the many others like this, underlie the linkage between mobility and risk, contributing, as will be seen, to merging people ‘on the move’ into a single category requiring the protection of UNHCR and IOM, thereby naturalising the fragmentation and hierarchisation of capital discussed in the previous chapter.

The linkage between mobility and risk is unsurprising given the amount of research that was deployed and publicised on the dangerousness of migration journeys toward Libya and onward to Europe. That refugees and migrants on the move were routinely subjected to exploitation, extortion, and other human rights violations is well documented, especially in the case of Libya, by journalists, NGOs, and UN agencies. The narrative was, at the same time, powerfully deployed by institutional actors, including the EU and UN agencies, to dissuade individuals from moving

onward, with particular attention paid to the danger of Libya and the Mediterranean crossing.⁵⁸ My aim is not to trivialise such abuses, nor to shed doubt on the pervasiveness of the risks individuals faced. Rather, what I am interested in here is how the framing of these migratory routes as risky, and of those travelling along them as vulnerable (by virtue of their mobility), allowed for a discursive shift toward the people on the move being represented through the deployment of particular risk profiles that required certain forms of management (Aradau 2004).

To help illustrate this shift, it is worth briefly considering UNHCR's periodic funding appeals for the Mediterranean situation. These documents, which have followed a similar formula since the launch of the first appeal in 2017, present UNHCR's '*Risk Mitigation Strategy*' for the Mediterranean (UNHCR 2017a; 2019j; 2021d, italics my own). Each iteration of UNHCR's strategy invariably begins with a map representing 'key figures' of relevance to the strategy. As depicted below, these key figures emphasise, with an impressive amount of detail, two 'types' of figures: the number of departures from North Africa and arrivals in Europe, on the one hand, and the number of deaths and other protection incidents along the migratory routes, on the other (UNHCR 2021d). This visualisation of risk immediately raises the question of what risk UNHCR is attempting to mitigate through its strategy, and for whom.

⁵⁸ A concrete example of this is UNHCR's *Telling the Real Story* (TRS), an online portal that 'aims to communicate with communities about the dangers of onward irregular movement'. TRS aims to provide a counter narrative to those perceived as established by smugglers and the diaspora. In 2021, UNHCR stated that 'TRS has closely monitored the constantly changing smugglers' narratives and effectively adjusted its messaging targeting those most at risk' (UNHCR 2021d: 29).

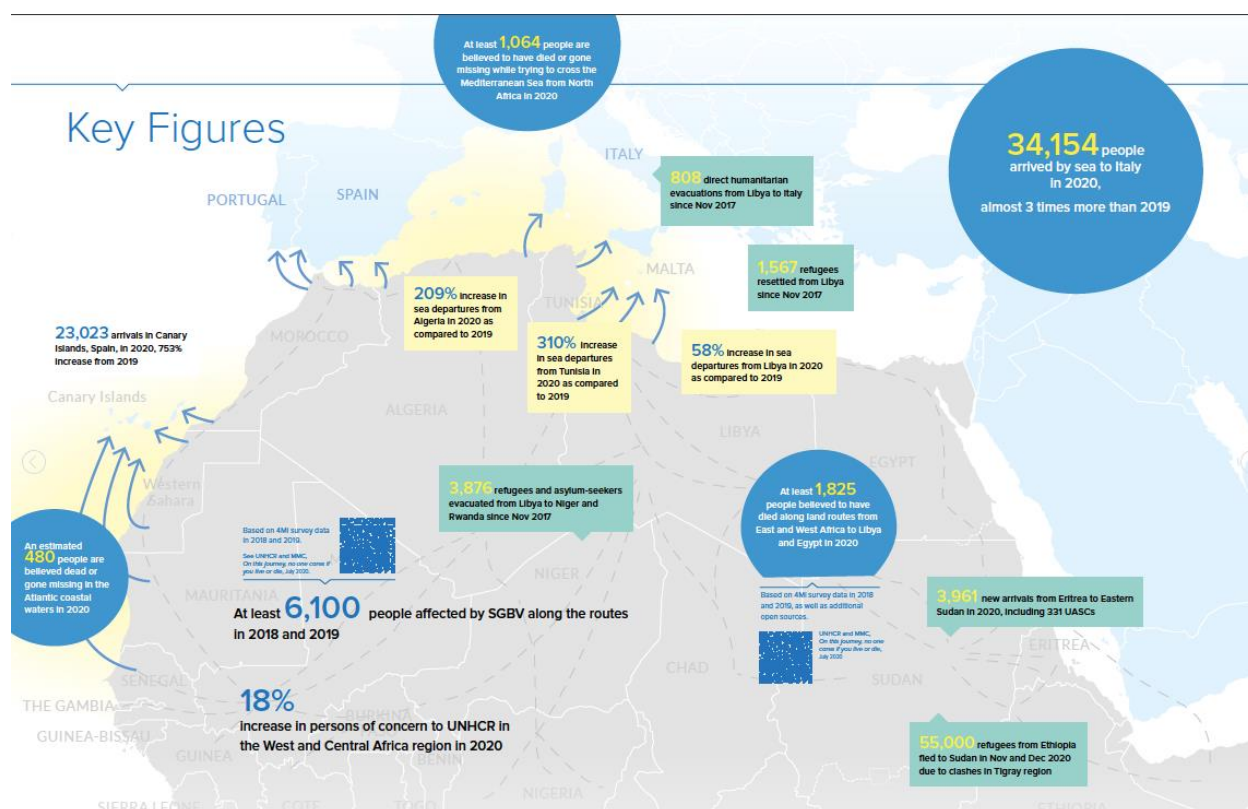


Figure 6: 'Key figures' map from UNHCR's 2021 Risk Mitigation Strategy (UNHCR 2021d)

The tension between refugees and migrants being *at risk*, and the mixed movements *embodying* risk is present throughout UNHCR and IOM documents. This, it seems, allowed for the discursive shift towards qualifying the irregular movement of refugees and migrants as, in and of itself, dangerous and transgressive in nature. For example, UNHCR's 2021 and 2019 Risk Mitigation Strategies speak of 'the dangerous irregular mixed movements of refugees and migrants' (2021d: 6), of 'dangerous irregular movements' (2019j: 19), and of the importance of 'reducing dangerous irregular movements' (2021d: 21). Similarly, IOM documents pointed to the need 'to address mixed flows and to prevent their most abusive manifestations' (IOM 2009: 7). A subtle shift appears to have taken place towards describing the risk posed *by* mixed movements, rather than exclusively those that the individuals composing them risked encountering while on the move.

The 'flows' of people on the move were, thus, in the aggregate, themselves presented as transgressions with the potential for 'abusive manifestations'.

To be sure, UNHCR, IOM, and NGO publications on the Central Mediterranean route also clearly described the 'protection risks' faced by persons on the move trying to reach their intended destinations. The abuses described were many, from extortion and forced labour to torture and sexual violence. Through the description of the dangers faced along the route, clear concern was displayed for the well-being of the people on the move at risk of falling prey to them. The perpetrators, however, were rarely exposed, with the important exception of smugglers and traffickers, who held a central position in this literature as *the* source of violence against people on the move (UNHCR 2021d: 13, 17, 21). This is despite the fact that, elsewhere, UNHCR research surveying refugees and migrants pointed to state officials as, overwhelmingly, the main perpetrators of abuse along these migratory routes. Yet the depiction of the pervasiveness of protection risks faced by 'people on the move', most often at the hand of the smugglers who were presented as 'forging' the routes, made risk and danger appear inherent to the movement itself, almost as if embedded within it. The risks related to the irregular migration of people on the move, therefore, were not only projected as those faced by the refugees and migrants, but those embedded within their very movement. As a high level UNHCR representative of the Special Envoy for the Mediterranean emphasised:

Nobody is in favour of dangerous journeys (...) The people on the move are about 15 per cent of displaced people. But they form ghost populations; there are links to trafficking, there are links to smuggling, there are links to terrorism, there are links to criminality more broadly, and this is problematic for governments as well as for everybody else' (O'Dwyer 2021).

Dissimulated within the flows was therefore a range of potential risks not only to people on the move but to society at large, requiring, for the benefit of all, specific protection measures, as will be seen in the final chapter, aimed at immobilising and returning them. From this conceptualisation, responding to the risk posed by 'dangerous journeys' with protection interventions represented a dual form of 'protection': protection for the people on the move as well as for the states who were at risk of receiving them.

What is interesting is that while the 'journey', 'movements', and 'flows' were, in the aggregate, presented as risky and transgressive and, at its most extreme, potentially embedded with criminal elements, the refugees-and-migrants that *individually* constituted them were, more often than not, presented as vulnerable, having themselves been swept up by the pull of the movement. In numerous external documents, UNHCR points to refugees and persons in need of international protection having been 'caught in' or 'caught up in' mixed movements. In UNHCR documents related to the EUTF, for example, UNHCR spoke of 'the hardship of persons caught in the mixed movements in Libya' (European Commission 2019e 3; 6) and the need for UNHCR to 'alleviate the suffering of persons caught in the mixed flows' (European Commission 2019d 6). Other documents discussed the 'protection needs for persons of concern under UNHCR's mandate caught up in mixed flows' (UNHCR 2019i 7). Interestingly, this language mirrored that used by UNHCR and other institutions to describe 'those caught into smuggling and trafficking networks' (European Commission 2019e 7). This, similarly, mirrors the language deployed by Frontex and other European agencies. Sachseder et al (2022: 16) have observed, in that regard, how Frontex attempted to position itself as a humanitarian actor by linking 'humanitarianism, gender/race, and crisis', which entailed the 'feminisation of all migrants...as in need of protection, agency-less, and

endangered by the masculinised figure of the people-smuggler'. Individuals making up mixed movements were perceived as having been swept up *in* and *by* the gravitational pull of the flow and of powerful and exploitative smuggler narratives.

While the vulnerability of 'people on the move' was clearly brought to light through those statements, a closer consideration of this framing reveals the more subtle overlapping nature of vulnerability and risk, or rather the 'vulnerability-risk axis' at play in this context (Warner 2008:32; Aradau 2004). With vulnerability and risk considered as 'two sides of the same coin', scholars across fields have explored the underpinning of discourses of vulnerability by notions of transgression and considerations of security (Beck 2009: 178; Brown 2014). For example, in analysing the discourse related to climate migration, Baldwin (2013: 1476) has drawn out the dual labels of 'threat' and 'victim' levelled in relation to potential climate migrants and the ways in which this construction legitimises 'moral intervention(s)'. Similarly, in engaging the seemingly incongruent discourses of pity and risk, Aradau (2004: 269; 2008) has shown how the representation of trafficked women and women 'at risk' of trafficking 'mutated into a risk to the state/society, just as groups at risk were thought to embody a permanent possible danger'. The framing of all migrants within large movements as simultaneously 'dangerous and endangered', as 'at risk, but also risky', has been observed within broader political and institutional discourse on migratory movements, and in particular in relation to irregular migration to Europe (Sachseder et al 2022: 17; Gray and Franck 2019). UNHCR and IOM's framing of people on the move as vulnerable and at risk, and of 'mixed flows' as risky, transgressive, and dangerous in nature, therefore, was situated within a broader discourse that legitimised and created a moral imperative to intervene and act upon the mobility of those on the move (Tazzioli 2021).

Vulnerability was not only associated with the risks within the movement itself, but with the propensity of certain individuals of joining them in the first place. According to UNHCR's conceptualisation, certain groups were more vulnerable than others of getting 'caught up' in the flows. Indeed, through the deployment of particular 'risk profiles', UNHCR documents reveal a clear preoccupation with, *inter alia*, the secondary movements of refugees and IDPs from their first country or place of refuge (Aradau 2004). Accordingly, already displaced groups across large swaths of Africa, in areas near the so-called migratory routes, were formed into risk profiles constituting individuals 'at risk' of and vulnerable to onward movement. UNHCR's 2019 Risk Mitigation Strategy (2019j: 22), for example, points to the need to target 'communities at risk of onward movements...in Egypt, Ethiopia, Nigeria (as a country of origin), Sudan and Somalia'. Within that general category are sub-groups of 'at risk' individuals, for example 'children and at-risk youth' by UNHCR. They are considered 'at risk' due to their perceived vulnerability to exploitation and other human rights abuses, thereby justifying targeted programming 'for youth transitioning to adulthood who are *at-high risk of onward movement*' and of becoming 'children on the move' (2019j: 24, italics my own). IOM's conceptualisation of who is vulnerable and at risk of onward movement is just as expansive, encompassing at times 'male migrant workers and stranded migrants' who 'are at high risk of trafficking and *being forced to resort to smuggling networks*', as well as returned migrants, for whom 'the potential for again risking irregular migration either to or through Libya is high' (European Commission 2016: 4, italics my own). It appears that it was the potential for mobility or further mobility that determined who was considered an at-risk group. These groups forming the people on the move represented both a risk of onward movement as well as a risk to themselves in getting caught up in such movements.

Accompanying this was a particular conception of the nature of the movement of people on the move, or 'at risk' of being on the move, which, as we will see in Chapter 6, appeared to justify particular forms of interventions. While on the face of it, the language of being 'caught in' mixed movements may have implied a degree of coercion or compulsion, this coercion was not solely framed in relation to the conditions that caused individuals to leave, but to the 'forces' that drew them in the movement. In other words, *refugees* making up mixed movements were not seen as 'more legitimate' in their attempt to seek protection elsewhere than other groups of individuals making up the movement, for they were not compelled to leave on account of the conditions *in situ*, but on account of the strength of narratives drawing them onwards. UNHCR 2021's Strategy spoke, from that perspective, of 'targeting those most at risk' by advancing a counter-narrative to that of 'the constantly changing smugglers' narratives' (UNHCR 2021d: 19). UNHCR was attempting to influence the decision-making of its persons of concern, mirroring IOM's information campaigns for migrants, before they engaged in what was presented as the transgressive and irrational behaviour associated with migration (on IOM campaigns see: Musarò 2019; Heller 2014; Pécoud 2010). This implied that for UNHCR, refugees making up mixed migration were not necessarily compelled to leave and seek protection further afield, meaning that, like any other potential migrants, they could and *should* stay where they were.

Returning to the risk of onward movement described by UNHCR, a large section of displaced populations was rendered vulnerable and at-risk of onward movement through the construction of risk profiles. While UNHCR also described the lack of legal protection and dearth of socio-economic opportunities in many countries of first asylum, the movement onward was ultimately articulated in terms of susceptibility or vulnerability to onward movement. In describing the

changing migration routes passing through Niger, for example, UNHCR noted that the new route, passing through Diffa (host to an important refugee population) created 'a risk that refugees currently in Diffa may consider joining these mixed movements' (UNHCR 2017: 42). Similarly, UNHCR provided that 'migratory routes often cross border areas where refugee camps and settlements are located with risks that greater numbers of persons of concern might consider joining the flow' (UNHCR 2017a: 8). While refugees were presented as being 'caught up' in the flows, they were not described as 'having had no option' than to join them, as often articulated in relation to refugee movements. Rather, they were 'caught in' the flows as a result of the pull of the flow itself, their proximity to it, and, often, the 'negative influence' of smuggler and diasporic narratives.

UNHCR's people of concern within mixed movements and those considered at risk of joining them were thus denied the recognition of compulsion often accorded to those perceived as having had no choice but to flee. This conceptualisation, it appears, brought 'refugees' and 'migrants' within mixed movements much closer together on the forced/voluntary migration 'continuum' and, as will be seen, contributed to blurring the dichotomic bifurcation, discussed in the previous chapter, upon which the operationalisation of mixed migration was otherwise built. *All* people on the move making up mixed migration, regardless of refugee/migrant categorisation, were therefore framed as needing to be 'dissuade(d)' and 'guide(d)...toward safer and sustainable legal alternatives in the communities where they are' (UNHCR 2021j: 41). As will be seen in the next chapter, this discursive framing further prepared the terrain for field-specific forms of protection aimed at immobilising and returning migrants *and refugees*.

Vulnerability-as-mobility

The previous section showed how people on the move were at once considered 'a risk' and 'at risk', and, as an extension of that, large swathes of individuals, such as those situated near migration routes and other groups, were also considered at risk and 'vulnerable to migration', requiring targeted forms of protection. As was seen, the vulnerability to migration, of being caught up in these mixed movements, appeared to bring the 'refugee' and 'migrant' categories closer together, blurring the notions of compulsion and voluntariness often associated with the movement of the two respective groups. Another understanding of vulnerability further blurred the distinction between the two. This was the vulnerability that refugees and migrants embodied by being on the move, their *vulnerability-as-mobility*. This was a label that followed people on the move for the duration of their journey, transcending status-based categorisations and carving out a singularly vulnerable category of individuals from the broader group of refugees-and-migrants.

As I will show, the framing of all people on the move as vulnerable represented an important shift away from the classical conception of vulnerability as 'womenandchildren', bringing previously invisible groups into the fold of protection responses (Enloe 1993; Johnson 2011). Refugees, in this context, were thus no longer the exclusive and 'privileged' recipients of humanitarian assistance and protection. Rather, it was all people on the move, encompassing refugees *and migrants*, that became the *discursive* target of humanitarian attention, with assistance and protection distributed based on perceived vulnerability, not status (Zetter 2007). People on the move, who embodied a particular form of vulnerability and threat were effectively merged into a single category of intervention. Nowhere is this clearer than in the IOM and UNHCR produced documentation for the EUTF, which details the two agencies' joint action and consistently

mentions targeting their 'assistance and protection' interventions at 'vulnerable migrants and refugees'. In these documents, UNHCR and IOM promised coordination through an 'integrated approach at 'reaching the most vulnerable' and 'jointly agreed upon vulnerability criteria that will allow for prioritisation and identification of at-risk groups in need of further assistance and protection' (European Commission 2019f: 11).

Nowhere were the specific vulnerability criteria clearly articulated. UNHCR and IOM documents mention in passing certain categories, such as women, individuals with medical needs, and children, but at the same time refer to the targeting of other more diffuse categories of vulnerability, such as 'victims of extreme risk' (European Commission 2019f: 19). While vulnerability remained ill-defined throughout UNHCR and IOM EUTF documents, various EUTF funded projects jointly engaged IOM and UNHCR in delivering assistance and protection to *certain* refugees and migrants according to their understanding of deservingness of assistance and protection. That UNHCR and IOM were targeting their assistance towards the 'most vulnerable' was nothing new, however. Indeed, with often scarce resources, humanitarian agencies have long had to prioritise their resource allocation and interventions towards those who were understood as having the greatest need (Cowling 2020; Sözer 2020). Although vulnerability-based targeting was not new, it was the very *conception* of that vulnerability that shifted in the mixed migration field.

The concept of vulnerability and its usage in the humanitarian context has received considerable academic attention, through which the gendered, racialised, and depoliticising dimensions of its deployment have been brought to light and criticised (Turner 2019). Accordingly, through the

discursive labour and practice of humanitarian organisations, certain subjects of humanitarian aid, in particular women and children, have embodied vulnerability and victimhood itself. This literature has drawn out the ways in which humanitarian organisations have 'produced' a vulnerable beneficiary (most often racialised women and children), framed as requiring protection, and oftentimes protection from the risky and racialised men with whom they fled (Turner 2018; Johnson 2011). From this has emerged a strong critique of the ways in which certain categories of individuals, in particular young, single, refugee and migrant men have been rendered invisible and illegible through discourses of vulnerability (Cowling 2020). This discourse has also been seized upon in political discourse, in particular, as Sachseder et al point out in the context of the 2015 'migration crisis', which reinforced the gendered and racialised stereotypes that opposed 'masculinised migrants as threatening' and 'feminised refugees as deserving and in need of protection' (Sachseder et al 2022: 2; Gray et al 2019).

What is interesting, here, is that the 'mixed flows' along the Central Mediterranean route were perceived as primarily constituted of the very same individuals who, at best, received little humanitarian attention elsewhere on account of them being less 'legible' to the humanitarian enterprise, and at worse, presented as dangerous criminals – that is, young men. Thus, while male refugees and migrants were framed as not-so-vulnerable or downright *undeserving* of protection elsewhere, in the mixed migration field, the possibility of protection interventions towards *all* those on the move was contingent on the establishment of a mobility-vulnerability nexus and the framing of all people on the move as 'situationally vulnerable', rather than individually so (UNHCR 2017: 2). The able-bodied and otherwise agentially perceived male migrant/refugee was thus turned into a legitimate object of humanitarian intervention, joining women, children, the ill, and

the elderly, who already belonged to this broader category of vulnerability (Turner 2018; Warner 2008: 32). Yet, with the figure of the 'people on the move' situated along the 'vulnerability-risk' axis, their vulnerability/risk was one that required and legitimised specific forms of interventions on their mobility, as I will show in the next chapter.

An illustration of this shift may be found in IOM's 2019 *Handbook on Protection and Assistance to Migrants*. In explaining their shift from trafficked migrants, most often women, to the programmatic targeting of vulnerable migrants more broadly, and in particular those within the 'migration process', IOM provided that:

Eventually, IOM began asking its partners and donors to fund more flexible programmes to allow for delivery of assistance services not only to trafficked persons but also to those considered to be vulnerable to trafficking, and not only to women and girls, but also to boys and men. Over time, IOM and others began to use the terms "vulnerable migrants", "migrants in vulnerable situations", and "migrants vulnerable to violence, exploitation and abuse". IOM also began to pursue policies and programmes applicable to all migrants with protection and assistance needs, not only victims of trafficking (2019: 4).

In line with IOM's expansion into the realm of protection, detailed in Chapter 2, the language of migrant vulnerability allowed IOM to significantly expand its scope of action. 'Migrants vulnerable to violence, exploitation and abuse' and 'migrants in vulnerable situations' have become the main target of IOM interventions along the Central Mediterranean route. Yet, given the characterisation of the migration route itself as dangerous and rife with violence, this conceptualisation opened the possibility of all migrants moving along it within mixed migration flows, as falling under the framing of migrants vulnerable-to-something. This is what UNHCR described as 'situational vulnerability', referring to 'circumstances *en route*...that render migrants at risk', which 'is

frequently the case when migration is through irregular routes, resulting in people being exposed to exploitation and abuse by smugglers, traffickers, recruiters, and corrupt officials, as well as risk of death aboard unseaworthy boats or during hazardous desert and other land crossings' (UNHCR 2017: 2). All those on the move irregularly were thus vulnerable by virtue of being on the move.

A clear linkage was thus established between irregular movement and vulnerability to various abuses. The large-scale EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration was a prime example in that regard. The initiative, which will be considered in the following chapter, spanned 26 countries 'along key migration routes in Africa' and specifically targeted migrants in 'vulnerable situations' along the routes, 'including stranded migrants, victims of trafficking (VoTs), unaccompanied migrant children (UMC), migrants with serious medical conditions (including HIV/AIDS), and *other categories of those at-risk*' (IOM 2021, italics my own). While this included more easily identifiable 'classically' 'vulnerable groups' (children, persons with medical conditions), the diffuse nature of the other categories of purported vulnerability (stranded migrants and 'other categories of those at-risk') expanded the association of vulnerability to those not traditionally situated within its frame. By linking individuals' mobility to notions of vulnerability and need, however, the shift expanded the breadth of individuals within mixed movements who could be targeted by the agency's interventions.

While UNHCR and IOM protection programmes along the Central Mediterranean route were directed towards the 'most vulnerable', their interventions simultaneously underlie a geography of vulnerability, according to which individuals in specific areas were framed as particularly vulnerable and at risk by virtue of moving along them or being stuck in them, thereby directing

the flow of assistance and protection. Indeed, further indicating the vulnerability-mobility nexus, protection programming specifically targeted areas known as transit areas or 'mixed migration hubs'. In UNHCR and IOM-drafted EUTF documents for Libya, for example, a clear preoccupation was shown for three particular areas where the 'most vulnerable' were purportedly found: the desert from northern Niger into southern Libya towards the coast, detention centres, and disembarkation points. These areas were highly publicised as risky; areas where human rights violations took place and where migrants and refugees fell prey to smugglers and traffickers. They also seamlessly mapped onto areas where migrants and refugees were perceived as 'highly mobile', in which they were thought to engage with smugglers to arrange their travels northwards. The same migrants who were valuable to smugglers and traffickers were also of worth to UN agencies such as IOM and UNHCR in their struggle for capital. With UNHCR and IOM's protection interventions aligned with migration management objectives, as seen in Chapter 3, the bread and butter of international institutions in Libya and along the Central Mediterranean route more broadly was both responding to the vulnerability of people on the move and managing the risk they posed of onward movement to Europe.

While on the face of it, a broadened scope of vulnerability that made visible previously neglected groups, such as migrants, broadly, as well as refugee and migrant men, could be considered a desirable shift, their visibilisation as objects of protection underscored a clear continuity with the paternalism and racialisation observed by critics of the 'classical conceptions' of vulnerability. In the field of mixed migration, the hierarchisation of capital, which consolidated 'people on the move' as the prized capital and object of protection, as seen in the previous chapter, was indeed fragmented along highly racialised lines, such that the presence of individuals of pre-categorised

African nationalities was framed as risky and unruly, and singularly vulnerable. This was often in opposition to other groups, such as Syrians and Palestinians who were framed, in contrast, as the 'real refugees'. This will be considered in the next chapter. The vulnerability and risk which was imbued in the figure of the 'person on the move' was one that recognised vulnerability and need, while simultaneously denying the legitimacy of their movement or presence *in situ*. Refugees and migrants 'on the move' were thus turned into objects of protection – and control – through a discourse and practice of protection that emphasised prevention, immobilisation, and, most importantly, return. I will draw out the specific practices and logic of protection born of this in the following chapter.

From that perspective, rather than target the abuse faced by those on the move, protection programming was framed to address and halt the movement itself. This not only justified but created an imperative for UNHCR and IOM to 'rescue' these individuals 'further upstream' before they were subsumed by the flows heading north through the desert to Libya and across the Mediterranean. To protect individuals who were vulnerable-to-something involved, according to IOM (2019: 5), 'development and implementation of interventions to reduce such vulnerability', which, in this context, came to mean interventions aimed at the source of migrant and refugee vulnerability, framed as their mobility itself, or at least their mobility exercised through irregular movement. The 'rescue' was, at times, literal. The joint EUTF-IOM search and rescue operation, for example, officially rescued 'stranded migrants' in the desert north of Agadez (leading to Libya) before returning them to Agadez. Here they became beneficiaries of IOM's protection, understood

primarily as voluntary humanitarian return.⁵⁹ The desert search and rescue operation, however, also served as a metaphor for the underlying rationale of rescuing refugees and migrants from their endangering migration along the route to Europe.

The 'politics of risk' and the 'politics of pity', hence, converged around 'protection' as the appropriate intervention for the people on the move (Aradau 2004). The strength of this logic and discourse of vulnerability, I argue, was that it delimited a group of individuals upon whom protection interventions were justified, at once consolidating the fragmentation of capital seen in the previous chapter and making *necessary* the forms of protection subsequently enacted to respond to their vulnerability. In other words, the 'field-specific set of beliefs' that emerged regarding the vulnerability of people on the move contributed to a shared way of seeing and understanding the field and how to act within it, allowing and making acceptable a shift in the 'rules of the game' and the forms of conceivable protection for people on the move. As will be seen in the following chapter, particular field-specific protection practices and durable solutions emerged from these field dynamics, which, while clearly aligned with migration management

⁵⁹ The EU and IOM have, through the Joint Initiative, been supporting search and rescue operations in the desert north of Agadez since 2016. In Niger, this is taking place across the backdrop of migratory routes out of Niger and into Libya having become more dangerous since 2015, when Niger passed a law on the 'illicit trafficking of migrants'. The law has effectively criminalised irregular migration taking place north of Agadez, forcing migrants and refugees to take more remote and costlier routes (van Dessel 2019). At the same time as conducting their search and rescue operations in the desert, IOM has been a main implementing partner in the construction of the EU-funded police posts in border areas of Niger, which have made it possible for the Nigerien Security Forces to operationalise the crack-down on irregular migration in the first place, effectively pushing the migratory routes further into the desert and as a by-product of that, providing the impetus for the Joint EUTF-IOM search and rescue operation. Perrin (2018) provides an account of the operationalisation of this programme in Niger, shedding light on IOM's use of 'community mobilisers' employed by IOM to intercept migrants and encourage them to reach a transit centre and then be returned, raising questions about the humanitarian and rescue-oriented nature of the programme.

objectives, were at the same time largely naturalised as *the* appropriate response to the vulnerability-as-mobility at play in the mixed migration field. The problem, however, was that the protection on offer by UNHCR and IOM was not necessarily one that refugees and migrants 'on the move' were seeking. A paradox of visibility thus ensued along the Central Mediterranean route, which juxtaposed the discursive visibility of people on the move to what appeared as their relative invisibility or 'slipperiness' on the ground.

Discussions held over a three-day UNHCR-MMC workshop in February 2021 provided insight in that regard. The 'slipperiness' of refugees and migrants was a recurring theme across the workshop on 'Protection in Mixed Movements'. For example, the UNHCR Special Envoy for the Mediterranean, after showing a short video testimony of a Cameroonian who passed through several countries before arriving in Libya asks: 'Why did this person never approach us? Could he have stopped along the way if we had offered him alternatives to this dangerous journey?' (Cochetel 2021). IOM representatives, emphasising the 'slipperiness' of migrants along the Central Mediterranean route, led a presentation entitled 'See Migration like Water' (Cordaro and Sattler 2021). Another panellist presented on the 'challenges of targeting and accessing transit migrants'. The presenter emphasised as a main challenge that 'transit migrants' 'are highly mobile and often stay in transit hubs for a limited amount of time'. Accompanying this was a set of difficulties, not least that humanitarian actors 'struggle to spot vulnerabilities, as some people are actively hiding them, or they are just not visible at a first look'. Of the prescribed recommendations was for humanitarian organisations to increase their presence 'in places in which they (migrants) live and transit' and at 'migrant intersections', including ghettos, train stations, and bus stations (Vidal 2021).

Faced with the apparent 'slipperiness' of the people on the move, the perceived solution for many humanitarian organisations appeared to be to increase their own 'stickiness' by intercepting migrants in areas where they were exercising their mobility and encouraging them to access their services (Pallister-Wilkins 2019). While the intent for many organisations may not have been to immobilise people on the move, for UNHCR and IOM the hoped-for result of such programmes was explicitly, in and of itself, to provide an alternative to onward movement – to reform or correct the risky behaviour of onward movement – in the form of 'protection' *in situ* or back in their country of origin. This challenge of identification, in that sense, brought to light a fundamental disjuncture between the framing of people on the move as vulnerable, their purported 'need' to be rescued upstream, and the ways in which many individuals 'on the move' understood their own mobility, aspirations, and needs.

This section explored the ways in which the construction of a discourse of vulnerability of people on the move served to construct an 'integrated' category of protection intervention, that merged 'vulnerable refugees and migrants' on the move into a single group, thereby consolidating the fragmentation and hierarchisation of capital seen in the previous chapter. Certain risk profiles, framed as a risk of onward movement and as a risk to themselves, were thus turned into legitimate objects of UNHCR and IOM protection, for their own good. This was invariably manifested through a paternalistic set of interventions taking the form of preventative action, in certain risk areas and for certain risk profiles, and of specific interventions towards refugees and migrants moving along the route northwards. These will be further explored in the next chapter.

Visibility through vulnerability

If the previous chapter presented a neat image of nationality-based sorting and categorisation, the discourse of vulnerability entered the picture and blurred the line that sorted UNHCR's 'people of concern' from IOM's 'migrants', as seen in the previous section. This line was further blurred through the *practice* of protection of UNHCR staff members interacting with refugees-and-migrants, which gave rise to *multiple* logics of vulnerability. As I will show, at times vulnerability was seized upon by those working on the ground to transcend the categorical sorting to which the struggle for capital had given rise. Rather than draw on the notion of all people on the move as vulnerable, however, UNHCR field staff were guided by individualised notions of worthiness of protection. This, ultimately, reflected a mismatch between the emerging discourse of vulnerability-as-mobility and the entrenched ways of working and understanding worthiness of protection on the ground.

These logics unsettled the fragmentation and hierarchisation of capital, seen in the previous chapter, in two ways, considered in turn in the following sections. Firstly, the discursive framing of all those on the move as vulnerable was seized upon to make *some* individuals otherwise categorised as 'migrants' into 'people of concern'. Secondly, it allowed for ground-level UNHCR officials to bring otherwise invisibilised 'refugees' into the frame of UNHCR's protection. I refer here to 'vulnerable-enough migrants' and 'vulnerable-enough refugees' to reflect the categories of practice employed by my interlocutors as well as to draw out how some 'borderline case' (that is, 'vulnerable *enough*' cases) were brought into the fold of refugee protection (Bowker and Star 2000: 206). These cases became 'morally legitimate' objects of protection, generating an

amorphous redrawing of the line between 'migrants' and 'people of concern', based on vulnerability, rather than nationality.

'Vulnerable-enough' migrants

While the operationalisation of the mixed migration field demanded a clear separation of 'people of concern' from 'migrants', UNHCR staff working in the field were faced with the difficulties and contradictions involved in distinguishing, in practice, 'persons of concern' from the migrants within mixed movements. As the previous chapter set out, this was largely done, *prima facie*, on the basis of nationality. On the ground, however, and in the face of the vulnerability-as-mobility discourse, the line separating refugees from migrants was no longer clear, beyond the one institutionally drawn by UNHCR and IOM. The potential vulnerability of *all those* on the move blurred the neat line delimiting the two categories, rendering asylum seekers registered with UNHCR not necessarily more deserving of protection than those considered *prima facie* as migrants. Indeed, the perception of need and vulnerability *across categories* was commonplace, especially among UNHCR interlocutors who were tasked with drawing the line on the ground. Despite the apparent rigidity of the 'migrant' and 'people of concern' classification, the perceptions of vulnerability held by some UNHCR protection officers created space for a redrawing of their boundaries.

My UNHCR interlocutors, in particular those interacting directly with refugees-and-migrants in registration and protection-related work, seemed particularly conflicted by what appeared as the arbitrariness of the Refugee Convention and its carving out of a specific protection regime for refugees. If, on the face of it, both refugees and migrants on the move were equally vulnerable,

then why should refugees be afforded a specific form of protection? While the mixed migration framework provided for the 'protection' of migrants via IOM, this 'IOM protection' was sometimes viewed as a lesser one by UNHCR staff members. This appears to have caused a shift away from 'deservingness' of international protection being associated with risk of persecution in one's country of origin, as provided by the Refugee Convention definition, towards one that linked deservingness of protection to vulnerability and need *in situ*. As one UNHCR interlocutor working on refugee protection in Tunisia put it:

Both *refugees and migrants* who passed through Libya to get here (Tunisia) have experienced human rights violations. For me, the main problem is how can you grant international protection to people who experienced violence, torture, and rape *en route* to here, but who don't necessarily fall under the Refugee Convention. The line is not clear on whether we should be referring them to IOM or tell them to stay here with UNHCR. For me, international protection should be about people's ability to live decently and access rights wherever they are, not about whether they are at risk or will die in their country of origin.

This line of reflection eventually brought some of my interlocutors to draw, on an *ad hoc* basis, those perceived as 'vulnerable-enough migrants' into the fold of refugee protection. In Tunisia, this allowed them to fall under the protection of UNHCR, at least temporarily, until their refugee claim was decided. These practices took place at the profiling stage, described in the previous chapter, in which the initial nationality-based classification was occasionally

upended based on the person's perceived vulnerability or 'specific needs'.⁶⁰ As one UNHCR interlocutor overseeing profiling in Zarzis put it:

At the profiling stage, our objective is to detect the asylum seekers *and the vulnerable cases*. We insist on vulnerability and on the trajectory of the person. For example, if it's a single woman who passed through Sudan and Libya, or if it's an unaccompanied minor, then we consider that the person is vulnerable and could maybe be registered. So basically, nationality helps us determine whether the groups are asylum seekers or migrants, but looking at basic needs and vulnerability also helps us determine whether the person is in need of protection. Some of the factors that we consider in assessing vulnerability are whether it is a woman travelling alone, their age, and whether the person had a difficult journey to Tunisia.

In Libya, similarly to the vulnerability-based exception in UNHCR Tunisia's profiling process, individuals outside of the nine nationalities registered with UNHCR (those considered of 'migrant nationalities'), were exceptionally registered with the agency if deemed vulnerable-enough through a 'vulnerability identification referral'.⁶¹ Rather than the exception to the *prima facie* categorisation being articulated around the person's international protection needs (that is, their fear of persecution in their country of origin), it was based on their perceived vulnerability *in situ*, which allowed individuals otherwise categorised and understood as migrants to be considered as of concern to UNHCR for the purpose of registration.

⁶⁰ 'Specific needs' is a system of classification used by UNHCR to determine vulnerability and target assistance. UNHCR describes this as a 'standardized and exhaustive list of an individual's particular characteristics, background, or risks that may provoke protection exigencies (UNHCR 2010: 9). This includes a set of 11 categories of 'specific needs' (for example, child at risk, unaccompanied or separated child, woman at risk, older person at risk, disability, serious medical condition), with each having a number of sub-categories (UNHCR 2009).

⁶¹ This is considered in only very exceptional circumstances. As mentioned in the previous chapter, only 256 individuals have been registered as of 2020 from outside the pre-determined 'refugee nationalities'.

An initial dislocation played out, therefore, between the official discourse of vulnerability-as-mobility, seen in the previous section, and the perception of some UNHCR staff members interacting directly with people on the move. The official discourse of vulnerability-as-mobility implied that, with all people on the move framed as vulnerable, UNHCR and IOM should protect 'their own' vulnerable group, respectively. Yet faced with individuals perceived as vulnerable, and with the underlying rationale of targeting the 'most vulnerable', the logic of vulnerability-as-mobility meant that some UNHCR staff members, attempted to draw those they considered the 'most vulnerable' into the fold of their own protection, regardless of *prima facie* categorisation. These borderline cases of 'vulnerable-enough migrants' presented themselves as morally legitimate objects of care without necessarily being seen as refugees. Through these cases, lines were subtly redrawn, producing an opening for UNHCR officials to make individuals of concern to UNHCR in more indeterminate ways.

As the above passage indicates, however, on the ground not all migrants were considered vulnerable-enough to transcend the migrant/person of concern categorisation. In a further dislocation of the vulnerability-as-mobility discourse, only *some* migrants 'on the move' corresponded to the *individualised* perception of vulnerability that continued to prevail in face-to-face interactions between UNHCR field staff and refugees-and-migrants. This gave rise to a fundamental disjuncture in the way in which vulnerability was *discursively* projected as extended to all people on the move, and how it continued to translate in practice in the delivery of substantive protection and assistance. On the ground, rather, the benchmark of vulnerability was still associated with traditional and individualised conceptions of vulnerability.

Thus, while the discourse around vulnerability and protection had shifted to making *all* persons on the move vulnerable *in theory*, the '*materiality*' of vulnerability had not, meaning that the tools, assessments, and protection practices - the lens through which vulnerability was made legible to UNHCR and formed part of the agency's '*habitus*' - had remained much the same and continued to privilege very specific and individualised forms of vulnerability (Cowley 2020). For UNHCR officials on the ground, in practice vulnerability was still firmly articulated around the notion of '*specific needs*', a standardised set of '*vulnerability categories*' employed by UNHCR worldwide, empowering field staff to label the vulnerabilities of its persons of concern and prioritise the delivery of assistance among them. The technical tools related to vulnerability and the perceptions and practices of those on the ground, had, thus, not entirely caught up with the notion of mobility-as-vulnerability in circulation in the mixed migration field. There was a mismatch between the discourse of vulnerability-as-mobility, which governed *in theory* the extension of protection to all persons on the move, and the longstanding practice and structures of UNHCR protection.

This mismatch or '*disruption*' suggested that individual field actors' habitus had not evenly, nor entirely, adjusted to the emerging logic of vulnerability in the field, giving way to unexpected practices and understandings of vulnerability.⁶² One of these unintended manifestations was the way in which some individuals pre-categorised as '*migrants*' were made worthy of protection *qua* refugees by the discourse of vulnerability. The latter were brought into the fold of *refugee* protection using UNHCR's longstanding individualised conception of vulnerability. Accordingly,

⁶² This could be understood in relation to Bourdieu's concept of hysteresis, in which, often as a result of rapid changes in the field, there is a '*disruption between habitus and field*', where habitus and changes arising in the field are mismatched (Hardy 2014: 127)

certain groups of 'vulnerable migrants' had the potential to form 'borderline cases' and transcend the migrant/person of concern pre-categorisation. Considered as *potentially* 'vulnerable-enough', for example, were single women, unaccompanied minors, severe medical cases, and LGBTI cases. One interlocutor working in the Libyan protection context described her advocacy to have a 'migrant' assisted by UNHCR:

There was this guy from Chad who was severely burned following a really bad explosion where several migrants were seriously wounded, but he wasn't of one of the nine nationalities that UNHCR considers as being 'of concern', therefore, in theory, we couldn't refer him for urgent medical services. Normally UNHCR says, if they are not of those nationalities and not registered, they can't be referred for UNHCR funded services. The man's condition was so severe, he had severe burns all over. We pushed and pushed and finally UNHCR agreed to consider his case for a medical referral, but normally they would say, 'Go to IOM'.

For most other interlocutors, this vulnerability was most often identified based on age (children/elderly), gender (women), and sexual orientation, along the lines of the classical conception of vulnerability laid out in the previous section. The vulnerable-as-mobility migrants falling outside of this scope were seldom considered vulnerable-enough to cross the migrant/people of concern barrier, creating a residual category for whom specific forms of protection were reserved, as will be considered in the following chapter. Much work has already been done in critiquing conceptions and practices of vulnerability in the humanitarian context, in particular, how certain groups are determined as 'morally legitimate' subjects of assistance, and in critiquing their disempowering, gendered, and racialised undertones (Ticktin 2011: 19; Cowley 2020). My aim is not to add to this, but instead to consider how, in the mixed migration field

where vulnerability was seemingly not determined by legal status, it could instead be used as a means to migrate between categories, thereby changing and redrawing their very nature.

In the narrowing of the 'refugee' and 'migrant' categories, shaped by the perception of vulnerability of both, a shift appears to have taken place in how UNHCR protection was understood on the ground by those tasked with delivering it. Many UNHCR staff on the ground knew full well the individuals being 'made' of concern might eventually be rejected upon assessment of their refugee claim. Most perceived individuals on the move as not being 'real refugees' at all, as I will consider in the following chapter. Yet for some having these people on the move fall under UNHCR's protection, however temporarily, meant providing vulnerable individuals with needed assistance and allowing them to consider their next steps in their journey. For many of my interlocutors interacting on the ground with people on the move, this was fundamentality driven by an impulse to ease the difficulties associated with onward movement. The legal basis of refugee protection appeared to have very little bearing. Protection, in that sense, was conceived of quite similarly for individuals of 'refugee nationalities' and 'vulnerable-enough migrants' on the move, who were perceived as similarly vulnerable, yet also as inescapably on the move. Reflecting on this, one UNHCR protection officer said:

Seeking asylum in this context is not really about people being refugees under the convention, but about them finding a practical way to survive until they move on. Seeking asylum might mean having a shelter, legal status, and support while their asylum claims are being processed which could take a long time – up to a year, sometimes longer – enough to decide on and plan for their next move.

In the mixed migration field, the discourse of 'vulnerability' had come to define the scope of action of IOM and UNHCR, justifying, in theory, each agency's 'protection' of *their* people on the move, as seen in the first section. Yet vulnerability, on the ground, functioned according to a very different modality, in which the people of concern/migrant distinction was not always consolidated. It was, rather, at times unsettled through the *ad hoc* practices of UNHCR field staff. Here the 'borderline cases' of the 'vulnerable-enough migrants' occasionally passed across the division that was established between IOM and UNHCR. These cases, at the same time, symbolised the unmooring of the 'refugee category'; its detachment from its legal definition in favour of a more contingent notion of deservingness linked to conceptions of vulnerability. The final section further illustrates this by turning to another manifestation of the unruliness of vulnerability by considering the contingency of making 'refugees' from outside the mixed migration framing.

'Vulnerable-enough' refugees

Scholarship has explored the ways in which refugees are expected to perform their vulnerability to receive humanitarian assistance, be considered for a resettlement programme, and, sometimes, in order to prove their 'refugeeness' in the first place. In the latter case, during refugee status determination interviews, asylum seekers, are often placed in a position of having to lay bare their past trauma, experiences, and physical markings in order to prove past persecution and make 'credible' the risk of future persecution (Smith and Waite 2019). This section explores yet another modality of vulnerability, however, according to which individuals already perceived as refugees, *theoretically*, were made into objects of UNHCR protection by virtue of their vulnerability alone. I draw on the case of Libyans, here, who, although perceived as refugees in principle, were not registered with UNHCR Tunisia unless seen as 'vulnerable enough'. While the previous section

considered how those perceived as 'vulnerable-enough migrants' were made into 'people of concern', this section explores how 'refugees' otherwise invisibilised by UNHCR were also, on an *ad hoc* basis, made into people of concern through the lens of vulnerability.

As seen in the previous chapter, in Tunisia, Libyans displaced by the conflict were considered by many of my UNHCR interlocutors as refugees 'in theory'. They were understood to have fled for reasons that legally justified refugee protection according to the Refugee Convention and other instruments, yet their situation in Tunisia, often articulated by UNHCR officials around their perceived material wealth, indicated that they did not '*need*' the assistance associated refugee protection. As the head of UNHCR's office in Zarzis put it: 'Plain and simple, Libyans *are* refugees, even if we only register them in exceptional cases when they are extremely vulnerable and need assistance'. Another high level UNHCR Tunisia official explained, 'Well, if you are taking the *legalist* approach, then technically, yes, Libyans should be registered with UNHCR, but we are being pragmatic here'. At the time, Libyans displaced in Tunisia were generally perceived as not 'vulnerable enough' to warrant UNHCR's attention, providing no real impetus for UNHCR to push for their registration with the Tunisian authorities. Hence they remained largely invisible to the refugee protection structures in the country. Various iterations of 'Libyans are fine in Tunisia', 'Libyans have money, they don't need our assistance' were routinely expressed in response to my line of questioning, such that despite an acknowledgment of Libyans theoretically fulfilling the refugee definition, it proved almost impossible to question why these refugees-in-theory hadn't been considered as morally legitimate objects of protection in the same right as those part of mixed migration.

From the start of my fieldwork, I was confronted with the constant incredulity of my interlocutors at my line of questioning about the situation of Libyans in Tunisia. On the face of it, Libyans in Tunisia defied the common perceptions associated with the refugee label. While institutionally invisible to UNHCR, in different pockets of Tunisia, Libyans were, in contrast, quite visible. With many driving nice cars, staying in resorts on the coast, and Libyan-plated cars filling the parking lots of nice restaurants, Libyans were not easily identifiable with the vulnerability-related conceptions related to the refugee category. One CTR reception officer expressed his scepticism at Libyans being helped by UNHCR: 'Libyans come here with their fancy cars, they live in nice homes, and then they come to ask us to be recognised as refugees. What can we give them? What's the point of referring them to UNHCR for registration if they don't even need assistance? So, we tell them that we won't be able to offer them anything'. Clearly, most Libyans did not meet the picture of vulnerability and neediness with which many interlocutors appeared to associate UNHCR's people of concern.

In the face of most Libyans not being viewed as legitimate objects of protection, and to affirm my own legitimacy in exploring this topic, I sometimes found myself emphasising the *vulnerability* of some Libyans to make them more legible to my interlocutors. This, I discovered early on, caught their attention, while at the same time sparking my own discomfort at reinforcing the refugee-vulnerability typology. While the purported universality of the right to seek asylum got me no traction in conversation with my interlocutors, the notion of *some* Libyans being vulnerable momentarily unsettled the invisibility of the otherwise not-vulnerable-enough Libyans in Tunisia. What I eventually came to realise is that 'vulnerable-enough Libyans' embodied borderline cases of their own, enabling some to transcend the categorisation and sorting to which

gave rise the struggle for capital seen in the previous chapter. Here, too, this was done by UNHCR field staff drawing on individualised conceptions of vulnerability.

As one UNHCR official put it in Tunisia: 'UNHCR does not register Libyans, but we started to create exceptions for the most vulnerable because we couldn't really justify preventing an entire nationality from asking for protection'. Rather than expanding the scope of UNHCR's 'concern' into the realm of 'migrant' protection, such as in the case of 'vulnerable-enough migrants', here vulnerability allowed certain Libyans, who were as a group already considered as refugees-in-theory, to be occasionally and individually considered asylum seekers by UNHCR. In these cases, too, it was ground-level UNHCR registration staff who took it upon themselves on a case-by-case basis to identify vulnerable cases and lobby for their registration with senior UNHCR officials. Despite that, only a select few Libyans stood a chance to get registered with the agency.

Some viewed this discretionary power quite cynically, with various iterations of this cynicism articulated by one UNHCR registration officer: 'It's no longer a right to claim asylum. To claim asylum is not really about asking for international protection, it's us asking them are you vulnerable? It's about measuring their vulnerability and need for assistance'. This was, nonetheless, the only way that invisible Libyans could pass a different categorical barrier within UNHCR, allowing them to move between 'other of concern', as seen in the previous chapter, to 'asylum seeker'. A counselling session and an 'in-depth assessment' of the individual's vulnerability was thus conducted *before* the person was formally able to register with the agency, following which the registration officer would *potentially* advocate for the person's registration to

the office's Senior Protection Officer. One UNHCR registration official reflected on the shift towards considering the 'vulnerability claim' of Libyan refugees over their refugee claim:

I sometimes advocate to the head of office on a case-by-case basis for vulnerable Libyans to be registered as asylum seekers instead of 'other of concern', even though in practice I think that we should allow all Libyans to register as asylum seekers; this should be their right. To me it is obvious that they cannot return to their country of origin because there is a war there; most of them fled from Libya, for example, because they belonged to a certain family or have relatives who want to kill them. Libyans who approach us often come with proof clearly showing their refugee claims, including photos and stories for example of their children being killed before their eyes. We cannot even register these people and we cannot refer them for assistance. The solution then is for me to push for certain individuals to be considered as asylum seekers, for them to have a chance at having assistance. I need to highlight their vulnerability in Tunisia in order for them to be considered as asylum seekers.

A small number of Libyans ended up being registered with UNHCR as asylum seekers on this basis. No clear guidelines were established in order to clarify which Libyans could be considered vulnerable-enough, however. This vulnerability was often articulated around the notion of 'protection concerns', with UNHCR staff members emphasising they were only able to advocate for the registration of Libyans as asylum seekers upon an assessment of 'serious protection concerns' *in Tunisia*. The limits of this remained ambiguous and were left to the personal discretion of the registration officers as well as to the ability of Libyans to 'perform' or embody the vulnerability to which those officials would be most sympathetic. Like the 'vulnerable-enough migrants' seen in the previous section, however, there existed predefined groups of 'borderline cases' for whom advocacy was possible. Some UNHCR staff described having personally advocated for Libyan women who had experienced sexual violence, for example, while others

described that only LGBT Libyans could be successfully registered with the agency by virtue of the perception of them not being able to integrate in Tunisia.

At the time of my fieldwork, according to my UNHCR interlocutors, LGBT Libyans constituted the most important proportion of registered Libyan asylum seekers. This was the source of some tension, however, as these same ground-level staff were having to turn away Libyans who didn't fit the vulnerability threshold of borderline cases. One protection official reflected on the arbitrary nature of only being able to carve out an exception for LGBT Libyans as asylum seekers:

It is basically only LGBT Libyan refugees who have been registered as asylum seekers with UNHCR so far. A lot of Libyans are approaching us for support though. It is very awkward because what are we supposed to say to the Libyans who approach us for help? I'm sorry we only register LGBT Libyans? That doesn't work, so it is very difficult when they approach us for help.

Thus, while most Libyans in Tunisia were perceived as 'fine as they are', and therefore not of concern to UNHCR, a small number of Libyans were able to make themselves visible to the agency through their perceived vulnerability and need for protection. At the same time, ground-level UNHCR staff members, through their *ad hoc* advocacy, were contributing to reshaping the notion of international protection based on perceived need and vulnerability. Accordingly, perceptions of Libyans being 'fine' socioeconomically and not requiring UNHCR's assistance were occasionally upended through individualised manifestations of vulnerability and need, making these few individuals visible as legitimate objects of UNHCR protection. Only the few considered vulnerable-enough were thus able to become asylum seekers despite the general perception of Libyans

theoretically being refugees. This reflects, more broadly, a shift towards a particularly contingent form of UNHCR protection, the merit of which was decided before any formal determination.

Thus, like the 'vulnerable-enough migrants', seen in the previous section, Libyans, too, were occasionally brought into the fold of refugee protection by UNHCR field staff who drew on the individualised conception of vulnerability, itself a hang-up from UNHCR's longstanding structures and practices of protection, which enabled UNHCR field staff to target and make visible those perceived as most vulnerable. Here, too, the logic of vulnerability practiced on the ground, with its entrenched categorisations of vulnerability, at times contributed to blurring the hierarchisation of capital that had been formed among those outside the mixed migration framing. What this meant for Libyans, however, was that being considered as 'refugees-in-theory' did not suffice for them to be of concern to UNHCR. The logic of vulnerability instead created an additional barrier or test for them to pass in order to be considered worthy of protection.

Thus, while 'people on the move' were potentially vulnerable and worthy of protection by virtue of being on the move, thereby enabling a malleability between 'migrants' and 'people of concern', only the most vulnerable 'refugees-in-theory' from outside the mixed migration framing were made into objects of concern to UNHCR. The borderline cases brought to light in the last two sections, together, expose the malleability and permeability of the categories of 'migrant' and 'refugee' and the forms of sorting that were considered in the previous chapter. While, for those perceived as making up mixed migration, vulnerability allowed for an expansion of protection towards *some* individuals considered as 'vulnerable migrants', this same lens of vulnerability, outside the framing of mixed migration, simultaneously appeared to make refugee protection

more contingent, narrowing its application to *vulnerable refugees*, rather than to refugees *as refugees*. In both cases being made visible as a person of concern to UNHCR required corresponding to individualised criteria of vulnerability, which functioned as a modality of transcending the precategorisation established to neatly distinguish the 'people of concern' from the others.

Conclusion

This chapter explored how the different logics of vulnerability at play in the mixed migration field functioned to make visible *certain* refugees-and-migrants, making possible protection interventions towards them. While the previous chapter set out the sorting practices that distinguished between 'migrants' and UNHCR's 'people of concern', the notion of vulnerability, here, blurred this categorical division making it difficult, in discourse as in practice, to distinguish between the two. The logics of vulnerability, in their differing and sometimes contradictory forms, ultimately made the boundaries of each of the categories more permeable and their application, in practice, more indeterminate, often in unintended ways.

In official UNHCR and IOM discourse on mixed migration along the Central Mediterranean route, people on the move were blurred into a single category of 'integrated' intervention through a discursive shift that framed *all* people on the move as vulnerable, simply by being on the move or considered at risk of onward movement. In the mixed migration field, the emerging logic of vulnerability allowed UNHCR and IOM to make visible as 'vulnerable' groups often overlooked by the humanitarian lens of vulnerability: young migrant and refugee men, who constituted the majority of those moving along the Central Mediterranean route. This required a discursive shift

in how vulnerability was conceived and projected. With the starting point of characterising the migratory journey as rife with danger and risk, all refugees and migrants along the route were constituted as vulnerable to experiencing harm. The shift towards 'vulnerability-as-mobility' made all those on the move potential objects of protection and control by virtue of their perceived vulnerability, while groups across large swathes of Africa were considered at risk of being pulled into the flows moving northwards. This discourse made necessary – for their own good – 'sticky' protection interventions along the route which aimed at protecting people on the move through their immobilisation.

On the ground, too, vulnerability served as a modality of making visible. However, if vulnerability-as-mobility made all those on the move theoretical objects of protection interventions, vulnerability as practiced and understood on the ground by UNHCR field staff continued to be grounded in individualised conceptions of vulnerability. According to the latter, only certain individuals were considered vulnerable-enough. This chapter explored these 'borderline cases', which, in a mismatch to the emerging field logic of vulnerability-as-mobility, embodied *individualised* vulnerability, and were, on an *ad hoc* basis, made visible to UNHCR as 'of concern', thereby transcending the precategorisation of 'migrant' or 'other of concern' to which they would have otherwise been affixed. In the context of mixed migration, this allowed some 'vulnerable migrants' to be brought into the fold of refugee protection. In contrast, outside the framing of mixed migration, Libyans, who were considered as refugees-in-theory but made 'other of concern', were occasionally registered and made visible as asylum seekers upon a determination of their vulnerability.

At the same time, these borderline, vulnerable-enough cases contributed to reshaping the boundaries of the refugee category and the meaning of international protection more broadly. For UNHCR, and with deservingness of protection being associated with need and vulnerability *in situ*, international protection was incrementally being redrawn through the perceptions and practices of those on the ground, who associated protection with providing *assistance* to those conceived as the most vulnerable, and hence the most legitimate objects of protection. While, on one hand, this allowed the boundaries of UNHCR protection to expand and incorporate individuals who would have otherwise been categorised as migrants, on the other, it meant that those who were theoretically considered as refugees were only made visible if proven on a discretionary basis to be vulnerable-enough.

I will further explore the blurring of these lines in the following chapter by considering the isomorphic forms of protection enacted by UNHCR and IOM. These suggest, as will be seen, an increasing interchangeability in who was protected and how. Building on observations made on the narrowing of the refugee and migrant categories and redrawing of the boundaries of international protection, I consider how the refugee and migrant bifurcation was further upended through a remapping of protection on the ground.

CHAPTER 6 – PARALLEL PROTECTION TRACKS

In this chapter, I first consider the way in which the people on the move – the ‘vulnerable’ refugees and migrants over whom UNHCR and IOM rigidly divided protection responsibility – were convertible into a *single* form of *merged* economic capital. With refugees-and-migrants forming the foundation of this field and what was at stake within it UNHCR and IOM were thrown into a struggle to convert them into other ‘species’ of capital, namely economic capital. The funding coming from European donors was destined towards responding to *mixed migration*, however. A particularity of this mixed migration field, I argue, was this merged form of economic capital that posed specific structural constraints on its actors. For European donors all persons on the move were conceptualised as objects of protection, a protection which, it was hoped, would prevent onward movement. That individuals were characterised as refugees or migrants mattered little to European donors at this stage of their journey to ultimately be categorised as worthy recipients of protection.

The structural constraints produced by this parallel struggle for *merged* forms of capital, I argue, contributed to shaping field-specific practices of protection which, in effect, erased the purported distinction between refugees and migrants on the ground. These practices were not wholly new, but the product of the structures of the field and the trajectories of each agency, both of which contributed to shaping a field-specific space of possibilities when it came to the protection of refugees and migrants. Institutionally, UNHCR and IOM continued to insist on the bifurcation of the refugee/migrant protection system yet in practice they were enacting very similar forms of protection. In doing so, they blurred the distinctiveness of the very categories whose boundaries

they purported to guard. In this chapter, I turn to these protection practices as enacted by UNHCR and IOM on the ground.

First I consider this in relation to the forms of protection-as-assistance that took shape in the mixed migration field. Then, in the second section, and forming of the bulk of this chapter, I evidence the ways in which these structural constraints produced parallel practices, rooted in the field-specific conception of protection in relation to solutions. In the first instance, this resulted in an interchangeability of protection services delivered to refugees and migrants *in situ*, while in the second instance, this resulted in increasingly converging solutions and in a 'downward spiral' of protection for all those considered as on the move. A consideration of the practice and logics of protection shows that, in effect, the forms of IOM and UNHCR protection have come to mirror each other calling into question why the two agencies, and in particular UNHCR, continue to maintain the categorical distinction at all. Central to this, as will be seen, is the symbolic differentiation at work between UNHCR and IOM in the field, rather than any substantive differentiation of refugees and migrants.

Merged capitals, homologous protection

As seen in Chapter 3, European funding dedicated to the protection of refugees-and-migrants represented an important part of the funding earmarked for responding to mixed migration and formed a central part of donor strategy in the region. EUTF documents and EU representatives routinely presented the funding scheme as the 'largest protection instrument', with over 50 per cent of funding dedicated to protection programming (European Commission 2020a). Of importance here is the fact that no distinction was made in *whose* protection they were funding.

This is because the EUTF funding and other funding schemes in the region, such as the Regional Development and Protection Programme for North Africa (RDPP), were directed towards protecting *all* people on the move, with funding allocated to protection forming one large 'pot' to which potential protection providers appealed for funding (European Commission 2022a).

This, I argue, contributed to shaping protection practices and action in two ways, which I will briefly consider in this section, after detailing the 'merged' nature of this capital. Firstly, it threw UNHCR and IOM into a struggle and competition over the merged economic resources in the field. Secondly, and related to this, it contributed to a perception of interchangeability of protection *in situ* for refugees and migrants and mirroring forms of protection being carried out by the two agencies. It was not only the economic capital that was merged, however. For through this, the distinctiveness of the categories the agencies insisted on maintaining and the forms of protection to which refugees and migrants were entitled also began to blur for those involved in its delivery. Not only were the protection 'services' perceived as interchangeable, but increasingly those seeking them were perceived as interchangeable too.

Merged economic capital

The funding and interest of donors channelled into projects aimed at assisting 'people on the move', regardless of category, meant that the funding made available to UNHCR and IOM in the field was merged into a single form of economic capital, disbursed according to the proportion of refugees/migrants and the ability of each agency to frame *their* protection projects as worthy of being funded. With the economic capital available to UNHCR and IOM merged into a single 'pot', UNHCR and IOM were thus pulled into a struggle, and competition, over securing their

'share of the migration pie' – of the *same* pie – to echo the expression used by my IOM interlocutor, quoted in Chapter 3. This section briefly considers the nature of this merged capital before turning to the practices of protection that have been shaped, in part, by the struggle for it.

In Libya, under the EUTF, UNHCR and IOM have since 2015 jointly undertaken the implementation of three large-scale projects of protection, together totalling a staggering EUR 184.6 million (European Commission 2021).⁶³ This had obvious implications on how projects were framed and the practices of protection that flowed from it. For instance, the most important protection programme jointly implemented by the two agencies through their proposed 'action document', was explicitly framed to 'manage mixed migration', covering assistance to refugees and vulnerable migrants as well as 'durable solutions' for both. Outcome indicators of the EUTF programme quantified the delivery of protection services to refugees and migrants on same indicator line, blurring categories, and the forms of protection to which they would have been entitled under international normative frameworks.⁶⁴

As we have seen, the economic capital in the field was, in part, accessible through the 'accumulation' of field-specific capital (i.e. the number of registered persons of concern or migrants under IOM programmes). Yet it was not enough for UNHCR/IOM to show that it had refugees/migrants under 'its protection', requiring funding. In their proposals for protection

⁶³ The three projects are: 'Managing mixed migration flows in Libya through expanding protection space and supporting local socio-economic development' (EUR 99.6 million, carried out with the WHO), 'Integrated approach to protection and emergency assistance to vulnerable and stranded migrants in Libya' (EUR 29 million) and 'Protection and sustainable solutions for migrants and refugees along the Central Mediterranean Route' (EUR 56 million).

⁶⁴ For instance, one main project indicator is worded 'Number of migrants in transit and forcibly displaced people protected or assisted' (Akvo 2021).

projects, they had to additionally show how that funding represented an 'added value' to their donors and donor interests. UNHCR sometimes explicitly compared itself and its 'added value' to IOM in order to sell its protection projects to donors. Echoing one UNHCR interlocutor's explanation, also presented in Chapter 3, 'We need to show them why it is in their interest to fund us over another agency, for example IOM'. As a result, the two agencies were pulled into a struggle to define and redefine the range of legitimate and funding-worthy protection practices. This struggle, I argue, shaped field-specific forms and practices of protection.

From the perspective of EU donors, the purpose of protection funding and the range of funding-worthy protection action was clear. The fact that EU funding was deployed by donors in an attempt to immobilise individuals 'on the move' was not veiled, and donors were closely involved in making this clear to the 'people on the move' themselves. In an interview carried out at the embassy, a representative of an important EU-donor state candidly described interactions he had with refugees and migrants during field visits:

I've previously made trips to the south of Tunisia as well as to Libya where I have had to have the difficult discussion of telling refugees and migrants myself to drop unrealistic expectations about going to Europe. In relation to Tunisia, the message is that the most important thing is that they are safe here, and they *are* in fact safe here in Tunisia. Then we can start having conversations about integration or other long-term solutions for refugees and migrants. I've had the conversation with Eritreans in particular: 'Look you're safe here, that's our first concern...'. Through UNHCR for example we are helping them stay in Tunisia, and one of the main things we are doing is supporting them through the reception centres in the south.

The provision of protection-as-assistance and solutions for refugees-and-migrants in certain targeted geographic areas were funding priorities for donors. This same embassy, for instance,

was proving equal funding to UNHCR and IOM to run and maintain reception centres in the south of Tunisia. What that meant was that, in certain geographic areas 'protection' for refugees and migrants took on an interchangeable character in the form of material assistance *in situ* for both groups. Donors were interested in funding reception centres and providing limited material assistance to individuals of targeted groups, in targeted areas. When I asked him about what form 'protection' of refugees and migrants took for him, he emphasised that:

The Swiss, UK, Dutch, and EU delegations have all invested a lot into the rehabilitation of these reception centres for refugees and migrants in order to get them up to a certain standard. This is a protection priority for us. At first, the situation in the reception centres in the south was very problematic. The conditions there for both refugees and migrants were horrible, almost just as bad as they were in certain detention centres that I have visited throughout the years in Libya. When it comes to the migration situation here in Tunisia, the reception centres are a priority. Why? Because the south is where things happen. That is definitely where our attention and funding is at.

To recall, as seen in Chapter 3, the south was not necessarily where there were more migrants, simply more migrants that corresponded to the 'mixed migration' label that had been drawn up to appeal to donor interests. Nonetheless, with this interest on the south, donors were closely involved in monitoring the situation there and provided *targeted* funding via protection programmes. The implementation of this form of protection-as-assistance was carried out by UNHCR and IOM alike, bridging the refugee-migrant bifurcation with a single form of assistance. Thus, in stark contrast to how migrants were being received by European states *in Europe*, the refugees *and migrants* who were perceived as making up the mixed migration in the south of

Tunisia and Libya were both considered, at least theoretically, as worthy objects of this form of protection-*qua*-assistance *before* reaching European shores.

One official of UNHCR's main implementing partner in Libya explained to me: 'There is no doubt that the EUTF has completely politicised the delivery of protection services in Libya but at the same time the EU is willing to fund assistance to refugees *and* migrants, so this is not the problem. From there, however, the problem has become the competition between UNHCR and IOM and their continued insistence on drawing a line between refugees and migrants for them to be able to access and divide that funding in the first place'. Hence, in the next sections I turn to the delivery of parallel and isomorphic forms of protection to 'refugees' and 'migrants' and the contradictions to which they gave rise.

Parallel protection tracks in situ

This section briefly describes my encounter with these protection-as-assistance programmes delivered by UNHCR and IOM in southern Tunisia. It is interesting to view this encounter in parallel with the processes described in Chapter 4, where the institutional preoccupation with unmixing and sorting UNHCR's 'people of concern' from 'migrants' and placing them within their respective 'protection tracks' was brought to light. If 'people of concern' and 'migrants' were being sorted based on a perceived substantive difference between the two, then one might expect a substantive difference, too, in the forms of protection afforded to them. Yet, on the ground, and in contrast, the individuals involved in providing this protection-as-assistance appeared to see very little difference in the forms of protection provided, pointing to an interchangeability similar to that mentioned above in relation to donors.

On my first field visit to the south of Tunisia, I met with a young IOM official in the agency's barbed-wire enclosed Zarzis field office. The young official had started at IOM as a caseworker and had moved up the ranks, his colleagues in Tunis referring to him as *the* person with whom to speak in the south. From the onset his answers were cautious and carefully worded. Clearly I was not the first researcher or journalist with whom he spoke. I could tell that I wouldn't get much out of the discussion, beyond IOM's main institutional line. His statements, however, revealed a particular conception of IOM's protection role in southern Tunisia that had become emblematic of the parallel forms of protection taking shape in the field of mixed migration. As will be seen, these parallel protection 'tracks' expose the isomorphic forms of protection, and the perceived interchangeability between these tracks, being put in place by UNHCR and IOM through EU and EU member-state funded and 'designed' assistance projects for people on the move.

Explaining the context in the south of the country, he specified that people:

Come to Tunisia and either ask for international protection from UNHCR or they ask for *the specialised protection of IOM*. Most will ask for asylum. But if they don't have any reason to seek asylum, *they will fall under the protection of IOM*. This means that they receive accommodation and assistance from IOM (italics my own).

As mentioned in the previous chapters, individuals who were perceived as making up mixed migration were, at least theoretically, divided up and managed from the moment they entered Tunisia and Libya. UNHCR and IOM, in that sense, projected themselves over those they categorised as 'people of concern' and migrants, respectively, with the official rationale of

providing protection to these seemingly distinct groups. What is interesting, here, is the official's perception of IOM's 'specialised protection' as homologous to that of UNHCR's, with the conception of protection itself limited to providing material assistance *in situ*.

This was a common thread throughout my time in the south of Tunisia. During my time there, IOM and UNHCR officials, in turn, brought me to visit their respective reception facilities, where they provided accommodation for those falling under their 'protection'. On each of my visits, my interlocutors, who worked at the centres, boasted about what made their reception facility better than the other agency's: UNHCR's is bigger than IOM's, IOM's is newer and in better condition than UNHCR's – as if individuals had any say over where they would be staying at all following their categorisation as migrant or person of concern to UNHCR. Despite the posturing of my interlocutors, these centres were practically indistinguishable from each other if not for the logos of the local NGOs managing the establishments adorning the walls. Both were held in equally grim and poorly maintained buildings on the outskirts of town, with rows of rooms hosting individuals in overcrowded conditions.

Despite this, the presentation of each agency's centres gave the impression of interchangeability; that the difference between the centres held by UNHCR and IOM could be reduced only to their material condition, not the substantive protection of differentiated categories of individuals. This is because in the south of Tunisia, IOM and UNHCR were engaged in delivering what was perceived as parallel forms of protection through *assistance* to migrants and refugees, respectively, supported by the same donors whose flags set on a plaque similarly adorned the walls of the IOM/UNHCR reception centres. Following last chapter's observations on IOM and

UNHCR's attempts to get 'sticky' in order to provide protection to people on the move *in situ*, these parallel forms of protection, reduced to material assistance provided along migration routes, made refugee and migrant protection at the interface between those individuals and UNHCR/IOM almost materially interchangeable. Individuals making up mixed migration, whether categorised as people of concern to UNHCR or migrants, could access accommodation and assistance (cash assistance/vouchers/non-food items) while they remained in these centres.

Another feature of these parallel forms of protection was the conditionality attached to the protection-as-assistance. A highly conditional form of protection emerged that, in effect, made assistance contingent on the immobility of people on the move. Indeed, in both Tunisia and Libya, the protection-as-assistance of IOM and UNHCR was tied to its geographic and temporal circumscription, underlying a certain logic of control to this protection. In Tunisia, for instance, the focus on the south of the country and the presence of a 'protection infrastructure' there meant that individuals could not access this assistance anywhere else in the country and had to remain in the south. At the time of my fieldwork, when individuals were intercepted and returned further up the coast, near Sfax in the north, they were subsequently transferred by the Tunisian Red Crescent and Tunisian Refugee Council and brought to the reception centres further south, near the border with Libya, in Medenine. This is where their cases would be processed and where they would receive assistance. Incidentally, this also meant shifting individuals from one of the most affluent Tunisian governorates (Sfax) to one of the poorest, near the Libyan border, where

individuals were told to stay until they received the results of their refugee status determination.⁶⁵ Individuals who strayed from the centres and attempted to move elsewhere in the country risked losing access to this support.

Under the watchful gaze and funding of European donor states, the two agencies put in place a mirroring infrastructure of assistance in the form of reception/accommodation and cash assistance/vouchers in southern Tunisia, whereas in Libya this took the form of integrated forms of assistance through merged protection programming and, as we will see, increasingly isomorphic forms of 'durable' solutions. Officially, the *finality* of these protection tracks differed: UNHCR's was directed towards encouraging immobilisation in place, while IOM's was meant to encourage migrants' return to their country of origin.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, it remained that the dispensation of protection by both agencies on the ground, in many ways, took on the appearance of parallel programmes of assistance towards people on the move. This protection-as-assistance, however, was highly contingent and conditional on the immobility of refugees and migrants. The implications of what this interchangeability meant for protection will be considered in the final section of this chapter.

⁶⁵ This process did not last, however. As reported by one UNHCR Tunisia interlocutor, the governor of Medenine eventually resisted the transfers coming from outside the governorate, requesting that each governorate be responsible for the reception and processing of 'their' cases. UNHCR eventually began securing limited accommodation in Sfax.

⁶⁶ However, here too, and as will be seen further in the chapter, the distinction became increasingly blurred through the two agencies' forms of converging 'durable' solutions.

Merged and fragmented field-specific capital

The close involvement of donors in designing protection for refugees-and-migrants was not understood as a contradiction by my UNHCR Tunisia interlocutors. Rather, the dominant understanding among them was that more donor attention on the south meant more services for some, that is, more *protection* for some, which could ultimately only be construed as a good thing. As one UNHCR interlocutor who interacted closely with donors expressed: 'The EUTF is giving to IOM and UNHCR to stop people from going there, but from our side the money will be wisely used, so there is no harm in using what the EU is prepared to give us for assistance. Ultimately this means that we can help people more'. Similarly, in relation to people on the move as a whole being viewed as objects of protection, a high-ranking UNHCR Libya official echoed, 'And if more people can be protected, isn't that a good thing?'

With the conception of persons on the move as inherently vulnerable and at risk, as seen in the previous chapter, it naturally followed that people on the move, regardless of categorisation, *should* have access to particular forms of protection as assistance. This did not necessarily mean that 'more people' were protected, however. Instead, it shifted the focus away from the status-based prioritisation to a vulnerability-based targeting, following the field-specific logic brought to light in the previous chapter. As explained one UNHCR protection official, 'pointing to the south of the country created a lot of services for UNHCR and vulnerable migrants. In Tunis, for example, we don't have shelters or NFIs (non-food items) as we don't have the mixed migration, but in the south, we have a lot more services'. The fact that donor interest in funding reception and assistance was perceived as beneficial came from the operational dynamism it gave to UNHCR in the south and the perception of providing needed support to *vulnerable* individuals.

The fundamental contradiction was that those persons registered with UNHCR who were targeted under this protection-as-assistance programming were not necessarily understood as '*real* refugees' by my UNHCR interlocutors. There was, rather, a prevailing conception among my interlocutors that what made those individuals worthy of protection was their vulnerability, rather than their 'refugeeness'. Thus, while the economic capital of the field was merged into a single form of capital, so too was the field-specific capital of refugees-and-migrants, which was at once fragmented and merged into, ultimately, a single category of intervention that bore increasing resemblance to that of 'vulnerable migrants', with a host of durable solutions that stemmed from this, as will be seen in the second part of this chapter.

Indeed, in line with the racialised conceptions related to mixed migration raised in the previous chapter, most of the UNHCR officials with whom I spoke held the perception that what the agency was dealing with in southern Tunisia was, ultimately, a phenomenon of *migration*. As one high ranking UNHCR Tunisia official explained to me:

When we are talking about mixed migration in the Central Mediterranean context, we are basically talking about migration. Look at the different groups coming in mixed movements, these are not real refugees fleeing their country of origin, they are people who are seeking to migrate to Europe. For example, the Sudanese who were often in camps prior to going to Libya, they want to get to Libya as they want to reach Europe. Syrians, in contrast, are not part of mixed movements, they *are* refugees and they are the exception. Palestinians and Yemenis also are not part of mixed movements.

Another UNHCR interlocutor, when talking about the services in the south, emphasised that 'We have a large number of asylum seekers in shelters in the south who will ultimately not get recognised.... It doesn't really matter than the level of acceptance is low. The shelters are necessary because people come in large numbers, even if they are not refugees'. Thus emerged a perception

according to which the individuals who were being categorised and registered with UNHCR as persons of concern were not necessarily perceived as genuine refugees requiring international protection, despite embodying the agency's primary target for protection-as-assistance. Yet, UNHCR's (and donors') disproportionate attention to providing assistance to persons on the move did not seem out of place or contrary to the agency's mandate. This was in part due to the discourse of vulnerability that had emerged around mixed migration, which naturalised this fragmentation and hierarchisation of protection, as seen in the last chapter.

Paradoxically, this meant that individuals perceived as 'real refugees', in fact, had access to more limited forms of UNHCR assistance and protection. Here, Syrians, Yemenis, and Palestinians were perceived as the 'real refugees' by virtue of 'being outside of mixed migration', as consistently echoed by my interlocutors. Yet, with UNHCR and donors' attention turned to southern Tunisia and the 'mixed migration' there, those perceived as genuine refugees were left aside, invisibilised by UNHCR protection services following their registration with the agency. This created a paradoxical allocation of protection resources that appeared inversely proportionate to a person of concern's perceived 'refugeeness'. Certain parallels can also be drawn with UNHCR's presence in Niger, where research has pointed to an uneven distribution of resources, with disproportionate visibility and resources allocated to the 'transit area' of Agadez as a result of European funding, in

contrast to the reported relative neglect of the southern Diffa region, host to longstanding camps for Nigerian refugees (Van Dessel 2019; Boyer 2019).⁶⁷

In Tunisia, a UNHCR interlocutor working closely with donors said that ‘Donors do not care about Syrians because they are not crossing the sea, the same for Yemenis and Palestinians...The sad thing is that these groups do not receive the necessary support because the interests are not oriented towards them. They are refugees, but are not mixed migration’. While most individuals registered in the south were able to access accommodation through UNHCR reception centres, for example, this assistance was only exceptionally available in northern Tunisia. It was perceived that assistance that might facilitate the long-term integration of Syrians was an unnecessary investment considering that Syrians were labelled as ‘not at risk’ of secondary movement to Europe.

With persons on the move originating from African countries along or near the Central Mediterranean route specifically targeted by protection programming, this fragmentation produced a hierarchisation of protection along highly racialised lines. It is interesting to note that this racialised hierarchy of protection reflected a reversal of hierarchisations that have been raised elsewhere (on the difference of treatment of African and Arab refugees elsewhere, see Janmyr 2022; Turner 2020). Here, rather than being invisibilised, as seen in other contexts, the *male* African ‘on the move’ was made the prime object of care and visibility through a paternalistic discourse

⁶⁷ With the support of the European RDPP programme, UNHCR opened a ‘sub-office’ in Agadez for ‘mixed movements’, which as of 2020, covered a total population of concern of 1,434 individuals. By way of comparison, the only other location in Niger to host a sub office was in Diffa, on the border with Nigeria, with a population of concern of 265,696 individuals (UNHCR 2021b).

of vulnerability, as seen in the previous chapter. Against this emerging landscape of fragmentation, hierarchisation, and racialisation, we must, therefore, question what being a recipient of this targeted protection meant and what shape protection took for these people on the move. 'More protection' must not be construed as a taken-for-granted good, for this protection took on a highly conditional form that as a whole managed the mobility of these persons on the move southwards, as I will consider in the following section.

The fragmented protection that took shape in the mixed migration field was marked by resources directed towards providing protection-as-assistance across the person of concern/migrant divide to those perceived as part of mixed migration. On the one hand, and as seen in the previous chapter, this meant the scope of who was conceived a legitimate object of care (and control) was broadened to people on the move as a whole. On the other hand, however, the increased blurring of categorical boundaries between the groups under UNHCR and IOM's protection meant for UNHCR that those delivering assistance on the ground no longer viewed themselves as providing a distinct form of protection to *refugees*. That IOM and UNHCR made themselves implementers of protection for European donors through a projectisation of protection on the ground shifted the structures of protection away from the universality of international protection, for UNHCR, and toward a highly conditional form of assistance. At this level, not only were those considered as 'real refugees' recipients of lesser protection, but those receiving 'protection' were not necessarily perceived as genuine refugees at all. As we will see, the conceptualisation of this subset of persons of concern to UNHCR allowed for field-specific forms of durable solutions of these people on the move.

Southbound solutions

In the second part of this chapter, I explore the increasingly isomorphic practices that have emerged in the realm of solutions for refugees and migrants. In the field of mixed migration, the parallel tracks through which individuals were categorised as either persons of concern or migrants and placed under the protection of UNHCR or IOM eventually converged at the point of durable solutions, through which both groups were managed via converging southbound 'solutions' out of Libya. In the following sections I trace the concrete practices that have emerged around these solutions.

Voluntary Humanitarian Returns

I begin this section of the chapter with IOM's durable solutions for migrants. For those familiar with the literature and practice of durable solutions, this will no doubt seem like a misnomer, an incongruous use of 'durable solutions'. After all, the language of durable solutions is rooted in the history of refugee protection and the mandate of UNHCR, which recognises UNHCR's responsibility for seeking, promoting, and assisting refugees in finding 'permanent solutions to the problem of refugees'. The concept – long articulated around the threefold 'solutions' of voluntary repatriation, local integration, and resettlement – has indeed, historically, been promoted by UNHCR in the search for permanent solutions to the displacement of *refugees* (Loescher 2003; Brun and Fábos 2017). Implicit in these solutions is the acknowledgement that refugees, by definition, cannot be returned to their country until certain conditions are in place,

notably that it is safe to do so (Long 2013: 9).⁶⁸ Yet, the language of solutions has increasingly been mobilised in the context of *mixed* migration to frame the management of migrants' mobility, more broadly.

The large-scale EUTF regional project, implemented by UNHCR and IOM, for instance, was framed as 'Protection and sustainable solutions for migrants and refugees along the Central Mediterranean route'.⁶⁹ In this project's action document, and with a EUTF funding allocation for the region of EUR 125 million, UNHCR and IOM proposed themselves as providers of solutions for refugees and vulnerable migrants, respectively. Perhaps telling of this shift, is the way in which, in the programme's action document protection was completely subsumed into the language of migration management. The proposed actions of IOM and UNHCR toward durable solutions, the document emphasises, 'facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible protection and migration management' (European Commission 2019c: 3). From that perspective, and as I will show in the following sections, IOM's provision of 'durable' solutions for migrants did not symbolise a shift towards alternative protection options for migrants, but, instead, reflected a general shift of the logic of durable solutions in the opposite direction: towards a converging track of solutions for migrants and refugees, coalescing around their southbound return. In other words, UNHCR's

⁶⁸ While a history of the evolution, uses, and applications of these durable solutions to various refugee movements falls outside the scope of this work, for the purpose of this chapter it bears considering that these three durable solutions have typically been considered part and parcel of refugee protection and under the responsibility of UNHCR (For more on durable solutions, see: Chimni 2004; Long 2013).

⁶⁹ This EUTF action aims to strengthen the provision of 'protection and sustainable solutions for migrants along the central Mediterranean route', which received earlier funding in 2018 to support the EU-IOM Joint Initiative, discussed below.

durable solutions increasingly resembled that born of IOM's longstanding migration management activity, the return of migrants.

It is first worth reminding ourselves about how IOM's longstanding migration management activity of migrant returns became a durable solution at all. As described in Chapter 3, the Lampedusa shipwreck in 2013 represented a pivotal moment for IOM, which allowed the agency to frame migrants in Libya (and further 'upstream') as vulnerable and in need of IOM's protection. From this moment, and building on IOM's logistical know-how and prior experience in the country, IOM was able to significantly expand into Libya, in part leveraging a discourse of vulnerability and need to provide protection to a hitherto neglected group: vulnerable migrants. Several years later, and by the time of my fieldwork, IOM had expanded its protection footprint across the region, in particular along the Central Mediterranean route, through the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration, described in the previous chapter. While the material assistance provided *in situ* formed a part of this migrant protection, as seen above, the focus of the organisation's protection work was, in fact, the return of migrants, framed as a 'sustainable solution' by the EUTF. Migrant return, repackaged under the new label of 'Voluntary Humanitarian Returns' (VHR), was viewed as the finality of IOM's protection work, as *the* durable solution for migrants. Not only did the framing of migrant return represent a shift in IOM's representation, but it also shifted, as I will argue in the final section, the range of acceptable actions when it came to durable solutions, more broadly.

It is worth noting that it was through the growth of this programme that IOM was able to ensure its operational and institutional expansion in Libya. I discussed IOM's conception of protection

and durable solutions with a high-ranking IOM official who had been overseeing IOM activities in Libya since 2013. He emphasised, at once, the importance of VHR for IOM as well as for the individuals IOM was protecting through this programme.

In 2013, we received our first million euros from the Netherlands. The Swiss quickly followed suit with another million euros. What were they funding? The first programme that was funded was the Voluntary Humanitarian Return programme. Because of the situation in Libya and our experience there we were able to show that we were quickly able to get migrants out of Libya, for their own safety, and from there the funding grew. At first, we were working mostly on detention centres, but then we realised that vulnerability was not limited to migrants in detention, that migrants outside of detention centres were also vulnerable to various forms of abuse and exploitation and also required our protection. In the context of IOM's work, we are talking about a humanitarian form of protection, and what we mean when we talk about protection in Libya is really VHR. We give some material assistance as protection, but really our humanitarian protection is VHR.

Against the backdrop of Libya's fraught security context and the discursive framing of vulnerability-as-mobility, IOM was able to repackage its emblematic migration management tool, Assisted Voluntary Return and Repatriation (AVRR) under that of humanitarian protection. My interlocutor was steadfast when it came to the fundamental difference between the two and the humanitarian character of VHR:

AVRR is a migration management tool, whereas VHR is clearly a humanitarian and protection tool. VHR is a protection tool that is used when it is no longer possible to secure protection in place. There is an obvious protection gap that cannot be filled in Libya. The only way to offer protection is to get these people back to their countries to help them meet their protection needs there. So most of our work in Libya is about channelling migrants through the VHR programme so that they are able to find protection that is not available to them in Libya. We try to do this as quickly as possible and have really streamlined the process since its inception; AVRR has something like an 8-page form, whereas the VHR form is two pages. We are really trying to remove people as efficiently as possible. It's in that sense that the VHR programme has a truly humanitarian character. But of course, we make sure that people who have serious

protection concerns in their country of origin are not channelled through VHF; they are then instead absorbed by the protection team and other options are considered.

With his hands, my interlocutor demonstrated the process to me. He loosely cupped his right hand and moved it through the air, symbolising the wide path of the VHR programme scooping up migrants and returning them to their countries of origin. With his left hand tightly cupped, he demonstrated the very small minority of migrants who would not be returned to their countries of origin through VHR.

As other research has pointed out, despite the humanitarian repackaging, there is a clear migration management continuity between AVRR and VHR (Brachet 2015; Pécoud 2020; Rodriguez 2019). The emphasis on vulnerability and protection has nonetheless allowed IOM to rebrand its traditional migration management activities with a humanitarian veneer, providing it with a logic of protection and legitimacy, in part naturalised by the discourse of vulnerability-as-mobility raised in the previous chapter. As argued by Bartels (2017: 331), in the context of IOM's work in Morocco, protection and the articulation of migrant vulnerability as 'soft modes of governing' have become 'new normative rationalities' of mobility control. These have allowed IOM to expand into the realm of migrant protection while maintaining, and even expanding, its longstanding and contentious involvement in migrant returns. While the situation in Libya and the risks that migrants face in the country indeed warranted forms of protection for refugees *and*

migrants, it is noteworthy that returns became the privileged tool of this protection,⁷⁰ allowing both IOM and the EU to couch their actions in Libya, including their facilitation of migrant returns from detention centres, in a humanitarian veneer.⁷¹

Institutionally, this repackaging allowed IOM to maintain the same logics and practice, rooted in its history and trajectory within the migration management field *and* to access a form of economic and symbolic capital that, in the mixed migration field, was available for protection responses. The shift in framing paid off in terms of economic capital as well as in the symbolic capital available in the field of mixed migration. In the face of the programme's success measured by the number of individuals returned to their country of origin the EU-IOM Joint Initiative, which was launched in 2016, received multiple funding top-ups, in 2018 and 2019, allowing for IOM to scale up its operational response for the return and reintegration of migrants (European Commission 2019). The need for additional funding came as a recognition that the 'pace and scale of the returns... have been far more important than anticipated... calling for the reinforcement of protection, voluntary return and reintegration actions' (European Commission 2019c: 3). By 2022, IOM

⁷⁰ The IOM-UNHCR Action fiche for the regional programme, for instance, emphasises that: 'Voluntary return is an important protection measure and one of the most suitable options for vulnerable and stranded migrants facing dire conditions along the routes and who wish to return to their countries of origin but do not have the necessary means to do so...These returns are voluntary, since they are done at the explicit request of the individual returning, and humanitarian, as they represent a life-saving option for many migrants who live in particularly deplorable conditions, both inside or outside of detention centers' (European Commission 2019: 12).

⁷¹ It is also worth noting that the EUTF, the instrument that funded IOM's VHR programme and, in part, the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration, is the same funding instrument which, in parallel, aimed to enhance the capacity of the Libyan Coast Guard (LCG) through equipment, trainings, and material assistance, empowering the LCG to increase interceptions at sea and return migrants to Libya. Following their interception at sea, individuals were routinely placed in Libya's notorious detention centres, from where many, with no other option to access safety, would request IOM's VHR, significantly increasing the demand for this form of protection and driving IOM's operational expansion.

reported having assisted over 120,000 individuals return to their country of origin between 2015 and 2021 through the EU-IOM joint initiative, with over 42,000 of those returned from Libya (IOM 2022).

Symbolically, IOM's scaling up in Libya earned the agency a place at the table of key humanitarian actors in the country, as a testimony to the perceived legitimacy of VHR and IOM's protection work, more broadly. Indeed, IOM's framing of and involvement in the provision of humanitarian solutions for migrants gained broad recognition and acceptance among other humanitarian actors working in the country. Indicative of this recognition and acceptance, an action document for another EUTF project carried out in Libya takes IOM's VHR as its reference point for durable solutions. Here, the Danish Refugee Council proposes, as one of its main activities 'piloting and implementing durable solutions for beneficiaries, including referral to IOM for voluntary return, whenever possible' (European Commission 2020: 9).

More than that, however, IOM's provision of VHR as an accepted form of durable solution shifted the range and scope of acceptable protection. IOM's presence as a provider of protection within the field of mixed migration, and the EUTF funding made available for this protection, reshuffled the distribution of capital within the field in its favour and, with that, forced a redefinition of the meaning and practices of protection in line with the clear logics of migration management favoured by donors. This defined the forms of protection disbursed to *migrants* as conditional protection-as-assistance and voluntary humanitarian returns, as we have seen. It also, however, contributed to shifting the range of appropriate action and responses to *refugee protection*, as I will argue. Indeed, closer consideration of UNHCR's 'durable solutions' in the Libyan context, to

which I now turn, points to a redrawing of UNHCR's durable solutions, in the form of 'southbound solutions', which bear increasing resemblance to that of IOM.

Downward spiral of protection

In the last chapter, I presented the discursive shift that allowed UNHCR and IOM to frame *all* persons on the move as vulnerable and in need of protection. As I argued, this opened the space for the previously neglected and invisibilised figure of the able-bodied male migrant/refugee to be brought within the discursive frame of vulnerability and made into an object of protection, protection, at least, in the form of protection-as-assistance, as seen in the first part of this chapter. What durable solutions, however, awaited those persons of concern to UNHCR, particularly those who did not fit the traditional conception of vulnerability? As I will show in the following sections, with local integration in Libya impossible and the obvious structural limitations of resettlement, UNHCR designed solutions that pushed its persons of concern further south, to their countries of origin, or further 'upstream' on the migration route, mirroring IOM's southbound solution of migrant returns.

Emergency transit mechanism

The question of what solutions awaited persons of concern to UNHCR in Libya was not merely theoretical. By the time I posed it to the most senior protection official of UNHCR Libya's operation, UNHCR's Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM) had been functioning since 2017. The EUTF-funded mechanism, cofinanced under the same scheme as the EU-IOM Joint initiative discussed above, was established to facilitate the evacuation of vulnerable asylum seekers and refugees to Niger, from where their asylum claim would be assessed and their cases submitted

and processed for resettlement. These mechanisms were put in place in the context of the EU-AU-UN task force, established in 2017 with EUTF funding, through which the 'major humanitarian return and evacuation operation was launched, by stepping up the voluntary humanitarian returns to countries of origin and evacuating persons in need of international protection with a view to further resettlement'. As was seen, IOM's VHR programme was met with great success, marked by an important scaling up of its operations in Libya and the agency over-reaching its return target. It proved harder, in contrast, for UNHCR to meet the resettlement objectives of the ETM. Resettlement was eventually abandoned as the objective in the later iterations of the ETM, leaving some with no other option than to return to a previous country of asylum or return home.

The evacuation mechanism provided an answer to the immediate protection risks faced by persons of concern in Libya and the absence of consular representations in the country, which hindered the processing of visas required for resettlement (Scarpa 2021). Despite its advertised objective, however, it quickly became clear that not all individuals evacuated to Niger could successfully be resettled, not least because resettlement countries ultimately decided on each case on the basis of their own priorities and criteria (Lambert 2021). A group that did not easily fit within the scope of resettlement programmes was precisely this subset of persons on the move, newly framed as vulnerable and in need of protection, yet not corresponding to resettlement states' priorities: young men. As years passed since the first evacuations, the facility designed as a transit space for evacuees turned into a permanent home for many, in particular many of those single young men rejected for resettlement. With that, the discontent of those stuck in limbo and that of the Nigerien host state, which had never agreed to becoming a 'holding state', grew (Lambert 2021).

In September 2019, UNHCR sought an alternative solution. Instead of questioning the ETM model and this form of southbound solution, it expanded its scope, reaching a new agreement with Rwanda (European Commission 2019d; Claes and Botti 2019). This time UNHCR had learned its lesson, however. Rwanda would not only serve as a transit point for individuals awaiting resettlement, but resettlement was from that moment onwards considered only one among other possible durable solutions. Rwanda was conceived more broadly as a possible host for the *local integration* of vulnerable individuals evacuated from Libya (UNHCR 2021c). In a statement on the ETM, UNHCR explained the possible durable solutions awaiting those who were evacuated:

Upon arrival, UNHCR will pursue durable solutions for the evacuees. While some may benefit from resettlement to third countries, others will be facilitated to return to previous countries of asylum, or to return to their home countries if it is safe to do so. Some may be given permission to remain in Rwanda subject to agreement by the competent authorities (UNHCR 2021c).

Although UNHCR later raised serious concerns about the human rights situation and possibilities for local integration as a durable solution for asylum seekers and refugees in Rwanda in the context of the 2022 UK-Rwanda agreement,⁷² the Rwanda ETM, implemented by UNHCR and supported by the EUTF and the African Union, was nonetheless considered a solution for vulnerable individuals in Libya, providing a convenient precedent to the later UK deal. Rwanda was also considered an appropriate and safe base from which to explore further novel durable

⁷² For more on UNHCR's position on the UK-Rwanda agreement, see 'UNHCR Analysis of the Legality and Appropriateness of the Transfer of Asylum Seekers under the UK-Rwanda arrangement', in which it expresses concern, inter alia, that 'asylum-seekers relocated from the UK to Rwanda may not be treated in accordance with accepted international standards' and that they may face limited 'local integration prospects' (UNHCR 2022a: 6).

solutions, including return to first country of asylum and return to the country of origin, both of which will be considered in the following sections in relation to Libya. This, as raised by Lambert (2021) put asylum-seekers and refugees in Libya in the impossible situation of having to accept an evacuation to Rwanda despite the possibility of an 'unwanted solution' (Lambert 2021: 21). Indeed, as raised in the ETM monitoring report, most individuals evacuated via the ETM were under the impression that they would be resettled to a third country. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the most significant challenge to the implementation of these alternative durable solutions remained the 'reluctance' of evacuees themselves to choose them. According to the report, cases that were rejected or not considered for resettlement, the 'residual cases', in general 'decided to leave the centre and are hard to track', raising doubts on the purported durability of UNHCR's proposed solution and potentially leading to further 'mixed migration' (Altai Consulting 2021: 25).

Previous country of asylum returns

UNHCR Libya's Durable Solutions Factsheet provides a surprising description of the durable solutions available to refugees *in* Libya: 'UNHCR Libya remains available to assist refugees in Libya with Durable Solutions including resettlement to third countries, return to countries where they had previously been granted asylum or to voluntarily return home' (UNHCR 2022b). The representation of these durable solutions and notably that of the novel durable solution of return to previous country of admission was emblematic of the field-specific durable solutions being put in place by UNHCR in the Libyan mixed migration context.



UNHCR Libya remains available to assist refugees in Libya with Durable Solutions including resettlement to third countries, return to countries where they had previously been granted asylum or to voluntarily return home. Persons determined to be in need of international protection and who meet the resettlement criteria can be resettled. A small number of refugees are resettled each year.

Figure 7: UNHCR Libya durable solutions

In the face of the difficult security situation and the barriers to providing protection for refugees *in* Libya, UNHCR had to imagine new forms of protection solutions for its persons of concern. At the time of my fieldwork, detention centres in Libya were filled with persons of concern to UNHCR. Some had been targeted during the conflict, and individuals were desperately seeking a way out. Within that context, UNHCR was forced to close its highly publicised Gathering and Departure Facility (GDF), which the agency had opened in Tripoli as a transit facility to house some of the most ‘vulnerable refugees’ awaiting evacuation out of Libya to Niger and Rwanda. The GDF became overcrowded with individuals from the urban area, and people who had recently escaped detention centres and seeking immediate safety from the Libyan conflict, as well as evacuation out of Libya. Most, however, would not be considered for resettlement or humanitarian evacuation out of Libya.

Faced with this dire situation, two new solutions were imagined by UNHCR: ‘return to the first country of asylum’, which had officially been accepted within the frame of UNHCR Libya’s durable solutions, as seen above, and the less publicised ‘returns to the country of origin’, which will be considered in the next section. ‘So, where does that leave our understanding and the scope for

durable solutions?', my high-level UNHCR interlocutor asked me while taking stock of the situation, before emphasising the need for new solutions:

I remember at that time, in 2018, I went to Tajoura detention centre and saw hundreds of men crammed inside what was a large hangar. Something like three hundred men packed into the space like sardines. Here I was, staring into a sea of hundreds of men from the horn of Africa, knowing very well that no resettlement country would be interested in resettling them. This forced us to think more broadly about the nature of durable solutions and to allow for the possibility of returning individuals to a previous country of asylum as a durable solution. Classically, we would talk about resettlement, voluntary repatriation, and integration, but the reality was that there were so few places available for resettlement – always too few, and that integration is impossible in the Libyan context. Then, if we talk about voluntary repatriation, we were forced to ask ourselves about the voluntary nature of this repatriation and to consider whether repatriation, for example, out of detention centres could be considered voluntary at all.

At the time of our discussion, and according to my interlocutor, returns to Ethiopia and Chad for specific cases were under negotiation. These, like many other countries along the Central Mediterranean route, were two countries with existing and sizeable refugee populations. And, considering that the existing refugee populations in Ethiopia and Chad were themselves in dire need of durable solutions, and that many had travelled to Libya from refugee camps in these and neighbouring countries, it was, again, hard to imagine how returns to a previous country of asylum could be considered durable at all. This was all the more surprising given that UNHCR elsewhere cautioned against returns to the previous country of asylum unless the protection is deemed 'effective and available' (UNHCR 2016).

UNHCR had itself, in the context of Central Mediterranean route funding appeals, pointed to 'the lack of effective protection in countries of first asylum and transit' as well as the 'absence of

effective international protection, assistance, the possibility for a durable solution and viable livelihood and self-reliance opportunities' as a main cause for the onward movement of refugees, leaving them with 'little option other than moving onwards' towards Libya and across the Mediterranean in the first place (UNHCR 2018: 13; UNHCR 2021d: 17). Through the incorporation of this durable solution, the agency was proposing to return persons of its concern to contexts where individuals would face an 'absence' of international protection, situations in which UNHCR acknowledged that individuals faced a degree of compulsion in leaving in the first place. If anything, it appeared that this new durable solution pushed refugees and asylum seekers further into orbit southwards, from where they risked having to begin the search for this elusive 'effective protection' anew.

Country of origin returns

Less officially, returns to the countries from which refugees originally fled were also incorporated within UNHCR's practice of durable solutions. My UNHCR interlocutors were careful not to word this solution as that of voluntary repatriation. Voluntary repatriation, one of UNHCR's three durable solutions, which UNHCR describes as 'the free and voluntary return to one's country of origin in safety and dignity', has long been favoured politically by UNHCR. Its implementation, however, requires that certain conditions are in place, namely that individuals are able to return in safety and dignity (Long 2013; UNHCR 2004: 2). UNHCR has previously come under criticism for the perceived lack of 'voluntariness' of some of its past repatriation schemes and for the uneven application of the safety and dignity of return criteria, resulting in instances nearing 'UNHCR-sanctioned refoulement' (Long 2013: 10). Yet, in this context, UNHCR's articulation of 'returns to country of origin' represented a shift. The shift belied the known lack of genuine

voluntariness associated with returns and represented an admission that the appropriate conditions for safe repatriation were not in place. My interlocutor, the senior UNHCR Libya official, illustrated the need for returning refugees to their country of origin by drawing, again, on the example of refugees in detention centres in Libya:

I remember going to Tajoura detention centre and just sitting next to a Darfuri man, trying to convince him to go back to Sudan. 'Is it really that bad?' I asked him. 'What about Khartoum, couldn't you just go back and live there?' I never could have imagined doing this a few years ago, but somehow this is the situation we are in, and we have to view solutions much more broadly in the Libyan context. Within the scope of these broader durable solutions, we've even started doing 'returns to country of origin'. We are not calling it voluntary repatriation as we know very well that it obviously doesn't fulfil those condition when people choose to leave Libya from detention centres or other situations where they are unsafe. But who are we to deny them the right to return to their country; isn't the right to enter one's country a universal human right after all? Those refugees find themselves between a very hard place and a rock, that is for sure, but ultimately it has to be their choice which one they will choose.

In practice, returning persons of concern to UNHCR back to their country of origin entailed channelling them towards IOM and funnelling them through the latter's VHR scheme, discussed above. Hence, in humanitarian data and reporting on Libya, returns that UNHCR considered as potentially involuntary and unsafe for refugees were, on paper, turned into 'voluntary humanitarian returns', contributing to IOM's figures on migrant returns in Libya. Yet, as Zieck reminds us, 'refugees are *ex definitio* unrepatriable persons'; for so long as a refugee qualifies as such, they cannot be returned involuntarily to their country (Zieck 2004 36). The process of returning refugees to their countries, at the same time, involved turning UNHCR persons of concern into 'migrants', at which point IOM could take responsibility for them and return them to

their country, despite the questionable voluntariness of the process. This points to the movability of the 'refugee' and 'migrant' categories, in practice, despite the categorical rigidity that UNHCR and IOM insisted on maintaining in the 'unmixing' of mixed migration that was seen in previous chapters.

The movability between categories was itself enabled by the very rigid bifurcation upon which the unmixing of mixed migration depended in Libya. Indeed, as seen in Chapter 4, persons on the move were categorised as either 'persons of concern' to UNHCR or 'migrants' to IOM from the moment they entered the country. In Libya, this crude process of categorisation was made on the basis of nationality alone, rather than on the grounds of an individual eligibility assessment. The *prima facie* categorisation, not *recognition*, at play in this context meant that individuals *institutionally* fell under the responsibility of UNHCR based on their nationality. However few were recognised as refugees due to UNHCR not widely undertaking RSD in the country.⁷³ Most persons of concern to UNHCR, therefore, remained registered as asylum seekers without ever being given UNHCR-mandated refugee status determination.

The absence of real recognition made it possible to turn UNHCR's 'refugees', or persons of concern, into IOM's 'migrants' for the purpose of return. This allowed them to return an otherwise potentially unrepatriable group of persons, without applying any of the minimal safeguards linked to UNHCR-led repatriation schemes or the application of the cessation clause, found in the refugee convention (Zieck 2004; Long 2013). Instead, persons of concern to UNHCR, in particular

⁷³ Of the nearly 50,000 refugees and asylum-seekers registered with UNHCR in Libya in 2019, only 4,700 were recognised refugees, with most of those being Palestinian refugees, reflecting an 'older' caseload with UNHCR in Libya (UNHCR 2022d refugee data finder 2022).

this 'residual group' of mobility-as-vulnerability refugees (that is, young African males), for whom few other solutions were available, were channelled and turned into migrants through IOM's VHR machine. This reflected not two parallel protection tracks for refugees and migrants, but a single one, converging around a unique process of return out of Libya to the country of origin.

A Libya-based NGO interlocutor explained the process through which individuals who would have otherwise been considered as persons of concern to UNHCR based on their nationality were made into migrants. In Libya, assistance to refugees via UNHCR was generally limited to Tripoli and the areas immediately surrounding the city. What this meant was that the persons of concern to UNHCR who strayed from Tripoli were forced to rely on IOM as the only remaining source of support. As my NGO interlocutor pointed out, this was the case for those who had left Tripoli for the western port city of Zuwara, one of the main departure points by sea for Europe. Here, individuals of concern to UNHCR were no longer able to access protection from UNHCR. While UNHCR justified its geographically-bounded policy by raising the operational complexities of Libya and its unwillingness to get involved in areas known for smuggling to Europe, the effects of this policy nonetheless underlie a logic of mobility-control-as-negligence, resulting in its persons of concern being forced to seek out alternative support, including VHR.⁷⁴

By way of example, my NGO interlocutor raised an event involving a group of young Somali boys and men, one of the nine nationalities 'of concern' to UNHCR in Libya, who had attempted to

⁷⁴ UNHCR points to security reasons and lack of authorisation from the Libyan government to explain the geographically limited scope of its presence in Libya. UNHCR interlocutors have also explained that UNHCR does not want to be seen as involved in or helping people get smuggled to Europe by operating in areas known for onward movement.

cross to Europe by boat before being intercepted and disembarked in Zuwara by the Libyan Coast Guard. With many forcibly returned individuals facing destitution upon return to Libyan shores and, with no access to UNHCR protection-as-assistance in the west of the country, many were reportedly forced to request support from IOM, which, in contrast, maintained an important operational presence in the area. Of those individuals some had no recourse but to accept IOM's 'humanitarian voluntary return' to Somalia, following which they were able to receive immediate assistance while awaiting return to their country of origin. Interestingly, while UNHCR had no protection presence in the west of Libya, it was still able to remotely conduct counselling sessions to allow for registered persons of concern to return to their country of origin with the assistance of IOM and with that, to pass under its responsibility.⁷⁵ Thus, while protection-as-assistance was not available for persons of concern outside the delimited areas of UNHCR protection in Libya, what remained was UNHCR's support to return home through the joint counselling sessions it provided, which would result in persons of concern being channelled to IOM, reflecting a merging of durable solutions practices for refugees and migrants towards VHR.

This meant that, with the exception of the small number of people resettled and evacuated directly from Libya, for persons on the move – for those 'of concern' to IOM and UNHCR - there could be no way out of Libya forward. The only way out was back, through returns to a previous country of asylum or their country of origin. How sending individuals back to another 'refugee situation' further upstream (where they would invariably still require durable solutions) or to a country where

⁷⁵ UNHCR and IOM had in place a joint counselling process for cases of registered persons of concern who sought out IOM's VHR to return to their countries of origin, during which UNHCR would assess whether individuals were likely to face protection risks upon return.

they could be at risk of persecution could be considered durable remained unclear. Yet, the scope of conceivable durable solutions had shifted to make returns, in one form or another, a central practice and conceptualisation of durable solutions for both migrants and refugees.

Field-specific logics and practices of protection

Having surveyed the practices taking shape within the field of mixed migration, it is, finally, worth asking: 'What, *actually*, is new to the field'? After all, that UNHCR was engaged in migration management or supported the return of migrants is not in itself new. In previous instances, UNHCR has gone as far as returning refugees, too, to their countries of origin despite unfavourable or downright dangerous conditions (Long 2013). One does not have to look far, either, to see that UNHCR's 'official' three durable solutions are themselves forms of migration management. Resettlement, to take but one example, allows for the 'orderly movement of clearly identified categories of people through active cooperation between states and non-state actors', as described by Garnier (2014: 943). Migration management, therefore, and to echo UNHCR's historical trajectory set out in Chapter 2, is not situated outside refugee protection, it is rather also embedded within its grammar, within the habitus of UNHCR and the historical trajectory of the refugee protection field.

As seen in Chapter 1, actors are never purely situated at the 'orthodox' end of the pole (that is, protection for protection's sake), but exist on a continuum in which protection is always embedded within other rationalities. The practices taking place within the field of mixed migration, therefore, were not entirely new, nor wholly 'heretical' to protection, for the structures of the field and the practices carried out within it were shaped, in part, by the habitus and prior trajectories

of the actors that made it up, which, in turn, came together to shape the range of legitimate action and struggle within the mixed migration field. This meant, and to return to the material raised in this chapter, that UNHCR's practice of durable solutions within the mixed migration field drew on its own trajectory, seen in Chapter 2, and practice of protection/migration management, while its existence in the field of mixed migration further shaped its understanding of legitimate protection.

That the logics and practices that have emerged from the field of mixed migration followed certain historical trajectories was undeniable. Yet, I argue that the *coexistence* of UNHCR and IOM, and their struggle in relation to the capital at stake in the field, shifted the space of possibilities when it came to the protection of refugees and migrants (Emirbayer and Johnson 2008: 16). This space of possibilities produced not an entirely new, but rather a *field-specific* logic and practice of protection, an inner logic and practice, born of the opportunities and constraints produced by the structures of the field. Indeed, the mixed migration field – structured by its specific distribution of capital (the re-valuation of symbolic capital as seen in Chapter 3 and the respective merging of the economic and field-specific capital, as seen in this chapter) at stake in the field – imposed certain field-specific structural 'constraints', 'delimiting the space of what can conceivably be attempted or accomplished' (Emirbayer and Johnson 2008: 16).

In the field of mixed migration, 'protection' could only successfully be framed as protection-for-something, as protection as the means to an end, rather than the end itself. My interlocutors drew on this framing willingly, sincerely hoping that this would attract the needed economic capital to, in turn, protect those in need. Less visible to these field actors, however, was the ways in which the struggle for capital between them also pulled them into a struggle over the very definition of

protection and how to carry it out in practice. The re-definition of protection had to be consistent with the 'grammar' of the field, itself aligned with the migration management objectives, producing, in Bourdieu's words, a 'diversity of acceptable solutions within the limits of grammaticality' (Bourdieu 1996a: 236). Indeed, by framing protection as protection-for-something, the broad rules of the game were set, for the symbolic capital at stake within the field had been explicitly aligned with European donors' migration management objectives, constraining the limits of action and forms of imaginable protection solutions. This new grammaticality, deeply imbedded within rationalities of migration control, shifted the meaning and practice of protection, to the point to where protection was no longer about protecting *people*, but about protecting *borders* from those people.

From within those shifted structures and constraints, the actors of the field drew on their own habitus and trajectories to position themselves within the field and further shape its structures. IOM's unambiguous history and trajectory as a service provider for states, as seen in Chapter 2, secured the agency an advantageous position within the field. The implementation of projectised and targeted programmes on behalf of states was etched into its organisational habitus as the motor of its institutional growth. It was thus able to unproblematically repackage much of its existing migration management work as that of protection projects, through which it tapped into new forms of capital accessible through the 'protection' of migrants. At the same time, in as much as the actors within the field were shaped by the field, they also contributed to shaping it and its structures. Here, it appears that IOM's presence in the field, marked by its significant institutional expansion in the realm of protection through the provision of VHR, set a new benchmark for

'protection': It contributed to filling out, through practice, the expanded boundaries of legitimate practice for which it was greatly compensated in various forms of capital.

Paradoxically, although IOM was a relative newcomer to protection, it was UNHCR's practice of protection that began increasingly to resemble that of IOM, instead of the other way around. Considering, the targeted forms of protection UNHCR directed towards people on the move, characterised by an allocation of resources prioritising this category over those perceived as 'real refugees' and by the specific forms of durable solutions that UNHCR conceptualised for them, the isomorphic practices put in place by UNHCR and IOM came into clear focus. The implementation of these explicitly migration management-oriented, conditional, and targeted protection *projects*, however, brought UNHCR's practice of protection closer in line with the practice arising from IOM's positioning in the field, itself a product of IOM's longstanding trajectory within the migration management field. This was a positioning that was conducive to greater access to capital, although far less conducive to UNHCR realising its universal mandate of international protection.

The redistribution of capital within the field and the struggle for these competing forms of capital, rather, produced a field-specific practice of protection across IOM and UNHCR. This field-specific practice was the result of, at once, an opening and, at once, a foreclosing of the range of possible actions related to protection. Inherent to this, and symbolic of the simultaneous opening and foreclosing of protection 'possibilities', was the fragmentation of protection shaped by the merging of people on the move as a single form of 'valuable' capital and the hierarchisation of worth of refugees-and-migrants based on their perceived mobility. While the hierarchisation of

refugee protection has been raised in other contexts (see, for example: Janmyr 2022), the field of mixed migration, in which UNHCR and IOM were competing to provide protection, appears to have produced a unique narrowing (limited to certain geographic areas and to those considered as 'on the move'), and a merging (delivered regardless of legal categorisations) of protection. Instead of safeguarding the purported specificities and 'privileges' linked to a rights-based category of beneficiaries (the 'refugee'), *all* persons on the move were cared for through highly conditional and paternalistic forms of assistance and mobility control, and broadly conceived of as potentially *returnable* persons.

Indeed, in the struggle over the merged economic capital and merged field-specific capital, and through the isomorphic practices of protection that ensued from this, the categories of 'refugee' and 'migrant' lost their purported specificities, even to those carrying out the protection on the ground. This was somewhat paradoxical given UNHCR's continued insistence on jealously guarding the boundaries of its 'persons of concern' through the practices of unmixing, examined in Chapter 4. Thus, while persons on the move were rigidly sorted between UNHCR and IOM, made into refugees or migrants, we are left to wonder to what end. Although the need to preserve the space for asylum and international protection historically grounded UNHCR's support of IOM's return of migrants based on the complementarity of action between the two and the supposed substantive difference between migrants and refugees, in the mixed migration field UNHCR was active in the enactment of field-specific practices that included the return of persons under its own protection. What substantive difference was UNHCR safeguarding, then, when it envisaged solutions – alongside IOM's return of migrants – that returned people to contexts characterised

by 'an absence of international protection' or the return of refugees to their country of origin?
And where does this leave the supposed specificity of the refugee category?

In a context where those categorised as 'persons of concern' to UNHCR were perceived and increasingly treated as migrants, the practices of unmixing brought to light in Chapter 4 appeared as little more than a strategy for each to maintain their respective *symbolic* differentiation, rather than the substantive differentiation between refugees and migrants.⁷⁶ Indeed, the practices of unmixing were crucial to giving each agency their *raison d'être* within the field, providing each the minimal entry required to legitimately gain access to it. This crude nationality-based categorisation along with the parallel and converging practices of protection seen in this chapter, however, suggest that the struggle of the field was never over the safeguarding of difference, entitlements, and rights attached to each category, but of safeguarding each agency's positioning over them. The symbolic difference between the two was, therefore, successfully maintained: by virtue of continuing to carve out population groups, UNHCR gave truth to its existence institutionally as the 'UN Refugee Agency' and IOM the 'UN Migration Agency', but, on the ground, the 'differences that distance[d]' them from one another were increasingly hard to maintain (Bourdieu 1996b: 242).

⁷⁶ At its most extreme, this echoes Emirbayer and Johnson's (2008) example, in relation to economic firms, on the symbolic differentiation involved in the position-taking of Pepsi and Coca Cola. They each attempt to carve out their own markets through the production of symbolic difference, but is the product they are selling actually different?

Conclusion

Literature borrowing from Bourdieu's field approach often posits that fields develop a logic in step with the consolidation of field boundaries and autonomy (Emirbayer and Johnson 2008). Paradoxically, in this case, the field of mixed migration appears to have developed a logic and field-specific practice, a 'grammar' of its own, because of the *reverse* process largely linked to the interpenetration of the heteronomous pole. For donors, and on the southern shores of the Mediterranean, it appears that the refugee/migrant divide mattered little in terms of warranting *material support and assistance*: all persons on the move were persons to be cared for and managed through funding to UNHCR and IOM. The merged form of economic capital at stake in the field, however, threw UNHCR and IOM into a struggle over these species of capital, a struggle that would contribute to redefining the logic and practice of protection in the field of mixed migration.

Although donors viewed all persons on the move as persons to be cared for and managed, it was UNHCR and IOM's struggle for this capital that redefined the boundaries of the categories of individuals under their protection along with the forms of protection they enacted within it. Indeed, their coexistence within this field and the struggle for the merged forms of capital, including the economic capital and the capital of refugees-and-migrants, shaped a new space of possibilities in which took root a field-specific practice of protection. This space of possibilities was circumscribed by the 'grammar' of the field – the 'rules of the game' – themselves crystallised through the alignment of the symbolic capital with migration management objectives. The practices enacted within the field were, therefore, at once the product of the opportunities and

constraints created by these structures, and at once, shaped by the organisational habitus of each agency acting within them.

This produced a field-specific logic and practice of protection, characterised, notably, by the simultaneous opening and foreclosing of protection: It opened-up to persons on the move, regardless of legal categorisation, but closed-off certain groups of individuals, including the status-based category of the 'refugee', hitherto typically considered *the* 'privileged' recipient of protection. In the field of mixed migration, fragmentation of worth drove the logic of protection resulting in the 'people on the move' being 'protected' by UNHCR and IOM. From the merging of these persons on the move into a single form of capital and single category of intervention also emerged an isomorphism in how they were perceived and protected on the ground. In practice, this was characterised, firstly, by an increasing interchangeability in the forms of protection-as-assistance delivered *in situ* to persons of concern by UNHCR and migrants by IOM. And secondly, by the implementation and conceptualisation of field-specific durable solutions that turned those people on the move, also regardless of category, into potentially returnable individuals.

The practices of protection have, in effect, blurred the line between refugees and migrants, allowing, as was seen, one to be treated as the other; refugees to be returned via IOM's VHR or to be sent to another country where their international protection needs would likely not be recognised, and effectively blurring the categorical distinction that UNHCR tried so hard to maintain. Considering these practices, we are forced to wonder to what end UNHCR continues to insist on maintaining the boundaries of the groups falling under its protection. As I argued, in the field of mixed migration, where refugees and migrants were targeted through parallel forms of

protection, the practice of unmixing, fundamental to the struggle between UNHCR and IOM, represented little more than a position-taking strategy for them to, respectively, establish their legitimate right to exist within the field. It represented an effort at maintaining symbolic differentiation, rather than any form of substantive differentiation between refugees and migrants, resulting, however, in a downward spiral of protection for both.

CONCLUSION

UNHCR is working more and more with IOM around the question of protection. The agencies are closer together than they ever have been before. This is because there is so much potential for overlap in our work – just think about the distinction between refugees and migrants. UNHCR now considers other people who are not necessarily refugees as ‘people of concern’ and IOM is talking about extremely vulnerable migrants. What the difference is between the two is very unclear, yet it is so important in terms of determining the responsibilities of each organisation.

The above passage was drawn from a conversation I had with one of my high-level UNHCR interlocutors working on the Central Mediterranean route. I conclude my thesis with it because, in this reflection, my interlocutor inadvertently touched upon the many different elements I had been trying to make sense of since the beginning of my fieldwork. He touched upon the constellation of ‘migrants’, ‘refugees’, ‘IOM’, and ‘UNHCR’, and the blurred nature of the lines between them. What was striking in this discussion and many others I had in the course of my fieldwork was, on the one hand, the acknowledgement of the blurred nature of the ‘refugee’ and ‘migrant’ categories, and, on the other, UNHCR and IOM’s continued institutional insistence on *forcing* a differentiation between the two in practice despite acknowledging this blurriness.

This observation related to my first core argument, which is that, in the mixed migration field, refugees and migrants *had* to be differentiated and separated. This unmixing was not for the benefit of the persons on the move themselves, however, but because it had become the institutional *raison d’être* of UNHCR and IOM in the mixed migration field. It was the means through which the two agencies ensured their existence and positioning within the structures of the field and their positioning in relation to the other. The arbitrariness of the field, its rules, and its structures were naturalised to such an extent that the ‘game’ of unmixing between the two

agencies was viewed as a *necessity* by the actors engaging in it, despite the clear contradictions that were taking shape on the ground. The two agencies were thus unquestionably turned toward each other, as well as toward the appropriation of refugees-and-migrants, with their unmixing considered a central stake in their inward-looking struggle for positioning and dominance.

My second core argument is that UNHCR and IOM's *fabric as institutions* was fundamentally changed through their common struggle and relational coexistence within the space they inhabited. The two were not merely working side by side in a common 'ecosystem' or 'regime'. Rather, their common struggle in the field of mixed migration was, in and of itself, transformative. For, by existing in the field, the two agencies at once shaped and were shaped by it, contributing to producing a situated and field-specific logic of practice that redefined, in turn, who they were as institutions within the mixed migration field.

While the logic of practice that emerged from the mixed migration field in Tunisia and Libya was indeed field-specific and situated, the implications are much broader. The localised struggles within the field and the field-specific logic of practice to which these struggles gave rise contributes, in turn, to shaping the actors of the field: they are etched into their internal grammar and fashion the 'space of possibles' within which they continue to act in and beyond the field (Bigo 2011: 232). Indeed, this grammar, internal to the field, continuously and dynamically contributes to reshaping the institutional habitus of UNHCR and IOM, expanding and shifting their possibilities for action and the structures of dispositions, seen in Chapter 2, upon which they draw over time and space.

Moving beyond formal mandates and being attentive to the transformative effect of the relation allowed us to appreciate the malleable boundaries between the two and the ways in which their coexistence and struggle for capital shaped them both. I briefly summarise, here, the emergence and transformative nature of the mixed migration field, before concluding with a reflection on the 'field'.

The emergence of the mixed migration field

Throughout the preceding chapters, I built a case for understanding UNHCR and IOM as entangled in a particular kind of social space – a *field* – understood in the Bourdieusian sense as a set of relations structured around a particular issue area and form of struggle over capital. What bound UNHCR and IOM in the mixed migration field, I argued, was their parallel operational response to refugees and migrants on the ground within contexts of mixed migration. This parallel operational response generated a struggle for the field-specific capital of refugees-and-migrants, in which the definition of refugees/migrants and of UNHCR and IOM as institutions became central stakes.

While the confluence of global and local historical and institutional developments prepared the terrain for the field to emerge in Tunisia and Libya, its structures were hardly predefined; nor were they fixed in time. Rather, they took shape and evolved through the changing configuration of UNHCR and IOM; the symbolic framing of its actors; and the dynamic social environment they inhabited. In Chapter 2, I traced the global and local historical developments that created the condition of existence of the mixed migration field on the ground.

Three historical junctures are particularly significant to understanding the emergence of the field of mixed migration at a global level. The first was UNHCR's 'operational turn', which consolidated from the 1970s onwards, which shifted both the interpretation of its mandate and the practice of refugee protection. Next came IOM's gradual incursions into humanitarian responses and, eventually, into what was framed as 'protection'. From its initial position of primarily providing migration management-related services to states, it was gradually able to gain credibility and legitimacy, and carved out a vulnerable population of its own: vulnerable migrants. With these developments, UNHCR and IOM *de facto* increasingly took on operational responsibilities on the ground, providing assistance and relief to refugees and migrants, articulated around the notion of protection. IOM's parallel role was further consolidated with its entry into the UN as a related member in 2016, when it rebranded itself as the 'UN Migration Agency', symbolically mirroring UNHCR's representation as the 'UN Refugee Agency'. While this juncture may not have fundamentally altered *what* IOM did on the ground, it was nonetheless significant in entrenching, at least symbolically, the notion of parallel institutions 'responsible' for refugees and migrants.

As we have seen, these global developments intersected on the ground with local dynamics, together shaping the possibility of emergence of the field in Tunisia and Libya. The changing configuration and roles of UNHCR and IOM on the ground was observed by tracing developments from the mixed migration crisis of 2011 to the consolidation of a bifurcated structure and division of labour between UNHCR and IOM from 2014 onward, which crystallised the emergence of the field along the Central Mediterranean route. This bifurcated structure was marked by UNHCR and IOM accessing EU funding for 'refugee *and migrant* protection' and carving out clearly defined populations over whom they could respectively act, in theory, without impeding the other. While

this division of labour may have appeared as a form of 'entente' between UNHCR and IOM, it was also the very source of the competition between the two, as it entrenched the refugee/migrant bifurcation and created the structures of struggle for capital within which they acted.

As was seen in Chapter 3, the work of *framing* the field and the issues at stake within it was central to this struggle. The labour involved in framing the field functioned as a strategic form of position-taking, which significantly altered the structural landscape they inhabited: It altered the boundaries of the field and the distribution of capital within it. Indeed, with significant donor funding directed towards responding to *mixed migration* through the 'protection' of refugees and migrants, UNHCR and IOM varyingly attempted to position themselves in relation to donors. In so doing, European donors, UNHCR, and IOM drew themselves into the narrow space of the mixed migration field, a space in which the symbolic power to define the appropriate scope of protection action was more than ever held by European donors.

Transformative power of the struggle for capital

In drawing donors further into the mixed migration field, a delicate trade-off was made: UNHCR and IOM were able to gain in political and economic capital, closely tied to the field of power. At the same time, they lost in relative autonomy. For donors themselves became closely involved in the practice of protection and instituting their own 'vision and division of the social world'. A particular feature of the mixed migration field, therefore, was the dual and *open* struggle for refugees-and-migrants, on the one hand, combined with the struggle for the EU funding dedicated to responding to 'refugees' and 'migrants', on the other.

This particularity was embodied, in Bourdieusian terms, by the two competing forms of capital that defined the nature of the struggle between UNHCR and IOM: the field-specific capital of 'refugees-and-migrants' that formed the foundation of the field and the *raison d'être* of both actors within it, and the political and economic capital that was closely tied to the field of power and the dominance of European donors. This merging of 'refugees-and-migrants' as a form of capital and of the European funding dedicated to responding to them meant that what was at stake in the mixed migration field was not only which agency would take responsibility for whom. Even more important was how each could position themselves favourably towards the field of power by redefining what taking 'responsibility' for refugees and migrants through protection meant on the ground.

In Bourdieu's conception of the field, different forms of capital, economic and non-economic, are in the circulation in the field at the same time and convertible into each other according to different exchange-rates, based on their valuation within the field. As we have seen, the transformative potential of the struggle for capital in the mixed migration field lay specifically in the tension between the merged capital of 'refugees' and 'migrants' and that of the merged political and economic capital (that is, the merged funding for refugees *and migrants*) to which their protection and management were associated. This played out at two levels. Firstly, the tension between refugees-and-migrants and the political and economic capital at stake in the field shaped who was seen as an object of protection, and to whom. This, ultimately, entrenched field-specific hierarchies of worth and visibility based on the higher valuation of some over others. Secondly, the struggle played out at the level of how, and to what end, UNHCR and IOM enacted protection on the ground. Crucially, the two agencies competing for the merged forms of capital

opened the possibility for greater indeterminacy in how protection was practiced and widened the space to redefine how protection could legitimately be carried out.

Thus, with the merged field-specific capital of refugees-and-migrants and the merged capital from European donors, UNHCR and IOM were thrown into an open struggle for the meaning of 'refugees' and 'migrants' and that of protection. This struggle, as was seen, set the foundation for a new logic internal to the mixed migration field. More specifically, it set the groundwork for the field-specific logic of practice, which in turn, contributed to redefining the internal grammars of UNHCR and IOM and what they 'are' as institutions.

A field-specific logic of protection

The field-specific practice of protection in Tunisia and Libya's mixed migration field, I argued, was characterised by hierarchisation, fragmentation and homologues of protection. As seen in Chapter 4, the struggle over the different forms of capital in circulation in the field shaped a hierarchisation of worth and fragmentation among the refugees-and-migrants that translated into who would be made into an object of protection to whom. I argued that UNHCR and IOM were not interested in an infinite accumulation of refugees and migrants under their responsibility. They were, rather, positioned towards a certain type of field-specific capital, the 'people on the move' who, framed within the notion of irregular onward movement, were more easily convertible into the economic and political capital at stake in the field.

The people on the move, therefore, were considered a 'prized' form of capital and were fragmented from the broader group of refugees-and-migrants. They were sought after by both

UNHCR and IOM, which meant that, whether considered as a person of concern to UNHCR or a migrant by IOM, the people on the move, as a whole, were worthy of institutional visibility and protection. With all people on the move sought after as objects of protection, a further form of fragmentation was established, that of 'unmixing' the mixed migration population. This is where the clear division of labour between UNHCR and IOM came into play. As we have seen, the division of labour rested on a strict bifurcation that pre-categorised individuals on the move, most often based on nationality, before any status determination procedure.

From the moment they entered Tunisia or Libya, therefore, all people on the move were, at least theoretically, considered of concern to UNHCR or IOM and channelled in separate, but parallel protection tracks accordingly. Importantly, the struggle for people on the move was not an open turf war between the two, for there were broader institutional incentives, influenced by the political and economic capital in the field, that made it equally valuable for UNHCR *not* to make certain people on the move of its concern. This exposed the tension between the two competing forms of capital in the field, which allowed for an entente between UNHCR and IOM on the carving out of their respective population groups.

In contrast, those who did not fit the mixed migration framing, and were not considered as 'on the move', were not rigidly divided and sorted between UNHCR and IOM. There were no parallel protection tracks when it came to the refugees-and-migrants who did not fit the profile of mixed migration. With UNHCR, this resulted in a conditional and highly hierarchised form of protection, where UNHCR visibility was largely afforded on the basis of perceived convertibility into donor funding. As a result, the people on the move were hypervisible, while others were relegated to

subordinate forms of visibility/invisibility and protection. Based on a resource allocation that reflected their worth in relation to the struggle for capital in the field, some were prioritised and others were diverted away from UNHCR's visibility and protection structures.

This structure of fragmentation and hierarchisation was upheld, as seen in Chapter 5, by a field-specific logic that emerged from the mixed migration field: the logic of *vulnerability-as-mobility*. According to this logic, *all* persons on the move irregularly on the route, by virtue of being on the move, were considered vulnerable. This logic facilitated a shift towards making previously invisible and '*underserving*' groups into legitimate objects of protection interventions: refugee and migrant men, who made up the majority of those migrating along the Central Mediterranean route. This was a form of vulnerability that required specific forms of protection interventions, which not only naturalised their fragmentation from the broader category of refugees-and-migrants, but also made necessary the forms of interventions that were enacted towards them. Indeed, with mobility itself considered the *locus* of danger and risk, people on the move were all, whether categorised as refugees or migrants, framed as needing to be dissuaded and stopped in their movement. This logic of vulnerability-as-mobility consolidated a merged and single category of intervention of the 'people on the move', which, regardless of refugee/migration categorisation, required a similar form of protection response delivered in parallel by UNHCR and IOM.

The logic of vulnerability, therefore, further blurred the categorical distinction between refugees and migrants. With both refugees and migrants on the move considered vulnerable and with both framed as being able to remain *in situ*, the lines between the two and the forms of protection response they required were effectively merged into one. Donors, too, viewed refugees and

migrants on the move as part of one category that required protection and management regardless of their labelling. This was marked by the merging of EU funding dedicated to migration management and protection for refugees *and migrants*. In an apparent disjuncture from the rigid bifurcation that sorted people of concern from migrants, therefore, it was no longer clear where the substantive difference between the two categories lay. With UNHCR officials on the ground associating the deservingness of protection to framings of vulnerability and protection needs *in situ*, international protection was being redrawn on the ground as a form of protection-as-assistance to the most vulnerable.

This revealed a fundamental disjuncture within the fragmented and hierarchised protection structures of the mixed migration field, as seen in Chapter 6. Indeed, the people on the move registered with UNHCR were not necessarily considered as 'genuine refugees' at all. Rather than their 'refugeeness', it was their perceived *vulnerability* that made this category worthy of protection to my interlocutors. Indeed, most of my interlocutors fundamentally associated mixed migration, including those registered as people of concern to UNHCR, as a phenomenon of *migration*. Accordingly, my interlocutors perceived that those on the move could have remained further south on the route instead of continuing their journey onward, which brought these people of concern to UNHCR closer to the category to that of 'vulnerable migrants'.

The paradox was that those perceived as 'genuine refugees' had access to *more limited* forms of protection and assistance, due to the hierarchical protection structure that privileged the visibility and protection of people on the move. Indeed, with donor and UNHCR attention turned towards 'mixed migration', 'real refugees', identified as Arab refugees settled in northern Tunisia, were

positioned towards the lower rungs of the hierarchy of protection and visibility. They could not benefit from the same assistance and services that had been established in areas, such as in southern Tunisia, that were characterised by mixed migration. Those considered real refugees, therefore, received more limited protection, while those receiving protection and assistance by UNHCR were not considered refugees at all by those delivering it on the ground. This appeared to create an allocation of assistance and protection that was *inversely* proportionate to the perceived 'refugeeness' of those registered with UNHCR.

The subordinate visibility and protection afforded to 'genuine refugees', when contrasted with the hypervisibility and prioritisation of resources for the people on the move, raised the obvious question of what shape protection took in the mixed migration field and to what end protection was enacted towards them. In Chapter 6, I paid close attention to the parallel forms of protection put in place by UNHCR and IOM for refugees and migrants on the move, through which I considered the increasing interchangeability of the forms of protection and durable solutions that were enacted for each of them. Indeed, with donors funding protection-as-assistance for refugees *and migrants*, a parallel infrastructure was put in place by UNHCR and IOM. This contributed to blurring the substantive difference in treatment of refugees and migrants by UNHCR and IOM.

The practice of durable solutions on the ground further confirmed the interchangeability of forms of protection enacted toward refugees and migrants, as we have seen in Chapter 6. I took IOM's Voluntary Humanitarian Returns programme, considered a *solution* for migrants in Libya, as a starting point from which to consider the ways in which solutions for *refugees* have mirrored IOM's logic of southbound returns. As we have seen, from the mixed migration field, and through the

struggle for the merged economic and political capital in the field, emerged a reconfigured space of possibilities; a new range of appropriate protection action. This appropriate range of action shifted UNHCR's protection further into the realm of IOM's repackaged protection action.

Accordingly, UNHCR, in competition with IOM's protection approach, adopted a range of new solutions, most of which involved returning its persons of concern further south. This included through the emergency transit mechanism, which gradually shifted from being a point of transit in Niger to facilitate resettlement to a possible destination for the purpose of integration in Rwanda. Furthermore, UNHCR formally conceived of returns to previous countries of asylum and non-voluntary returns as durable solutions, despite the clear recognition of the absence of effective protection and risk of further persecution. UNHCR effectively turned its own people of concern in Libya into a returnable population, mirroring the southbound return logic of IOM's VHR programming.

UNHCR and IOM in the field of mixed migration

In Chapter 2, I contrasted the dispositions that have defined UNHCR and IOM since their inception by drawing upon the notions of categorical differentiation, protection/migration management, and state cooperation. When taking these as a reference point, it becomes increasingly clear that the struggle for capital in the field of mixed migration contributed to shifting the ways in which the agencies practiced protection in relation to these dispositions. Most importantly is that, in the space of struggle created by the two existing within the same field, UNHCR's understanding and practice of protection appears to have collapsed into IOM's form of migration management, repackaged as 'protection', rather than the other way around. Indeed, against the broader funding

landscape of the EUTF and the conditional forms of protection it created, IOM was able to position itself in line with the funding-related political and economic capital of the field. It was, therefore, able to establish a new field-specific 'benchmark' of protection in line with donor expectations, which, in all but name, represented a continuation of its longstanding migration management work.

The expansion of protection 'possibilities' further into the direction of migration management had a profound impact on UNHCR's ability to position itself within the field. With the merged economic capital and merged field-specific capital of refugees-and-migrants, UNHCR could only ensure its 'share' of either forms of capital – of *the mixed migration pie* – by orienting itself towards those same donor expectations as well. While migration management, as discussed in Chapter 2, has long formed an underlying logic of the practice of protection, the struggle within the field of mixed migration further embedded UNHCR's internal grammar within rationalities of migration control, in line with the political and economic capital of the field. The presence of IOM as a newly recognised dominant protection actor in relation to the field of power, therefore, provided a blueprint for a new, field-specific practice of protection. With that, the practice of protection became, foremost, a practice of protection of European borders.

Yet, my UNHCR interlocutors willingly and strategically projected themselves toward donors in order to position themselves within the field. They firmly held to the belief that this increased funding, however politicised, would only in the end benefit those it was trying to protect. Throughout this thesis, I argued that neither UNHCR, nor its protection could remain unchanged by this struggle for capital however, despite the best intentions. For, in the midst of the struggle

in the field in Tunisia and Libya, UNHCR parted with the very characteristic that had defined it since its inception: its identity as the UN *refugee* agency.

As seen in Chapter 2, UNHCR has always fiercely guarded the 'refugee category' from the encroachment of other labels – especially that of 'migrant' – by insisting on the distinct character, needs, and entitlements of the former in relation to the latter. In the field of mixed migration, too, UNHCR and IOM fiercely guarded the boundaries of their respective 'refugee' and 'migrant' categories through the imposition of a strict bifurcation between the two. Yet, through the practices of unmixing and logics of vulnerability seen in Chapters 4 and 5, UNHCR and IOM completely redrew the boundaries of these categories from the ground up, effectively emptying them of substantive content within the mixed migration field. People on the move, whether categorised as people of concern to UNHCR or migrants, were effectively all perceived as potentially returnable, turning them all into migrants. This reflected the underlying turn towards southbound returns as *the* solution for all people on the move, which denied them the possibility of recognition of genuine 'refugeehood' while, at the same time, denied the agency of those on the move through the language of vulnerability-as-mobility.

As considered in the Introduction, scholars have long brought attention to the problems inherent to the refugee/migrant dichotomy. While UNHCR has always sought to safeguard this distinction, in the mixed migration field in Tunisia and Libya it appears to have *itself* abandoned its attachment to the purported distinctiveness of the 'refugee'. Indeed, in the face of the blurring and redrawing of the refugee and migrant categories on the ground, UNHCR and IOM's continued insistence on the bifurcated system of protection resembles little more, in that sense, than 'window dressing'. It

was a way to maintain the symbolic differentiation between the two and their position of dominance within the field. The two Agencies were thus able to continue giving meaning to their labels as the 'UN Refugee Agency' and 'UN Migration Agency', while at the same time increasingly blurring the differences between them and the categories of individuals they were meant to protect on the ground.

This is not without consequence. For with the emptying out of any substantive differentiation between 'refugees' and 'migrants', the meaning and practice of protection have also been thrown into a downward spiral. The continued structuring of displacement responses that divided individuals along lines of refugees/migrants, despite what we observed as their effective blurring on the ground, has given rise to an unmoored struggle between UNHCR and IOM. Indeed, while the bifurcated response, which mirrors the refugee/migrant dichotomy, provided the impetus for struggle in the first place, the erasure of this dichotomy on the ground through UNHCR and IOM's valuation of economic and political capital, meant that the forms of entitlements and protection previously secured for refugees were progressively discarded.

Through the struggle within the field in Tunisia and Libya, UNHCR has effectively contributed to stripping the people of *its* concern of the possibility of meaningful refugee protection, while submitting *all* people on the move, alongside IOM, to potential forms of mobility control normally afforded to migrants as seen in Chapter 6. Paradoxically, this is exactly the situation that UNHCR has warned us against by historically insisting on safeguarding the distinctiveness of the 'refugee category' to preserve the space for refugee protection. Yet through the struggle in the field, we

have observed the mechanics of how UNHCR has itself actively participated in the localised and ground-level dismantlement of the very space it has always sought to safeguard.

Final reflections on the field

The Bourdieusian field lens, ultimately, allowed us to see and understand differently UNHCR/IOM, refugees/migrants and the boundaries that constitute them, the lines that divide them, and the forms of protection that are enacted at their interface. By employing a lens that allowed us to view these organisations in relation to each other, I showed that in their struggle for capital, the 'differences that distanced' them from one another were, on the ground, impossible to maintain (Bourdieu 1996b: 242). Their struggle in the field, in effect, blurred the institutional boundaries between UNHCR and IOM, the categorical divisions between refugees and migrants, and it turned protection itself on its head, as was described in the previous sections.

The 'mixed migration field' provided a salient site for the empirical study of the relational struggles between UNHCR, IOM and their wider environment. It is by no means the only salient one, however. Our understanding of UNHCR or IOM would on the contrary be greatly enriched by applying Bourdieu's field theory and the field lens as a way of 'seeing differently' to other displacement contexts. For instance, it would be relevant to apply it more systematically to the 'Syria response' in Turkey, Lebanon, or Jordan, where observers have identified a turn toward developmental and neoliberal approaches to protection (see for example Turner 2018; Tsourapas 2019). Placing this within a field perspective, we might understand better how the coexistence of actors at the meso-level, such as UNHCR, the World Bank, and UNDP within a single space in relation to donors and host states, may have produced practices and understandings of protection

that are themselves specific to *their* field. The idea, therefore, is not to produce an overarching theory or universally applicable 'findings', but instead to draw out how struggles over capital and power 'situated in time, space, and subject area' produce situated practices and understandings of migration governance.

While much can be gained from applying field theory's conceptual tools elsewhere, it is worth highlighting that the 'mixed migration field' remains uniquely interesting. What is unique about this setting is that, unlike a setting characterised by actors involved in a so-called *refugee* response, the mixed migration field engages the core of the refugee and migrant categorisations. As we have seen, what is at stake in UNHCR's and IOM's struggle for capital is not only the meaning and practice of protection, which is shaped by the logic and 'rules of the game' of the field, but the very meaning of the 'refugee' and the 'migrant'. By extension, what is at stake in how each agency positions itself over refugees and migrants is their institutional identities as the 'UN Refugee Agency' and the 'UN Migration Agency'. For in remaking the refugee and migrant categories the two agencies are also fundamentally remaking themselves.

More systematically applying the field lens to other geographic settings where UNHCR and IOM are responding to refugees and migrants on the ground could also, in that sense, contribute complementary insight into how the stakes of the struggle between UNHCR and IOM are shaped elsewhere. For, struggles between UNHCR and IOM over category-drawing and responsibility-sharing in contexts as varied as Bangladesh, Venezuela, the Balkans, and the Pacific hint at such dynamics playing out in other contexts. The dynamics of these settings need to be submitted to further empirical enquiry. The myriad forms of struggle and logics of protection that promise to

come to light through such studies would produce a richer understanding of how actors of protection are shaped in relation to their wider environments, with profound implications on how and to what end individuals are protected.

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