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Negotiating Mobility and Constructing Aspirations:

The Case of Young Venezuelan Migrants "in Transit" in Chile

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Disclaimer:

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List of Acronyms

CPI	Corruption Perceptions Index
EU	European Union
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Intersex, Asexual
OEA	The Organization of American States
PDI	Police of Investigations

Abstract

Since the mid-2010s, the Venezuelan humanitarian crisis has shaped international migration discourses both within the Latin American region and globally. For many Venezuelans, however, migration is not a straight line from point A to point B; instead, it involves a series of transit locations where migrants renegotiate the journey and reconstruct their aspirations. With this in mind, this study attempts to uncover how and why Venezuelan migrants' mobility and aspirations change along their transit migration journeys through Chile. Through a series of participant interviews and qualitative coding analysis, this research investigates how the combination of different factors such as socioeconomic status, gender, sexuality, trauma, and health along with country-specific factors affect the construction of aspirations and notions of fulfilment.

Relevance to Development Studies

In the "age of migration", migration studies are an increasingly relevant discipline and an especially important part of development studies. Focusing on migrants, and in particular their personal narratives, sheds a light on the many ways in which research and policy can be directed in order to bring out the best in migrant communities around the world. As this research project takes an intersectional lens to evaluating migration journeys, it demonstrates that many factors like gender, sexuality, class, and health that can often result in marginalization are not always straightforward. Indeed, intersectionality weaves a complex web of characteristics to consider when reaching for goals in line with human development. For this reason, linking migration with development studies is essential for understanding a great deal of our increasingly diverse and interconnected world.

Keywords

Venezuelan migration, Chile, mobility, aspirations, social imaginaries, transit migration, territorialization of fulfilment, Europe, the United States, the capabilities approach, class, sexual health, gender relations

Chapter 1 : **Introduction**

This research paper seeks to shed light on the varied migration patterns that Venezuelans have been taking around the world since the beginning of the country's humanitarian crisis during the mid-2010s. Since 2014, the number of Venezuelans residing in Chile has skyrocketed; however, the number of Venezuelans leaving Chile has also increased. There are a variety of characteristics that might designate Chile as an attractive country for migrants: its status as a high-income country, the expansive job market in Santiago, low crime rates relative to the Latin American region, and a nationalized health system among others. For this reason, the prevalence of secondary migration journeys outside of the country raises questions.

The patterns and the aspirations that lead to secondary migration are often complex and influenced by a variety of factors; therefore, this research seeks to uncover which factors shape and (dis)allow the migratory aspirations of young Venezuelan migrants in Chile. In an attempt to answer this question, the relationship between geography, mobility, and aspirations will be explored through a series of interviews with young Venezuelan migrants and analyzed within the context of transit migratory pathways.

1.1 Contextual Background

1.1.1 The Venezuelan Crisis

Since the Bolivarian Revolution began in Venezuela during the late 1990s, the country has experienced both economic and social turbulence, leading to what many academics have referred to as a failed state.[1] The nation has experienced hyperinflation, which peaked in 2018 at 344,509% (Statista 2021b), poverty rates which skyrocketed from 29% in 2012 to 96.2% in 2019 (Statista 2021a), and a ranking of 176 out of 180 countries on Transparency International's (2021) Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI).[2] According to Hawkins (2015), the Venezuelan government suffers from clientelism and corruption and therefore, cannot effectively provide basic services like water and electricity nor implement the correct reforms to do so. Overall, the collapse of the oil-based economy in combination with authoritarian politics and failed social programs have resulted in a mounting crisis that has left the country and its population vulnerable and destitute.

Liberalist scholars have contributed the crisis to failed state nationalization of resources and rent-seeking economic activities, while critical authors emphasize other factors like Dutch Disease (i.e. the resource curse) and the role of neo-imperialist foreign policy carried out by powerful international actors like the United States. However, the Venezuelan crisis is far more complex than can be explained by one school of thought; indeed, some of the factors that have contributed to the complex humanitarian crisis include budget

[1] According to Britannica, a failed state is defined as one "that is unable to fulfill the administrative and organizational tasks required to control people and resources and can provide only minimal public services." Failed states are also characterized by illegitimacy in the eyes of the global international order, as well as on the domestic level; human rights and civil liberties are not protected, and physical security is not guaranteed.

[2] Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) "ranks 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption, according to experts and businesspeople." According to the system used by the CPI, country number 1 is perceived as the least corrupt, while country number 180 is perceived as the most corrupt.

mismanagement; high levels of corruption; a lack of economic diversification; authoritarian politics; state repression of opposition parties; and reliance on foreign investors in combination with an inward-looking development model (Bull and Rosales 2020: 2).

As a consequence of Venezuela's economic collapse and unstable political climate, many citizens are living in dangerous conditions. The rise of opposition persecution has led to state sanctioned repression and extrajudicial killings (Bull and Rosales 2020: 5). Additionally, resource shortages have led to nationwide power cuts, the scarcity and price inflation of life-saving medicines, and supermarket shelves that are regularly empty. These shortages have also contributed to increasingly high levels of crime including burglaries and kidnappings.

As a result of the instability of daily life, increasing numbers of Venezuelans have fled their home country throughout the past 10 years. Since 2014, there has been an exodus of nearly 5.6 million people from the country, accounting for approximately 15% of the population (Wolfe 2021). Many Venezuelans have chosen to migrate to the European Union (EU), as demonstrated by the significant increase in asylum applications since 2015. While in 2015, the number of Venezuelan applicants was not significant enough to be included in the Eurostat Asylum Application data set, by the fourth quarter of 2016, applications had increased fivefold (Eurostat 2017). Four years later in 2020, Venezuelans made up 17% of all asylum applications (European Commission 2020).

The pressures of this migration crisis have been felt most heavily within the region, with many Venezuelans settling in neighboring countries like Colombia, Brazil, Peru, and Caribbean nations like Aruba and Trinidad and Tobago (Center for Disaster Philanthropy 2021). As Dietrich Jones (2020: 2) discusses in her article about Venezuelan migration in the Dutch Caribbean, "recent migrations have created panic among states, who feel ill-equipped to respond to the sudden increase in arrivals" due to limited resources and constrained bureaucratic capacity. This has been the case in other neighboring countries, where adjustments to national migration policy and increases in bureaucratic capacity are much slower than the rate at which Venezuelan migrants are entering the borders.

1.1.2 Historical Migration Flows Between Venezuela and Chile

Widespread Venezuelan emigration is a relatively new phenomenon within Latin America. During the 1970s and 80s, while many countries in the region were experiencing a return to authoritarian politics, Venezuela had just successfully installed a democratic regime after fifty years of dictatorship and the oil boom of the 70s had dramatically increased quality of life for the middle class (Rojas Mira 2019: 35-37). Consequently, the foreign population in Venezuela nearly doubled from 600,000 in 1970 to one million by 1990 (Solimano 2004: 5).

Simultaneously, the political situation in Chile became more turbulent in 1973 when the country experienced a military-led coup d'état. Many Chileans left as the country began to destabilize, while others were forced to flee as political exiles during the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in the 1970s and 80s (Solimano 2004: 7). In 1984, it was estimated that 44% of all Chilean political exiles had repatriated to Venezuela (Llambias-Wolf 1993: 598). This number peaked around 1981 with approximately 25,000 Chileans residing in Venezuela (Rojas Mira 2019: 40).

The political realities of Venezuela and Chile have changed significantly over the past thirty years, which has resulted in a dramatic shift in migration flows between the two countries. Venezuela's aforementioned political and economic crisis has notably contributed to an increase in the number of immigrant residents in Chile. As of March 2021, nearly half a million Venezuelans are known to be residing in Chile (McGowan 2021) and the number of approved visas for Venezuelans has risen over 12,000% in the last 7 years, from 1,272 in 2014 to 159,539 in 2019 (Departamento de Extranjería y Migración 2020).

1.1.3 The Current State of Migration in Chile

Chilean politics have proven relatively stable since the return to democracy in the 1990s; this, in combination with the country's socioeconomic success and status as a high-income country, has increasingly attracted a steady wave of immigrants over the past thirty years. In fact, the immigrant population in Chile has grown from 1% in 1990 to 8% in 2019 (Doña-Reveco and Gouveia 2020: 4), an increase that can mainly be attributed to the intensification of migration flows from Venezuela, Haiti, and Peru. However, the Chilean government's capacity to accommodate this influx has been significantly challenged by an outdated legal framework and inadequate bureaucratic infrastructure.

Firstly, Chile's current immigration law is based on an ideological framework from the Pinochet dictatorship that sought to promote national security by way of anti-immigration rhetoric and policy (Stefoni, Silva, and Brito 2019: 267). The current law is outlined by two decrees: *Decreed Law No. 1094 of July 1975* and *Supreme Decree No. 597 of June 1984*, which are vague in nature and leave decision-making power of granting entry up to the discretion of border police and military. This has forced the Chilean government to create new regulations in real time and ultimately led to the implementation of a number of laws that have complicated migration processes.

One of the most pertinent examples of this is the mass deportations of migrants, mostly of Venezuelan nationality, that have been carried out by the Police of Investigations (PDI) since February 2021. Hundreds of migrants have been deported without due legal process, a decision that has been condemned both by local rights-based actors and international organizations (United Nations n.d.). In order to adapt to criticisms and the increasing number of migrants that have entered Chile both formally and clandestinely, legislators have amended particular parts of the law over the past few years.

However, these revisions have mostly made subtle changes to the previous law instead of formulating a coherent Chilean migration policy, which Stefoni (2011) refers to as "a policy of no policy" (Noy and Voorend 2016: 618). The Piñera administration has recently enacted a new migration law in order to replace the existing model from the Pinochet regime, which focuses on what the president has coined as "putting the house in order". The new policy has been met with criticism and opposition from migration experts and civil society organizations who claim that a heavy-handed discourse around migration will cause more precarious journeys.

In 2018, in order to address the Venezuelan crisis in particular, the Chilean government created a new type of visa for Venezuelan nationals: The Visa of Democratic Responsibility. Until its implementation, most Venezuelans entered the country as tourists and later regularized their status as permanent or temporary. Thus, this policy was implemented in an effort to more closely govern the immigration process of Venezuelans who were arriving at the border in mass. The requirements for this visa, however, have made it even more difficult to enter Chile. The requested documents to apply for this visa include a passport, Criminal Record Certificate, and a fee of 30 USD, paperwork and money that has become exceedingly more difficult for Venezuelans to acquire due to the country's ongoing political crisis (Yaksic 2020: 106). Additionally, applicants must apply for the visa while still in Venezuela, meaning that they must continue living within the context of a humanitarian crisis until they receive approval.

Furthermore, Chile's post-migration bureaucracy is ill-equipped to handle procedures and paperwork for migrants who reside within the country. Residency applications and procedural paperwork often delay anywhere from eight months to one year and a half. Additionally, residency permits are often received by applicants two to three months after their validation date. Moreover, while migrants wait for their temporary or permanent residency visas to be approved, they are not able to leave the country, apply for government subsidies,

or legally administrate their bank accounts among a host of other restrictions (Riveros Marín 2021). This in turn complicates assimilation and migrant participation in Chilean society.

1.2 Research Problem Statement

Since 2014, nearly half a million Venezuelans have fled their home country and arrived in Chile to escape the growing humanitarian and political crisis. Since then, a few studies have been conducted that attempt to address the situation of Venezuelan migrants and refugees within Chile's borders from humanitarian, legal, and policy perspectives (See Doña-Reveco 2020 and OEA 2020). While the studies that have addressed the situation of Venezuelans who arrive in Chile are important in improving the situation of migrants within the country, there is a lack of research on whether Venezuelan migrants intend to remain in Chile or continue their migration journeys onward.

According to data from the Police of Investigations (PDI), there were nearly 30,000 Venezuelan migrants who left Chile during the last three months of 2019 (Álvarez 2020). Moreover, according to a study conducted by the OEA, more Venezuelans had left Chile during December of 2019 than had entered the country. While this can in part be attributed to the Piñera administration's newly implemented migration policies in addition to fears surrounding the social uprising of 2019, there have not been studies conducted nor data gathered about these departures. Given the many factors that attract migrants to Chile, it remains curious where Venezuelans are going and why.

Thus, this research is concerned with understanding the choices that Venezuelans construct throughout their migration journeys and how these decisions change along with their perceptions and expectations. Moreover, these perceptions are expected to be shaped by differences in gender, class, sexual orientation, and ethnicity among other factors. This thesis will address themes of mobility, aspirations, and fulfillment that might encourage Venezuelan migrants to pursue secondary migration trajectories.

1.3 Literature Review

Over the past 100 years, as result of industrialization and increasing globalization, international and transoceanic migration has increased significantly. Moreover, during the 21st century, an age of political turmoil and ideological transformation, migratory patterns have increasingly become more complex and drawn-out (Takenaka 2007). Accordingly, the focus of migration literature has shifted from the traditional permanent settlement and temporary labor migration pathways to the emergence of "new migration dynamics" (Urquia et. al 2010: 1620).

In earlier migration literature, scholars attempted to typify migration based on specific push or pull factors. For example, Jennissen (2004) defines the four types of migration as 1.) Labor migration; 2.) Return migration; 3.) Chain migration; and 4.) Asylum migration. Additionally, Bell, Alves, de Oliveira, and Zuin (2010) name three types of international migration including 1.) Labor migration; 2.) Forced migration; and 3.) International retirement migration. While these academics all offer a detailed starting point, types of migration are not easily categorized because they tend to be fluid and coinciding.

Additionally, there has been significant critique on the economic model of migration, which has tended to overlook historical relations, family, community dynamics, role of intermediaries in encouraging, and the role of state documents, and foreign migration policy (O'Reilly 2016: 27). Thus, economic theories of movement that were once dominant in migration literature have fallen to the side, making room for more studies that focus on the social, cultural, and political factors that encourage migration. Recently, there has been a re-

emergence of literature which discusses secondary migration patterns. These investigations tend to center around concepts like transit migration, onward migration, stepwise migration, and a variety of other concepts that have been developed to describe non-static migratory patterns.

Transit migration, according to Schapendonk (2012: 578), "refers to migrants' periods of waiting in-between the country of origin and the destination." He also proposes that transit is more of a migratory phase than a specific category of migration. Some academics claim that transit has a specific timeframe; for example, Düvell (2008) proposes a definition of transit migration that is temporally specific, ranging from one week to three months. However, Dimitriadi (2015: 340) asserts that transit has no timeframe because movement in this context is contingent on individual perceptions and expectations. Papadopoulou (2008: 4) echoes this sentiment, stating that transit migration is "characterized by indefinite migrant stay… and may or may not develop into further migration depending on a series of structural and individual factors." For the sake of this research paper, the latter definitions that do not delineate timeframes for transit migration will be utilized.

One type of transit that is being discussed in greater detail is stepwise migration on an international level, as opposed to its previous application within discussions on domestic, rural-urban migration. As suggested by Paul (2011), stepwise international migration implies a hierarchy of countries throughout the migration journey. In other words, migrants' perceptions of the hierarchical rankings of countries drive them to the stepping-stone countries where they stay during the journey before arriving in the destination country. Paul (2011: 1844) writes, "I propose that stepwise migration be redefined to include multiple stops (of substantive duration) in various intermediate locations as part of an intentional, hierarchical progression toward an individual migrant's preferred destination."

However, Paul's assertion that stepwise migration is an intentional and premeditated trajectory is challenged by Roberts (2019: 321). She suggests that the line is not so clear cut between stepwise migration and ongoing migration trajectories "that hinge more on chance and real-time responsiveness to changing personal and political contexts." For the purposes of this research paper, the term transit migration will be used in favor of stepwise migration; however, it will be remolded into a definition that is inclusive of the differing social, cultural, and geographical contexts on the migration journey that may allow for planning and the others that may not.

1.4 Research Questions

In order to understand how young Venezuelan migrants construct their aspirations to embark on a transit migration journey to Chile, this research paper will attempt to answer the following question through the construction of life stories:

1.4.1 Main Question

How do local opportunity structures and global social imaginaries influence the mobility and trajectories of young Venezuelan migrants currently residing in Chile?

1.4.2 Sub-Questions

1. What kind of challenges and opportunities do Venezuelan migrants face in their daily interactions?

2. To what extent do their perceptions of daily interactions and acculturated sense of global hierarchies inform the social imaginaries that they construct and sense of fulfilment that they experience?
3. How do those imaginaries and sense of fulfilment shape their migration aspirations?

1.5 Research Objectives

The objective of this research is to investigate the extent to which different social, cultural, and economic factors throughout the transit migration journey shape and influence the construction of Venezuelan migrants' aspirations.

Chapter 2 : **Theoretical Framework and Methodological Strategies**

2.1 Theorization

This research paper will apply the capabilities approach mobility model put forward by Carling to an exploration of transit migration.

2.1.1 Capabilities and Aspirations in Migration

Amartya Sen's (1999) capabilities approach asserts that the freedom to achieve well-being is central to development and that well-being can be defined by a person's ability to freely realize their goals and dreams. Capabilities, or one's ability to convert means into achievements, derive from "certain personal, sociopolitical, and environmental factors" that either enable or disable one's potential (Robeyns and Byskov 2020). In recent years, more academics have enhanced the international migration debate through the application of the capabilities approach.[3] Thus, in an effort to apply an intersectional lens to understanding the multiple influences that shape migration journeys and further develop the existing migration discourse, the capabilities approach will be employed in this research paper.

Appadurai's concept "the capacity to aspire" takes the capabilities approach one step further and is a useful starting point for evaluating how cultural conceptualizations of "the good life" influence individual wants and desires. In fact, he argues that aspirations are never just individual, but rather are constructed from social, cultural, and local influences (Appadurai 2004: 68). Moreover, they are continually transformed by changing interactions and are (dis)abled by social class; the rich have a greater capacity to aspire than the poor as they have access to more resources that can immediately fulfill their desires.

The capacity to aspire has been applied to numerous migration studies.[4] Nathan (2005) opens discussions about its impact on the wellbeing of migrants and the realization of different migration trajectories. The author combines Appadurai's and Sen's theoretical frameworks, demonstrating through case-study research that the capacity to aspire is unevenly distributed across social groups and largely based on capabilities enabled by class position. Indeed, he argues that class is one of the main determinants of the extent to which one can aspire, "the position of a person, her own position as a producer and income earner, her social circle and contacts with outsiders, her access to resources and control over income, and her knowledge all influence and limit her capacity to aspire." (Nathan 2005: 38). This research paper will further develop ideas about how the confluence of multiple factors, especially class, influence capabilities and aspirations through the application of the aspiration/ability model.

2.1.2 Aspiration/Ability Model

As a theoretical framework, this research paper will employ the aspiration/ability model put forward by Carling (2010), who asserts that there are both environmental and personal factors that influence migration aspirations. However, the ability to realize those aspirations is also contingent on environmental and personal factors, which lead either to the realization

[3] See de Haas (2003, 2006, 2010a, 2021), Assaduzzaman et. al (2020), and Eichsteller (2021).
[4] See Pontrandolfo (2017), Czaika and Cothknecht (2021), and Vitus (2021).

of migration or involuntary immobility. The concept of involuntary immobility will be further researched through an exploration of how mobility in transit migration situations changes along the journey. Figure 1 demonstrates Carling's conceptualization of the aspiration/ability model.

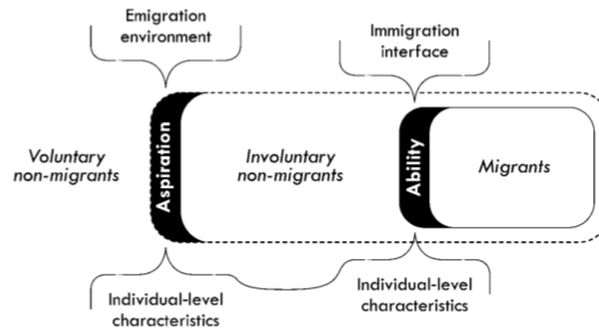

Figure 1: The Aspiration/Ability Model

2.1.3 The Territorialization of Fulfilment

Paul's (2011) idea of the perceived hierarchy of countries associated with transit migration is inextricably linked with Pajo's (2008) concept of the territorialization of fulfilment: that fulfilment is perceived as specific to a particular geography. Pajo (2008: 161) relates that "different countries [territorialize] different states of fulfillment, and any country in the world, including those not well known by the emigrants, [occupies] a given position in the world hierarchy. That the emigrants' visions of the world order could not come from their experience. That the world hierarchy was essentially a social imagination." In order to understand how Venezuelan migrants perceive their transit journeys (e.g. aspirations to reach Europe), it is important to explore their perceived geographical hierarchies and where these perceptions stem from.

Thus, this research paper will explore how participants constructed their social imaginaries of Chile, Europe, and the United States, how this has influenced their own hierarchical perceptions of the global order, and how this affects aspirations/ideas of fulfilment. Moreover, the relationship between geography, mobility, and aspirations will be analyzed within the context of transit migration, evaluating how limitations are overcome and new aspirations are constructed as migrants move from place to place. In summary, the theoretical framework supports questioning how changes in expectations, capabilities (i.e. mobility), and aspirations throughout a migration journey may influence the incidence of onward migration patterns.

2.2 Methodological Strategies and Data Collection Methods

Upon establishing a research topic, I decided that constructing life stories would be the most authentic way to capture the true essence of the migration experience. Thus, the following section of this research paper presents the tools that I used to collect data and create meaning together with participants including methods, procedures, strategies, and techniques.

2.2.1 The Process of Recruiting Participants and Their Profiles

My initial motivation for this project stemmed from conversations with a long-time friend from my exchange semester in Santiago, Alejandro. Hearing his personal stories about leaving Venezuela on a migration journey to Chile, but also his aspirations to migrate further, inspired me in the direction of conducting qualitative interviews. When I mentioned to Alejandro that Venezuelan migration to Chile was a topic I wanted to explore for my thesis, he offered to function as what King et. al (2019: 59) refer to as a "gatekeeper". As a Venezuelan migrant himself residing in Chile, he was the 'insider' who helped me to recruit participants.

As Essers (2009: 164) states, "As the life-story approach entails talking about one's private life, it is important that the interviewee is approached in a trustworthy manner." Thus, the established methodology for selecting participants was this: Alejandro, an 'insider', casually conversed with Venezuelan friends or acquaintances about their migration aspirations and my project; then, if they showed aspirations to migrate further and interest in the project, he asked if they might want to participate. From there, Alejandro would pass me their contact information and I would coordinate interview schedules with participants via Whatsapp.

As I was attempting to understand aspirations at an in-depth level over an entire migration journey, I decided to narrow the number of participants to five. As Chong (1993: 868) comments, "One of the advantages of the in-depth interview (…) is that it records more fully how subjects arrive at their opinions." For example, tone, ramblings, speed variation, or hesitations may help the researcher to garner a more profound understanding of how participants are navigating the emotions attached to specific situations, which is particularly important when constructing life stories.

The criteria for selecting interviewees was a specific profile: Venezuelan migrants between the ages of 20 and 30 who are currently residing or have resided in Chile and have aspirations to continue their migration journeys to Europe or the United States. The following chart shows the demography of the five participants who shared their life histories as a part of this study.

Table 2.1
Participant Demography

Participant Name	Age	Gender	City of Origin	Sexuality
Jorge	26	Male	Puerto la Cruz	Sexually Fluid
Alejandro	23	Male	Barcelona	Heterosexual
Adriana	29	Female	Caracas	Bisexual
Erik	24	Male	Barcelona	Heterosexual
Cristiano	30	Male	Maracaibo	Homosexual

Source: Field Work 2021.

2.2.2 Constructing Life Stories and the Qualitative Interviewing Process

The chosen methodology for this research paper was constructing life (hi)stories through a series of semi-structured, qualitative interviews. This combination of methodological tools is typical in development studies research because it allows the researcher "to 'capture the concrete details of lives in context' without allowing data collection to be overwhelmed by standardized procedures in a way that might destroy the 'intimacy' of narrative accounts" (Lock and Lloyd-Sherlock 2011). I employed this methodology to allow participants' narratives to

flow easily in and out of various topics and to ultimately paint a broader picture of what their collective experiences might add to the broader migration discourse. My research aimed to capture Paerregaard's (1998) philosophy that life stories are "a trace of some reality that is more than the story itself."

Previous to starting the interviewing process, I had created a loose interview guide (See Appendix 1) which helped to steer the conversation and keep me on track to reach particular topics. Questions were divided into five sections: life in Venezuela, leaving Venezuela and the migration journey, entering Chile, life in Chile, and the future. By categorizing the migration journey this way, I hoped to see how trajectories were constructed and where certain decisions were made.

Having organized my methodological strategy and established my research subjects, I commenced interviewing in early August and finished the process in October. I conducted between three and five interviews of approximately one hour with each participant via Zoom. Each session was recorded so that I was able to watch them over again and eventually, create transcriptions for coding.

2.2.3 Transcription and Qualitative Coding Analysis

The first part of the qualitative research process is what Yin (2011: 182) refers to as "compiling the database." This includes organizing research notes and important literature, as well as assembling records and increasing familiarity with the content of the research data (Yin 2011: 181-184). As I began to gather data, I created a step-by-step process that allowed me to both organize myself and constantly review the data. I began by uploading recordings to Amberscript, an audio transcription software. Once the interview was transcribed, I listened to it once again alongside the transcription, checking for accuracy. Before the next interview with a participant, I always made sure to complete this process, and watch the interview once more. This ensured that I had an in-depth understanding of topics that we had already discussed and could consider any remaining questions that we might have missed during the previous session.

The next part of the research process was "disassembling the data" (Yin 2011: 186). In order to conduct a thorough analysis, I used *Atlas.ti* qualitative coding software. As Yin (2018: 128) asserts and many authors agree, qualitative data analysis software "do not do any analysis for you but may serve as an able assistant and reliable tool." Indeed, using *Atlas.ti* allowed me to map out connections between words and ideas of the participants in order to understand the most important themes. This was extremely important in the process of documenting personal narratives because it allowed me to examine the data on both an individual and collective level.

I took a coding approach that included elements from both open and axial coding methodologies. First, in open coding "data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences" (Strauss and Corbin 1998: 102). Initial codes were data-driven (DeCuir-Gunby et al. 2011: 137) and thus, simplified into negative and positive categories by geographical location: Venezuela, Chile, the United States, and Europe. Example codes included "negative: venezuela > corruption"; "positive: venezuela > culture"; and "positive: chile > opportunities". This helped me to understand the overarching feelings that participants had toward certain geographies or experiences.

Then, I turned to axial coding in order to "uncover relationships among categories" and ultimately, to identify the conditions that caused negative and positive perceptions (Strauss and Corbin 1998: 127). During this process, I created codes for specific themes such as class, gender, economic capacity, family life, and value systems in addition to codes about experienced emotions such as desperation, frustration, freedom, resentment, disinterest, confusion, and satisfaction. I also included more theory-driven codes that engaged with the

construction of social imaginaries and aspiration drivers. Using this methodology in combination with an intersectional theoretical framework allowed me to identify the precise factors that were contributing to specific feelings and outcomes.

2.2.4 Positionality, Reflexivity, and Ethics

Since the beginning of the research project, I knew that constructing life stories with participants who had lived through a humanitarian crisis would be an emotional process. As Gilbert (2001: 9) says, "research is a process of exploration and discovery that is felt deeply." This was true for participants, as many recounted personal experiences that were distressing and intimate in nature.

Thus, embarking on my research journey, I was aware that researching sensitive topics is an emotionally challenging process for interviewees; however, I did not initially consider how these stories might affect me as the researcher. Studies published by Dickson-Swift (2008; 2009) have demonstrated that "researchers need to find strategies to manage not only the emotions of the participants but also their own emotions" (Dickson-Swift 2009: 70).

At the beginning of the research process, I often felt that I was walking on a tight rope, attempting to regulate my own emotions while also staying present to the emotional needs of my participants. However, this initial challenge became easier over time, as I learned practical skills to manage it. For example, interviews exceeding one hour were often emotionally draining for both myself and participants; thus, I kept all interviews to a maximum of one hour. Additionally, I decided that sticking to one interview per day allowed me to properly process difficult stories and engage with "informal support networks" before taking on another interview (Dickson-Swift 2009: 73). This allowed me to work ethically, empathetically, and with special attention to each interviewee.

In incorporating notions of reflexivity throughout the research process, I realized "that we are all multiple insiders and outsiders" (Deutsch 1981: 174). My positionality as an American researcher from a European university deemed me an 'outsider' and could indeed have pose challenges to the power dynamics between myself and participants. Although I did not necessarily take note of this, it is possible that certain information was either withheld or embellished because of my positionality. At the same time, my experience of having lived in Chile on a university exchange also made it easier for participants to relate nuances about different parts of Chilean society. This meant that I understood implicit meanings more quickly, especially given that participants lived in the neighborhood where I had previously resided.

My positionality as an 'outsider' conducting interviews in my second language was another challenge that I faced in the beginning of the interviewing process. I felt that I often missed words and sometimes failed to understand language-based nuances. However, at the same time that I felt like an outsider, I also had an 'in' to the group, in that my partner is Venezuelan and thus, my Spanish incorporates slang and words typical to Venezuela. Interviewees found this interesting and it worked to close a gap between myself and participants. I also found that research subjects felt more comfortable being vulnerable because they perceived my obvious foreign accent and nervousness around grammatical errors as a sign of vulnerability as well. Thus, negotiating my role as an insider/outsider did not prove to be negative, but many times actually deepened my relationship and connection with participants.

2.2.5 Scope, Limitations, and Practical Challenges

Due to unforeseen challenges with Covid-19 travel restrictions, I was forced to rework my initial research plan, which was to conduct an ethnographic study in Santiago, Chile incorporating in-person individual and group interviews. I adapted my research methodology to one-on-one synchronous interview meetings via Zoom, which had both its drawbacks and advantages. One of the main downsides that I encountered as a researcher was that when participants were overwhelmed with emotion, expressing empathy through the screen was much more difficult than demonstrating it in-person. Technological connectivity problems also created barriers, in that sound or video quality was reduced. Additionally, as Deakin and Wakefield (2014: 613) mention, "participants appear more likely to 'drop out' of the interview last minute or without notice."

Regardless, there were also a number of advantages to conducting online interviews. The greatest benefit was that I was able to constantly revisit interviews, both voice and video recordings. Re-watching video recordings was particularly helpful, as I could reassess my own responses to participants and overtime, improve my management of self. This also afforded me the opportunity to tune into the details of participants' body language and facial expressions that may have been missed while note-taking during an in-person interview. In such a way, I was able to spend more time evaluating the raw data itself. I also found that rapport was established fairly easily via online methods and that participants were more than willing to discuss emotional topics, especially after the first one or two interviews.

With regards to scope, it is essential to mention that participants all came from relatively stable socioeconomic backgrounds and identified as having a middle/upper middle-class social position before the crisis in Venezuela, which directly translated to their socioeconomic standing in Chile. For example, participants were all currently residing in a mainly residential middle/middle-upper class neighborhood in Santiago called Providencia. While many might have been living paycheck to paycheck, they were all able to enjoy time out with friends and the purchase of consumer goods. Although class was not a factor that I originally intended to be a requirement for selection, it did indeed help to narrow the scope of my research and eventually opened the door for more in-depth discussions on class. However, it also served as a limitation, in that this study does not include perspectives from the most marginalized groups of Venezuelan migrants residing in Chile.

Chapter 3 : **Life in Venezuela and Migration**

3.1: Introduction

In this chapter, I employ the aspiration/ability model, the capacity to aspire, involuntary immobility, and the territorialization of fulfilment as an analytical framework to explore the research data. This chapter is structured similarly to the interviews, in that it will consist of two sections separated by theme. The first section (3.2) discusses participants' lives in Venezuela followed by (3.3) the different journeys that participants took when leaving Venezuela. These experiences will be analyzed in order to understand the extent to which socioeconomic status, gender, age, and other factors determine the participants' capacity to aspire and the construction of their social imaginaries.

3.2: Life in Venezuela

In order to understand how participants experienced growing up in Venezuela and how this influenced their aspirations, I used *Atlas.ti* to develop codes that highlighted the positive and negative aspects of living in the country. The most commonly cited positives, apart from social class and economics, included culture, satisfaction with family life, and opportunities. The most frequently mentioned negative aspects of growing up in Venezuela included changes in lifestyle, crime, politics, cultural backwardness, violence, and family issues.

When participants recalled their upbringings in Venezuela, most childhood memories were overshadowed by discussions about the financial situation of their families and the economic status of the country. The steady increase in income for their families that came with the country's economic upturn during the early 2000s allowed participants to attend private schools, purchase expensive consumer goods, and overall, enjoy upward mobility in social class. However, the ensuing crisis tainted those previously constructed positive narratives. The following section will address how participants constructed their aspirations to leave Venezuela, drawing on the positive and negative aspects of their lives growing up, including discussions about social class, culture, crime, and violence.

3.2.1: Lifestyle Changes: The Impact of Social Class on Aspiration Construction

Before 2015, while Venezuela's abundant oil reserves were being exported around the world and the Chavez government was experiencing its golden years, the country's middle-class experienced a dramatic increase in living standards. Government jobs were plentiful and well paid, as were those in the oil extraction industry, leading to an expansion in economic capacity for those who occupied such positions (Hetland 2018: 146). Participants' early memories in Venezuela were marked by the economic success of the country, most citing initial times of financial hardship followed by a significant improvement in the economic situation of their families during the early to mid-2000s.

The middle-class lifestyle that participants became accustomed to during Venezuela's economic boom was largely contingent on the fact that their families worked either for the government or in the petroleum industry. For example, Alejandro's father worked as an infrastructure contractor for the government while his mother's restaurant was contracted by

the government for catering services; Jorge's mother was an economist at a government-funded university and took on other economic projects for the state; Erik's mother worked as a public accountant for the Venezuelan state; and Cristiano's father worked in oil extraction. These roles were especially important in the construction of participants' memories of Venezuela and the narratives that they continue to create today.

Working for the government was a lucrative position to be in during that period. As Jorge told me, his mother had many privileges working for the state, "It went really well for her and actually, for a lot of the time in the house, my mom had a better salary than my dad. The truth is that (…) we had a very good economic income during that time. We were able to build the house and do really nice things (…) my mom always liked her luxuries." Jorge also recounted stories of his travels to places like Aruba, Argentina, Brazil, and Panama where he went with his mother "because in that moment it was the fashionable place to buy clothes."

Similarly, Alejandro told the story of his mother's catering contract with the government, as she ran a restaurant out of their home that was near to where many government deputies lived and worked. Overtime, she gained the confidence of those public officials, and was also able to recommend his father for a role as a public contractor. As he explained, "from there we began to earn capital as a household (…) we began to have a better social status when my parents began to work for the government." With this increase in income, Alejandro's parents were able to invest more money in their house, purchase a truck, and fund his siblings' travels throughout the country for sports tournaments.

This economic growth that the middle-class experienced was also marked by an abundance of opportunities and increases in privilege. Cristiano's memories of living in Caracas were positive and included a reflection on the "carefree" lifestyle that he led in the capital, which was largely made possible by his parents' ability to support him economically. Similarly, Erik had the opportunity to visit family in the United States for six months and focus on music projects while casually working in a restaurant. He also recalled a time when going to the supermarket was commensurate with filling the shopping cart full of items, many of which would ultimately go to waste. As Adriana commented, she had the opportunity to study civil engineering while her grandmother did not even know how to read. Thus, there was a drastic increase in living standards and accessibility to a middle-class lifestyle as Venezuela's economy boomed.

However, as shortages became more obvious and the political situation in the country worsened, this lifestyle began to drastically change. As Cristiano recounted, "There comes a moment when I go to Caracas, I see all of the possibilities that I have, I live there, I have my first dream job doing Visual Merchandising for Zara, which in that moment for me was like wow, I'm Anne Hathaway in the Devil Wears Prada. But from then on, the shortages began." Indeed, in the span of just five years, from 2012 to 2017, Venezuela's poverty rate increased from 29% to 92.3% of the population (Statista 2021a), driving the middle-class back into situations of precarity and bringing Venezuela's golden years to a halt. For Cristiano, who told me that he was blissfully unaware of the country's political situation, it came as a shock when his father called one day and said that he would not be able to offer him financial support. A similar conversation took place between Jorge and his parents, who were no longer able to pay for his studies in Caracas. In Adriana's case, her salary as an engineer was only enough to buy a kilo of cheese. Participants discussed this decline in economic capacity at length, a change that seemed to serve as one of the main drivers that encouraged migration.

However, it is important to note, that as Van Hear (2018: 929) asserts, poverty, at least in the sense of absolute poverty, is not a driver of migration because "the poorest rarely can migrate since resources are needed to do so." However, the threat of poverty for the middle-class is. Becoming accustomed to a certain lifestyle and no longer being able to afford it pushed participants to migrate to other places where they believed it would be possible to

access that quality of life once again. As Adriana told me, "Restricting yourself from buying underwear because it costs more than your salary, making a line one or two times to buy bread that you make last for a week… I mean, that's not life." This demonstrates that Adriana's definition of 'life' is something that she had already experienced in the past and desired to reach once again by way of migration. As Nathan (2005: 38) confirms, "The capacity to aspire (…) is a link between the past and the future- since it is determined by past capabilities."

Participants' social circles, knowledge, education, and income were factors that influenced their capacity to aspire, informed and shaped by their middle-class social standing. The experienced change in economic power, from middle-class to poverty, was a driving factor in constructing participants' migration aspirations and allowed them to construct aspirations that were commensurate with the lifestyle to which they were accustomed. This leads to further discussions of how class influences migration trajectories and the construction of social imaginaries, which will be further explored in the following section.

3.2.2: The Construction of Social Imaginaries

Participants' social imaginaries that they had constructed while living in Venezuela influenced their individual and collective perceptions of the world and thus, their migration aspirations. The views that participants held regarding their own lives in Venezuela were more commensurate with the imaginaries that they had constructed of the United States or Europe. In other words, they felt that their lives in Venezuela during the 'good times' were comparatively more similar to those of the middle-class in the United States and Europe rather than their perceptions of the middle-class in the rest of Latin America.

Indeed, Venezuela's history as an international business hub and its legacy of European migration are a unique combination of factors that have resulted in a more cosmopolitan mindset within the population, particularly members of the middle-class who grew up during the country's economic upturn. The majority of participants have developed what I will refer to as a "globalized mindset", which points out the global social imaginaries that have taken the form of aspirations to travel internationally and explore the world. These aspirations have been informed by media consumption, relationships with peers, and family diaspora, as will be explored across a comparative analysis of participants' migration narratives.

Ever-increasing globalization has expanded our capacity to consume media from all corners of the world, meaning that we are constantly confronted with "information about how other people in the world live" (Nathan 2005: 40). This constant exchange of information that takes place rapidly around the globe, along with increased migration patterns and the rapid dissemination of information across social media platforms, often affects aspirations.

For example, Erik, whose personal interests and career goals lie in music production, was influenced by media representations of the music industry in the United States. When discussing why he wanted to leave Venezuela, Erik mentioned the idea of the U.S. as the birthplace of rock and roll, "We have [the United States] very idealized because of Hollywood, because of the music industry… it's where the money is." Moreover, he told me that when he looked at Venezuela, there were no rock stars there; thus, the U.S. was 'the place to be' in order to align with the goals he had set for himself. For that reason, he chose the country as his "Plan A" option when initially considering migration trajectories.

However, his vision of the United States wasn't just rock and roll; it was also centered around the idea of a better quality of life and "abundance", imaginaries that had been constructed by connections to family living in Florida. Erik also cited the lack of multiculturalization as a negative aspect of Venezuela that encouraged his migration trajectory, "In my city

you don't meet gringos or Colombians… it's purely Venezuelans." Here, it is clear that his personal interests, leading to increased media consumption of the American music industry and therefore, a "globalized mindset", influenced the construction of his social imaginaries and consequently, his aspirations.

Likewise, Alejandro's personal interest in football (soccer) was one of the initial factors that constructed his social imaginaries of Europe. As a child, he woke up early on the weekends to watch football games and began to construct an idea of what it meant to be a football fan. So much so, that he began aspiring to experience life in the cities where his favorite teams played: Madrid, Manchester, Barcelona, and London among others. As he explained, "I liked the energy that football gave me and I said wow, I want to go to Manchester. Something as stupid as that. (…) I want to get out of my comfort zone. I want to speak another language. I want to communicate with these people and ask them what they feel about seeing the team play. It sounds silly, but it was, like, what I wanted at the time. So, from that age I began wanting to leave Venezuela."

Alejandro also constructed social imaginaries about Europe as a whole based on watching games and immersing himself in media for European league football fans. For example, he noticed that people dressed differently than in Venezuela and that players and fans dyed their hair eccentric colors. He told me, "I realized that people in London are much more open. Like there was a lot of diversity in everything. It was much more accepted. And I said shit, I want that, I also want to dress differently." In such a way, Alejandro constructed an image of Europe that was non-judgmental, free, and receptive to differences, an experience that he wanted for himself. This yearning to express his individuality also stemmed from his own lived experiences of Venezuela as a "repressed" and "conservative" society where he felt that differences were rarely celebrated.

Additionally, discussions with peers and friends significantly influenced the social imaginaries that participants constructed about Europe/ the United States. For example, in Jorge's case, discussions with a friend from his university in Caracas who came back from an academic exchange to Poland significantly shaped his own aspirations. The two sat down to discuss the exchange program and Jorge began to construct an image of Europe that attracted him so much that he applied to go on exchange to Poland that same year. He also recalled that his classmates were fighting over placements for an exchange program in Sweden. When he wasn't able to go in the end, he recounted, "The truth is that this depressed me a bit because I wanted to go to Poland and live the European experience that my friend had told me about." Thus, for Jorge, the construction of social imaginaries stemmed largely from the stories of others who had returned from Europe.

Social imaginaries were also constructed through his own experiences travelling. As previously mentioned, Jorge had the opportunity to travel while growing up, which was primarily enabled by his mother's salary from her job with the government. In this case, class was an influencing factor that enabled Jorge to develop a "globalized mindset" and an interest in exploring beyond Venezuela.

Overall, participants' social imaginaries of Europe and the United States developed overtime and were influenced by a variety of personal, geographical, historical, and situational factors, including Western media influence, social class, and conversations with peers. However, the overarching question when discussing the construction of social imaginaries is: what enables people to construct certain imaginaries and how does this effect their capacity to aspire toward those imaginaries? The answer to this question lies in discussions about the social class in which participants were raised.

For example, discussions with peers about experiences in Europe or the United States often took place within a higher education setting, meaning that they could afford to study at university. Additionally, consuming Western media from a young age implies access to specific types of technology that are not available for those in precarious situations.

Similarly, Jorge's holiday travels, which significantly impacted the construction of his social imaginaries and consequently, his aspirations, were precipitated by his family's economic capacity. This can be further explained by considering the country's political climate from the 1990s through the early 2000s; the "globalized mindset" that participants adapted throughout their lives was facilitated by their middle-class upbringing, which was ultimately a result of Venezuela's economic success.

3.2.3: Crime, Violence, and Insecurity: Conflicting Values

Another driving factor that influenced participants' emigration journeys was the insecurity that began to plague Venezuela during the mid-2010s. Interviewees recalled experiencing crime in the country from a young age, which steadily worsened as shortages became more prevalent and the value of the Bolívar declined exponentially. As waves of protests swept the country from 2014 to 2017, participants personally experienced the threat of state-sanctioned violence; indeed, all participants had either witnessed or personally been a victim of a violent crime and three out of five had watched a violent death or wounding take place. The following section will therefore present participants' experiences with crime, violence, and insecurity, which often served as the final push for them to leave Venezuela.

Firstly, it is important to mention that participants were all familiar with insecurity and crime from a young age. Although Venezuela was economically stable throughout the majority of their childhoods, burglaries and petty crime were relatively commonplace. Indeed, being the victim of a crime was not necessarily less likely due to the neighborhood in which the participant lived or their social class. Instead, the way in which the crimes were experienced can be explained *from* their social positions. For example, Alejandro told me that his father worked as a contractor for the government and, as part of his projects, was required to subcontract local workers from the labor union. He further elaborated that, "Those labor unions were dangerous [in that area] because the majority were criminals, they were armed, and they were street people who robbed", a conceptualization of labor unions that alludes to Alejandro's own class position in Venezuelan society as well as the division between the laboring/working class and the upper middle-class. In this sense, his own experience and conceptualization of crime derived from a place of class privilege.

As he described, his father's relationship with the union workers became problematic and Alejandro's family began to received death threats. However, as a middle-class family, they possessed the resources and privilege to circumvent the situation and his father hired a chauffeur to bring him and his siblings to and from school in various cars. However, one day, the chauffeur was followed to the school and his father received a phone call, the caller threatening to kidnap and kill Alejandro if their requests were not acquiesced. Again, mobilizing their material resources, Alejandro's parents changed his school to another private one across the city.

While the early Chávez government did indeed lift the majority of the population out of poverty, class discrepancies still existed, and so did the tensions between classes. This polarity resulted in the aspiration for greater security by the middle class who possessed the resources that could grant them more protection. As the country was driven deeper into crisis, the fear of being the victim of violent crime increased and the availability of resources for the middle class to protect themselves significantly diminished. Interestingly, the junction of two juxtaposing factors encouraged Alejandro to leave Venezuela: his middle-class social position granted him the capacity to aspire, while the change in material resources and consequent increase in vulnerability to crime resulted in the construction of aspirations to leave the country.

Apart from the crime that his family experienced, Alejandro's aspirations to leave Venezuela were also rooted in the sexual abuse that he suffered as a child, which was

perpetrated by a male family friend. He was under the impression that covert sexual abuse of children is commonplace in his country and credited this to the "repression" and "backwardness" of Venezuelan society. This assertion is intriguing as it indicates Alejandro's assumption that sexual abuse of children is less common in countries where topics like sex are less taboo.

He also mentioned feeling that he could not speak out against the perpetrator in fear of being "accused" of being gay and ostracized from his community. This reveals Alejandro's belief that perhaps, had he been living elsewhere, it would have been easier to denounce the abuse that he endured without the repercussions of social stigma. He also cited the lack of sexual education in schools as one of the main reasons that he did not initially realize he was living a situation of abuse. Alejandro associated feelings of insecurity and fear that derived from the abuse with characteristics intrinsic to Venezuelan culture and as a result, felt that his own personal value system conflicted with Venezuelan society. This is an important facet of the construction of his search for a more "open" society, and thus, the construction of his aspirations to leave Venezuela. Toward the end of our conversations, Alejandro further elaborated that,

> Socially speaking, I feel like we Venezuelans are really broken. Yes, we're happy people, we're people who always want to share and have people around us. And the world sees us that way. In fact, there was a time when Venezuela was the happiest country in the world despite all of the shit that was going on there. (...) But of course, it's because in crisis, we always search for happiness. But that's human beings in general. I don't think it's Venezuelans, but rather the human being in general seeks to be happy in the midst of so much garbage.

The conflict between Alejandro's personal values and the violence that he experienced while still in Venezuela helped to construct his aspirations to leave; however, so did the search for a place with which he felt that his values could align. The construction of aspirations here stems from the search for happiness; for something that was lost and needs to be found. While there are some values from Venezuela that migrants hope to leave behind, there are others that they seek to find again elsewhere. This is not necessarily limited to Venezuelan migrants because it also speaks to the broader narrative of the human condition.

Again, this leads back to class considerations in that many scholars have doubted whether "happiness really matters to migrants, especially those who could not meet certain basic needs in their home country" (Hendriks and Bartram 2018: 284). It is generally assumed that once survival is secured, the pursuit of happiness reappears in migrants' aspiration constructions (Ibid., 286). As confirmed by Hendriks and Bartram (2018: 285), "happiness expectations are major predictors of choice behavior when making important life decisions such as whether to migrate." Thus, Alejandro's capacity to aspire to happiness, bolstered by his basic needs being met, is directly linked with his ability to define happiness as being synonymous with freedom from the threat of violence.

Adriana's most impactful encounter with violence occurred at the second anti-government protest that she attended in Caracas on a street close to her home. As she recounted, suddenly, armed government trucks arrived and began shooting into the crowd of demonstrators. About ten meters away from where she was standing, a teenage boy was shot in the head. When she saw him convulsing on the ground, she ran over to administer first aid but quickly realized that he had been killed. Her exasperation recalling the story was evident, as she told me:

> These are moments that mark you as a Venezuelan, they're moments that generate a lot of frustration knowing that you can't do anything but stay calm, that you don't have a

> gun to shoot back. I mean, it sounds awful to think about the fact that you might want a gun to shoot them back. It's frustrating too because you want to do more, and you can't. You want to do something more for your freedom of expression, you want to do more for your country. You want to defend your ideals and you can't because it's the others that have guns, not you. You can't fight with rocks when the others have bullets.

The language used here describes feelings of helplessness and a perceived lack of agency, two factors that significantly contributed to Adriana's aspirations to leave Venezuela. This is also evidenced by the apparent reluctance to emigrate that she describes here:

> Why the hell should you have to leave your country? Why should you have to go work in other countries knowing that you have everything in your country? It's not fair for people who dream, who study, who make so much effort. It's not fair. I mean, migrating isn't easy in any aspect and even less when you leave with one foot forward and one foot back.

Thus, in Adriana's case, the desire to leave her country did not derive from the "globalized mindset" that was discussed in the previous sections; at least this was not one of the deciding factors in her story. Rather, the choice to leave was born out of frustration and the loss of autonomy that she experienced as life in Venezuela became more violent and precarious.

Overall, the precarity caused by violence and crime that increased over time as the crisis deepened significantly increased the aspiration to migrate. The search for a life free from the threat of violence and the quest for happiness are linked to personal values, enabled by a specific social status, and make up a large part of migrants' aspiration construction.

3.3 The Migration Journey

For most participants, the migration journey itself was not a direct path from point A to point B, but rather a series of stops along the way that have led to different destinations, some temporary and others more long-term. While Chile has been a place of fixed residency for all participants, not one was prepared to admit that their migration journey had reached its end. Aspiration construction was constantly and consistently influenced by participants' upbringings in Venezuela, but also redefined in real-time as a response to changing conditions, trauma, and their lived experiences in the countries to which they have migrated. Thus, aspirations that were not constructed while participants lived in Venezuela developed throughout and as a result of the migration journey. For this reason, movement from one location to the next was often unexpected, unplanned, or last minute; moreover, countries where migrants never expected to go have often ended up being locations of long-term residency. This section of Chapter 3 will discuss how participants' aspirations have been subject to constant change along the migration journey, painting portraits of the various experiences that have culminated in their current situations.

3.3.1 Rock and Roll, Trump Era Border Crackdowns, and Forced Aspiration Changes

Erik's story begins with the migration tale of his grandfather, a wealthy Portuguese immigrant who formed a small colony on Saint Margarita Island during the 1960s and 70s when trajectories from Europe to Latin America were still common. Erik grew up on the island for the first few years of his life before his father developed a gambling addiction and his mother decided to take him and his brother to live in a coastal city called Barcelona. The family lived

in a zone between Barcelona and Lechería, which tended to be an upper/middle class neighborhood where many government officials resided. His mother worked as an accountant for the government, as previously mentioned, while her new partner was a social worker for the government. He recalled a consumer lifestyle with an abundance of food in the house and receiving expensive gifts, such as an Xbox, for Christmas.

Erik's childhood was sometimes "dark" once his mother remarried and consequently, family life was turbulent. However, from a young age, he formed a strong connection with music, which played a formative role in shaping many of his migration aspirations. Through his consumption of American media and music, he developed an interest in visiting the United States. His extended family was residing in Bonita Springs, Florida where he decided to visit for six months when he was 17 years old. This trip was not necessarily influenced by the worsening situation in Venezuela, but rather came about as the result of Erik's personal dreams and goals to succeed in the music industry.

During this first trip to the United States in 2015, Erik learned English while working under the table at a chain restaurant and making music with different bands that he met through Facebook groups. As he told me, "I just wanted to go do rock and roll!" After the six months, Erik's conceptualization of the United States remained positive, but he wanted to return to Venezuela for a time before making the commitment to migrate. Upon his arrival back home, however, he quickly realized that the political situation was becoming dire as prices were increasing along with the frequency of power outages and water cuts; life was becoming more limited and many of his friends were making the decision to leave the country permanently.

Thus, in November of 2016, Erik decided to take the leap to return to the United States for good. It was "Option A" since he had family there, a job to go back to, and a group of friends who could serve as his "base" while acclimating. However, the trip was cut short when border agents would not allow him to enter the country. Erik was subject to hours of interrogation in a small room in the airport where migration officials asked him a series of psychologically demanding questions, some even "screaming in your face, like 'What the fuck are you doing here?! I don't have time for bullshit like this!'" Finally, after hours of questioning, "[The border agent] told me, 'You're a young 19-year-old boy, you're Venezuelan. There's the issue of Trump, Latinos…' and he told me, 'Your background is the perfect background for an immigrant, well, for someone who wants to stay.' And he told me they weren't going to let me pass so go back home calmly, and the less time you're here, the better."

Erik was forced to formally declare that he had worked illegally during his first trip to the United States. As a penalty, he was not only deported, but also barred from entering the U.S. for the next five years. He returned to Venezuela and went through a time of inner turmoil, battling feelings of "depression" and "frustration." From that moment on, Erik was forced to change his aspirations, to instead develop new ones, and not on his own accord.

As we began discussing how Erik's migratory pathway took shape after his deportation, I asked him, "Why Chile?" to which he responded, "Chile was something that came about because of what happened in the United States." Previous to this he had never considered migrating to Chile, as he didn't have any contacts there or prior interest in the country. However, unlike the United States, Chile's migratory politics allowed for easily accessible entry and regularization. At the time, Venezuelans had a positive reputation in Chile, something that Adriana had also mentioned during our conversations. Since Chile was a more difficult country to access due to geographical and financial barriers, the Venezuelans who did arrive tended to be of a higher social class and highly educated. Thus, visas were abundant and entry requirements were not strict comparative to those of the United States and Europe.

There were many other positive aspects of Chile that Erik mentioned, those that had more to do with culture and lifestyle than with practical considerations. Firstly, salaries were

relatively high especially when compared with wages in Venezuela. While working unskilled jobs, he could still go out with friends on the weekend and enjoy his free time. Additionally, Erik's perception of Chile as a liberal and open-minded country was deemed attractive; for example, he praised the availability and diversity of vegetarian food options and the ease with which he was able to purchase and consume marijuana with minimal cultural stigma or taboo.

Nevertheless, this combination of factors was not sufficient for Erik to stay in Chile, as he explained, "For me [Chile] was a trampoline; a place that's better than Venezuela, but it's not my goal." In such a way, Chile became a pit-stop, a detour, the long way around to get to where he was really headed: Europe.

To understand how this aspiration became a reality, we circle back to where this section began: Erik's Portuguese descendance. Through his grandfather's Portuguese nationality, Erik and his brother applied to nationalize their estranged father and afterwards, themselves. Similar to my previous question about Chile, I asked him, "Why Europe?" to which he answered, "It wasn't so much like I was going to Europe because I want to have a lot of money. That mindset is better for going to the United States. So formally it was more because of the culture, it was also more for the quality of life. But it wasn't like I had the ambition to earn a lot of money. I've never been like that truthfully. The lifestyle is more what I like."

While living a luxurious life wasn't the main driver of his aspirations, the social imaginary that Erik had constructed about Europe was. Citizenship or residency in Western countries was synonymous with freedom for participants, as it signified to them a higher standard of living, more opportunities, and an overall feeling of completion. As Erik described, "I felt free from the moment I had the passport in my hand." After he received the passport, Erik remained in Chile for some months saving money and preparing for his journey. In 2019, he finally booked his flight and met family in Portugal and Spain before moving to Germany in August of that year where he has lived since.

Many factors influenced Erik's aspiration construction, the first being his own personal interest in American culture and his goals to succeed in the music industry. However, an unexpected deportation from the United States forced him to rethink his aspirations and goals and Erik relied on the social imaginaries he had constructed of Europe to re-align his aspirations with his reality. The construction of aspirations, therefore, is constantly re-negotiated throughout the migration process and subject to change based on real-time experiences and developments in the migrant's life. However, the possibility that these aspirations become reality are significantly altered by a few very specific factors; namely, family lineage. For Erik, this allowed his aspiration to live in Europe to manifest into reality; for the rest of the participants, the same aspiration remains just that, an aspiration.

Furthermore, the social imaginaries that migrants construct as they move throughout the world and meet new people, as they speak to friends and hear stories about other countries, often result in the perception of a hierarchy between world regions. This is demonstrated by Erik's use of the word "trampoline" when referring to Chile, which relates to Pajo's (2008) concept, the territorialization of fulfillment. Interestingly, the idealized image of the United States and Europe that Erik had created was not disturbed once he arrived. It was not even tarnished by his deportation from the United States. This signifies that the idea of fulfillment as intrinsic to a specific territory is not just an abstract imaginary that migrants construct before they arrive in that place; instead, geographical fulfilment is a real, lived experience and offers a sense of completion that marks the end of the transit migration journey. This speaks to the strength of the social imaginaries that migrants construct and is not necessarily exclusive to this particular research group. It also reveals the power of the culture of migration and the collectivist aspect of migration diasporas.

3.3.2 Gender and Sexuality as Aspiration Determinants and Mobility Enablers

The following section of this research paper looks at gender and sexuality from the perspective of two personal stories. The combination of non-heteronormative sexuality or gender expression and country-specific cultural values has the power to create either a welcoming or a hostile environment for migrants. There have been many studies conducted on the feminization of migration, which concludes that women are more likely to end up in care-oriented professions or more precarious conditions when working in a host country (Peréz and Ugarte 2021: 3). Additionally, sexuality is an important factor to consider, especially in the context of Latin America where on one hand, "macho" culture can often result in a threatening environment for the LGBTQIA+ community. On the other hand, shared sexuality can often generate feelings of community. What this study seeks to contribute to the discussion is a comparison between different cultural contexts of host countries and how these (perceived) differences aid in the construction of aspirations when analyzed through the lens of sexuality and gender.

Cristiano's migration journey from Venezuela began in Cartagena, Colombia, a city known for its sex tourism industry and, in line with its colonial legacy, frequented by Europeans and North Americans based on the sexual racialization of bodies in the global south (Quevedo Gómez et al. 2020: 2). As Cristiano told me, Cartagena is a place where foreigners come because "they want to spend money." When he arrived in the city, he began working as a street vendor at a hamburger stand, which he recalled laughing, "Shit, that is not for me." However, he made friends who were working as escorts and through connections in Cartagena's gay community and encouragement from friends, he decided to become an escort to wealthy foreigners on holiday in Cartagena.

A typical night of work for Cristiano consisted of going to an upscale club or hotel with a group of foreign European tourists and working as an escort providing accompaniment and sexual services. This opens the floor for discussions on the racialization of sex workers in Colombia and the indirect exploitation that they may face. Some of these the relationships that Cristiano developed, however, turned more into situations of sugar dating. This experience was advantageous and "empowering" for Cristiano, as one of his clients financed the continuation of his migration journey to Bogota, where he eventually met the long-term partner with whom he migrated to Chile. This demonstrates the way in which it is possible for migrants to use consensual sex work as a way to propel themselves further on their migration journeys.

Additionally, as Cristiano described, the sex work was well-paid, "It was the first time in my life that I had so much money in my hands" and on a more personal level, he felt that "it was on my own accord and in the way that I wanted." In Cristiano's case, participating in sex work was a choice that he made; however, for many other migrants, sex work is a last-resort survival mechanism that results from their marginalization in the host country or during transit. As Zulver and Idler (2020: 1130) assert, this is the case for female Venezuelan migrants who generally face more discrimination in the Colombian labor market and thus, resort to prostitution.

On the contrary, Cristiano's knowledge that he could fall back on his job as a hamburger vendor or easily find other employment opportunities allowed him to take the risk of venturing into sex work on his own accord. For female migrant sex workers, job insecurity leads to sex being used as a means of survival and thus, decreases opportunities to become involved in sugar dating and escort arrangements. While Cristiano exists within a marginalized community, in that he is gay and a migrant, his position as a male offered him more security which, in turn, increased both his geographical and social mobility. The increased mobility that he experienced allowed him to continue his migration journey onwards, which

can clearly be examined from a gendered perspective. It would also be interesting to further explore class considerations of this topic through a study on Venezuelan female migrant sugar babies and escorts in Cartagena.

Cristiano explained to me that the gay community in Colombia was quite established and accepted, "I think Colombia is a model country for the LGBT community… I'm not saying that nothing can happen to you or that you won't have insecurities (…) but there are a lot of people who fight, there's a neighborhood that's completely gay, there are activists, today they celebrate Pride Month." This allowed him to live in a more carefree way and truly immerse himself in the lifestyle that he wanted.

However, when Cristiano moved to Guayaquil, Ecuador with his partner, this was not the case. As Carillo (2004: 58) argues, "sexuality, broadly conceived, can be the indirect or direct motivation for international relocation and movement", a term he refers to as "sexual migration" (Manalansan 2006: 225). Transnational movement often enables or disables queer practices and identities to take shape due to cultural specificities. For example, as Cristiano recalled, public displays of affection with his boyfriend attracted negative attention in Ecuador, "People in the streets came to us and told us not to hold hands in the street, not to dress like this, not to come back around here." On the other hand, the pair saw Santiago as "a super cosmopolitan city where people were more open" and for that reason, decided to leave Ecuador and continue their migration journey onto Chile. While the couple also considered economic factors when planning their migration to Chile, their sexuality was also a factor that directly influenced that decision. In this case, Cristiano's migration aspirations were significantly impacted by his identity as a gay man and the ability that he had to express this aspect of himself.

Shifting the discussion to the female gendered experience of migration, Adriana's search for employment throughout her migration journey speaks to the difficulties that migrant women often encounter in finding jobs in their area of expertise. Adriana studied mechanical engineering in Venezuela, a job which she hoped would allow her to support herself and help her family financially. However, this dream did not come to fruition due to the crisis. In leaving Venezuela, she hoped to be able to find lucrative work in the engineering sector, one of her main motivations for migration.

In between Venezuela and Chile, Adriana and her partner Rafael, who also graduated as an engineer, lived for about a year and a half in Peru. The pair first arrived in Lima where they stayed for 9 months, but neither was able to find work as an engineer. It is already well-documented that many Venezuelan migrants experience xenophobic discrimination and criminalization in Peru (See INEI 2018a,b and Feline Freier and Peréz 2021), which likely explains the difficulty that the two experienced in their job search. However, Adriana attributed her inability to find an engineering position to gender discrimination. As she explained to me, "In one of [the interviews] they treated me really cruelly since my career is sexist. In my line of work, if you're not a man, they look at you poorly." Ultimately, she gave up her search after being discouraged by her first two interviews.

When the couple moved to Cusco, Rafael began working in engineering, while Adriana did not. There are a number of possible explanations for this. For example, attitudes toward migrants may vary from city to city, meaning that Rafael may have had less difficulty finding work in his field in Cusco than in Lima. It is also possible that while his status as a migrant may have limited his options, his gender did not. In contrast, Adriana faced the double-entendre of her status as a migrant and her being a woman.[5] The intersection between migration status and gender discrimination in Peru is a topic that has recently been addressed in academic studies focusing on female Venezuelan migrants in Peru, the conclusions of

[5] Ala-Mantila and Fleischmann (2018) assert that women migrants face many more disadvantages than men when seeking work in a new host country.

which are consistent with Adriana's experiences.[6] Thus, this case further demonstrates that gender-based discrimination, especially in "male-dominated" career paths, sets back highly-educated Venezuelan women from participating in jobs tailored to their expertise in Peru.

Moreover, as in Adriana's case, gender-based discrimination created a situation of involuntary immobility. Although her original goal was never to stay in Peru, she revealed to me that she spent much more time there than she had originally anticipated. As her plan was to work in her profession as an engineer, she was expecting a higher salary; instead, she worked selling artisanal goods in a market, which meant that saving up to continue her migration journey to Chile took much more time.

She also confirmed that this experience of gender-based discrimination solidified the idea that Peru was only a temporary place to save money for her ultimate destination, Chile. In such a way, gender discrimination directly impacted her aspirations to continue her transit migration journey. This is further highlighted by the ease with which Adriana entered in the engineering labor market upon her arrival to Chile. While this is certainly not the case for most highly educated Venezuelan female migrants in Chile, she was able to secure employment in her line of work shortly after arriving. Thus, the social imaginaries that she constructed about Chile were confirmed by her lived experience, strengthening her belief that she had made the correct choice in continuing the journey to Chile.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, however, Adriana was laid off and has found it difficult to secure a new job since then. Nevertheless, she explained to me that the challenges she faces are not related to her gender, but rather to the fact that her university documents from Venezuela are not legalized in Chile. It appears that the gender discrimination Adriana encountered may have been a country-specific factor based on the cultural particularities of Peru. However, it is also widely researched that migrants in Chile do indeed face gender-based discrimination in a variety of ways.[7] This may also depend on whether jobs are classified as highly skilled or manual labor. Perhaps other Venezuelan women residing in Chile feel that they would like to continue their migration journeys due to concerns of gender discrimination within the country; however, in Adriana's case, it seems to have only affected her aspirations while in transit in Peru.

[6] This testimony is consistent with recently published research about Venezuelan migrant women in Peru. See Peréz and Ugarte (2021) and Feline Freier and Peréz (2021).

[7] See Mora's (2008) study on the difficulties that Venezuelan women in Chile face in meeting the demands of both reproductive and productive labor expectations.

Chapter 4 : **Life in Chile and Beyond**

4.1 Life in Chile

When discussing life in Chile, participants tended toward a positive evaluation of the country in contrast to Venezuela. However, when up against the social imaginaries that they had constructed about life in Europe or the United States, Chile dulled in comparison. The following chapter addresses how the challenges and achievements that participants have experienced while living in Chile aided in the construction of their aspirations. Section 4.1.1 offers a general overview of which different country-specific factors are responsible for encouraging participants to continue their migration journeys and which characteristics influence them to stay. Section 4.1.2 zooms in on how involuntary immobility constructs aspirations through the close analysis of one migrant's experience with the Chilean healthcare system. Lastly, Section 4.2 discusses how migrants see themselves in relation to their future aspirations.

4.1.1 "Should I Stay or Should I go?": Participant Conceptualizations of Life in Chile

One of the biggest challenges that participants faced when moving to Santiago was the high cost of living. As discussed by Jorge, Erik, Alejandro, and Adriana, who had all lived in coastal cities at some point during their time in Chile, well-paid jobs were scarce in Valparaíso and Viña del Mar, but the cost of food and rent was affordable; in contrast, the cost of living was "extremely" high in Santiago, but the job market was much more navigable. This paradox has made it difficult for migrants to save money and also resulted in situations of involuntary immobility. As Cristiano put it, "Here saving up for a ticket to Europe isn't, 'Okay I'm going to save for three months with the wage of my job'; no, you have to save for a year and a half. It's seriously infuriating, but that's how it is." So, while migrants tended to regard themselves as "better off" living in Chile than any other Latin American country, they were perhaps not as well off as they "could be." Thus, improvements in quality of life that participants had experienced while living in Chile tended to be countered by the possibility of even greater improvements in other locations like the United States or Europe.

For Adriana, the uncertainty of the current political regime in Chile was one of her main concerns in constructing aspirations to continue her migration journey. In October of 2019, the Chilean "social awakening" led to country-wide protests that turned violent, leaving about 30 people dead and hundreds injured (Cambero 2021). She recalled the "haunting" experience of standing in line for bread in the morning in Chile as she had previously done in Venezuela. What scares her the most, apart from having to relive traumas from her home country, is that "this new generation has really communist mentalities." She further elaborated that, if she leaves Chile, "it will be for political reasons." Thus, the psychological trauma of political turmoil and violence that she had experienced in Venezuela, combined with the recent instability of Chilean politics, is one of the main factors in the construction of Adriana's aspirations to continue her migration journey onwards.

Participants made other situational comparisons between their lives in Chile and their pasts in Venezuela, discussions that centered around personal values and stemmed from cultural upbringing. One of the most commonly mentioned qualities that migrants missed from Venezuela was a sense of 'warmth', something they felt they had lost along their journey. This 'warmth', which was equated both with a sense of community and a deeper characteristic of their personalities, was something that participants were searching to find once again.

This uncovering, however, was deemed geographically contingent in that participants were convinced they would not be able to find it in Chile.

In fact, Chilean society was perceived as colder and more distant by nature in comparison with the family-like closeness that migrants had experienced while growing up in their neighborhoods back home. Such cultural differences were cited as one of the main reasons for dissatisfaction with life in Chile. The perception of Chileans as "cold" may be attributed to the discrimination or feelings of being an outsider that migrants face; it could also be influenced by observations of Chile as a highly consumerist society. However, this may also be attributed to a widely accepted perception within Latin America of Chilean society as "individualistic" and "rigid", as demonstrated by research conducted by the Image of Chile Foundation in 2012 (González 2012). Whether participants' vision of Chile was constructed through regional social imaginaries, their own experiences, or a combination of both, it is clear that migrants were convinced that the warmth they were searching for would be found elsewhere.

This loss of 'warmth' was also linked with the desensitization that migrants had experienced through prolonged and repeated exposure to traumatic events while living through the crisis in Venezuela. Collective trauma had forced them to become colder themselves and less affected by changes around them and in their interpersonal relationships. As Jorge mentioned, upon his arrival to Chile, he had "very little perception of death. People died and it was like fine, they died, it's already passed. But in reality, it is something important; it's the life of a person and you're not aware of that fact that you're never going to see them again." This sentiment was echoed by others, who had hoped that by leaving Venezuela, they would perhaps be able to reconnect with the more sensitive, emotional side of themselves.

There were a number of factors that contributed to participants' aspirations to reside in Chile as part of their transit migration journeys. The most commonly cited reason was economic stability followed by lifestyle improvements, availability of visas, cultural acceptance, and political security. As I inferred from a cross-analysis of participants' discussions about their lives in Chile, the country boasts a unique combination of characteristics that facilitate assimilation: accessibility of the labor market, the "fairness" of wages when compared with Venezuela, and the straightforwardness of the legalization process.

Interestingly, however, some factors that encouraged migrants to stay were not necessarily positive. The next section of this chapter will tell one migrant's story of how infectious disease and the Chilean healthcare system have played a role in constructing and shaping his aspirations to continue his migration journey.

4.1.2 Reasons for Staying: A Portrait of one Migrant's Sexual Health Journey and Living with HIV/AIDS

Cristiano grew up in a wealthy and stable household in Maracaibo, a port city in western Venezuela close to the border with Colombia and is the youngest of four siblings. His father was an oil worker, a lucrative job that allowed his mother to stay at home and raise him and his siblings. Cristiano explained to me that as a child, he always gravitated toward more feminine activities and describes himself as clearly gay from a young age. Growing up, he rarely felt singled out or discriminated against for this and described Venezuela as a culture in which respect for others comes before anything else. Having had a few girlfriends in high school and at the beginning of university, he finally 'came out' as he moved to a more liberal Caracas and began working in the fashion industry. Life in Venezuela, and particularly in Caracas in that moment, was exciting and full of opportunities.

As a self-described apolitical, Cristiano never paid much attention to the political climate of his country until it began to affect him. As life in the capital became dense with

an increase in anti-government protests and state sanctioned violence, Cristiano decided to return back home. However, he realized that his once stable family life was quickly changing and being shaped by the heaviness of the crisis that was taking hold of the country.

Once he realized that he and his family could no longer afford the lifestyle to which they were accustomed, he decided to take his first migration journey to Cartagena, Colombia where he worked as an escort. As previously discussed, he lived in Colombia and Ecuador before landing in Chile. Upon his arrival to Chile, and just before applying for regularization, Cristiano was robbed of his passport and identity card, a frightening moment because he knew that obtaining documentation from Venezuela would be complicated and costly, not to mention the challenges that it poses to accessing legalization processes, banking, and healthcare in Chile. Without any form of identification, Cristiano was unable to regularize his stay in Chile and for that reason, did not have access to the public healthcare system, which almost became a dire situation within the context of his story.

As we were wrapping up our last interview, I asked Cristiano how he had experienced the Chilean healthcare system, a question to which he responded, "I think in this moment, just now, come the most relevant and important five minutes of our interview." During what ended up being a twenty-minute conversation, Cristiano revealed to me, "Nine months ago, I got very sick and I was at the point of dying. I'm HIV positive." He spent months in bed and lost 8 kilos, sinking into a depression and reaching the brink of late stage HIV, AIDS.

In his state of severe illness, Cristiano went to the public healthcare clinic. He reflected on the moment that his test came back positive and the hospital staff asked for his RUT (Chile's version of a social security or citizen service number), "The moment that [the test] came back positive, they asked me for my RUT. Imagine that moment of my life. I cried, I cried, and I cried. I told the doctor, I'm illegal, I don't have a RUT, I don't have anything, I don't have a job. I'm going to die. That was the only thing that I was thinking: I'm going to die."

However, as soon as Cristiano received his diagnosis, the doctor's office provided him with a provisionary RUT, making him eligible to receive treatment within the public healthcare system. In fact, Chilean law requires any patient testing positive for HIV/AIDS be provided with free treatment despite their legal status. For Cristiano, this means that all treatment, medication, and mental healthcare services related to his HIV/AIDS diagnosis is provided at no cost. Access to thorough treatment has consequently allowed him to make a full recovery and today, his HIV is undetectable and untransmittable.

Linking this experience with his aspirations, Cristiano told me that his positive experience with the Chilean healthcare system "motivates me to stay here in Chile because the truth is that (…) it's something that I need." As we began to discuss plans about his future, he told me that he would like to live in Mexico, Argentina, or Spain; however, migrating again is a scary prospect because of the uncertainty it poses to accessing his HIV medication. As Crabtree-Ramírez et. al discuss, the availability of HIV medication "for individuals is threatened during migration." In this sense, living with HIV imposes limits on Cristiano's capacity to aspire and consequently, results in a situation of involuntary immobility.

Throughout the process of writing this research paper, there were a number of small stories that I connected, which served as many small brush strokes within the bigger picture that I was attempting to paint. However, this is one painting that I found essential to give its own canvas. Cristiano's narrative is important because it opens the floor for a broader discussion about the complexity and intersectionality of one's capacity to aspire, in this case from a lens of sexual health.

As a gay man, a migrant, and a former sex worker, Cristiano's narrative demonstrates the importance of evaluating mobility from an intersectional lens. His capacity to aspire has been both restricted and propelled by his sexuality; for example, while homophobia compelled him to leave Ecuador, he decided to remain in Chile because he felt his sexuality was

accepted. Additionally, he moved from a situation of involuntary immobility to planned migration through participating in sex work. When discussing concerns of sexual health and migration, the two cannot be seen independently, but rather, as codependent and inextricably intertwined. For this reason, it is essential to take an intersectional approach when evaluating limitations on migrants' capacity to aspire.

4.2 The Future

"Migrating within Latin America is like changing rooms in the Titanic; you change rooms yes, but you're still going to sink." Jorge's words seemed to resonate with all participants; regardless of whether or not they were satisfied with their lives in Chile, all five had aspirations to continue their migration journeys onward either to the United States or to Europe. For some, this future was a vague outline; for others it was a real and tangible goal toward which they were consciously working. Nevertheless, everyone was clear on the fact that staying in Latin America would not be conducive to realizing their dreams.

For example, Adriana related to me that although she would like to stay in Chile, "I think that I still have to leave Latin America. I think it's necessary to go to countries that are a bit more stable." With this statement, Adriana alluded to the fact that the choice to stay or to leave Chile will not ultimately be up to her, but rather a result of the (in)stability of the region in the coming years. Thus, her future aspirations are not necessarily constructed by a desire to migrate again, but rather as a consequence of feelings of uncertainty surrounding the political and economic factors that shape Latin America.

This was further demonstrated in our conversations about potential destinations for her next migration journey. Similarly to Erik, Adriana's family lineage would potentially allow her to apply for Spanish nationality, something that she has recently been looking into. When discussing the possibility of moving to Spain, she recounted stories of friends residing in Barcelona who "live well, eat well, and are in a good place." She also mentioned the United States, referencing the country's "economic stability" and the availability of "opportunities" that educated migrants search for. Overall, the United States, and in particular New York, was the place where she could attain "economic, emotional, social, and labor stability" and live out her own "American Dream." Thus, for Adriana, aspirations for her future were constructed by the social imaginaries she had created of the Western world as undoubtedly stable and her desire to feel secure.

Similarly to Adriana, Cristiano relied on friends in Barcelona for information about living in Europe, whom he told me, "positioned themselves and have been successful." As his primary focus is in fashion, he was concerned about making a name for himself, something that he believed he would be able to achieve in Europe. Explaining his perspective, Cristiano told me,

> There's a place not just for the migrant, but for any person with goals and that's the thing about Europe that really grabs my attention; that independently from you being French or Venezuelan or Chilean, the city allows you to advance in what you want to do. I believe that Europe allows you to make yourself known, to do it, and to achieve it. So, I think that's my next step.

Cristiano's perception of Barcelona paralleled with the idea of the 'American Dream' in that anyone can "make it" if they try hard enough. Moreover, the idea of "making it" is territorialized to a specific geography, mostly the United States, but also to Europe here. This territorialization is also highly influenced by the personal aspirations or lack thereof of each participant. For example, Cristiano was not particularly interested in learning English, and

therefore, saw Buenos Aires and Barcelona as the fashion capitals to which he felt drawn instead of places like New York or Milan.

Jorge's perception of the United States and Europe, and motivations to continue migrating, were similar to those of Adriana and Cristiano. He recounted the story of a friend who lived in the United States and was contracted as a cartoon artist by the producer of Spongebob Squarepants solely through connections he made while living in Los Angeles. For Jorge, the version of the United States that he had constructed through this story meant that being in the 'right place at the right time' would ultimately lead to success. As he stated, "You're more likely to run into Madonna in a bakery in Los Angeles than a bakery in Caracas." This quote is a particularly vibrant example of how countries, and even cities, are territorialized as places for opportunity, fulfillment, or both.

Jorge also told me, "I consider myself a man of the world… I'd like to experiment, to live in other countries" and subsequently took me on a 15-minute journey around the globe, describing in detail all of the places that he'd like to explore. "I have four countries where I'd like to live," he explained, "The first is France, the second is Germany, the third is Australia… and the United States." These aspirations stemmed from personal motivations to learn other languages (i.e. English and French), social imaginaries that he had constructed through stories of friends, and his own career goals. Again, personal interests are largely at play in Jorge's story, as his film-making hobby draws him to the United States whereas his degree in mechanical engineering and interest in aerospace engineering increases the appeal of Toulouse, France, home to Aerospace Valley.

Erik's migration journey was different from that of the other participants, in that he was able to apply for a Portuguese passport due to familial lineage. Access to European citizenship increased Erik's global mobility and in turn, expanded his capacity to aspire. Erik's Portuguese passport was the missing link between his involuntary immobility in Chile and the realization of his migration aspirations. However, his sense of fulfillment is still not complete. Similarly to Jorge, Erik told me, "I'm of the world, you know?" His aspirations include traveling beyond Germany to France, Italy, back to the United States "for a good amount of time", and maybe one day, settling down in Madeira.

Interestingly, Germany was a country imagined as a location of fulfillment both for Erik and other study participants. So why would Erik want to continue his migration journey after arriving in a place where his aspirations could be fulfilled? Perhaps the answer to this question lies within the concept of the globalized mindset. While fulfillment is indeed often territorialized, Erik's conceptualization of fulfillment is based on exploring all of those different geographies that are deemed as fulfilling. His globalized mindset, deriving from his middle/upper middle-class upbringing in Venezuela and his personal interest in music production, made it so that fulfillment was territorialized but to the extent that all territories were explored. Instead of reaching a sense of fulfillment after having settled down in Germany, his aspirations grew with the increased mobility he experienced with his European passport. Additionally, access to social programs and higher wages in Germany meant that with increased fulfillment, his capacity to aspire expanded. In this sense, reaching his original aspirations increased his confidence in his ability to aspire even further.

The capacity to aspire is an important part of discussions around the future, not just because participants are *able* to aspire toward a life in Europe or the United States, but rather because of their *motivations* to aspire. The impact of their own personal interests and hobbies on their aspirations is significant and speaks to their increased capacity to aspire, something enabled by the way that they experienced class both in Venezuela and Chile. The effect that class has on facilitating the construction of aspirations and notions of the territorialization of fulfillment is essential in understanding why participants aspire toward a life in Europe or the United States.

Chapter 5 : **Conclusions**

Overall, this study has sought to extend research on the construction of aspirations along the transit migration journey. While current migration literature has focused on how aspirations can affect transit, fewer studies have been conducted that question how transit can in turn affect aspirations and mobility. The research paper has demonstrated that aspirations are reconstructed and redefined at many points throughout the migration journey, as is mobility. However, it has also shown that the most influential factor in constructing participants' aspirations was their lived experiences in Venezuela.

Aspiration construction began from an early age, through media consumption, personal experiences, and conversations with peers that were all enabled by a middle/ upper class social standing. As Appadurai (2004: 67) contests, "aspirations form parts of wider ethical and metaphysical ideas which derive from larger cultural norms. Aspirations are never simply individual (as the language of wants and choices inclines us to think). They are always formed in interaction and in the thick of social life." Thus, the aspirations that migrants had for their lives were already partially developed before the Venezuelan crisis took shape and served as the basis for the future aspirations that they constructed along the journey.

The aspirations that participants developed throughout their upbringings were later influenced by external factors; namely, the political, economic, and cultural circumstances of Venezuela. Psychologically stressful and traumatic events that participants endured while in Venezuela, including state-sanctioned violence, sexual abuse, and bearing witness to crimes and other traumatic incidents, accelerated their aspirations to leave the country. Additionally, the economic crisis that the country endured, which resulted in social class demotion, lack of access to basic resources, and widespread insecurity, also informed the construction of their aspirations on a much more immediate, needs-based level. Further research on transit migration would benefit from comparative studies of middle-class migrants from different countries in order to garner a deeper understanding of how class and cultural factors interact to construct aspirations.

Overall, the aspiration construction that happened from a young age shaped participants' sense of fulfillment because they consistently compared themselves to their peers who had traveled to/arrived in Europe or the United States. The involuntary mobility that migrants experienced in transit led to feelings of isolation, insecurity, and ultimately, unfulfillment, indicating that notions of fulfillment are both territorialized and largely based on social global imaginaries. The view of the Western world as the center of the globe is a result of cultural and media influence; yet the perception of the Western lifestyle is a huge motivator and aspiration driver. Thus, this study has demonstrated the influencing power of social global imaginaries.

However, this is not to say that aspirations were not subjected to changes or renegotiated along the migration journey. In fact, responses to real-time challenges were among the main drivers in reshaping migrants' aspirations or advancing their aspirations more quickly. Xenophobia, gender-based discrimination, and homophobia affected the local opportunity structures available for migrants while in transit and thus, propelled them toward Chile. This speaks to the necessity of taking an intersectional approach when evaluating motivations to aspire and how they vary along different points in space and time.

Upon arrival in Chile, another set of opportunity structures influenced aspirations to stay or leave. Common factors like economic and political stability, the availability of visas and regularization processes, and lifestyle improvements encouraged migrants' aspirations to stay in Chile. However, cultural differences, the high cost of living, and trauma-based fears

about future political stability were country-specific factors that ultimately marked Chile as just a stop along the transit migration journey. Moreover, social imaginaries about Europe and the United States provided the comparative lens through which participants viewed the disadvantages of life in Chile. This further demonstrates that aspirations developed in Venezuela have continued to follow and shape migrants' aspirations. Additionally, access to life saving HIV/AIDS medicine through the Chilean public healthcare system worked to deconstruct one migrant's future aspirations. This research extends an invitation for further investigations into the impact of HIV/AIDS diagnoses and other chronic illnesses on aspiration (de)construction and mobility.

All in all, the decision to migrate and to continue on a transit migration journey is influenced by a complex set of factors that are ultimately unique to each migrant. Individual realities were shaped by socioeconomic status, gender, sexuality, trauma, and social/cultural norms. These realities change when exposed to external country-specific factors, which both directly and indirectly impacts mobility, the capacity to aspire, and consequently, migrants' aspirations.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Interview Guide

Area of Interest	Questions
Life in Venezuela	1. Can you tell me a bit about your life in Venezuela from your childhood to the time that you left? 2. What part of Venezuela are you from? 3. How was your family life and how was your childhood? 4. Can you tell me about your parents and your siblings? 5. What made you realize that the political climate in Venezuela was changing? 6. What made you want to leave Venezuela? 7. Do you have family that is still living in Venezuela? 8. Do you have family and friends that left Venezuela before or after you? Where are they living?
Leaving Venezuela and the Journey	1. Did you go somewhere else before Chile? 2. Did you try to go to any other country apart from Chile? 3. How did you travel? By bus or by airplane? Can you tell me a bit about that experience? 4. When you left Venezuela, what was your plan? Did the plan change with time?
Entering Chile	1. Why did you choose Chile as your destination country? 2. What year did you arrive in Chile? How old were you? 3. How did you enter Chile? 4. With which visa did you enter and how was the bureaucratic process? 5. Do you have family in Chile? 6. Have you experienced other problems with paperwork, visas, etc.?
Life in Chile	1. Can you tell me a little bit about your life in Chile? 2. What do you like about Chile? Can you provide some examples? 3. What don't you like about Chile? Can you provide some examples? 4. What opportunities do you have?

	5. What are some challenges you face and how do you cope with those challenges?
The Future	1. Where do you see yourself in ten years? 2. How do you see your future unfolding? 3. Do you want to stay in Chile, or do you have other plans? 4. If you could go anywhere, where would you like to go? 5. Why don't/do you want to stay in Chile? What are the characteristics that do (or do not) attract you?

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