# LIVES IN LIMBO

## SYRIAN YOUTH IN TURKEY

**REBECCA BRYANT, AMAL ABDULLA, MAISSAM NIMER, and AYŞEN ÜSTÜBICI**

# Lives in Limbo

# FORCED MIGRATION

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# Preface

In May 2022, Turkish journalist Hande Karacasu was arrested under the Turkish Cyber Crimes Law for "manipulating information and distorting facts" regarding migrants in a short film called *Silent Invasion* (*Sessiz İstila*), which she had uploaded on YouTube a couple of days earlier. The film begins in 2012 in Turkey, as a young couple about to have their first child watches the news of the first Syrian refugees entering Turkey. It then jumps to thirty years later, a dystopic future in which the fertility of Syrians and low birth rate of Turks have made the latter a minority in their own country. The baby born in 2012 has grown up, and the film uses him to imagine a time when Turks cannot speak their language in public, when their children cannot enroll in higher education or find jobs, and in which they experience violence on the streets. In Karacasu's dystopia, Syrians have literally "replaced" Turks—a nod to the "great replacement theory" that is prevalent today among the global far right (e.g., Davey and Ebner 2019; Nilsson 2022). Despite her arrest, the video remained on YouTube, and she was released two days later. As of writing, the film has five million views.

Like in many migrant-receiving countries around the world, xenophobia is on the rise in Turkey today. Although Syrians were welcomed in the country when they first fled their homes, many Turks today say that they have outstayed their welcome. There is dissatisfaction with changing urban environments, with the visibility of the Arabic language, and with a perceived favoritism toward Syrians in allocation of government resources. These xenophobic attitudes become especially prevalent during election periods, when opposition parties utilize the issue of Syrian refugees to their own benefit. In particular, there is a widespread belief among many opposition voters, reinforced by the rhetoric of opposition parties, that Syrians who have been given citizenship will vote for the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). Opposition parties have tended to promise their constituents that they will send Syrian refugees home if elected. Such tensions at the local level have also resulted in violence against Syrians as well as their homes and businesses.

Moreover, as Karacasu's short film makes clear, in the current political climate in Turkey, youth as a category often bear the brunt of negative

stereotyping of Syrians. In the context of a growing economic crisis, young men are viewed as a cheap labor force that is taking jobs from Turkish youth. Alternatively, as numerous television programs have commented, "they enjoy the benefits that should be given to our own young people." Special scholarship programs help to provide university education but are also portrayed in the media as taking away opportunities from Turkish youth. In addition, clashes between Syrian and Turkish young men in certain cities have led to media portrayals of Syrian youth as criminals who are changing Turkey's urban spaces.

In the context of Turkish military interventions in Syria starting in 2016 and the establishment of a buffer zone in the country's northwest, negative media portrayals of Syrian youth have intensified. In particular, a vocal public discourse has developed around the idea that Turkish youth are fighting and dying in Syria while Syrian youth are comfortably living in Turkey. In addition, and as often happens in postconflict settings, fertility among Syrian young women is rising, even as Turkish families of similar socioeconomic status tend to limit numbers of children. Among certain groups of Turkish citizens, this has produced fears of being "replaced," as in Karacasu's video.

In the context of economic crisis and extreme political polarization in Turkey, we believe that it is crucial to have informed discussions about the future of Syrian refugees in the country, particularly taking into account the rights of an age group that by now has spent a formative part of their lives there. Our findings here deal with a particular period in the Syrian refugee saga, particularly the period following initial displacement, after many youths had already spent several important years of their lives in Turkey. Our research began more than four years after that initial displacement, and while some of our interlocutors had arrived only a few months earlier, most had already been in Turkey for some years by the time we met them. Especially among the latter group, the desire to remain was high at the time that we interviewed them. Anecdotal reporting and some polls at the time of writing suggest that this desire is changing following the devastating earthquake of February 2023 and its toll in the country's south, near the Syrian border, where around half of the refugees in Turkey live. That earthquake occurred on the back of an ongoing economic crisis coupled with intensified xenophobic backlash that was already pushing many Syrians to seek ways to leave the country.

In this context, we find that our research offers insights that are both locally specific and general. We focus on how refugee youth rebuild lives and reimagine futures in a context where their lives are ruptured and they have little hope of returning to their devastated homeland. This may be because the Syrian regime "won" the war, and those who opposed the regime fear for their safety. Or, as in so many cases in our interviews, it may be because

they have nothing to return to. So many of the youth with whom we spoke said that not only their families' properties but their neighborhoods and towns, and hence their communities, no longer existed. This context helps us understand how youth, already a liminal category, find ways to make futures in a situation of chronic uncertainty.

At the same time, the research gives us insights into the specific problems created when youth, in particular, are left in a state of extended waiting or "permanent temporariness," that is, when the legal and political structures neither allow them to go back nor permit them to move on. We look here at the specificities of the Turkish case, where many of our interlocutors found gaining Turkish citizenship to be the only option to allow them a solid foundation on which to plan futures.

The research that we present here was part of a collaborative project, "Integration and Well-Being of Syrian Youth in Turkey," that took place between 2017 and 2020, with follow-up research by each of us between 2020 and 2023. The research was funded by the U.K.'s Economic and Social Research Council (grant reference ES/P002455/1) and the Türkiye Bilimsel ve Teknolojik Araştırma Kurumu, or TÜBİTAK (project number 116K828), under the bilateral Newton-Katip Çelebi Fund. The co-Principal Investigators were Rebecca Bryant and Ahmet İçduygu, and the grant was based jointly at their respective institutions, the London School of Economics and Koç University. Following the coup attempt in Turkey in July 2016, we had delays in the start of our research. We were fortunate to receive further funding from the Riksbankens Jubileumsfond (grant reference GC17-1123:1) as part of the London School of Economics Institute of Global Affairs project, "The Responsible Deal: Where and How to Best Protect and Integrate Syrian Refugees?" (Prof. Erik Berglof, Principal Investigator). This funding enabled us to overcome impediments resulting from the political situation in Turkey and also to share the research results with a wider audience.

The book was a product of collaborative effort. Each researcher composed distinct chapters or parts of chapters, placing the concerns and perspectives of the young Syrians at the heart of the narrative. Subsequently, these individual contributions were unified into a cohesive whole by Rebecca Bryant, then later revised collaboratively. Our friend and collaborator Maya Mamish, who played an important role in conducting interviews in five Turkish cities, was unfortunately unable to participate in this written co-production. We wish to acknowledge and warmly thank her for her contributions.

This project not only bore fruit in the form of this book but also in the form of four new children brought into the world over the course of its several years. For this reason, we dedicate this book to the project's children and their futures.

# Introduction

## Syrian Pasts, Turkish Futures

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> The way I see Turkey is that I prefer Turkey over anything. Now for example, I do not prefer France or any European country. I do not prefer any of those. I prefer only Turkey. . . . Honestly now the idea of return is not there at all. Why it is not there is because Syria is destroyed to a point that I do not have anyone in Syria. My family and relatives and my friends, everything that links me to Syria except its soil is here.
>
> —Zuher, twenty-nine years old, living in Izmir,[1] Turkey, since 2012

This book asks how Syrian refugee youth create futures from the limbo of exile. How do they plan for the future in conditions of uncertainty? How do they imagine their future lives, and where do they hope to be? And how does being young affect the refugee experience, in some cases creating opportunities and in other cases closing doors?

Our geographical focus is Turkey, which today hosts more refugees than any other country in the world. More than three million of these come from neighboring Syria, and nearly a quarter of those are between the ages of nineteen and twenty-nine. Most field studies indicate that as time passes and Syrians remain outside their home country, many are being transformed from temporary refugees to permanent immigrants, investing and planning for a future in Turkey. This is particularly true of youth, most of whom have come of age or spent important years of their childhood or adolescence as refugees. Many found that their exile forced them to put futures on hold. Youth who would have attended university or begun work had they remained in Syria found that their plans of education and training or marrying and building a family had to be deferred. How have the dreams of Syrian youth changed in exile, and how do they plan for the future now?

We trace those hopes and dreams to the context of prewar Syria and examine the dynamics that shape the lives of Syrian youth in Turkey today. We describe the impediments of a Turkish immigration regime that has only reluctantly moved beyond seeing them as temporary guests in the country and begun to acknowledge that most are likely to remain. Because of the

Turkish government's reluctance to integrate them, Syrian young people in Turkey find themselves in the limbo of "permanent temporariness" (Bailey et al. 2002), even as they express the desire to build lives where they are and even as they remake the cities where they now live. The book gives voice to the dreams of Syrian youth who have little hope of returning to their devastated homeland.

We also explore why the future of this generation will shape the future of the region. Starting in the 1990s, the Middle East and North Africa have been experiencing a youth boom. While infant mortality declined in previous decades, birth rates stayed steady. This has produced a population bulge: as of 2021, youth between the ages of fifteen and twenty-nine constituted around 28 percent of the population in Arab countries of the Middle East and North Africa.[2] This has also led to high rates of youth unemployment across the region, particularly as youth aspire to a higher education without appropriate work available afterward. According to the United Nations, the region needs to create thirty-three million new jobs by 2030 in order to rectify the youth unemployment problem.[3] Turkey has not been exempt from this trend: universities have multiplied over the past two decades even as graduates are left without work in the fields they studied.[4]

Life, then, is already fraught with uncertainty for many youths across the region. This uncertainty only increases for refugee youth, as well as youth in communities receiving large numbers of young refugees. Despite the signal importance of youth as a generational category, however, studies of refugee communities have tended to ignore the problems specific to young people, some of which are related to exile and some of which they share with their non-refugee peers. Conversely, studies of youth in the region have tended to ignore the specific plight of refugee youth, despite the large numbers of displaced persons, particularly in the Middle East and Levant. In a context of existing regional instability, youth aspirations and dreams for the future help us understand social, economic, and political change.

Our focus on youth, displacement, and future-making emerged from these considerations. Specifically, we examine how the lives of refugee youth are shaped by and shape social and political life in Turkey. At the time of writing in 2023, an important election cycle was underway whose results are likely to affect the fate of displaced persons in the country. In order to understand this context, we provide below a historical background to Turkey's asylum regime and the country's history of mass immigration, as it will inform our later considerations of how host community attitudes toward Syrians have evolved over time.

We then discuss youth and future-making to make clear the approach that we will take throughout the book. We chose the focus on future-making to emphasize the way that lives go on and people plan for futures, even in the state of permanent temporariness in which refugees find themselves.

Through this approach, we also wish to emphasize that youth as a life stage is oriented toward the future, and youth in our study were all concerned with growing up and moving on. They wanted to establish themselves, to support their parents and siblings, and to have families of their own. In writing the book, we especially built on work in the anthropology of the future that examines the relationship between social and individual orientations to particular futures. Using insights from this literature, we focus each chapter on different and evolving ways in which youth orient themselves to the future in conditions where expectations have been shattered, possibilities often seem arbitrary, and hope must be rescued from uncertainty.

## Background: The Turkish Migration Regime and Its Histories

The scale of the Syrian exodus is well known: since the start of the conflict in that country in 2012, more than half of its population has been displaced, with around 6.8 million people fleeing beyond its borders. Around 5.7 million of these took refuge in neighboring states. While officially 3.3 million of these live in Turkey under temporary protection status as of 2023, estimates place the real figure at over four million.

Although Turkey currently hosts more Syrian refugees than any country in the world, this is not the first time Turkey is facing a mass influx of refugees into its territories. Between 1923 and 1997, as part of its state building process, Turkey accepted more than 1.6 million refugees considered to be of Turkish descent, mostly from Balkan countries (İçduygu and Kirişçi 2009; İçduygu, Erder, and Gençkaya 2014; İhlamur-Öner 2013). The difference in Turkey's treatment of refugees considered "ethnic kin" and others became clear in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The country experienced influxes of almost 350,000 refugees from Bulgaria in 1989, over a million Iranians after 1979, and up to 500,000 people from Northern Iraq in 1991. While Bulgarians were considered to be of "Turkish descent and culture" (*soydaş*) and were given citizenship under Turkey's 1934 Settlement Law, the Turkish government was reluctant to open its borders to Kurds in 1991 and did so only as a result of United Nations Resolution 688, which created safe zones for Kurdish refugees (İhlamur-Öner 2013). Most Iranian migrants have been given refugee status according to international norms, allowing them to remain in Turkey temporarily while awaiting resettlement in a third country.

All of these migration waves are still very much ingrained in Turkey's collective memory and influence the ways the public responds to the current refugee crisis. What has also been ingrained in that collective memory is knowledge of the fraught relationship between Turkey and neighboring

Syria, involving decades-long disputes over border territories. Just as the Treaty of Kars in 1921 drew the border between Turkey and Georgia at the expense of Georgian territorial claims while dividing territories where Georgian-speakers lived, so the drawing of the Syrian-Turkish border line stirred rather than resolved a territorial dispute. In 1920, during the breakup of the Ottoman Empire, the Treaty of Sèvres made Syria a French mandate territory. The subsequent Turkish War of Independence ended with the Treaty of Lausanne, which determined the border between the mandate territory and the newly established Republic of Turkey. At that time, the new Turkey did not include the Sanjak of Alexandretta, which remained under French control. However, Alexandretta declared independence in 1938, only to have Turkey annex it the following year as Hatay Province. The border drawn in 1939 is the same one we see today, though in 1944, with Syrian independence, it came to delineate two sovereign states. As with the Georgian case, the arbitrarily drawn line also divided villages and families (Lundgren-Jorum 2013). In areas around Gaziantep and Kurdish regions to the east, the line seemed similarly capricious (see Gürkaş 2018). For decades, Syria continued to include the Hatay Province in its own maps.

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, particularly under the guidance of then Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and his "zero problems with neighbors" policy, the relationship between Turkey and Syria began to thaw. When he was prime minister, Turkish President Erdoğan developed friendly relations with Bashar al-Assad, visiting him in Damascus and welcoming him in Istanbul and for a vacation in the southern Turkish city of Bodrum. Before the start of the Syrian conflict, the two countries had a visa-free travel regime that made the border more porous and encouraged trade and travel across it (see Tür 2013). During that period, the relaxed border regime produced a sharp uptick in cross-border trade and petty smuggling.[5] This easing of movement restrictions enabled small traders and businesspeople to build on existing family and other networks that had been attenuated by the previous border regime (esp. Yıldırım 2017).

Soon after violence began in Syria in early 2011, a small group of only 252 Syrians crossed the border and took refuge in Turkey. In response, Erdoğan, then prime minister, announced an open-door policy for Syrians fleeing the conflict, though without immediately giving them Temporary Protection status. They would not gain that until October 2014. In the meantime, in the early days of what many Syrians at the time saw as a revolution, the Turkish government constructed camps in the southern border regions and anticipated that the tens of thousands of displaced persons who flowed across the border would eventually return to their homes. There was still a belief at the time, both in Syria and in Turkey, that the Assad regime would capitulate, that it would not attempt to crush its own people. Early estimates in 2011 put the number of refugees expected to cross the border at around one hundred thousand.

In other words, the Turkish government was unprepared for the magnitude of refugee flows to come or what would become the duration of their exile. Moreover, despite Turkey's role as a recipient of mass refugee influxes throughout the twentieth century, in comparison to other countries of its size and importance, it lacks significant infrastructure and expertise in the areas of migration, refuge, asylum, and integration (İçduygu and Aksel 2013).

Initially, the Turkish government anticipated a temporary situation and called Syrians "guests" (*misafir*). This linguistic play, which also reassured Turkey's own citizens of the refugees' temporariness, was in line with Turkey's geographical limitation on the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. There, in the aftermath of World War II, signatories of the Convention initially promised asylum only to refugees fleeing Europe. While other states later had lifted the geographical limitation and amended their signature to include other refugee groups, Turkey had refused to do so. As a result, refugee camps in the country's south were initially labeled "guest camps," while the disadvantage of "guest" status is that one does not have the legal and political protections that would otherwise be provided to refugees. This left Syrians in a legal quagmire, unable to acquire full legal status from their hosts. Syrian refugees have been dependent on the state's "generosity" rather than being viewed as persons with rights.

This became particularly apparent as the conflict dragged on, and refugees were unable to return. In 2012, with the breakdown of a ceasefire in Syria, the refugee flow increased and by the end of the year had passed the one hundred thousand mark. In March 2013, the number of Syrians in Turkey still hovered at around 250,000, most located in camps. However, the rise of the Islamic State in Syria's north caused a massive exodus across the border. Although Turkey encouraged settlement in camps, otherwise known as Temporary Protection Centers, by this time, many chose instead to follow networks of relatives, friends, and trading partners to cities or to move independently to urban areas to find work.

The next years saw a collapse of Syrian government control, particularly in northern regions of the country, but no victory for opposition forces. Instead, 2014 witnessed the progress of the Islamic State throughout the north of the country and the spectacular acts of violence in which its members engaged. That violence caused yet another massive flight, so that by the end of 2014, Turkey was hosting more than a million Syrian refugees, and by the end of 2015, more than two million. The twenty-five camps coordinated by the Ministry of Disaster and Emergency Management (AFAD) accommodated only around 250,000, or about 10 percent of the country's Syrian population at the end of 2015. Although international monitors described the camps as "well-organized and well-run" (International Crisis Group 2013),[6] the unexpected numbers far outstripped capacity.[7]

In the fateful spring of 2015, what came to be known as Europe's "refugee crisis" seemed initially to result from the lack of a permanent solution

in Turkey to the Syrians' plight. During that sudden rush into Europe, most migrants traveled via Turkey, either taking the land route into the Balkans or the sea route across the short stretch of water to Greece's Aegean Islands. While in 2014 Frontex reported that there were around fifty thousand migrants who made the trip to Greece from Turkey, that number jumped to more than eight hundred thousand in 2015 and around 150,000 in the first three months of 2016, before the EU and Turkey inked the agreement that would stem the flow.[8] Of this total of around one million migrants, estimates are that around half were Syrian. If these estimates are correct, this would constitute more than twice the number of refugees then living in camps in Turkey and one-quarter of the number of Syrian refugees in the country at the end of 2015.

Importantly for our study, a staggering three-quarters of those trying to reach Europe were younger than thirty-five years of age, in other words, at a stage of life when making plans for the future is critical. The first survey conducted with arriving migrants in Germany (Ragab, Rahmeier, and Siegel 2017) showed that of the almost one thousand Syrian refugees interviewed, most were young males, and more than 90 percent of those said that armed fighting in Syria was a threat to their safety and that they feared conscription or kidnapping by one of the various organizations involved in conflict. A surprisingly large number of those attempting passage in that year had university degrees; these persons usually saw Europe as a more appropriate place to seek work, as opposed to Turkey, a country whose language they did not know.[9]

By the end of 2015, Turkey had reportedly spent more than $6.7 billion on humanitarian assistance for Syrians in the country, while international funding only came to $455 million (AFAD 2016). Although at the time the Turkish economy was relatively strong, this large amount of funding began to produce discontent among many Turkish citizens. The growing problems in Turkey only came to international attention during the 2015 "refugee crisis." Nevertheless, the European Union pushed through the EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016, intended to stem the migrant tide. It provided €6 billion in aid directly to Syrian refugees and host communities in Turkey, thereby relieving part of the financial burden. This aid would be jointly administered through the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey, which at the time of writing had disbursed €5 billion for projects throughout the country.[10] This influx of further funding aimed at improving living conditions and integrating Syrian refugees in their host country, even as it did not question the interstitiality of their position there.

In sum, Turkey's long history of receiving mass migration has been primarily characterized by either the integration and naturalization of ethnic "kin" or the expectation that other migrants, such as Iranians and Afghans, will move on to other destinations. Not only has the Syrian influx repre-

sented the largest mass migration to Turkey in that country's history, but it is also a group that speaks a different language and whose extended stay in Turkey was not expected. As time has passed, however, both Syrians and Turks have begun to reassess the temporality of Syrians' stay in the country and to understand that return in the near future is unlikely.

## Turkey as Migrant Destination?

When refugees began to arrive in boats to the Greek Aegean Islands in the spring of 2015, an immediate assumption of many observers in Europe and even Turkey was that precarious and uncertain conditions in the latter had pushed them to make such a dangerous crossing. Certainly, in initial on-the-ground surveys at the time, most Syrians crossing from Turkey into Greece expressed that they expected to be able to build a better life in Europe, either because they knew European languages or had relatives in EU countries. However, despite the assumption that conditions in Turkey were the primary push factor, Ayhan Kaya notes that "more than 80 percent of the Syrians who settled on the Greek islands reported that they only spent a few days in Turkey to prepare for their journey to Greece. Only 20 percent of those reported that they had spent more than six months in Turkey prior to leaving for Greece" (Kaya 2017a: 372; see also UNHCR 2015).

The observation that many of those who attempted the sea passage to Greece only transited briefly through Turkey is also backed up by studies since 2016. These show that while human smuggling continues along migrant routes to Europe, many of those now traveling are not unaccompanied young men, as was the case in the pre-2016 wave, but are instead persons pursuing family reunification. The most comprehensive study of smuggling in the Izmir region, the main smuggling hub along the Turkish coast, reports that "transit migrants seeking to be reunited with family members, who had successfully reached Europe in recent years, seems to be a rising trend" (Yıldız 2017: 16). This study implies that today's irregular migrants are not being pushed but rather pulled to take the dangerous passage. The same study goes on to note that in the post-2016 period, many Syrians use smugglers not to get from Turkey to Europe but to make their way safely to Turkey through the violence of war-torn Syria and the increasing restrictions at the Turkish border (Yıldız 2017: 19).

Indeed, there is a growing literature on the transformation of Turkey from a transit country to a migrant destination (e.g., Baban, Ilcan, and Rygiel: 2017). The EU-Turkey deal only cemented such a default endpoint, as it externalized the "refugee problem" outside the EU's borders (Burström 2015; Karadağ 2019; Üstübici 2019). On paper, the deal aimed to halt dangerous illegal migration and improve routes for legal immigration to the

EU, thereby containing migrants in Turkey until their applications would be approved. In practice, many EU countries have made little effort to meet their asylum targets. Although the EU promised to resettle through a legal route one asylum seeker for every person turned back at the Greek border, as of 2020 only 25,000 of the quota of 72,000 had been resettled (Garcés Mascareñas 2020). Even this target figure is barely a drop in the sea of persons that has flooded Turkey over the past ten years.

By all reports, most of the almost four million Syrians living in Turkey today are in urban centers where they can find work, particularly those in the south and west of the country. Even before the EU-Turkey deal was struck, it became clear to Turkish officials that the asylum regime previously in place was not sufficient to deal with the needs of this new population in its cities. The Law on Foreigners and International Protection came into force in April 2014, including an article on the provision of "temporary protection" status to "foreigners who have been forced to leave their country, cannot return to the country that they have left, and have arrived at or crossed the borders of Turkey in a mass influx situation seeking immediate and temporary protection."[11] The Temporary Protection Regulation (Geçici Koruma Yönetmeliği) of October 2014 ensured that asylum seekers would not be returned against their will and gave them access to fundamental rights and services, such as health care and education.

As a result of this regulation, the relevant categories giving Syrians access to services were no longer whether they lived inside or outside camps. Rather, "the regulation categorizes the Syrian refugees into two groups: those who completed their registration with biometrical data (photograph, fingerprints, etc.) and those who did not" (Ongur and Zengin 2019: 113).[12] This temporary status has provided Syrians in the country with basic rights, then, but refugees continue to face challenges in access to those rights. For instance, Syrians under Temporary Protection were not able to gain work permits that would allow them to be legally employed in Turkey. Only in January 2016, the government passed the Regulation on Work Permits for Foreigners under temporary protection. This allowed Syrian refugees more easily to gain work permits and to join the labor force. Although policymakers expected to see a decrease in informal labor as a result of this measure (İçduygu and Şimşek 2016), its implementation has been quite limited so far. According to the latest available statistics by the Ministry of Labor and Social Security, as of 2021, a total of 91,500 Syrians were granted work permits in Turkey, including those under Temporary Protection status and full Turkish residence permit holders.[13] This shows that, like other migrant groups in the country, the majority of Syrian refugees remained in the informal labor market, which constitutes approximately 40 percent of total employment in Turkey (Şenses 2016). Syrians often work in the most precarious sectors of that market, with poor working conditions and little job security.

While the pathways to formal incorporation in the labor market are very limited, Turkey hosts one of the largest cash aid programs of its kind targeting refugees. In the context of the Facility for Refugee Integration in Turkey (FRIT), the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) program has provided cash aid to over 1.5 million refugees since 2016, with over 90 percent of those being Syrian. The cash transfer amount is quite low, currently 230TL per eligible family member per month (less than 10 euros) and is meant to maintain basic food security. According to some scholars, this service-based approach "renders Syrian refugees vulnerable to manipulation of political authority, creating subjects or 'needy' individuals rather than refugees with legally guaranteed social and economic rights" (Yıldız and Uzgören 2016: 199).

Furthermore, while even as early as 2015 many polls reported large numbers of Syrians preferring to stay in Turkey, the regime of temporary protection offers few obvious pathways to citizenship and permanence. To acquire Turkish citizenship through naturalization, one must first have a residence permit for five years, which is something that Syrians under temporary protection do not acquire. After Turkish President Erdoğan announced the possibility for exceptional citizenship for Syrian refugees in July 2016, Syrian refugees have been selectively invited by the authorities to apply for Turkish citizenship. As of November 2023, 238,000 Syrian refugees, approximately two-thirds of them adults, have been naturalized.[14] However, eligibility criteria for Syrians wishing to acquire citizenship cannot be found in written form. Both our own research and that of others has found, anecdotally, that a considerable number of those invited for citizenship were entrepreneurs, university graduates, or young professionals employed by civil society organizations working with the Syrian community (Şimşek 2020). Note that the desire for Turkish citizenship was high among young people we spoke to. Nonetheless, all of them are aware that the chances are slim for those with no education or financial resources. Hence, one group of researchers commented, "Given the reality of living in limbo, poverty, and struggling to make ends meet without the prospect of a more stable future . . . many Syrians would rather risk dangerous journeys to Europe in the hopes that they might be recognised as refugees with the prospect that this status will lead to a stable pathway toward full citizenship" (Baban, Ilcan, and Rygiel 2017: 54).

The number of Syrian citizens in Turkey has remained more or less stable since 2018, the year that Turkey completed its 764-kilometer southern border wall[15] and ramped up efforts to prevent new entries. Those efforts have reportedly included shooting persons attempting to cross illegally and forcing others caught in the act of crossing to sign papers requesting to be returned to Syria.[16] Even as the Turkish government attempts today to prevent further entry, the duration of the protracted conflict and scale of the destruction in Syria has also compelled the Turkish state to rethink its sys-

tem of refugee protection. This is especially the case in that as time passes, young Syrians become better integrated and more settled, and it becomes more and more clear that Turkey will be responsible not only for temporary protection but also for finding durable solutions.

## Youth Futures in a State of Uncertainty

Even as young Syrians become more integrated, however, political polarization and politicized discourse around migration stigmatize Syrian youth. Anxieties emerge around uncertain futures, and youth are crucial to such imagination. Media portrays young men as either taking away Turkish jobs and benefits or as potential criminals, while emphasizing young women's fertility and sexual threat. Moreover, the visibility of youth in education and the workplace and of their attempts to reproduce their culture in exile lead to a public discourse that "we are no longer living in Turkey, we're living in Syria." Even as youth become more integrated to their lives in Turkey, then, the reproduction of Syrian culture, especially in urban areas, is often portrayed as a failure to assimilate. The idea that even youth, who might otherwise be seen as malleable, fail or refuse to assimilate then appears in public discourse as a threat to the future Turkishness of Turkey.

Not only is youth a period of transition, youth are also "a critical indicator of the state of a nation" (Honwana 2012: 3). This is so because youth are what a nation will become: youth make up the workforce and the consumers, the voters and politicians, the parents and grandparents of coming decades. Despite the recognized importance of youth for communal futures, however, research focused specifically on refugee youth and their experiences and needs is sparse (for similar observations, see Chatty 2007). Some limited research has addressed migrant youth perceptions of time and the future (e.g., Allsopp, Chase, and Mitchell 2014; Andersson 2014a), especially in relation to immigration regimes. Other qualitative research has examined youth agency, particularly in relation to humanitarian aid (Chatty 2010) and the experience of illegality or lack of documentation in the transition to adulthood (esp. Gonzales 2011). However, the experience of stalled temporality, an impeded transition to adulthood, and the impediments of immigration regimes experienced so keenly by many refugee youth are areas that have received little qualitative research focus.[17]

As we discuss further in chapter 1, the explosive growth in youth numbers throughout the Global South and the rise of digital technology have given rise to similar aspirations among youth around the world, as well as similar structural impediments to realizing those aspirations. In the age of Instagram, literature on "global generations" suggests that digital connections and cultural flows now connect youth around the world in currents of

a new cosmopolitanism (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2009). "Cosmopolitanism" here means that in many parts of the globe, youth aspire to similar visions of lifestyle, consumption, and travel. This new cosmopolitanism, then, "is about aspiring to the world, a sense of there being a wider array of paths, possibilities, styles and aims 'out there'" (Schielke 2012: 29).

At the same time, however, large numbers of youth in all parts of the world find themselves in conditions of precarity, as youth populations grow and employment cannot keep pace. One of the global currents in which many youth participate, then, is that of "waithood," a period of "prolonged adolescence or an involuntary delay in reaching adulthood, in which young people are unable to find employment, get married, and establish their own families" (Honwana 2012: 4). As social theorists working on the problem have observed, waithood emerges because "the current global capitalist system certainly creates, and arguably requires, a trans-national, youthful 'precariat' in all parts of the globe" (Thorpe and Ingliss 2019: 42).

For these reasons, as well, we know that today youth make up the largest number of persons on the move. The sense that cosmopolitan aspirations cannot be fulfilled in one's own country or environment pushes many youth in the Middle East and North Africa toward "the Outside," a term (*l'barra*) that Moroccans use to denote what Alice Elliott (2021) describes as a topography or horizon of possibility. Anthropological work has shown how youth in the Middle East and Africa have focused on Europe as the space to realize such dreams (esp. Alpes 2012; Anderson 2014a; Elliott 2021; Schielke 2012, 2015). As we will show in later chapters, many displaced Syrian youth have begun to view Turkey's cities as spaces of such vernacular cosmopolitan aspirations.

Refugee youth are not exempt from globalization or the cosmopolitan aspirations that it produces. However, refugee youth's experiences are complicated by the particular condition of permanent temporariness in which they find themselves. While many refugee youth experience the legal and social impediments arising from their status as "temporary" refugees, we know from cases of prolonged displacement that war rarely creates refugees who remain "temporary." Rather, throughout the world, from Afghanistan to Georgia to Uganda, we find millions of persons left in the limbo of "permanent temporariness," often held for decades in the squalor of camps while unable fully to plan for the future (Harrell-Bond 1989). Even in cases where forced migrants return to their homes, as in Bosnia or Rwanda, return is often prolonged, painful, and may entail secondary displacement (e.g., Blitz 2005; Stefansson 2010). In cases of ethnic or secessionist conflict, we see that while return may remain an ideal–for example, for Georgians displaced from Abkhazia or Greek Cypriots displaced from north Cyprus–the likelihood of return in internally displaced people's lifetimes is slim. In the Syrian case, while a regime change could open the door to return, and

while a recent study shows that many Syrians in Europe currently desire that,[18] changing work and educational opportunities and life circumstances invariably shift such views as time passes.

We stated above that youth is a period of transition particularly concentrated on the future but that in the context of forced migration this transitional period is enmeshed with the uncertainties of permanent temporariness. Building on recent work in the anthropology of the future (esp. Bryant and Knight 2019) and on the conditions for refugee return (esp. Zetter 2021), this book seeks to understand how displaced Syrian youth orient themselves to the future in a context where ordinary life has been disrupted, the present often appears stalled, and yet where the process of going on with life produces new contexts in which futures begin to be imagined differently. As Roger Zetter notes, among the UNHCR options of resettlement, repatriation, or local integration for refugees, return is the "not-so-easy" option, a "contested territory figuratively and in practice" (2021: 10). "The transformative impact of exile," Zetter remarks, "both reinforces loss and also conditions the prospect of, and the aspiration for, return." We suggest that this is particularly the case for youth, for whom prospects and imaginations of particular futures play an especially significant role in evaluations of whether to return, to move on, or to integrate into the host community.

In a recent book, Rebecca Bryant and Daniel Knight outline methods for ethnographic study of the future, in particular by encouraging attention to "orientations," or the open-ended and interdeterminate ways in which we orient ourselves to the future in everyday life. "While orientations entail planning, hoping for, and imagining the future, they also often entail the collapse or exhaustion of those efforts: moments in which hope may turn to apathy, frustrated planning to disillusion, and imagination to fatigue" (2019: 19). Importantly, recent study of the future suggests that even when the present appears "stalled," "on hold," or "futureless," people continue to anticipate, expect, speculate about, hope, and yearn for particular kinds of futures (e.g., Bear, Birla, and Puri 2015; Dzenovska 2018; Hage 2009; Jansen 2015a; Kelly 2008).

This book, then, aims to understand the ways Syrian youth are planning for and imagining their futures following their displacement to Turkey. What factors influence their expectations and hopes for the future? What factors influence plans to remain, to move on, or to return? In particular, we are concerned to understand youth aspirations, and how they weigh loss against gain. If return to homes in Syria is not imagined as a possibility, what sorts of futures do they see for themselves in Turkey? What sort of integration in Turkey would enable them to realize those futures?

Our approach builds on observations from ethnographies of refugee lives showing the ways life goes on even in the context of war and disruption of "the normal" (esp. Lubkemann 2008; also Kelly 2008). This literature has

questioned the analysis of violence that sees it as an "eruption" or exception to "the normal," thereby casting return as the only "normal" or non-pathological option. Stephen Lubkemann remarks, "Rather than treating war as an 'event' that suspends social processes, anthropologists should study the realization and transformation of social relations and cultural practices *throughout* conflict, investigating war as a transformative social condition and not simply as a political struggle conducted through organized violence" (Lubkemann 2008: 1). In the context of refugee lives, this suggests that rather than seeing the exiled state as one of temporal suspension, in which refugees are waiting to return or to move on, one should see it instead as a transformative social process. This would, then, entail viewing displacement not as exception to the norm but rather as a process of social change.

This does not mean that refugee youth do not consider their state to be "abnormal" but rather emphasizes that "normalcy" is itself contextual and may lead to "normalization" of their current circumstances rather than to return to their "normal" state prior to war. A growing anthropological literature on "normalcy" shows us how aspirations to a "normal life" may be constructed from situations construed as "abnormal" by persons living in them. Especially building on work in the postwar, post-Yugoslav Balkans, numerous researchers have shown how the social and economic, as well as spatial and temporal, displacements of war have led to a situation of pervasive corruption and political uncertainty that produces longings for "normal lives" (e.g., Fehérváry 2002; Gilbert et al. 2008; Greenberg 2011). In the context of large-scale displacement, however, the "normal" and what is lost should not be assumed and needs to be weighed against gains. These include especially the gains of safety, in particular for minority groups.

Indeed, contrary to assumptions in previous literature regarding refugee return, new studies call into question the possibility of successful returns, particularly of certain vulnerable groups, after violence (Adelman and Barkan 2011; Harild, Christensen, and Zetter 2015). Although the UNHCR has proposed resettlement, repatriation, or local integration as the three durable solutions to mass refugee movement, negotiated peace agreements usually prioritize return of displaced persons. This preference for repatriation, however, has not been accompanied by systematic study of the processes of return and reintegration. As Zetter (2021) argues, return is often an unsettling question, both because the idealized lost home has undergone changes in one's absence and because displaced persons themselves make investments and develop relationships in the places where they have settled. Critiques of the presumption that all refugees "naturally" want to go back to their places of origin challenge us to move beyond assumptions of the rootedness of people in places (Malkki 1992; Stepputat 1994) and to accept that sustainable voluntary return may be much more complex than dreams of restoring the status quo ante. Successful return is ordinarily not an event in which

refugees go back to their homes and resettle but rather a messier, iterative, and more open-ended process that may involve sending emissaries, testing the waters, and weighing opportunities (Harild et al. 2015).

Moreover, like any social change, displacement entails both losses and gains that are never even, equal, or unambiguous. Someone who has lost a mudbrick house in a village may gain a new flat and a better job in the city that enables her to send her children to university, but she may still view what she experienced as a loss and use a discourse of loss when talking about it. Alternatively, someone who has lost large landholdings may find himself in a small house missing his orchards but may refuse to dwell on the past and be glad for the safety of his children. Moreover, whether losing becomes a loss or whether it may be, in the scale of things, more of a gain is related to senses of communal security and the ability to have a future. This seems to be particularly true of minority groups but may be extrapolated to other groups for whom return inspires senses of insecurity. Howard Adelman and Elazar Barkan's 2011 comparative study of organized return after conflict shows that minority return is almost never successful, and minorities almost never remain. We know from numerous studies of Bosnia-Herzegovina that minority communities have for the most part rejected return to areas that had experienced conflict, though in some cases they claim their property there. Writing of the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka, Sharika Thiranagama observes that perceptions of loss are shaped, indeed determined, by the future more than the past: "The violent making and unmaking of place and 'home' in Sri Lanka is also about . . . the possibilities of finding a future in which one can flourish personally and collectively" (Thiranagama 2007: 32).

This book, then, asks about the conditions under which Syrian youth can flourish in Turkey given the likelihood that large numbers will be unable to or will refuse to return to their home country. Like much of the literature, we view integration as a two-way process that starts upon arrival in the host state, requiring adaptation by both refugees and the host society (Castles et al. 2002: 113). As Allison Strang and Alastair Ager (2010; also Ager and Strang 2004) note, almost every host country sends "mixed messages" regarding refugee integration. In Turkey, such mixed messages include that Syrians are temporary "guests" and the Turkish government their host and benefactor, and also that Syrians should learn Turkish and accommodate themselves to Turkish society and culture, if they wish to remain. The negativity regarding Syrians' difference and capacity to assimilate of course "powerfully conflicts with policy aimed to promote the integration of those who are granted refugee status" (Strang and Ager 2010: 595). At the same time, Strange and Ager elsewhere argue, the process of integration begins from the moment of arrival (Ager and Strang 2004). "People do not safely wait 'in limbo' until a host nation decides whether or not to accept them—the

processes of integration or alienation inexorably begin" (Strang and Ager 2010: 595). Indeed, as Natalija Vrecer (2010) observes, remaining in limbo can be damaging for refugees precisely because it produces prolonged uncertainty regarding the future.

The following chapters aim to understand Syrian youth as an age group in transition, expecting to move toward a particular kind of future while at the same time faced with the ambivalences of integration. These are ambivalences produced both by the "mixed messages" of the host society and by individuals' uncertainties regarding the medium- or long-term future. In this study, we see again and again that youth attempt to emerge from the liminality of their position and to carve out a clearer future in Turkish society.

## A Word on Methods

This book builds on research in five urban areas of Turkey: the border cities of Gaziantep and Mardin; the southern city of Adana, which is an economic hub close to the conflict zone; Izmir, a transit point to Europe on Turkey's Western coast; and Istanbul, Turkey's largest metropolis and a city that has hosted many economic migrants and refugees throughout its history. Our research began with an extensive survey of five hundred households, which we followed up with semi-structured interviews in the study's five cities, as well as field research in civil society organizations, schools and training facilities for refugees, and governmental organizations.

The findings presented in this manuscript primarily rely on our field research and semi-structured interviews, which provide us with reflection by refugee youth themselves on their experiences.[19] In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted in teams of two or three female and Arabic-speaking researchers with a total of 103 young Syrians in Turkey (around twenty interviewees per city). Initial interviews were conducted primarily between May and December 2018, and interviewees were identified through snowball sampling and the networks of the research institutions. We aimed to ensure representation in terms of age (nineteen to twenty-nine), gender (sixty-six men and thirty-seven women), socioeconomic status, and education level. Our study included both youth who were studying and still preparing themselves for adult responsibilities and persons who were married and had small children but were still in the process of transitioning to adult independence.

The purpose of these interviews was to gather information about their pre-migration background and progress, as well as to get in-depth information about their experiences in Turkey, their migration experiences, and their future plans. Our research focused on access to healthcare, education, and housing, as well as working conditions, in order to understand how youth had adapted their future plans based on the contingencies of the present.

These interviews were complemented with ethnographic observations within associations working for the Syrian population and interviews with stakeholders. During these visits, we collected information about the scope and type of services provided by the associations and the profile of the beneficiaries. In addition, we participated in cultural events and volunteered in associations in which we taught Turkish to beginners (Small Project Istanbul), accompanied hospital visits (as interpreters), and assisted in the presentation of computer training sessions. These participant observation opportunities provided us with data on informal interactions in language training, certification processes in NGOs, and access to healthcare. In addition, we visited shops and cafés operated by, employing, or catering to Syrians. We recorded notes focusing on young people's needs, integration difficulties, and career plans, as well as interactions with each other and with their peers in Turkey.

Despite our core team being entirely female and including three native Arabic speakers, we experienced difficulties in approaching young women who were not employed or in university education. When we were able to speak to them, however, many of the discussions were revealing, particularly concerning the constraints that young women face and the gains that some reported experiencing when existing social structures were overturned.

Because the research took place over several years, and because we followed up with certain of our interlocutors in subsequent years, we have been able to chart some of the changes that occur when abnormal situations become normalized. Communication was maintained with most of the participants after the interviews by texts and phone calls to follow-up on their progress. For many of the youth with whom we spoke, formative years of their lives had already been spent in Turkey, and it was becoming increasingly difficult for them to imagine their lives otherwise. The next chapters help us unpack that imagination as we look at various futural orientations and their consequences for youth in the present.

## Notes

1. Throughout the book, we use English spellings for Turkish place names commonly used in English (e.g., Izmir, Istanbul). Otherwise, we use Turkish spellings (e.g., Kütahya). In addition, we use the phonetic transliteration of Arabic personal names, even when those names have equivalents in Turkish (e.g., Khaled in Arabic vs. Halit in Turkish), as pronunciation between the two languages differs.
2. See "Middle East and North Africa: Youth Facts," *Youthpolicy.org*. Retrieved 12 December 2023 from https://www.youthpolicy.org/mappings/regionalyouths cenes/mena/facts/#refFN13.
3. "Middle East and North Africa: Addressing Highest Rates of Youth Unemployment in the World," *UN News*, 23 May 2022. Retrieved 12 December 2023 from https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/05/1118842.

4. The Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) announced a youth unemployment rate of 21 percent in the first three months of 2022. However, the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions (DİSK-AR) research center put the figure as high as 41 percent for youth between fifteen and twenty-four years of age. Moreover, according to the report, "One out of every two young women in Turkey is unemployed," while university graduates who do find jobs are mostly working for minimum wage.

5. For ethnographic observations of the long history of smuggling at the border, see Aras (2015).

6. As an example, Turkey's Sheltering Center Management System (AFKEN) won first place in the UN Public Services Awards in 2015, given by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Ersin Çelik, "Turkey's AFKEN Project Wins UN Public Services Award," *Yeni Şafak*, 7 May 2015. Retrieved 12 December 2023 from https://www.yenisafak.com/en/life/turkeys-afken-project-wins-un-public-services-award-2134063.

7. Moreover, as of writing, that number is dwindling by the day, as Turkey has begun efforts to close down its camps, helping those in them to find accommodation in the community but also nudging them to return to Syria. See Metin Gurcan, "Why Turkey Is Closing Down Syrian Refugee Camps," *Al Monitor*, 3 June 2019. Retrieved 12 December 2023 from https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2019/06/turkey-syria-why-government-closes-down-refugee-camps.html.

8. Frontex, *Annual Risk Analysis 2015* (Warsaw: Frontex, 2015). Retrieved 12 December 2023 from https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Annual_Risk_Analysis_2015.pdf; Frontex, *Annual Risk for 2016* (Warsaw: Frontex, 2016). Retrieved 12 December 2023 from https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Annula_Risk_Analysis_2016.pdf.

9. An initial UNHCR survey of those arriving in the Greek islands showed that 86 percent reported having secondary or university education, while 16 percent said that they were studying at the time of their flight (Don Murray, "UNHCR Says Most of Syrians Arriving in Greece are Students," *UNHCR*, 8 December 2015. Retrieved 12 December 2023 from https://www.unhcr.org/5666ddda6.html). In an assessment of Syrians arriving in Germany a few months later, one initial study found that 27 percent had studied at or finished university, 26.6 percent had an education from a gymnasium, and 26 percent had secondary education. Only 3 percent had no formal education, while 17 percent had only finished their primary education (Ragab et al. 2017).

10. "EU Support to Refugees in Türkiye." Retrieved 23 January 2024 from https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/turkiye/eu-support-refugees-turkiye_en.

11. Law on Foreigners and International Protection, Article 91 (unofficial translation).

12. See also Ongur and Zengin (2019) for estimates regarding Syrians' access to health services after 2014. Quoting the parliamentary human rights committee, they note that "the number of Syrian refugees who have received polyclinic help is over 32 million, the in-patient treatments amount to 1.3 million, surgical operations are over 1 million, and there are over 250,000 Syrian births reported" (114).

13. Note that only 5,335 of them were women. See *Work Permits of Foreigners 2021*, Turkish Ministry of Labor. Retrieved 12 December 2023 from https://www .csgb.gov.tr/media/90062/yabanciizin2021.pdf.

14. Number of Syrians in Turkey in November 2023, retrieved from https://multe ciler.org.tr/turkiyedeki-suriyeli-sayisi/#:~:text=%C4%B0%C3%A7i%C5% 9Fleri%20Bakanl%C4%B1%C4%9F%C4%B1%20taraf%C4%B1ndan%2019%20 Aral%C4%B1k,bin%2095'i%20ise%20%C3%A7ocuktur.

15. Anadolu Agency, "Turkey Finishes Construction of 764-km Security Wall on Syria Border," Daily Sabah, 9 June 2018. Retrieved 12 December 2023 from https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2018/06/09/turkey-finishes-con struction-of-764-km-security-wall-on-syria-border.

16. "Turkey/Syria: Border Guards Shoot, Block Fleeing Syrians," *Human Rights Watch*, 3 February 2018 from https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/02/03/turkey/ syria-border-guards-shoot-block-fleeing-syrians.

17. There are, however, ongoing projects on displaced youth in the region that are beginning to bear fruit. See, for instance, the Viable Futures project on Syrian youth in Jordan ("Viable Futures: Near and Long Term Prospects among Syrian Youth in Jordan," *University of Copenhagen, Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies*. Retrieved 12 December 2023 from https://ccrs.ku.dk/research/ centres/centre-for-comparative-culture-studies/viable-futures/) or a Friedrich Ebert Stiftung study on youth in Lebanon (Jasmin Lilian Diab, *Syrian Refugee Youth in Lebanon* (Bonn: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2022. Retrieved 12 December 2023 from https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/international/19847-20230223.pdf).

18. Listen to Syrians, survey conducted by Berlin Social Science Center. Retrieved 2 August 2021 from https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1WYn4 N7STdP2eW3EYdX86Gsb6lxE4VrcNvZ4aEczsFwI/edit?pli=1#gid=833 561282.

19. Full results of the research are available in Turkish. "Integration and Welfare of Syrian Youth in Turkey," *trdizin*, 9 September 2020. Retrieved 12 December 2023 from https://search.trdizin.gov.tr/tr/yayin/detay/620668/.

# 1

# **Expectation**

## The Struggle for Normal Lives

Before my husband died, when he was there before the siege, we had a house and a car; we had everything. We were happy. When he was with us, everything was good. Now, after the war, there are hundreds and thousands of women like me. My friend's husband died. My neighbor also died. I was very sad for them, but I never thought this would happen to me, or I would be like one of them. . . . It is not about the problems, but when a woman is married, there is someone to talk to and share everything with. The responsibility is different. The husband does his role and does things he must do, and the woman also has her role to do. . . . I am responsible for everything now. No one can do anything for me unless I do it myself. I cannot trust anyone.

  –Zina, twenty-nine years old, living in Izmir with her four young daughters

So the war started in Aleppo. . . . I was a student at the high school, and I was preparing for the high school exam, and the shells were falling while we were doing the exams. I was living near Aleppo, and we had to move to the city center. . . . I finished my high school's exams, and I enrolled at the university, and I was supposed to continue my studies. Then the war started in the city center after my arrival there. So we left. We left for Turkey illegally.

  Once we came here, I had five years of working! Actually, it was so hard for me to be accepted in Aleppo University. . . . And when I left everything and moved here, I was working and crying! I was crying at work! For example, when the boss was saying to me, "Clean here!," "Do this!" I haven't ever done this job in my life before! It was so hard for me, especially as I was a university student. . . . I hadn't worked before, ever! But you have to work. There is no other option.

   –Omaya, twenty-eight years old, a returning university student in Mardin

Two young women leading quite different lives have those lives interrupted by violence. Although they were the same age at the time we interviewed them, their lives were split by violence in very different ways. Zina lost both

her husband and her father while she was still pregnant with her fourth child. Her husband was taken away by regime forces, and his body was returned a month later, mutilated. Until that moment, she had lived contentedly with her children in the small house outside Aleppo that her husband had provided from his work as a driver. She had married when she was only sixteen, become pregnant immediately, and imagined her future role as a stay-at-home mother. This was the "normal" life that she expected to lead. She had those expectations overturned when her husband's body was dumped on her doorstep, and she immediately fled with her four daughters across the border. As she expressed it to us, in a marriage "the husband does his role and does things he must do, and the woman also has her role to do." Now, though, she says, "I am responsible for everything . . . No one can do anything for me unless I do it myself."

As elsewhere in the world, socioeconomic status is often a predictor for what sorts of expectations youth have regarding their lives. At the same moment Zina was marrying and starting a family, another girl of her same age, Omaya, was a high school student studying for the baccalaureate exam. In prewar Syria, education was compulsory until grade 6, and the country had met its millennium goals of having a high rate of attendance for both males and females.[1] However, after that age, the gender imbalance sharply increased, with many families taking their girls out of school and investing in educating boys. In addition, until the year 2000, higher education was subsidized but limited to state universities. As a result, it was available only to a select portion of the students who wanted to attend. After the turn of the millennium, higher education began to expand as the government allowed private universities to open (Buckner 2011; Kabbani and Salloum 2011), although these were too expensive for many Syrian families.

For these reasons, Omaya was fortunate to grow up in a middle-class family that supported her dreams of higher education. They supported her as she studied for her entrance exams, which were made more difficult by the Russian shells raining on her village outside Aleppo. Her family moved to the city center, which they thought would be safe. As a densely populated city and a UNESCO heritage site, the family assumed that it would not be attacked in the same destructive way. However, Omaya only had a short period at university before the war arrived in Syria's largest city. Her studies, which had just begun, were interrupted by her family's flight across the border. For five years, she worked as a cleaner in Turkey after having been protected by her family from the need to work in her home country. "It was so hard for me, especially as I was a university student . . . I hadn't worked before, ever!" Omaya explained.

Indeed, after five years of manual labor in Turkey she had a breakdown and had to stay at home for some months. It was then that she determined to continue her education at all costs and figured out how to enter univer-

sity in Turkey. Although at the time of our interview she was studying in an Arabic-language program for Syrians who wish to be taught in their own language, she recognizes that it is not the same as the education she would have had at home. Still, being able again to expect a university degree gives her hope–hope to continue her studies even after the undergraduate degree, hope to become the sort of person she had imagined herself being.

This chapter concerns expectation, or the route that youth thought that their lives would take before the war and the routes that they have been constructing since. As Rebecca Bryant and Daniel Knight (2019: 49–50) describe, expectation is what anchors the everyday. Building on our past experiences, expectation is what allows us to go on with our lives, expecting that roofs will not collapse, that our jobs will be waiting when we get to work, and that friends and family will not betray us. Investments in houses, education, or social ties rely on the sorts of quotidian expectations that allow us to make futures.

Of course, in circumstances such as war, expectation may also encompass what seems exceptional or even unthinkable. One may, for instance, come to expect that one could be kidnapped at checkpoints or that missiles may rain down at certain hours. Nevertheless, in so many of our interlocutors' narratives, normal lives were ones in which everything went on, and what one expected today is also what one could expect tomorrow. Moaz, a young man of twenty-seven who, after much struggle, had established a business for himself in Istanbul told us,

> My life before? In general, it was very nice, very cool. I lived in a city where we had Iraqis and Palestinians [refugees] and me personally, I was feeling so sorry for them. But I was sure that whatever happened, nothing will happen to Syria. I kept saying so. Everybody was living a normal life, and no one was afraid. The war came all of a sudden.

What interrupted the normal, then, was a sudden change and the recognition that one could no longer expect to expect. Moaz went on:

> So I had the normal struggles of a student who is working part time, living my life in my own house, things were very nice. My life was not the fanciest life ever because I was a student, but it was a nice life. Then in war, it was very hard.

As Bryant and Knight (2019: 63) remark, "The normative . . . is about 'meeting expectations'–a phrase that also suggests a reach into the future." In other words, they argue that we define the normal not only on the basis of the present but also based on our expectations that things will continue the way that they are. For this reason, "expectation defines what it means to *have* a future" (2019: 63).

Unsurprisingly, for many people the shattering of expectations is experienced as a loss. One can no longer count on getting an education, finding

a job in one's field, marrying at the time one expected, or having a certain amount of property or social collateral. For others, however, what they expected from their lives may not have been what they wanted, or losing their previous expectations may have allowed them to imagine new horizons. As a result, some of the youth in our study experienced the shattering of expectations as a gain. In our interviews, we found that young, unmarried women sometimes experienced the loss of expectations as something that increased their choices. That loss became a gain, however, when not only the youth themselves but also their families and communities underwent change.

This chapter explores youth as a period of transition characterized by aspirations and expectations, and we begin here to ask the question of how to understand losses and gains when expectations are destroyed or deferred. We emphasize here that the expectations of the youth with whom we spoke are not individualistic—in other words, are not only their own—but rather are individuated, that is, shaped by cultural norms and expectations. They are what Stephen Lubkemann (2008) calls "culturally scripted life projects" that refugee youth reconfigure in exile, as the social and cultural norms and structures that shaped them were shaken.

Below, we first return to our observations in the introduction regarding the "youth bulge" in the Middle East and North Africa to think about the broader social and political context of Syrian youth displacement. We then discuss the specific social expectations of youth in pre-2011 Syria, and how the social structures shaping those expectations were both shattered and reconstructed. This discussion prepares the ground for examination in the next chapters of the kinds of social and individual changes that youth have undergone, and moments when they welcome or resist those.

## The "Youth Bulge" as Catalyst and Constraint

In order to understand the specific constraints for Syrian youth in Turkey, it is important first to return to the demographic explosion of youth in MENA (Middle East and North Africa) countries, touched upon in the introduction. In the context of this "youth bulge," what could young people in Syria expect before 2011?

In 2010, immediately before the Arab Spring, all MENA countries had large youth populations, but in Syria, the population between fifteen and twenty-nine years of age constituted a full 50 percent of all adults (Goldstone 2015). While the median age around the globe was twenty-nine in 2010, Syria, on the cusp of revolution, had a median age of twenty-one (Roudi 2011). Many studies have argued that when there are large youth populations, economic and/or political instability can lead to conflict (esp. Urdal 2004; also, Huntington 1996; La Graffe 2012). Studies cite high youth unemployment,

corruption at elite levels, and lack of access to democratic structures as predictors for eruptions (Ozerim 2019; Urdal 2006; Yair and Miodownik 2016).

Others point to the expansion of higher education as a trigger when employment opportunities do not match expectations. Until the 1990s, the Syrian government pursued a public sector–led employment strategy similar to that in other MENA countries, where bloated government services employed large numbers of civil servants at low salaries (Huitfeldt and Kabbani 2006). By the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century, however, the Syrian government under Bashar al-Assad was trying to shrink the civil service—or at least encourage the private sector. During that period, not only did the youth population increase, but so did women's participation in the labor force. In 2006, one study of the Labor Force Surveys in Syria showed that 80 percent of those who were unemployed at the time were youth between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four who were trying to enter the labor market (Huitfeldt and Kabbani 2006: 3). "Thus, unemployment in Syria is very much a labor market insertion problem involving young first-time job seekers," the study's author notes (Huitfeldt and Kabbani 2006: 7).

At the same time, higher education expanded and became somewhat more flexible. Whereas before 2001 there were only four universities in the country, all of them public, by 2011 sixteen new private universities were in operation (CARA 2011: 11). "Following decades of stagnation, the beginning of expansion of HE [higher education] from 2001 raised expectations and pressures for academics, students and their institutions," even as public sector employment was decreasing and precarious employment was on the rise (2011: 14). By 2010, Syria lagged behind most other Arab countries in improving higher education, and particularly in updating and internationalizing to produce a workforce for an increasingly globalizing world (Kabbani and Salloum 2011; also Kabbani and Kamel 2009).

In a damning assessment of the relationship of education and state in prerevolutionary Syria, Raymon al-Maaloli (2016) describes how the Syrian government used education to achieve the particular ideological goal of creating loyal, patriotic citizens. It did this by embedding "an entire system of values and behaviors into Syrian educational institutions: loyalty to the party; obedience to the leader and faith in his abilities; the immortality of his thought; political and cultural isolation; repression as a means of resolving differences, conflicts, and tension; dogmatism and adulation; and ingratiating one's self to the centers of power."

In more measured terms, the study of pre-2011 higher education sponsored by the Council for At-Risk Academics (CARA) observes that there were significant contradictions in the state's attempts to reform institutions that were embedded in the structure of Syrian politics. "The institutional structures and practices of Syrian HE operated under the powerful and often contradictory pressures of government regulation and control, along-

side state-related assertions of broadly secular objectives, together with long-standing nationalist ambitions to use HE as an instrument for leveraging political power" (CARA 2011: 13). While different in tone, what both these assessments describe is a self-contained and self-referential educational system in the service of an autocratic regime.

Perhaps because of the relative insularity of Syria in the prerevolutionary period, available data does not show what William Kandel and Douglas Massey (2002) described two decades earlier as a "culture of migration" among youth. Discussing such a culture in Mexico, they assert, "Young people who grow up and come of age increasingly expect to migrate internationally in the course of their lives. For young men, especially, migration becomes a rite of passage, and those who do not attempt it are seen as lazy, unenterprising, and undesirable as potential mates" (2002: 982). As anthropologists working in the MENA region have also shown, for several decades, youth in North Africa, in particular, have internalized the idea of making the often dangerous journey to *l'barra*, "the Outside" (Elliott 2021), as necessary to becoming men, marrying, and establishing families, as well as a route to social improvement.

Hisham, for instance, was a young man living in a southern city for the past three years when we met him. An important part of his story was his experience as a gay man, and how his expectations of what would be possible for him changed in Turkey. Prior to discussing that, however, he told us that at the time of the revolution he was both working and studying, despite being from a middle-class family, because he had lost his father and wanted to help support his family.

> I was the only one among my siblings who was working and studying. And the new experience that I had is that I studied outside my province. But my goal was to finish my degree and work abroad; my goal was not to do something in the country because there is no future at all when it comes to salaries or to make a life. All my friends . . . the income in Syria . . . if you have had a *Wasta* [an acquaintance with influence] and you got hired as a civil servant, there is not enough income unless you want to rent a house in the worst area and live at the minimum [because of a bloated civil service with low salaries]. Or you would be originally from a well-off family that would help you financially to start a business or something. So, my dream and the dream of those around me was to take the degree and go abroad and visit our country during leaves and holidays.

Hisham tells us that he dreamed of working as a flight attendant, because he had friends who had entered that profession. It was particularly important to him that airlines seemed to prefer young people who could be trained on the job and that they "would consider the appearance and do not care about education and experience." The issue of experience, he explained,

was the main problem for young people on the job market with university degrees, and that this was true both in Syria and in Turkey:

> Work opportunities were like here in Turkey. Like, let's say a warehouse keeper needs three years of experience. So when we finish universities, we need to have experience to find a job. They do not recognize the degree by itself. And so it is difficult for anyone to give you a chance to have the first experience. So this is what we were suffering from in the job search, and we still do even here in Turkey. There were no vocational training and qualification centers in Syria. In Europe, after you take your degree, you do a certain training according to what you like to work in, and then you start working. You go to the employer with experience and training, not just a degree that I studied in university.

Moreover, as we noted above, Syrian education at all levels lagged behind in updating to integrate graduates into a globalizing work force. Hisham continued,

> Even on the level of my university, I studied business administration and my baccalaureate is in economics. But nothing that I studied is useful for me on the ground and in a practical way. No one uses the notebook accounting anymore. They did not teach us accounting programs on the computer. They only teach us commerce accounting, which no one uses anymore. The employer or the company prefers to hire someone who took courses in these programs over someone who studied four or five years at university and did a masters and PhD but does not know how to work on this program.

Despite Hisham's and his friends' hopes to make a life outside the country, however, it appears that emigration from Syria in the decade preceding the revolution was limited and often temporary. As many as one million laborers emigrated to neighboring Lebanon during the construction boom in that country's postwar period, but this number declined significantly in the 1990s and particularly following the alleged involvement of the Syrian government in the 2005 assassination of Lebanese prime minister Rafik Hariri. Henrik Huitfeldt and Nader Kabbani (2006: 5) estimate that in the mid-2000s around four thousand Syrian students left the country each year for studies abroad, and around half of these did not return. During this period, rather than being a significant source of out-migration, Syria was the world's third largest host of refugees, more than one million of whom came from Iraq (IOM 2020: 40).

Syria before the revolution, then, was a predominantly young country, but one where limited access to higher education and high youth unemployment meant that youth and their families already struggled to achieve ambitions such as class mobility. It was in this context that the Arab Spring brought hope for change.

## Raised Expectations and the Shock of War

> Many Turks think that we came here just for refuge and just to eat and drink and so on. They think we don't have a goal to build Syria in the future or that we have projects starting now for the future of Syria. . . . They don't really understand why we came. Of course, there are some Syrians who came for their own benefit, or they brought their money here and are working. I don't deny that. But most of the Syrian people who left in the revolution, left for a noble goal, to change the country, not just for food and drink and electricity and stuff. Of course, we didn't leave Syria for food and drink and electricity. There was injustice in food and drink and electricity, and we left for that, but of course the main goal was achieving justice and democracy in Syria, and to be treated like humans in Syria and not like animals . . . Frankly, it's all animals' treatment, since my grandparents' days and forever. . . . That's how we were treated in Syria.

Rasha is a young woman who was living in Gaziantep when we met her volunteering with a Syrian civil society organization that works to help Syrians integrate in Turkey. She was in her early teens when the revolution began, and because of her family's political engagement also became actively involved, ignoring her own education. When her family fled to Turkey, one of her brothers refused to come and was ultimately killed by a targeted bomb strike. She says that she only returned to education recently, and when we met her, she was studying political science—not the subject that she had expected to study in Syria, but one that seemed more relevant to her condition. "When I was young in Syria," she recalls,

> my best memories were not before the revolution, although before that I used to travel, be happy, do everything. But, I swear to God, I really don't feel the happiness of these memories. All my memories happened during the revolution. . . . I would go to the street, and write . . . on the walls. . . . I would write my opinion, my rights, on the walls, because I can't say them out loud.

She describes how she was once arrested while writing on walls but avoided being taken to a detention center and was instead beaten. When she walked out of the police station, bruised, she related, "I was happy, extremely happy. Even though I was arrested and cursed at, in the end, I am a free person; I won't stay under their military boot."

Like many of the older youth in our study, Rasha expressed having had hopes for Syria's political future in the prerevolutionary period. Some talked of family members who returned from study or work abroad, buoyed by Bashar al-Assad's rhetoric of reform and belief that the British-educated president would loosen the reigns and enable a more participatory politics. In a collection that brings together leading anthropologists working in Syria over several decades, authors show how political gestures toward increased

freedoms led to what the editors call a "legacy of raised expectations." During the period leading up to the revolution, "[n]ew prospects–which were, in hindsight, a mirage–temporarily revitalized Syrian activists, intellectuals, and entrepreneurs. . . . Emboldened activists, artists, and entrepreneurs seized the moment, and a long-suppressed civil society movement emerged" (Salamandra and Stenberg 2015: 5).

Many of the youth we interviewed were children or early teens at the revolution's start and so were too young to have formed their own political opinions or to have been actively engaged. In certain cases, they supported the revolution even then through online activities, or they emulated older siblings who became increasingly active. Those in their teens had often been politically active over several years, and many of these stayed in Syria as long as possible, refusing to abandon their homes. For instance, quite a few of our interlocutors remained in Aleppo until it fell to government forces. Among the older interviewees, a significant number claimed that they were continuing their support for the revolution in various ways in exile.

However, other youth in our study were reluctant to talk about politics, as they reported being surveilled both by Syrian regime supporters living in Turkey and by the Turkish security forces, who clamped down on dissent regarding Turkey's military operations in northern Syria starting in 2016. One activist we interviewed remarked,

> I personally received threats, I have been asked to remain silent, or I will be silenced by force. It was delivered by Syrian friends who had connections with the security department. They mentioned that they were giving me a warning: either you become silent, or they will resolve things their way. . . . It feels as if I am living in Aleppo in 2011. Back then, we were able to protest and run away, while here we cannot even open our mouth.

Fear of being reported clearly led some youth to engage in self-censorship, even during our interviews. Others, however, expressed their continuing active engagement, even if they did so in quite general terms.

Still others expressed initial support for the revolution and expectations of change but also disillusionment with the way that political options subsequently disintegrated. For some, this meant abandoning their expectations even while in Syria. As one young man from a rural area of Aleppo province, living in Mardin at the time of the interview, remarked,

> At first, the revolution was for all and on the right path, I joined it at the beginning. Then the extremists came and ruined everything, so I left everything and stayed at home and worked on the land with my family.

Another young man who was working in a textile factory in Adana deplored the way that, according to him, revolutionary values had disintegrated:

I care about Syrian people, and I wish them goodness. I believe that the rev-
olution was for the sake of people, not to harm people. People came together
from different sects and ethnicities. Arabs, Kurds, members of opposition and
supporters. In my eyes, the revolution now has taken a different direction. It
seems that now it is only representing a specific group of Syrian people against
the rest of Syria.

For others, their engagement in revolutionary activities while still in
Syria, especially those caught in the siege of Aleppo, kept them too busy to
think, and they began reconsidering their previous expectations only after
arriving in Turkey. For instance, one young woman working at an inter-
national NGO remarked, "When I was in Syria, especially after the crisis,
revolution, or war—different names. This concept changed in my eyes. Be-
fore moving here it was a revolution for me, but after I started working here
it became a crisis that I am dealing with." She told us that she had since
become apolitical, concerned only with helping refugees recover from what
the war had done to them.

Some, such as two young men we interviewed in Istanbul, expressed
anger at those who had put their hopes in reform. Both were nineteen years
old at the time we spoke to them, and, before arriving in Turkey, they had
endured two years of siege in Aleppo. While the first young man, Musa,
commented, "We had a very nice life before the revolution," his friend
Hashem interrupted to say, "It's not called a 'revolution'; it's called 'sabo-
tage.' Sabotage by the two sides." Musa then agreed with him, commenting,
"We had more freedom before the revolution." Hashem concluded, "It's a
conspiracy that happened, and we can do nothing."

In sum, the expansion of higher education, limited economic reform
that enabled some foreign investment, and limited freedoms that seemed
to encourage civil society also produced raised expectations in the imme-
diate prerevolution period. This happened, however, in the context of a
"youth bulge" in which expectations already conflicted with the realities of
high unemployment and an education system that did not prepare youth
for a global economy. In addition to youth's own expectations, however,
were also the expectations that society had of them. Understanding how
youth have responded in exile requires that we also think about the status of
"youth" as a category in Syrian society both before and after the war.

## Youth and Preparation for the Future

We first met Omaya in the apartment she shared with another young
woman who, like Omaya, was studying in the Arabic-language engineering
program of Mardin Artuklu University. Both of them had left their fami-
lies in other parts of Turkey to live and study in the small city of Mardin,

near the Syrian border. According to the mores and expectations of prewar Syria, this was unusual, and we questioned the young women about it:

> *Interviewer*: Girls, I didn't ask you if it was hard for your parents to let you come here.
> *Omaya:* It was hard for sure!
> *Interviewer*: But they accepted!
> *Omaya*: Why did they accept? Because all the Turks are sending their children to study! So, they strongly accepted this point!
> *Woman 2*: They integrated with the Turkish people from this point.
> *Omaya*: They got used to these mores!
> *Interviewer*: Maybe it can't be done in Syria but here it happens.
> *Woman 2*: Yes, yes. . . . In Syria, it was rare that a guy or a girl leaves their home city to study. They [parents] were not accepting to allow the girls to go to study in other cities. Maybe it was a bit better for the boys.
> *Omaya*: We got used to things like this [studying in other cities], as it is the ninth year that we have been living here, so it got easier for us.
> *Interviewer*: Maybe some Syrians didn't think that these things can exist in Syria, and because of this situation they changed. Maybe there are other thoughts that have changed, too, like your roles as women. What has changed?
> *Woman 2*: Now you find most of the girls–like the age of getting married is higher a bit. Now you see a girl who is thirty years old, and she refuses to marry! Because she could find a job opportunity, she doesn't accept a normal life! Or even you feel that there is no problem for the boy to marry a girl his age or a bit older! So, you see that this thing changed a bit! At the same time, you see other people marry off their children, so these children don't continue their education! [The children] are working at a young age, and the parents make them get married when they're eighteen or nineteen years old! They say, "He is working for a long time."

We see from this snippet of conversation the expectations of family involvement in youth life plans and both the difficulties and opportunities that youth face in conditions of exile. As we discuss below, for some youths, this loss of moral anchors produced confusion. Particularly in later chapters, we discuss how for other youths, this offered the opportunity to renegotiate conditions of "normality" with their families. As one of the women above remarked, some young Syrian women in Turkey were choosing to postpone marriage or refusing to accept spouses arranged by their families. "Because she could find a job opportunity," one of the women above remarks, "she doesn't accept a normal life!" "Normal" here may be seen to stand for mores and expectations that existed in prewar Syria.

Anthropologically speaking, youth is a life stage of preparation and transition that is marked differently in every culture. Youths prepare themselves for the rights and responsibilities associated with adulthood, even as they do

not yet have the social recognition of full adults. In prewar Syrian society, full adulthood tended to be conferred on those who had married and started a family, with education and employment being markers on the way to that. Nevertheless, dependence on parents can extend even into the period of marriage, particularly in cases where one does not have the resources to afford a separate household, or where establishing a separate household is not the norm.

As we remarked in the introduction, the literature on forced migration has only recently begun to give attention to this significant generational category. In one of the first works examining refugee youth comparatively, Dawn Chatty (2010: loc. 170) noted that in previous studies, there had been an implicit assumption that all children everywhere pass through the same stages of development and a failure to see that in many cultures "the category of adolescent was not recognized and individuals as young as twelve or thirteen were sometimes expected to take on the roles and responsibilities of adults." Prewar Syrian culture did have a category of youth and norms for youth behavior, even if in some economically stressed or rural households the responsibilities of adulthood may have come early. More relevant to our study is Chatty's observation that such studies of older refugee children and youth have primarily employed concepts of mental health and trauma that derive from psychology and that "[t]he egocentric focus of concerns common in much Western psychiatry is . . . often at odds with the community-centric focus of the lives of many youth in other cultures" (2010: loc. 188).

In other words, in all the interviews that we conducted, the expectations of who Syrian youth would become and the sorts of lives they would live were inseparable from family and community and the love and responsibilities that those entail. Utilizing Sharika Thiranagama's (2013) complex description of youth in wartime Sri Lanka, we describe here norms in which selves are neither individualistic nor collective but where individuation, or the process of becoming separate persons, also places importance on the relational aspects of the self, as selves are shaped through family and society. Almost all of the youth with whom we spoke emphasized this integration of self and community, or the importance of family, community, and place–village, city, neighborhood–to maintaining a sense of self. In that process, older siblings, parents, and grandparents are accepted guides as one makes life choices that will affect not only oneself as an individual, but also the family unit.

Many studies show that, particularly upon first arriving in Turkey, some families, especially from rural areas, attempted to maintain control by marrying off their children at a young age. There were also reports at the time of impoverished families taking bridewealth from Turkish suitors to marry their young daughters. The young women, Omaya and her flatmate with whom we spoke, reported cases even in their own families:

*Omaya*: Especially in the first days when we came from Syria to Turkey, they married off their girls to Turkish people. Even the boys! Normally it happens that they marry off their young girls, but now it happens also for the boys. For example, my cousin got married, and he was thirteen years old! They are kids! They still cry. . . .

*Woman 2*: Probably the reason that the family is fearing that their children might join a political faction.[2] As you know, there were many factions in this time, so they don't want to face any problems. They think that by marrying off the son, he will just concentrate on taking care of his home. So, the situation is strongly affecting the kids.

The reference to joining political factions refers to the fear of youth radicalization, which studies in the first years of Syrian displacement reported as a problem in Turkey, particularly in border regions. On the other hand, the same woman whose thirteen-year-old cousin was married off by his family remarks that by the time of our interview her own parents allowed her to move to another city for university because she had already been working for so many years and that, additionally, she had no plans to get married anytime in the near future.

*Omaya* I am twenty-eight years old, and when I think that I will marry one day . . . it is a responsibility! . . . I am not a young girl, but it is so hard for me now to marry! Accepting the idea of getting married is much harder for me than when I was younger.

Moreover, she observed, her parents themselves had changed and had become more concerned about her education than about her marriage.

These are retrospective observations regarding change, but they still tell us much about what expectations of "normality" had been before displacement. For the young women with whom we spoke, the transformation in expectations had led their families to let them study wherever they found a place and to consider marrying late. However, many young men, especially, had to travel alone to Turkey and lost the guidance that would have helped them direct their lives, both morally and in terms of planning.

Quite a few of our interlocutors observed, for instance, that the dispersal of those people who would have guided youth had affected the behavior of young men particularly. One young man from a middle-class Damascus family who was working at a company in Istanbul when we met him complained about young Syrians behaving impolitely or disrespectfully to their Turkish colleagues and neighbors and so giving Syrians a bad name. When we asked what he saw as the reasons for this behavior, he commented,

I think that happens because some Syrians do not have guidance here, unlike how it was in Syria, where they were guided by parents until they get married or even after that. Some Syrian young men who do not live with their families

> here think that they are not observed by their parents anymore, so they can
> do whatever they like here.

One of the fundamental assumptions of processes of individuation, then, was that family and community would be anchors and guides for one's future projects. In other words, "normal lives" were ones where youth could expect that anchor to continue into the future. Many youth express the loss of that guidance as a form of disorientation.

We see, then, that war and displacement did not destroy family and community as anchors but transformed them, in the process creating uncertainties among many youth about how to orient their future lives. Steven Lubkemann (2008: 11) has argued that studies of war should pay attention to "the reconfiguration of the social fields within which culturally scripted life projects are enabled." While most of the youth in our study expressed a disorienting sense of loss of social scripts to guide them, still others viewed their arrival in Turkey as a personal gain, often presenting opportunities that would not have been available to them if they had stayed in their home country. In some cases, they experienced this as a sense of freedom, for instance when young women commented that they would have had no opportunity in their home town in Syria to choose whether or not to wear the hijab. In other cases, they found opportunities, such as university study, that would not have been available to them or would have been more difficult in Syria. In those cases of opportunity, gain seemed to balance or even outweigh loss. In such instances of gain, there was effort made to learn Turkish and to integrate, as these youth saw their futures in Turkey, or potentially in another country beyond Turkey, but not in their home country.

## Conclusion

Alma, a young Syrian mother in her midtwenties, today lives in a small apartment in the center of Istanbul with her husband and daughter, who was three years old at the time we visited them. Originally from the city of Idlib, in northwest Syria, both Alma and her husband Ihsan were outspoken activists in the revolution calling for change and a better future. Their activism had put them and their families in extreme danger as targets of the Syrian regime. Like millions of young Syrians, either those who actively took part in the revolution or those who took a silent stance, Alma and Ihsan sought refuge in Turkey for the promise of a safe and more stable future. "We had to leave because of the regime," she told us, "Otherwise they would kill us or imprison the men and women then deport them. That's why we had to leave to live a normal life like humans, like our former life conditions."

In this brief summary of the reasons for their flight, we see the "legacy of raised expectations" (Salamandra and Stenberg 2015: 5) that began with

the death of Hafez al-Assad and replacement by his seemingly milder son, Bashar. We see how these raised expectations led to what James Ferguson (1999: 19) described as an "ethos of hopefulness," a phrase he uses to explain the despair of his Zambian interlocutors at their country's economic decline. "What had been lost with the passing of this era, it seemed, was not simply the material comforts and satisfactions that it provided but the sense of legitimate expectation that had come with them—a certain ethos of hopefulness, self-respect, and optimism that, many seemed sure, was now . . . simply 'gone, gone never to return again.'" The sense of legitimate expectation, and the optimism and hope that accompanied it, were central to Alma and Ihsan's struggle until the moment that they realized they could no longer have expectations.

The next chapter explores the moment when expectations are lost, life overturned, and one must act in anticipation. Anticipation, as we will see, is a way of fast-forwarding into the future, either to bring about a hoped-for outcome or to prevent an unwanted one. Syrian youth and their families fled across the Turkish border when there was no other chance, and we will see how so many young Syrians have struggled to create possibility and hope from uncertainty. They have aimed at again being able to expect—or as Alma expressed it, "to live a normal life like humans, like our former life conditions."

## Notes

1. See, e.g., "Syrian Arab Republic." *UN Women Watch*. Retrieved 23 December 2023 from https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/Review/responses/SYRIAN-ARAB-REPUBLIC-English.pdf.
2. She refers here not to political parties in the institutionalized sense but rather to radicalization by political or religious factions to the conflict.

# 2

# Anticipation
## Uprooting and Unsettling

━━━━━━

> The huge lorry was carrying them along the road, together with their dreams, their families, their hopes and ambitions, their misery and despair, their strength and weakness, their past and future, as if it were pushing against the immense door to a new, unknown destiny, and all eyes were fixed on the door's surface as though bound to it by invisible threads.
>
> —Ghassan Kanafani, *Men in the Sun*

> I felt that I was running away from death. When I reached the Turkish borders, when the smuggler said that we are in Turkey, you can't believe how fast my heart was beating. I felt safe.
>
> —Razia, thirty-two years old, a mother in Izmir

Ghassan Kanafani's *Men in the Sun* is considered a key piece of modern Arabic literature. In it, Kanafani describes the exploitation and humiliation of Palestinian refugees at the borders of Arab countries in the 1960s. His tale of three Palestinian men in search of a better future who ultimately meet a tragic end illustrates the ways in which so many refugees fleeing life-threatening circumstances face other forms of misery and hardship on their way to safer destinations. In the scene depicted in this chapter's epigraph, Kanafani portrays the border as a space on the distant horizon, across the scorching heat of the desert, a destination that also represents their destiny.

Kanafani's image of the border as a door to the future epitomizes what Rebecca Bryant and Daniel Knight (2019) describe as "thresholds of anticipation," in which the present is a liminal space leading one to an imminent future that one imagines and anticipates. "A threshold," they note, "implies both the imminence of the future and the idea of pressing forward into it, potentially crossing into it" (2019: 35). Moreover, as Bryant and Knight's historical and ethnographic examples show, mass displacement tends to be predicated on fears of impending danger and loss—not a horizon of expecta-

tion but a threat that appears on one's doorstep (2019: 35). One crosses that threshold into a presumably new space of time, one that radically reorients past and present. Bryant and Knight give the example of partitioning projects that created borders and exchanged populations across them in a violent rending of peoples that was predicated on the anticipation of violence. For Kanafani's Palestinian protagonists, the border is an "immense door" representing a "new, unknown destiny." It represents, then, not only a space that they physically cross but also a new time in which they anticipate having a future (Agier 2016).

This chapter explores borders as both spatial and temporal thresholds where we anticipate, reorient, and attempt to control the future during moments of abrupt change. Not only is flight from one's home a major upheaval in individuals' lives, but the moment of border crossing is a defining event in the experience of uprooted populations. It is the moment where individuals pass from citizens of one country to refugees or asylum seekers in another, altering their identities and sense of stability and belonging (Haddad 2007). Border crossings are also significant in the material and psychological impact that they have on refugees, as their material and psychological well-being determine the lives that they are to build in the host country and the future that they anticipate living there. While border crossing is an actual lived experience in the present to ensure survival, it may also be a pivotal moment in allowing individuals to redefine themselves and their futures (Khosravi 2010). This is even more true in the case of refugee youth, who are still in the process of defining their future lives and selves at the moment of flight. Border crossing, then, becomes a turning point where they must reorient their hopes and dreams while foreseeing and planning a life ahead in a condition of uncertainty.

In this chapter, we see their attempts to find paths for themselves in times of upheaval as a form of navigation (Vigh 2008, 2009a) or wayfaring (Ingold 2011). Henrik Vigh uses the concept of social navigation to refer to the ways that individual movement and change intersect with social movement and change. In particular, he is interested in how people make choices regarding their lives in times of chronic crisis. The term, then, "highlights motion within motion; it is the act of moving in an environment that is wavering and unsettled" (2009a: 420). In the descriptions of the young Syrians with whom we spoke, their environment in their homeland often appears simply chaotic: neighborhoods and villages bombed, lives and livelihoods lost, safety always on the horizon but never quite reachable. They describe making choices in conditions of both existential and epistemic uncertainty–both the uncertainty of what one cannot control and the uncertainty of what one does not know.

In recent years, anthropology has understandably attempted to move away from descriptions of violence and crisis as eruptions into an otherwise

harmonious present and to take seriously the idea that for many people around the world crisis is chronic, a way of life rather than an eruption into it (Knight 2021; Vigh 2008). It is also important, however, to take seriously our interlocutors' descriptions of the shock and disruption entailed by sudden violence. In almost all of our interviews, young people described normal, stable lives in the time before and attempts to hold onto or regain those lives as chaos descended. Certainly, we see in these young people's stories of serial displacement and learning to live with aerial bombardment how what begins as an eruption can become normalized. Henrik Vigh (2009a: 422) notes that "chronic social crisis creates an unsettled social orientation and awareness that is hyper-attentive to real and imaginary stimuli," and we see this in the stories of these young people's flights. But we also see how young people determine to move beyond it, to return to the "normality" they knew before. In this sense, Tim Ingold's description of wayfaring helps us understand how the paths that people create for themselves move them toward new futures. "Proceeding along a path," Ingold notes, "every inhabitant lays a trail. Where inhabitants meet, trails are entwined, as the life of each becomes bound with the other" (2011: 148). Moreover, "every entwining is a knot"–and we would add to this that such knots become handholds as one feels toward the future.

Crucially, both navigating and wayfaring rely on the futural orientation of anticipation. Whereas, as we saw in chapter 1, expectation involves the future coming toward us, to anticipate is to be pulled in the direction of the not-yet. "Unlike expectation, anticipation specifically contains the sense of thrusting or pressing forward, where the past is called upon in this movement toward the future" (Bryant and Knight 2019: 28). When one anticipates, one steers a path in conditions of uncertainty, where expectation is on hold. One casts a line into the future, which in our case is across a border that is itself unknown and that leads to the unknown. One does this, however, based on the resources at hand, which include knowledge of what has gone before.

This chapter, then, shows the ways the young people in our study found paths for themselves that left trails and entwined them with other people and other places. Of course, as we see below, the paths that people find for themselves vary both in the magnitude of exposure to violence and in the material means available to facilitate crossing and settlement. In tracing these paths, we look first at the moment of flight or the anticipations of violence that led to uprooting. We then turn to how they anticipated the border crossing itself, and how such anticipations shaped the routes and means of flight. That section further describes how the decisions that refugees make at the moment of border crossing in terms of their destination are attempts to introduce a sense of normality and stability in the face of looming uncertainty. Finally, we examine the immediate means that refugees used

to determine their routes, particularly knowledge gained from family and friends.

What becomes clear is how the need to anticipate so often fractures families and isolates individuals, but also how it relies on pre-existing connections and how it creates new relations of obligation. Anticipation is based on the past, on previous experiences that teach us both the meaning of certain signs and how to react to them. When people choose to flee, it is often not because they are literally running from danger in that moment but because they have reason to believe–based on what has happened to neighbors, people in another district, or to people like them in the past–that danger is approaching. Moreover, *how* we anticipate, the path we take, is often shaped by social relations. If the term "path dependence" describes the ways that past choices and actions determine the present, we may think of the way that relations shape anticipation as "path emergence." In a condition where all seems unclear, certain paths emerge as thin lines of connection across time and distance. Those paths may later truncate, or they may branch into pathways to new futures.

## Anticipation, Violence, and Displacement

> I am from Homs. I was very happy in my home. I was still single and then war happened, and we moved from one area to another, and we suffered a lot during the war. From one area to another. You lost people, you lost your money and home, your land and cars. One suffers a lot, to the extent that in the last period we lived in tents, not a house where there is a roof over your head. We were living in tents, and we heard that there are work opportunities in Turkey, that there is safety and stability. That no one tells you go away, come and go . . . no, no . . . there is freedom for Syrian citizens in Turkey, and so we came. We crossed by smuggling, and we passed through difficult areas.

At the time of our interview in 2018, Amal had been in Turkey for one year. The war had truncated her studies, and she had not finished high school, despite having ambitions to go to university like her siblings and become a lawyer. Although she was unmarried when their displacement within Syria began, she later married and had a small child. She explained how she made the trip across the border illegally with her husband, mother-in-law, and baby, using smugglers. They went first to Sakarya, a city to the east of Istanbul, where her husband had a cousin who had already been in Turkey for five years and who helped them get an identity card. She did not want to describe her trip across the border, which she only said was "very, very difficult." She described in detail, however, how her husband's cousin immediately found a house for them.

> We came here, and his cousin rented a house for us. He said that his Turkish neighbor had a house. He said the house is in your name, and we rented it. And we came and found this house. And someone would bring a carpet and another a pillow, and when I entered my home, I found the only thing missing was appliances. The only thing missing was to buy food. At first, there was not a fridge or a washing machine because it was new and despite this, I would say "thank God." The last period in Syria was very difficult for me. And I said, "thank God." Yes, it is a house with power and water.

There are several elements of Amal's story that are worth examining more closely. The first is that, like so many of our interviewees, crossing the border was intended as an *end* to anticipation. Amal describes how she and her small family were first serially displaced within Syria, gradually losing everything that they had until they were left destitute in a tent. Fleeing across the border was not something that they had considered, particularly because the border closure after 2016 meant that they needed to use a smuggler and take a particularly dangerous route. Like the men in Kanafani's truck, however, there seemed to be a threshold, the border, beyond which there was safety, stability, freedom, and work. There was the possibility of a "normal life," meaning one where "no one tells you go away, come and go." There seemed, in other words, to be a threshold beyond which they would not need constantly to anticipate violence.

Hence, while Amal's anticipatory act–crossing the border–is preemptive, a response to repeated violence and serial displacement, it is also an attempt to step into a new future, one where expectation, rather than anticipation, will be the norm. This is what Rebeccca Bryant (2012: 339) calls a "threshold of anticipation," which "implies crossing into another space of time and a radical reorientation" of the present and future. While the threshold that Bryant discusses is metaphorical, we see here how border crossing becomes a literal threshold of anticipation, one in which Amal will enter a new temporality that will not be defined by constant anticipation and movement. She will be able to settle down, to have a real home "with power and water"–a time of everyday life rather than a time of war.

The idea that crossing the border would be a step into such a new temporality emerged again and again in our interviews. Kamal, for instance, was fifteen years old and living in the eastern countryside of the Aleppo district when his family decided to flee because of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) taking control of the region.

> I came with my sisters, father, and mother. Part of the family came and a part stayed there. I came first with my sisters. We went to Istanbul in the beginning. The reason was to study and the situation in Syria made it not possible to live there. I left four years ago. I left because . . . there is no specific reason apart from living under ISIS control. There was no life, and we wanted just to

go, and we did not have details about what there is elsewhere. We just wanted relief.

For many of the young people with whom we spoke, leaving the country was not only about safety but also or primarily about having a future. In many cases, this was because studying had become impossible and finding work very difficult in the regions of Syria where they were living.

Asil for instance, was a middle school student in al-Raqqa when the revolution began, splitting his family over politics. While Asil and his brothers supported the revolution, their father had a government position and a loyalty to the Ba'ath regime. Eventually, their father "defected" to their side, fleeing with his sons to the countryside. Asil and his brothers worked with the Free Army until ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra overtook al-Raqqa in 2014. After more than two years of being unable to attend school, Asil gathered enough money to flee to Turkey, leaving his parents behind. At the time of our interview, he had not seen them for three years.

> I left to Khurbat Al-Joz, I tried seventeen times to cross the border, and the eighteenth time I made it to Turkey. I entered here and came directly to Istanbul. I went to my brother, and on the second day he took me to the Emniyet [security] to tell them that I just arrived and so they should register me. I stayed one month in his house, then I renewed all my information, and he took me to the school. I did a proficiency exam; I went to the school in the second semester. Finally, I finished high school.

For young people such as Asil or Kamal, the only way to plan for a future was through stepping into a new timespace where education could be an expectation.

Of course, for many other youths, the moment of flight was a preemptive act, one in which they escaped from anticipated violence. Yahya, for instance, was fourteen years old and living in Aleppo when the revolution began. Because his neighborhood was known for its regime support, the Syrian Free Army attacked it. "They attacked this place by mortar shells, artillery and gas tanks. When it was exploding, the buildings were falling over our heads. So, we fled from the bombardment! Me and all my family." They fled first to another part of Aleppo but found that some property owners were exploiting the situation to demand high rents. They paid to be smuggled through the lines of warring forces to their home village to the west of Aleppo. Soon his brother saved enough money to cross into Turkey, and a year later Yahya followed. "We just wanted to escape from the warring factions," he remarked.

The largest number of refugees in Turkey is from the Aleppo region, which borders Turkey. For many, all roads led to their northern neighbor. For Dawood, who was a high school student in Aleppo at the time the revolution began, there were no other choices.

It was a period when there were very violent bombings in Aleppo. At the beginning my family went to the Syrian army areas. They could go, but I stayed about one month–until it became too hard. My mother couldn't arrange for me to stay more, so we traveled to Turkey, because it was the closest to Aleppo. From where we were in Aleppo, the roads were all open toward Turkey.

We see, then, that while youth and their families anticipated violence and took preemptive action in fleeing across the border, that border represented not only safety but the opportunity to escape from the need constantly to anticipate. It was, then, not only a perceived place of safety but also a new space of time, a threshold that would allow them to step out of a time of conflict that had stalled their lives and begin to plan for the future. Navigating toward that future, however, would require other forms of anticipation that would shape their new lives as subjects of the Turkish state and as persons entangled in social relationships.

## Interpellation and Iteration at the Border

In an article exploring the act of border crossing as a form of anticipation, Stef Jansen (2015b) compares his experiences crossing the Netherlands–Belgium border as a child with crossing the Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia border in the company of local colleagues following the Yugoslav wars. While in the former case his family had driven across with no attention to the border as a line, in the second case, he and his colleagues had taken a long detour to avoid a particular border crossing where they anticipated that there would be trouble. "In practice," he remarks, "we encounter this state system as a structural effect through real and imagined interactions" that are "at least partly grounded in our own or vicarious previous experiences of interpellating border interactions" (2015b: 154). By "interpellating" here, he refers to Louis Althusser's argument that we emerge as subjects in the moment that we respond to the "call" of the state. Through anticipation–or in the Netherlands–Belgium case, non-anticipation–of border regimes and border practices, "we emerge as particular, unequal subjects" (2015b: 155).

For some of the young men with whom we spoke, displacement did not happen all at once but was an iterative process. Until 2014, it was relatively easy for Syrians to cross the border, and often families chose to send young men as emissaries–as well as, presumably, to distance them from the risk of recruitment into the Syrian military or militias. These young men would test the water, looking for jobs or trying to find a place where their families would be able to settle. Ihsan, whom we met at a community center in Gaziantep, remarked:

> In the beginning–in 2012, 2013, 2014–crossing the borders was very, very easy. I mean, to an insane degree. I would leave in the morning to my job in Syria and return at night to Turkey. Leave in the morning and return at night. Borders were very easy. The Turkish government made it very easy. There was no strict checking, and the way they treated us was very nice in the beginning. Later, even regarding the official papers and permissions ordeal, Syrians were excused from all of that; they didn't bother us. Even if I didn't have my identity card or my passport, that didn't matter, they would just make sure that I am Syrian and living here, and they wouldn't bother me.

In this case, Ihsan retained his work in Syria but crossed the border to stay in Turkey, where he was helping to establish residence so that he could bring his family.

For Zeyad, whom we met managing a shop in Izmir, the draw was initially to find work. He had completed the ninth grade but had to leave Aleppo and his school there for safety reasons, taking refuge in his family's ancestral village. There, he struggled:

> The place that I was living in is a village. And there was no job opportunity. After a certain time, the money that we saved was almost depleted, and I was forced to find a place to work. We heard about many of my friends who came to Turkey who could start a business and build a business. So, we said we should go, also, why not!

He crossed the border illegally then, staying in a house with thirteen other young men and looking for work. He stayed for less than a month before returning to Syria. He only returned again to Turkey when his father found a Turkish partner for their small garment factory and moved the entire enterprise across the border.

Salih, a young Syrian originally from Aleppo, crossed the border to Turkey alone in 2012 with his passport and settled in Mersin with his uncle prior to moving to Adana, where he works at an international organization. While he mentioned that the conditions of his crossing at the time were less restricted, his family members still in Aleppo need to seek a longer route should they choose to travel to Turkey, due to stricter entry requirements for Syrians:

> It has become difficult because now a visa is required. We live in the city of Aleppo; it is very hard for us to enter Turkey now. We normally go to Lebanon, then take a plane to come here legally. . . . I came here by car. There was nothing like that when I came. I entered with my passport, like I was traveling. Then the bombs went off . . .

Salih's experience is shared by most firstcomers who crossed the Syrian-Turkish borders at earlier stages of the conflict.

Sumbul, a university student originally from Aleppo, had come with her family to Turkey in 2011 as protests were gradually emerging in various Syrian cities. She explains the ease with which Syrians were able to cross from and to Turkey for the first few years after 2011:

> We came to Turkey seven years ago, in 2011, just as the war was starting. We came illegally, and we came back and forth annually between Syria and Turkey until 2014. I came with my family straight to Mersin. My father is a trader, so his job never stopped between Turkey and Syria.

While these iterative and exploratory crossings were possible early in the conflict, the arrival of ISIS into northern Syria caused Turkey to tighten border restrictions, especially following terrorist incidents in the country in 2016. After this time, "legality" and "illegality" take on importance in the ways that Syrian youth describe their crossings. It should be noted that smuggling occurred even before this time for those who had no papers. Faiz, for instance, had already been living in Izmir for six years when we met him. He had crossed into Turkey with his parents and siblings in the first wave of 2012 with only the clothes on their backs.

> When the incidents started, we were smuggled into Turkey. I came in 2012–I think it was in December. The [Turkish] government arrested us when we crossed the border, and we stayed there [at the border] for six hours. They were so hospitable! They didn't say anything to us. For sure, this was in 2012! They were very good with us. It was in the winter and the weather was cold. They offered us tea and asked us if we were hungry. And there were translators because at that time we didn't know Turkish. In the end, after six hours, they let us go. They knew that we didn't make problems before, we just escaped from the war.

Even in 2014, many youths reported using smugglers but crossing relatively easily. We had met with Razia at a community center for refugee women and children in Izmir, where she worked to help children suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Razia is originally from Aleppo and recounted her experience of arriving in Turkey with the help of smugglers in 2014:

> Four years ago, we came illegally–were smuggled. We didn't have passports, but the journey was very easy. I didn't face any difficulties. Now I think people are facing a lot of difficulties, but I didn't. At the time, there were two smugglers, one was Syrian and the second was Turkish. They were in contact with each other, and they managed to cover a hole in the ground with a big steel cover. They then asked us to go through, and I did, and that was it.

Not long after Razia's experience, however, restrictions tightened, with reported pushbacks beginning after Turkey's first military intervention into

northern Syria in 2016. After that date, many Syrians attempting to cross had experiences so awful that they did not want to discuss them. For instance, Belal, whom we met in Mardin, had been a student at Aleppo University when the revolution began. He crossed the border in 2015, after restrictions had already hardened. Like Razia, he would only say, "I suffered so much. The smugglers were bad; the way was hard; they use people; and it was a bad experience."

Human smuggling is by definition a form of exploitation that in an era of mass migration has become what Ruben Andersson (2014b) calls an "illegality industry." It is this industry, Andersson illustrates, that not only makes the immigrant illegal but also "produces what it is meant to eliminate, curtail, or transform—more migrant illegality" (2014b: 8). Andersson's work is part of a broader body of ethnographic literature that has turned its gaze from the category of the illegal migrant to the states and institutions that produce illegality. Taking a cue from philosopher Ian Hacking, Andersson is interested in how the "ways of classifying human beings interact with the human beings who are classified" (Hacking 1999: 10, quoted in Andersson 2014b: 16).

The effects of categorization have long been discussed in refugee studies literature, particularly with regard to how "the refugee" and "refugeehood" are produced (Scheel and Squire 2014; Zetter 1991; also Demetriou 2018; Scaletarris 2007). Beginning with Roger Zetter's pathbreaking work, much of this literature has been concerned with "how an identity is formed, transformed and manipulated within the context of public policy and especially, bureaucratic practices" (Zetter 1991: 40; see also Gill and Good 2019; Willen 2007a, 2007b). This has largely concerned the experience of adopting such an identity in order to conform to the demands of asylum bureaucracies and other institutions.

As Shahram Khosravi (2010) emphasizes, however, much of this identity is already shaped in the act of border crossing. What Amitava Kumar (2000) calls "the shame of arrival" is the moment of interpellation, the moment one anticipates how the state one waits to enter will react to one's documents or lack of them. "A legal journey is regarded as an honourable act in the spirit of globalism and cosmopolitanism," Khosravi remarks (2007: 331). On the other hand, "the border transgressor is seen as anti-aesthetic and anti-ethical (they are called 'illegal' and are criminalised)." Shame, in Khosravi's description, is something that "illegal" migrants internalize even long after entry into a country, perhaps even after they have become "legal."

Indeed, youth were eager to discuss the illegality or legality of their entry and their presence in Turkey. Many described how the struggle to acquire a legal identity had shaped years of their lives. Zuher, for instance, described how it led to further educational limbo, on top of the delays he had experienced in Syria:

> Because of the war, I lost like two or three years in school; I stopped my stud-
> ies against my will. If I had entered Turkey with a passport and legal papers, I
> would have applied to university and entered university straight away. But be-
> cause I entered illegally–I fled because of the revolution. So this lasted about
> three years until we were able to resume studying in Turkey in a legal way.

The label "illegal," which refugees adopt in their narratives, already antic-
ipatorily interpellates them in relation to the Turkish state and shapes their
future actions and movements. In particular, it interpellates them as subjects
in a less legitimate position to ask for assistance, as they "failed" to enter
through the proper legal routes and to provide the necessary documentation
and proof of the need to be protected. As we will see in subsequent chapters,
"illegality" at the moment of border crossing means that refugees cannot
leave anticipation at the threshold but must instead continue to anticipate in
regard to schools, employers, and the Turkish bureaucracy.

## Path Emergence: Finding Routes amid Uncertainty

In public discourse, there is usually a dichotomy presented between "vol-
untary" and "forced" migration, or between "refugees" and "economic mi-
grants," in their immediate reasons for departure. Migration scholarship, in
turn, shows how refugees exercise various forms of agency at the moment
of displacement–how refugees may also have economic motivations or how
so-called economic migrants may be fleeing conditions that cannot sustain
life (Khosravi 2010; Mainwaring 2016; Piipponen and Virkkunen 2020;
Van Liempt and Doomernik 2006). The most determinative form of agency
exercised by refugees is through decisions made during border crossing and
in the choice of destination–the if, the when, the how, and the where. These
decisions are forms of anticipatory action shaped by personal capital, past
experiences and the availability of information or lack thereof regarding
the destination of choice. It is through such anticipatory choices that paths
emerge, branching into new futures.

We remarked in the previous chapter that both resilience and aspirations
were shaped by the various forms of capital at refugees' disposal. In the mo-
ment of border crossing, we see how refugees use these forms of capital to
introduce a sense of familiarity to their journey and to reduce uncertainty,
enabling paths to emerge. One of the most common of these was social cap-
ital, or networks of family and friends, which all the young refugees in our
study employed to some degree.

Motaz's story is typical of this. He arrived in Turkey in early 2013, when
entry was still easy, after first having fled from Damascus to Lebanon. One
of the main reasons he booked a flight to Istanbul was that many of his
friends had gone there and were living in the Fatih neighborhood.

I don't have people that I know in other cities, for example in Izmir and so on. I know one in Izmir, one in Mersin, and so on. But in Istanbul, most people are here so whatever happens I will have people here who will tell me what to do.

Taim, too, related how although they had no relatives in Gaziantep, his family encouraged him to go there because of acquaintances:

I do not know, but my family were, like, go to Antep . . . go to Antep because there was a huge number . . . We had acquaintances, but they were not going to host me or something . . . but maybe there are people who might help you. For example, the brother of my sister's friend might help you find a job and so on. So, I found a job in a clothing store that way.

For others, such networks were ways of navigating new opportunities. When we asked Pasha why his family had settled in Mersin, he replied at first, "We haven't decided at all. We boarded the ship, got to Mersin, and stayed here. There is Taşucu Port, in Silifke, we went off the ship there. The closest city was Mersin, so we went there." He then elaborated, however. "We had a connection in Mersin who had rented an apartment for us upon our request, so we went there directly. People that got out (of Syria) one or two months before us." Pasha then went on to remark, "We have connections in every city, because this is war: It tore everyone apart, so we have people everywhere around Turkey. . . . Neighbors, relatives, friends. . . . We talk with or message each other." Pasha indicated, then, that although they settled in Mersin because of an acquaintance, it was random to the extent that it could have been anywhere else in Turkey because of the dispersal of the people they knew.

Migration scholarship has been attentive to the impact of social capital and social kin on the propensity of individuals or groups to migrate and their choice of destination. Although most of this scholarship has focused solely on cases of "voluntary" or economic migration, asylum seekers and refugees also greatly instrumentalize their social capital in choosing destinations (Garip 2008; Singer and Massey 1998). Existing social networks in the country of destination support refugees through the provision of information and knowledge regarding what to expect from the country that they are migrating to. Access to this knowledge consequently introduces a sense of familiarity and reduces the uncertainty and disorder caused by the experience of displacement (Khosravi 2010; Tilly and Brown 1967), helping refugees avoid further possible costs or the risk of being uprooted (Funkhouser and Ramos 1993).

This is prevalent in the experience of Syrian refugees in Turkey. Dunya, a young Syrian university student in Adana, recounted her family's experience when they first entered Turkey and were looking for a place to settle:

> Turks were not accepting Syrians because there were a lot of Syrians here who ruined their houses, so we kept looking for two days, and we didn't find a place to stay until one of our acquaintances pointed us toward Antakya. So we went to Antakya, and he helped us find a house there.

Social networks play a notable role in facilitating migration, particularly in urban settings where the issue of housing can be a major destabilizing factor for refugees. As seen from both Dunya and Pasha's examples, these networks can provide newcomers with either immediate or long-term housing solutions, reducing the need for refugees to interact with either the host community or local bureaucracies (Tilly and Brown 1967).

These networks are indeed essential, particularly at earlier stages of the refugee experience, as they help refugees familiarize themselves with the host country and find paths through uncertainty. Kamal, a young Syrian living in Mardin, had experienced living in numerous Turkish cities prior to settling in that city. His first destination was Istanbul, which he emphasized was only a temporary arrangement until reaching self-sufficiency:

> I had an older brother in Antep before going to Istanbul, but we went to Istanbul because it was only temporary, and we had acquaintances and an apartment to stay. I mean, there were many reasons to go first to Istanbul. Then I decided to move to Antep, which was my personal decision, because I wanted to live in Antep. This decision was related to independence. After that my family moved to Antep as well.

Indeed, the presence of an established social network prior to migration proves to be an important resource that serves to help newcomers navigate through social life in the host community, providing them with information about what to anticipate (Garip 2008). Mustafa, a young Syrian working in the NGO sector in Gaziantep, was among the earlier groups of Syrians in Antep. He describes how he was part of a group of Syrians that worked to assist newcomers arriving to Turkey settle:

> As one of the first arrivals to the city, we started to introduce the new arrivals to the city and inform them about what is acceptable and what is not, where to live and so on. Then the coalition was formed, and we became involved. I was in touch with the opposition representatives. We started to become involved, especially that I have been involved in civil activism myself. I met other people who were involved in Syria Trust, Red Crescent, and other NGOs. We have agreed to establish a small association on a voluntary basis. Also, international friends helped us to start the work.

Mustafa explains how they try to help refugees settle by explaining to them the otherwise opaque law and bureaucracy of their host country.

Social capital, then, becomes a key "facilitating factor" in helping refugees find paths, which themselves then lead to trails intertwined with people

and places. Mustafa further explains that these social networks are crucial in defining the dynamics of social relationships in Turkey:

> Here in Turkey the Syrians built their own communities, as you may have noticed. Like small communities. They integrate with the Turks, but they keep a closed Syrian community. There is integration, but there still is a shell that they leave and return to.

For many, then, the ability to reestablish oneself is highly reliant on recreating a familiar society within the host community as it not only provides refugees with the necessary tools to navigate life, but it also provides them with the sense of familiarity to build on.

These social networks are also important to the economic stability and security of refugees, as these networks can provide access to economic opportunities (Haug 2008). This is particularly the case where refugees have less economic or cultural capital, or fewer skill sets that are appropriate for the economic opportunities available in the host society (Funkhouser and Ramos 1993; Tilly and Brown 1967). We met Hazim and Faiz, two Syrian brothers of Kurdish descent, in their family home, which was situated in a neighborhood in Izmir where mainly Syrians resided. Like Kamal, the brothers also experienced temporary settlement in Gaziantep prior to moving to Izmir. These decisions were mainly driven by information regarding economic opportunities provided by family members who were already in Turkey:

> We came to our relatives in Gaziantep, but they gave us a low salary in Gaziantep, and we didn't know the country. Later, we knew the country better. . . . My uncle had relatives here in Izmir, so they came here because everyone resorts to their personal contacts. Then my uncle called me and explained to me that the salaries are better here. I was working at my relatives' factory, and I was making 150TL weekly. It was like I was working for free. But this was at first. . . . Then we learned [through the uncle] that it's not about money but the value of our efforts. . . . So I came here, and I brought my family, too, and now we're settled down.

Both brothers had come from Syria with only primary level education but were highly skilled in carpentry, which was their profession back in Syria. These particular skillsets led them to depend on economic opportunities provided by relatives, most of which are highly precarious:

> His [Faiz] work conditions were great compared to mine. He had an off day. It's true that his salary was low, but he had a holiday, and his work hours were clear, until 6:00 p.m. I worked for four months without a holiday. From 5:00 a.m. until 1:00 a.m. carrying stuff like tomatoes. I lost a lot of weight doing that. . . . I didn't see Gaziantep when we lived there. My workplace was in front of my house. My daily rate was 20TL. I suffered a lot.

We see, then, that networks serve as an important factor refugees rely on to determine their choice of destination in the immediate phase after border crossing. These relations allow refugees to establish a sense of normality and familiarity and often provide them with economic opportunities. In addition to kinship relations, though, ethnic relations and geographical proximity were also important in the ways that young Syrians in Turkey found paths in a new environment.

Many of our interlocutors identified as Kurdish, Turkmen, or Circassian, minority ethnic groups in Syria that have ethnic "kin" in Turkey. In many cases, members of these groups had already experienced some connectivity with their ethnic "kin" across the border before the war (Can 2020). Such connections gave some refugees an alternative to integrating into the host society, which was linguistically foreign to many (Funkhouser and Ramos 1993).

Faiz, who is of Kurdish descent, describes the importance of these historically rooted relationships to the decisions made by Syrian refugees: "We had Turkish relatives [in Turkey]. They were clans one hundred years ago, when there were no borders. In border areas from Qamishli to Gaziantep, all the people who were living there were relatives." Discovering where ethnic "kin" are located pushes some refugees to change their primary destination after becoming more familiar with the cultural diversity in Turkey's other cities. Pasha, a university student in Adana, was originally from a middle-class family of Circassian descent in Damascus. He explained how Circassian ancestry and linguistic capital helped him gradually integrate with the Turkish community in Adana compared to Istanbul, where he first lived:

> Living in Istanbul is quite costly. . . . Studying or working there is hard, people without their family there have a hard time. These types of issues make the situation tough for students. . . . I have a large circle. When we came here, we went to a Circassian Society. Everywhere in the world there are Circassian associations. We looked for it when we came here and went there. I can say that it is the only place where I don't feel like a stranger. I feel comfortable there, so I go there. I made a circle there, lots of friends. My Turkish got a bit better by talking with my friends there. Otherwise, I didn't know it at all.

As in Pasha's case, many youths in our study described relying on these historical or ethnic ties to help them settle, often determining where they settled. Zad, of Turkmen origin, had originally settled in Kilis because of close relatives there but was working in Adana when we met him because of more dispersed Turkmen connections. "My grandfather's family [extended kin] were here," he remarked. "So I came and started here."

Other youth, however, were disappointed that their ethnic "kin" did not help them more upon arrival or welcome them as warmly as expected. For

instance, Sama, in Mardin, remarked, "We moved directly here. We are originally from here, and we have a relative here. That is why we came." When we asked if by "originally" she meant a century ago, she answered, "Yes, something like that."

> We had many relatives here. . . . My mother and father had visited before the war. Our relatives are from the Arab community in Mardin, so they could speak Arabic. When we first came here, they welcomed us for five days and then said "goodbye" [laughing]. After that we rented a house, and we have not seen them since then. Sometimes I see them accidentally in the street, and we have just a "hi" between us.

The experience of not receiving sufficient hospitality from relatives on the other side of the border was a common theme. As one young man, Zuher, living in Izmir, explained, these relatives who had been divided from them by a border had often come to Syria and received their hospitality there:

> They used to come at Eids and other times. They used to come for fifteen days or two weeks a year. They used to stay with us, and it was Latakia, Aleppo, or Damascus, and we used to take them to visit these places and so on. The connection was always there between us; it was not broken ever.

Yet, he expressed disappointment with their hospitality while at the same time excusing it, remarking, "It is true that we have relatives to help us, but no, in Turkey, people can barely make a living and get by, and that's it."

What is common in the experience of these young refugees is a search for familiarity through kinship relations or cultural and ethnic similarities. These help refugees find a community that is similar to their own, even if this means a trade-off between bigger cities with potentially more economic opportunities and smaller ones where they benefit from the cultural proximity of the host community. As Tim Ingold (2011) notes, such choices lay trails, creating new "knots" of entwined relations that become handholds as one reaches toward the future.

## Carving One's Own Path

Although infrequent, there were youth in our study who had the symbolic capital, the degrees and other qualifications, that made Turkey only one among other possible routes to the future for them. Among these, quite a few were young women who insisted on pursuing dreams of higher education. One young woman, Farah, described to us how her older sister had preceded them all in coming to Turkey, because she found a scholarship at a Turkish university. As we mentioned in the introduction, higher education

in Syria has been limited, and many young people who seek a university degree are not able to find a place. Her sister was in such a position: "She wanted to study outside the country because she was not accepted in any university department. My father did not mind; my father's father studied medicine in France. So, he encouraged her. He told her to pack her stuff and leave for Turkey." The sister later met and married a young Syrian man living in Istanbul and sent for her family to join her.

One of the more interesting stories is that of Dalia, who told us, "Since I was young my dream was to finish university and continue in graduate studies, even a doctorate." Yet she came from Daraa, an area of Syria that suffered from some of the most intense fighting.

> Our situation was very difficult. We resisted; it is not easy to leave your country. We resisted for one, two years. I remember many times I would go to school and the gunfire shooting over our head or while we are taking classes, there is gunfire even at home. I remember one time we were sitting at home, and the fence of the home was destroyed, and the bullets came into the house.

Following those experiences, her family got passports and moved to Jordan, where she completed her baccalaureate, or high school leaving certificate. Although she was accepted to a Jordanian university, her family could not afford the expense.

> After that, I stayed at home for one year and then applied for a Turkish scholarship. When my father saw my situation, he told me you can apply to any scholarship you want. He said, "I do not mind you leaving for study. I am with you, and I encourage you." This is very important, especially [if] you know the Arab societies and Daraa. To the extent that my relatives did not approve of my leaving for study and even the neighbors, but thank God. The neighbors [in Jordan] would come and give advice to my family not to send me abroad. But my father, thank God, he is open-minded a little bit, and he is with me studying, and he is against me getting married and destroying my dreams and so on. . . . I lived for almost two years in Jordan, and after that I got the scholarship, and I traveled alone.

Majida, another young woman, was living in Gaziantep when we met her. She had graduated in 2014 from an English literature department in Syria and described to us how she had gotten stuck in Turkey when she went for a training there. Although she had no plans to make such a move, she was able to turn her university degree and knowledge of English to her advantage, working in various companies and in humanitarian aid. It was because of her excellent English that she was first offered a well-paid job in a company that needed translation services: "When I started working with companies, the salary was really nice. They gave me two thousand dollars, and I was newly graduated from Syria. That is why I started to like living here. Good money,

no war, no bombing, and friends around me." Eventually, she was able to bring her family and establish a life and career for herself in Gaziantep.

Indeed, young people often cited their knowledge of English as an advantage for them in a country where they perceived English to be less well known. Dalia, for instance, knew no Turkish but was able to demonstrate her English proficiency when she applied to English-language programs at Turkish universities. Language, then, constituted a form of cultural capital that she could employ in seeking a new path for herself. However, her case also indicates how language knowledge draws together the various fields, since only those persons from particular socioeconomic backgrounds, who were able to earn at least a baccalaureate, had sufficient knowledge of foreign languages to be able to use these to their advantage in the displacement process. This shows again, then, how anticipation of a new future across the border is not a complete break from the past but builds on it.

## Thresholds to New Futures

What all of these cases show is that displacement is never a simple flight and that displaced persons seek out secure paths that they hope will lead them to desired futures. By necessity, such paths also involve economic considerations, generally considered the deciding factor of migration in cases of "voluntary" migration. Even in the moment of displacement, we see the search for "knots" that will give them handholds, whether these "knots" are social, cultural, or symbolic. Often, these knots must weave together in order to create new pathways.

This is demonstrated through the experiences of a number of refugees, including Ihsan, Alma's husband, who, prior to moving to Gaziantep, lived in numerous border cities, starting with Antakya:

> For us, Antakya is very close to the Syrian borders, and it's an area that has jobs that suit us. Second is the language: Antakya people speak Arabic. Turkish people don't even speak English. In general, Turkish people don't have the knowledge that we have when it comes to English. It's very hard for us to go to an area where we can't understand anyone at all. The people of Antakya talk Arabic a lot, and it's an area that is very close to the Syrian border, the jobs are all there. Even for work it's easier for me to go back and forth between the two countries.

Ihsan reminds us here that the decisions made by Syrian refugees include social, cultural, and economic factors combined. These reflect the multifaceted decision-making process that refugees employ at the time of uprooting. In response to this, his wife Alma describes the numerous times they had to relocate within Turkey, explaining that survival is paramount:

> We don't choose the place, the place chooses us. For example, before we left for Gaziantep, his job was between Syria and Turkey, so I was living with his parents, and he was in Syria. The place chose for him to come to me because here there was money. Under these circumstances, if we don't work, we can't live.

The economic factor is thus a key determinant of how Syrians anticipate the future and decide their place of residence, if not during the moment of displacement, then in the short term after settling. In some cases, it was even a driving factor in choosing Turkey over other locations.

This was especially clear in the case of another couple, Jamil and Asala, who emphasize that they arrived legally in Turkey in 2017, even though their trip was a difficult one. They were both from middle-class families, educated, and newly married. While in Syria, they had ambitions to use their university degrees to work in tourism and the NGO sector, but Jamil explains the constraints of building a life together in the economy of a war-torn country:

> *Jamil*: To be honest, we decided to marry but because of the high rentals in Syria, we had to spend the whole salary for the rental! So we wanted to try and live abroad, why not! . . . . So we arrived to Turkey in August 2017.

Although they traveled to Turkey with passports and by boat from Latakia, the journey was still a difficult one, and the boat that they boarded also contained smugglers.

> *Asala*: They asked us, "So you want to go to Greece?" with a wink. He said to me, "Do you see the two people there? They also will go to Greece. Do you want to go with them?"
> *Jamil*: Actually I had this plan in my mind, but I was telling myself, "Don't do it! Are you crazy?!"
> *Interviewer*: You thought it was dangerous because of going by sea, or was there something else?
> *Asala*: Yes, and also because we don't need to do it. We can build ourselves in Turkey from nothing, and there are people who built their life, so why not do this plan? And actually, our plan succeeded. Who can imagine that one day we would acquire Turkish citizenship [which they had acquired immediately before the interview]?

In such a case, then, we see choices being made on the basis of limited knowledge acquired from friends and relatives, as well as reliance on cultural and symbolic capital. In cases such as that of Jamil and Asala, the border becomes not only a threshold beyond which one can be freed from anticipation, but also a line beyond which one can build expectations and have a future.

## Conclusion: From Anticipation to Expectation

At the beginning of this chapter, we heard from Amal, a young mother who had been unable to continue her studies and had been serially displaced within Syria, living in a tent before being smuggled across the border with her small family. When we spoke to her in Adana a year after her arrival, she reported being satisfied with her life at that moment, because it assured a future for her son:

> I feel like I am assured of my son's future. It's true he is still two years old, but maybe if I stayed here, he will study in Turkey, meaning the first thing is that he knows the language and also knows Arabic. Maybe if we stayed . . . inshallah that our country returns like before, and we return to our home. I say that I feel secure about him that he can study anything.

As we will see, the brackets that she leaves in her vision of her son's future ("inshallah that our country returns like before, and we return to our home") reflect a division that we found in many of our interlocutors' descriptions between what we call in later chapters "homing," or the process of building a home where one can have a future, and aspirations that might include the hope ultimately to return.

Homing involves building "normal lives," the loss of which many youths in our study described through the loss of expectation. It is expectation that had been missing from Amal's life before displacement and that made her home there unhomely. In the chaos of war, she and her family lived in constant anticipation–of bombs falling, militants attacking, and of someone telling them that they must again leave. She can now see her life returning to some form of normality, or being normalized where she is. As we will see, then, the passage of time complicates the possibilities of return and makes Amal's "inshallah" less hopeful than wistful.

# 3

# Rupture

## Discontinuity and Disorientation

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Suddenly the situation in my neighborhood [of Aleppo] develops, and they besieged the neighborhood, and they wanted to collect men who had not yet done their military service. So, suddenly, I packed a bag on my shoulder, and my family told me to leave for Turkey. My family gave me a sum that equals fifty Turkish liras. It was five thousand Syrian pounds . . . maybe it was sixty or seventy Turkish liras, and with that I got smuggled. Of course, I left in a way that was very challenging for me, because there were checkpoints and so on. It was scary until I was out of the regime-controlled areas because I was living in regime-controlled areas. And I came here. I started . . . I did not know anyone . . . I had to sleep in parks for one week while I was looking for work. And [when] I left, I was living in a villa, and we had a housekeeper, and suddenly I came to a very different environment from what I had.

–Taim, living in Gaziantep

We met Taim in Gaziantep, where he worked in media, supported by funding from the EU. When he was twenty-one years old, he had crossed the border alone with almost nothing and needed to start from scratch. We spoke to him seven years later, after he had worked first as a laborer and then as a manager of around forty workers in a textile factory. He explained the difficulty of adjusting to a completely different socioeconomic status and the challenge of interacting with people with whom he had never interacted before. "Now, it is not wrong to engage with different social classes, but my family has a certain aristocracy," he remarked. He elaborated, explaining that his family had a respected name in Aleppo, and that everyone in his family besides him had gone to university. For this reason, he explained, he had not previously had contact with the social group in which he found himself.

These are the people who are not educated and are not cultured. They are people who at a certain age, go down to work in the factory sector. So . . . it

was one of the worst moments and months that I lived, until I adjusted and knew how to deal with this group . . . how they deal with each other and how they talk.

This chapter concerns the unexpected rupture of crossing the border, and the ways youths had to leave behind what they had known and adjust to unforeseen circumstances. If the previous chapter discussed displacement as a form of navigation or wayfaring, this chapter discusses what happens when one is cut off from or loses one's bearings. How do we orient ourselves in new surroundings? If the ground has shifted beneath our feet, what handholds do we find to carry on?

As we will see here, the young people we met have been thrust into the whirlwind of history in which so much that was familiar has been swept away, yet they have been resourceful in transforming disorientation into new pathways. As a result, the chapter also concerns how, in unexpected ways, the temporary becomes permanent, the familiar becomes strange, and the ground begins to shift under one's feet.

If the previous chapter concerned critical thresholds beyond which actors faced a future that was unimaginable and unknown, this chapter concerns critical ruptures, or moments of radical break from what we had known before, in which life must start anew. In a recent book on rupture, the editors describe it as "a radical, sometimes violent and even brutal form of discontinuity" (Holbraad, Kapferer, and Sauma 2019: 2). They further observe that "while rupture operates as an inherently negative moment–a critical cut or 'switch-point' . . . that instigates a significant break with existing conditions–by the same token it can act as a positive or dynamic impulse towards escape, redirection, reconstitution and sometimes renewal" (2019: 1). Moreover, such moments of radical breaking produce periods of liminality, beyond which is something new (see also Humphrey 2019: 48).

A critical rupture, then, is a radical break from the past that requires entering a new timespace, a new period of one's life. If a critical threshold is one in which the present seems too present, too determinative of our future, a critical rupture is one in which the footholds of the present are suddenly lost–or so it seems at the time. As Taim described his own journey to us, we see the difficult process through which he shaped himself into a different sort of person. At first, this meant adjusting to the loss of the relatively comfortable life that he had known and entering the world of manual labor, which was entirely unfamiliar to him. Ultimately, though, Taim found a way back to a previous version of himself, one who had always been interested in media and communications. It was also a self who developed those dreams in new ways because of his flight across the border.

As a result, for Taim and other youth, the possibility of "return"–either to a place or to the past–began to seem unlikely. In most cases, they per-

ceived this as a loss of bearings and struggled to find ways to orient themselves toward the future. Like Taim it was difficult at first to accept their passage across the border as a rupture, one entailing loss. This happened only slowly, as time passed, and return grew less and less likely. It also happened through a process of normalization, as people sought the contours of "normal" life in their abnormal situations.

In this chapter, then, we confront the liminality of the book's title. While in the previous chapter we looked at forms of anticipation that enabled youth to cross the border and settle on the other side, here we examine the border itself as a fulcrum of rupture. Crossing the border meant, in the first instance, stepping into refugeehood, with its loss of social status. As we discuss below, this required constructing new senses of self. Crossing the border, however, also meant a loss of sociocultural bearings that resulted from the scattering of families and communities. Almost all participants experienced what has been termed "cultural bereavement" (Eisenbruch 1990, 1991) or grief at the loss of one's social structure and culture. This resulted in a lack of social and moral orientation, or a loss of those "social fields within which culturally scripted life projects are enabled" (Lubkemann 2008: 14).

A critical rupture, then, is one that breaks with the past and requires constructing a new present and future. In her description of the rupture produced by the French Revolution, most obviously represented in the figure of the guillotine, Caroline Humphrey (2019: 48) argues, "If we are to call any moment rupture, there has to be a bursting of bonds; there has to be a new sensibility, the definition of a reviled object from which to be separated, and the abrupt violence that actually achieves the split." While the youth with whom we spoke invariably described their attachments to their homes in Syria, like Taim they also had so often split from them, having witnessed or learned about bombings, atrocities, invasions, and the death of family and friends. As one politically active young man movingly explained, "Witnessing Aleppo being attacked, fallen, abducted, and liberated was like death for me."

That metaphorical death is a critical rupture, though in the case of these youths it became so not in the moment of flight itself but in the moment of crossing the border. While many youths had been internally displaced before taking refuge in Turkey, as we describe in the previous chapter, it was the moment of stepping across the border that allowed them to put immediate danger behind them. However, as this chapter should begin to make clear, this was only the beginning of a new process of socially, culturally, and temporally orienting oneself. As we describe here, finding handholds in everyday life, moving beyond the liminality of rupture, is already the beginning of "normalization" or the transformation of temporariness into permanence.

# Liminality: Crossing into Refugeehood

In this book's introduction, we remarked that rather than seeing war only as an irruption into "normal" life, we should begin to see it as what Stephen Lubkemann (2008: 1) calls a "transformative social condition." In chapter 2, though, we showed how our young interlocutors viewed the violence they had experienced as nothing less than a rupture of the lives they lived before. "I never imagined living anywhere besides Aleppo," several youths from that city told us. Many described their lives before as comfortable, even in cases where they had dreams that they already knew they could only fulfill elsewhere.

Importantly, the image of an irruption into the normal suggests that the peace presumed to follow war will allow the "normal" to return. Lubkemann's point is that ideas of war as an abnormality lead us to see it as a temporary rather than transformative event. They lead us to view displacement as a passing situation that ideally would be resolved rather than as a process that alters societies and selves.

In seeing displacement as a rupture, we reflect here how youth described those transformations, which they saw as beginning the moment they crossed the border. The initial rupture for many was in becoming a refugee, something that many youths felt keenly. One young man in his late twenties, living in Izmir, had recently married and had a small child and was struggling to start his own business. "It's impossible," he remarked. "As long as your name is 'refugee,' you are different, and they will look at you in a different way."

As we remarked in the previous chapter, the literature on forced migration has given considerable attention to the category "refugee" and to what that category and name do, both to persons who are labeled with it and to those who use it. In the first article that discussed "refugee" as a bureaucratic identity, Roger Zetter (1991: 39) remarked, "Within the repertoire of humanitarian concern, refugee now constitutes one of the most powerful labels. From the first procedures of status determination–who is a refugee?–to the structural determinants of life chances which this identity then engenders, labels infuse the world of refugees." While the label becomes a means to access much-needed resources, it also inflicts wounds on displaced persons' dignity and entails feelings of shame. For these reasons, as Zetter further notes, refugees "paradoxically, appear to accept yet also to reject the label" (1991: 43). This entails the sometimes contradictory process of using the label "refugee" to summarize one's experiences and traumas and the precarity of one's current situation, as well as to insist on rights such as asylum, even as one refuses the negative connotations of destitution. As several young people insisted, "We were not people who had nothing."

As Zetter observes, the rejection of the refugee label is a general phenomenon. We may see, however, that it takes on particular meaning in the Turkish case. A twenty-six-year-old man from Aleppo province working in a café in Mardin remarked that the work opportunities for Syrians were better in Turkey than in Europe, which was why he decided to remain. His impression, though, was that Europeans treated refugees with more respect than they received in Turkey:

> There is a large difference between the treatment from Europeans and the treatment from Turkish people. The Turkish people treat you like you're immigrant scum, as if you're less than them, a second-class citizen. On the other hand, Europeans, whether it's people in Europe or the people we interact with here, they treat us like we're on the same level; they don't separate us into a lower class.

We would hear again and again that Turks view Syrian refugees as "second-class citizens" or, more particularly, as "immigrant scum."

This experience of shifting identities after crossing the border is also reflected on by his wife's words:

> The reason why we are not getting used to them [Turks] is because they as people are not getting used to us, they are not accepting us because we came here due to the war. I told you before that when Syrians used to come [prior to the war] here, the Turks would greet them nicely, but now because we were put in a situation where we had to leave our country against our will, it is different.

Being originally from Idlib, a Syrian city on the southern border with Turkey, Alma had experienced a shift in how she is identified as a Syrian in Turkey, as prior to the conflict in Syria it was very common for Syrians in border cities to travel to Turkey on holidays. Syrians here experience the existential shift of becoming a refugee not only through their changing status and life conditions but also in relation with the Turkish host society that now views Syrians as potentially "threatening others" who might outstay their visit.

In the social science literature on borders, acts of marginalization enacted against migrants are usually known as "border*ing*," or the act of enforcing border thinking far from the border itself. The concept of bordering builds on the idea that borders drawn between territories clearly define the limits of the "inside" and the "outside," thus defining people on either end as "insid*ers*" and "outsid*ers.*" Borders emerge through bureaucratic practices that demand and control the migration and settlement of people, their mobility and immobility (e.g., Bigo and Guild 2005; Soguk 1999; Torpey 1999). However, borders also constitute "thresholds" where groups on either side are formed and recognized. Border*ing*, then, is an ongoing process of state

formation. As Etienne Balibar remarks, "*borders* are vacillating . . . they *are no longer at the border*, an institutionalised site that could be materialised on the ground and inscribed on the map, where one sovereignty ends and another begins" (Balibar 1998: 217–18 [emphasis in original]; see also Shapiro 1997; Vaughan-Williams 2009a). Rather, "the concept of the border is playing out in different and often unexpected ways at a multiplicity of sites in contemporary political life" (Vaughan-Williams 2009b 730). The border, in this vision, is not an area that is at the edge or margin of national life but is the place "where the nation is perhaps experienced most intimately" (Aggarwal 2004: 3; also Berdahl 1997; Green 2005).

Consequently, migrants, as a general category, and refugees more specifically, constitute the main targets of policies governing borders, as identities are reframed in terms of "legality" and "illegality" (Agier 2016; Khosravi 2010). These designations are often utilized in political discourse attributing risk, ranging from threats to the social fabric to increasing levels of crime, to human movement across the borders (Bigo 2007; Haddad 2007). We certainly see this in the generalized view of Syrians as destitute persons who threaten the welfare of the Turkish population.

Such views, however, came as a particular shock to those who had experiences of Turkey prior to the war and who did not, in their own opinion, resemble a refugee. Abbas was twenty-four years old when we met him and was attending medical school in a city on the western coast of Turkey but said that he had experienced considerable discrimination:

> I regret not researching the city before I moved there, because I lately discovered that the culture there is totally different from mine, and I had many problems. So one of the problems happened to me when once I was on a bus going to school, and I met a Turkish guy who was twenty-five to thirty years old. We started chatting, and he was very kind to me until ten minutes later when he discovered that I'm Syrian. So, he stated that he is very angry that Syrians are all over Turkey now, and he would like to leave Turkey and not come back until all Syrians are out of the country. Then suddenly he asked the bus driver to stop because he does not want to be with a Syrian on the same bus. And what really shocked me is that all the crowd in the bus did not condemn his act, but it seemed that they all saw eye to eye with him! . . . . I was astonished, and he just left the vehicle! It was really very awkward how he changed his cool behavior only because I told him that I am Syrian! Although I do not look like a poor refugee or a beggar, and despite the fact that I have money like many foreigners such as Americans, British, Germans, etc., I am treated or seen very differently from them!

Abbas's insistence that he does not "look like a poor refugee or a beggar" and that he has money like any other foreigner visiting Turkey reflects both the ways in which certain refugees with higher socioeconomic status reject what they view as a derogatory label and also the shift in Turkish public

opinion since around 2014. Indeed, incidents such as that described by Abbas have multiplied as the conditions of asylum reception changed due to violence intensifying in Syria, pushing more Syrians out of their homes in search of refuge.

For some of the youths with whom we spoke, it was the ability to mobilize networks and navigate the cultural landscape of Turkey—and therefore not to be a refugee—that led them to remain there rather than move on to Europe. Kamal, who was working in Mardin, described how many of his friends took the risk of the trek to Europe, but he rejected it:

> Some people went to Europe, but I was against this idea because I do not want to live as a refugee or as a burden on the society. I mean, I do not want to be a refugee, and in Turkey I did not feel that. In the end, I am like a normal citizen who can take care of his expenses. This idea was the most important idea that kept me here, even though my cousins, relatives, and many of my friends went to Europe. . . . The idea behind coming to Turkey started with the idea of being here temporarily, but the Syrian situation became worse, and we cannot think about return to Syria. So we were forced, we did not have a choice.

We will return later in the chapter to the ways Syrian youth had to adapt when the expected temporariness of exile became more permanent. For now, it is worth noting that the refugee label is one that many youths rejected, at least when they could.

## Cultural Bereavement and Loss of Moral Orientation

Despite rejection of the refugee label and attempts to cling to previous identities, most of the youth who participated in our study recognized the unlikelihood of reconstructing the communal lives that they had lived before the conflict. Families had been scattered and even shattered; neighborhoods and cities had been destroyed. In the process, people had lost savings and livelihoods, but for many people, they had more importantly lost a way of life. As one young Aleppan man in his twenties, Adnan, told us, "I never thought of a life outside Aleppo." He had studied business at Aleppo University and imagined himself taking over his family's business. He had an upper-middle-class life in a city that he loved, where his extensive social circles supported him. He also describes himself as conservative, at least in comparison to youth in Turkey, and he chose to live in a particular neighborhood of Istanbul specifically because it reminded him of the neighborhoods that he knew in Aleppo. This tendency to find similarities with neighborhoods in Turkish cities (Kaya 2017a, 2017b) is also, we suggest, a way of orienting oneself and one's "culturally scripted life project" in a context in which one's social and cultural orientations are fractured.

If the possibility of "return"–either to a place or to the past–seemed unlikely to many youths in our study, in most cases they perceived this as a loss of bearings and struggled to find ways to orient themselves toward the future. This was a result not only of the uncertainties of their situation in Turkey but also of the social and cultural losses resulting from the scattering of families and communities. Almost all participants experienced what has been termed "cultural bereavement" (Eisenbruch 1990, 1991), that is, grief at the loss of one's social structure and culture. This resulted in a lack of temporal and social orientation. In other cases, however, youths felt that they had gained from this loss of social strictures and from their arrival in Turkey, while in still others they found a balance between loss and gains. These ways of viewing the "reconfiguration of social fields" as loss or gain (or both) in turn shaped youth integration (or lack thereof) into Turkish society.

For the youth with whom we spoke, cultural bereavement was in the first instance disorienting. Like the mourning process in the face of death, cultural bereavement meant finding ways to accept loss. In the face of threats linked to their cultural identity, the young people reflected on themes such as loss of cultural norms and lacking the ability to maintain their cultural practices. Some youth expressed the need to continue their cultural traditions even in exile, as young people are the future of Syrian culture. Others talked about the gains of being in a country where they acquired new choices. In all cases, Syrian refugees discussed having to deal with multiple stressors as a result of their acculturation process.

Reluctance to speak Arabic in public was one of the challenges the young people have to negotiate, especially in spaces that might perceive Syrians negatively. Many youths articulated the frustration of being unable fully to express themselves in Turkish and missing the ability to use their native tongue. The latter is primarily because of fears regarding speaking Arabic in public spaces and reluctance to be identified as a "dirty Arab" (for similarities with the United States, see MacGregor-Mendoza 2000). One young woman, Basma, living in Izmir, poignantly explained an experience that she had with a Turkish neighbor with whom she had become friends.

> Once I went to my Turkish neighbor whom I loved a lot, and she loved me, too. I told her that I want to speak to you in Arabic, even though you will not understand. I just want to speak. I just want to speak in Arabic to cry. I just want you to listen to me. I cried a lot. She hugged me saying, "Do not cry. Do not cry." She felt so bad and told me not to cry. She said that she did not understand, but I could speak about my problems, and it felt good to speak, even though she did not understand. It was like a volcano inside me. . . . You feel like you are in a jungle and have no one. I am living like that for three years. Like I am living in a jungle without a friend. I could not breathe. I just wanted to be able to speak Arabic to someone, to tell her that I am feeling pain.

However, reluctance to speak one's language in public was not the only cultural rupture. Other youths talked of loss of cultural norms and traditions, particularly celebration of religious holidays. Although the same religious holidays are celebrated in Turkey, many youths complained that "there is no Eid[1] in Turkey," though it was unclear if for them this indicated a different way of celebrating the holidays or if it was because of their own circumstances, which made it difficult to celebrate. Some said that they lacked time and money to celebrate as they would have in Syria. For others, the main difference was the inability to gather as a large family during the holidays, either because they were scattered or because they needed to work. One young woman told us, "We haven't seen our relatives, our grandparents, for instance, for seven years. Most of them passed away . . . Eid is just like normal days for us. We just sit at home like any other holiday." For many, then, the loss of family, either through death or dispersal, meant that there could be "no Eid in Turkey."

Holidays, of course, ritually mark the year and produce a sense of collectivity and solidarity. For this reason, the complaint that "there is no Eid in Turkey" can also be seen to symbolize and express a greater loss of cultural bearings. Being uprooted from their own cultural milieu combined with the lack of meaningful connection toward Turkish society have created a sense of isolation and alienation for many youths. As we mentioned in the previous chapter, older interlocutors often commented that the younger ones lacked guidance. One young man who was almost thirty years old when we interviewed him reflected on the experiences of those a decade younger:

> The youth when we were in Syria, everyone would be concerned with their family, house and work or study. . . . In Turkey, they became refugees; they do not have jobs anymore. And the family is displaced, and the kids got displaced. There is no home, no work, no links connecting them, for example to Izmir or Istanbul. They got lost, with no offence they became in the streets [implying that they became delinquent]. This is very negative and very bad.

Such experiences seem to be more visible among those youth who were forced to leave their families behind. Having to negotiate life in deprived settings, and the lack of social guidance and possible opportunities, created a great sense of loss and led to further marginalization. One young man who left Syria without his family related his own experiences:

> I lived with many young men, about twenty to thirty men in the same house. Their ages start from fourteen or fifteen; they were very young. They didn't live enough with their parents; they didn't know right from wrong. They came here alone with no one to look after them . . . The bad friend enters among them and leads them to do bad things, which ruins the reputation of the Syr-

ians. The worst thing is that you lose these boys. It is hard to control them anymore, and when they get older they believe they are men. No one can stop them from doing anything.

As remarked in an earlier chapter, one significant change in the individuation process of Syrian youth in Turkey is the lack of family and elders' guidance, which would otherwise be a part of the transition to adulthood.

While Western European conceptions of the transition from youth to adulthood tend to portray it as one of individualization, where youth break away from the restrictions of family and their norms, we have suggested in this book that for Syrian youth it is more apt to describe instead a process of individuation, or life projects, within the context of family and familiar cultural norms. In that process, older siblings, parents, and grandparents are accepted guides as one makes life choices that will affect not only oneself as an individual, but also the family unit. Many youth express the loss of that guidance as a form of disorientation.

While most of the youth in our study expressed a disorienting sense of loss of social scripts to guide them, still others viewed their arrival in Turkey as a personal gain, often presenting opportunities that would not have been available to them if they had stayed in their home country. In some cases, this was experienced as a sense of freedom, for instance when young women commented that they would have had no opportunity in their hometown in Syria to choose whether or not to wear the hijab. In other cases, they found opportunities, such as university study, which would not have been available to them or would have been more difficult in Syria.

Omaya, whom we mentioned above, described that disorientation but was also ambivalent about whether it was a loss or a gain:

> And it happens that the woman loses a lot! I don't want to generalize for sure . . . but when all things change . . . like, you don't know what your role is anymore. Before, we used to know what our parents do, but for sure we are a new generation, and we can change the nature of our relationships.

She continued by saying that now her visions of the future were different than they likely would have been in Syria, and that there was no way for her to go back:

> The hardest thing for me is to think that I will be just a housewife when I get married. It's impossible! I can't accept being a traditional woman that just brings up the children, and he has other responsibilities. I can't! I can't imagine myself being that person one day.

When we asked if this was because the traditions had begun to change, she remarked,

Because life imposed it on us! I didn't change it! Maybe if I had stayed in Syria, I would have been that person who doesn't have a real social life [i.e., a life outside the home]. Life imposed that on me!

We will discuss in later chapters the normalization of the unfamiliar and unexpected, and particularly the changing social norms that make return more and more difficult. For now, it is worth noting that whether it is through bereavement or a sense of increased openness, the rupture of losing one's social and cultural bearings entails finding or creating new ones.

## Norms in Flux

We remarked in the introduction to this chapter that rupture leads to a period of liminality as initial disorientation gives way to reorientation. This is, of course, similar to the process of adaptation that all migrants undergo. A large body of literature examining migrant and diaspora communities shows the uneven ways in which such groups gradually adapt, attempting to integrate in their new homes while also trying to maintain their own cultures (Bauböck and Faist 2010; Fuglerud 1999; S. Hall 1990, Nagel and Staeheli 2004; Panossian 2002; Safran 1991; Schiller and Fouron 2001; Skinner 1982). This literature shows that fear of losing one's culture and traditions, as well as distance from ordinary social and cultural changes taking place in one's homeland, usually make such communities more conservative regarding their traditions than persons still in their homeland. This may be reflected in political affiliation (often more nationalist) (Connor 1993; Coufoudakis 1993; Østergaard-Nielsen 2003) or in maintaining conservative traditions such as arranged marriages.

In the case of forced migrants, however, there is often a violent rupture from the homeland that in the case of Syria has been extreme. Not only have lives and communities been destroyed, but entire cities and regions have been damaged beyond repair. For this reason, disorientation emerges not only from finding oneself in a new place but more importantly from the fear that all the orientations one had known before have been lost. Dalia, a woman who was studying in Adana and living without her family remarked,

For the future, I am thinking if my family accepted I want to bring them here and settle here. I do not know what will happen. Of course, because the situation in Syria is not clear yet. . . . It is difficult to build a future once again, and Syria needs at least ten years. These are the most important years in my life, and so at least I am thinking of living them here.

Like many youths in our study, Dalia recognized the length of time that recovery would take and measured it in relation to her own life. Nevertheless, she buffered a bald statement of loss with a more wistful hope for a country to which she might contribute:

Of course, I would love to return and contribute to rebuilding my country, and everything that I am studying is of course for my country and its development, and, if God wills, we will return. So, at least one should build a life here and study and develop culturally and financially, and then after that one would be a qualified person.

Such seemingly conflicting impulses are common to liminality and sometimes work themselves out as intergenerational conflict, particularly over traditional norms and practices (Brocket 2018; Christou and King 2015; Hall 2002; Levitt 2009). Syrian youth in our study expressed experiencing similar conflicts, whether due to pressure from elders or from their own desire to see their culture preserved. Pasha, a young man of Circassian background who lives in Adana, remarked, "Some families teach their children their language, their customs, and frankly, some families do not care at all, and it gets forgotten. And they get assimilated . . . Parents passing it on to their children, it is a magnificent thing."

However, attempts by Syrian families to preserve cultural practices were not always appreciated by youth in our study, particularly when they resulted in early marriages. Salem, a twenty-four-year-old man based in Istanbul, complained,

I met many Syrian girls; now some of them are more afraid about their girls. They [the girls] become more open-minded and free, even regarding their clothing. Also, interaction with males here is more available, so they have a lot of early marriage issues. They [the families] marry off their girls to guarantee they will not get lost here.

While early marriages acted as a form of protection from cultural loss, such marriages were already common in certain socioeconomic classes and areas of Syria before the war. As we remarked in the previous chapter, particularly the early years in Turkey were marked by poverty and instability for many families, and these appear to have played a significant role in maintaining and even exacerbating such a norm.

We should note, however, that the tendency to promote strict social norms was more prevalent among young men in our conversations in comparison to young, single women. In contrast, young women often expressed a lessening of the restrictions of the traditional values that they had experienced in Syria. Zahra, a twenty-nine-year-old woman, reflected on the issue of hijab among Syrian women and how women who choose not to wear it are perceived by the Syrian community,

[Back in Syria,] [i]t is imposed on each girl that you must wear the hijab . . . Here, I feel that you can express yourself, that if you are not convinced about it, just say "I'm not convinced." But when you feel convinced, it is okay wear it, and you will look great either way. But what I face are people who curse the women who used to wear hijab then stopped wearing it.

Regarding this matter, Dalia, whom we mentioned above, expressed more ambivalence:

> Back in Syria, there was some reservation regarding clothes, like the hijab, for example. Honestly, I have heard that some people used to wear the headscarf, and they got influenced, and they took it off here. They got influenced by society here, which is very open, open in relationships and clothes. We have relationships between men and women, but I felt like it is more here, and I felt there is a group here that has changed. Some people preserved themselves and got integrated, and some people got very influenced and melted.

"Melting," in this case, is to fully integrate, to become a different type of person than one was before. In the migration studies literature, this is often expressed as the difference between integration and assimilation, where the former implies cultural learning that facilitates life in a new country and the latter implies cultural "melting" or blending in. What we wish to emphasize here is that the loss not only of family but also of community and everything that ties one to the past constitutes a violent rupture that requires thinking the future anew. Or as the young man in the epigraph to the book's introduction proclaimed,

> Honestly, now the idea of return is not there at all. Why it is not there is because Syria is destroyed to a point that I do not have anyone in Syria. My family and relatives and my friends, everything that links me to Syria except its soil is here.

The critical rupture, then, is not simply crossing the border and is not even entering refugeehood but is also coming to terms with the destruction of what existed before.

## Disorientation and Continuity

> I do think I was living in a state of denial; I didn't want to be here in the first place. There was a rejection toward staying here, learning the language, or even establishing connections and relationships. I wanted to complete my studies here and go back home. Then gradually, and without realizing, I started recognizing the streets, speaking the language. Without realizing, I started to fall in love with the city.

When we met him in Gaziantep, Mustafa was twenty-five years old and working for a local NGO. He had supported the revolution in Syria, and we quoted him above remarking that witnessing Aleppo's fall was "like death." Because of his revolutionary activities, he fled across the border during the Aleppo siege.

> In the beginning I was alone, though more friends started to arrive. I have a friend from Aleppo. We were friends at school. He arrived here. These friends were part of my previous life back home, and they are still part of my life now. Maybe if they were not with me now, my life would have been unbearable. Sometimes, we share jokes that were fifteen years old. We recall them and laugh about them. There is part of the culture we managed to bring with us to here. There are a few restaurants in Aleppo that have opened branches here. I walk in the streets and greet others who know me. Without the presence of these details, I wouldn't have been able to stay.

In Mustafa's description, there is both rupture and continuity, as he and his friends recreate parts of their old life in a new place and make it their own.

Throughout our study, young people found similarities between Syrian and Turkish cities, whether in terms of the way of life, types of dress, the odor of food, or the sound of the call to prayer. Many young people clung to these similarities and said that they preferred to remain in Turkey because of the opportunity to recreate Syrian culture there. Indeed, in our household survey, 55 percent of the participants preferred to remain in Turkey rather than go on to another country because of what they saw as cultural similarities and the opportunity to maintain their culture there. In contrast, only 27 percent thought that Syrians who went to live and work in "Western" countries were able to reproduce their culture. For many young people who were projecting into the near future, when they would marry and begin to have families, this particularly meant passing traditional values to their children. Over 40 percent of participants believe that going to Western countries changes the family dynamics among Syrians; another 30 percent are not sure whether or not a move to Europe would affect family life. The belief that they will more easily maintain their culture and traditions while living in Turkey is one of the main reasons given for the majority of participants to say that they have no plans to leave Turkey for a third country.

The ability to recreate Syrian culture in Turkey, moreover, has actually contributed to the attachment that many young people now feel to the places where they live. In cities such as Istanbul, Syrians have transferred the taste of home to their new location by establishing Syrian restaurants and cafés in areas where many Syrians live. The act of bringing elements of the home, such as food, dance, and social engagement, to their new location become part of the process of establishing meaningful connections with the new place. Yazan, a nineteen-year-old woman who had been living in Istanbul and had moved to Izmir to study, noted,

> Even *salloura* and *mahrouseh* [types of Syrian food] are tasty here. They have the same taste [as in Syria] . . . . When we left our country, we were transferred back to it. I really love Istanbul. They [Turks] do not like Istanbul here. When I tell them I love Istanbul, they call me crazy. As a foreigner, you can live in Istanbul.

As will become clear below, maintaining that culture in Turkey is for many of our interviewees a matter of continuing social relationships and Syrian traditions and ways of life while attempting to acculturate to the Turkish cultural milieu.

Despite these many similarities, however, almost all the youth we interviewed had experienced moments when they realized differences that they had not expected or known about. Indeed, despite the popularity of Turkish television series in the Arab world before the Arab Spring, many young people in our study said that they did not know much about Turkey when they arrived there. Many expected difficulties because of language, but for others certain cultural differences were unexpected, particularly regarding living space and noise.

The language barrier combined with poor social engagement often led to lack of knowledge regarding Turkish norms of public behavior. These include norms of behavior in apartment buildings, not being familiar with the queuing protocols in public services, or having loud mobile conversations when using public transport. While youth reported such instances as learning experiences that taught them about cultural differences, they also were aware that their own behavior was often perceived as threatening the sense of ownership of space among the Turkish community. As a result, it had the potential to become a point of conflict between the two groups.

In particular, Turkish neighbors' complaints about noise was a theme that came up both in numerous interviews and in casual conversations with refugee youth. A young married couple who are based in Gaziantep gave the example of inviting friends to their flat in a large apartment building for a celebration:

> We were so happy, and we invited all our friends to our house. We sat on the terrace of our house until 6:00 a.m. We slept at 6:00 a.m., haha. We woke up and found a note on the door which said that if we repeat this incident that they will call the police. We were every day watching movies at high volume, and we didn't think that it annoys anyone, especially that we weren't working at that time. It was like we still live in Syria. We didn't know yet that . . . our Syrian neighbor wrote it because the Turkish neighbors asked him to write this note. The Turkish people who got annoyed, they were living across from our apartment.

Many youths said that they needed to recalibrate their expectations of how they would be able to lead their daily lives.

Some commented that it was normal for a host community to expect some form of respect for its cultural norms and traditions:

> In the end, you have to integrate with the conditions of this new community that you came to live in. If I will live with the customs and traditions that I was doing in Syria, for sure, the Turkish community has the right to not accept

me. For example, keep making the noise at midnight although I know that it is something that bothers them . . . so, for sure, they won't like me, and I won't like them as well. (Asala, quoted in chapter 2, a thirty-year-old woman from Gaziantep)

The young people in our study shared a common understanding that cultural awareness was key to gaining acceptance and to overcoming their own liminality. Asala's husband Jamil, for instance, whom we met in the previous chapter, also described incidents that he had witnessed that created tension. In his opinion, though, the responsibility for change lay with Syrians, who needed to adapt to this new cultural milieu:

Turks don't ever like noise! And they maybe even knock on the walls if you make a lot of noise in your home. This doesn't happen ever in Syria. We are very noisy people; we shout and talk loudly, etc. And we don't care if it is at midnight or not! And no one complains about us. But there is no kidding with Turks about this point. Sometimes they take it easy if it is a weekend, but if you make noise after midnight during the week . . . if you kept making the noise, they complain to the police.

While some refer to cultural adaptation as an obligation and a sign of respect, others considered learning about Turkish culture as a pragmatic solution to seek better integration. Zuher, a thirty-year-old man from Izmir, remarked,

I am a refugee here, so I should respect–I should respect Turkish people's habits and traditions. I do not have to change my traditions and habits–no, I can live my way in my home, but outside the home when in contact with Turkish people, I should respect their habits and traditions, whether I think they're right or not.

In this case, then, even seeming cultural similarities could be disorienting when they revealed unexpected differences. While many youths tried to navigate using familiar cultural markers, they often found those points of navigation misleading and still experienced a loss of social and cultural bearings. Reorientation becomes a process of learning to navigate in these unexpected circumstances.

## Conclusion

This chapter has shown that most of the youth who participated in our study recognized the rupture in their lives entailed in crossing the border. Not only did they change from persons with particular social statuses to refugees, but they also saw the unlikelihood of reconstructing the communal lives that they had lived before the conflict. Families had been scattered and even shattered; neighborhoods and cities had been destroyed. In the

process, people had lost savings and livelihoods, but for very many people they had more importantly lost a way of life.

Youth face cultural bereavement and the loss of moral guidance in exile. For many, like Adnan, the young Aleppan man from an upper-middle-class family quoted at the beginning of this chapter, this was experienced as a life-shattering loss. "I never thought of a life outside Aleppo," he told us. Adnan's family was fractured and life utterly ruptured, and only the experience of similarities in Istanbul became a way to recover some form of orientation.

For some others, especially young women, that rupture may lead to gain, such as continuing education or making choices about one's future. For still others, it means family pressures to maintain cultural norms and fulfill expectations. In all cases, however, as time passed, disorientation gave way to orientation, and youth found themselves beginning to feel at home in places that they had previously imagined as only a temporary refuge.

Despite such reorientation, however, the temporalities of rupture followed them. As we will see in the next chapter, even as the passage of time made what had once seemed temporary more and more permanent, Syrians in Turkey remained in legal and political limbo, a state of permanent temporariness in which waiting became an important part of their struggle.

## Notes

1. *Eid* in Arabic refers to a holiday, but specifically to the two main religious holidays, Eid al-Adha (the Feast of the Sacrifice) and Eid al-Fitr (the holiday breaking the Ramadan fast).

# 4

# Waiting

## On Permanent Temporariness

Where is the exact problem? That there is no clarity in the law, especially the ones in relation to Syrians. There is no clarity! Nothing comprehensible! Mostly it depends on the mood of the officers, and there is no monitoring. You have three million Syrians in your country, so you must be clear. There is another point about the identity cards. There are people who have the *kimlik* [identity card], but the problem of the *kimlik* is that it paralyzes your ability to move! If you want to go to another city, you have to request a travel permit! And you also can't leave Turkey and come back!

−Anas, twenty-four years old, Istanbul

In a cultural hub and social center established by and for refugees in the heart of Istanbul, we met with Anas, a young Syrian man originally from Damascus, along with a group of friends he made at the center. We sat in a circle and listened as each recounted their experiences as young Syrians in Turkey, each coming from a different background with one thing in common: an immanent feeling of stuckness caused by the ambiguous and everchanging legal situation in which they find themselves. Conversations regarding the *kimlik*, or Turkish identity card, were not uncommon among Syrian refugees. This was especially the case among refugee youth, as it not only provides the means to travel and navigate through everyday life, but it also provides a frame under which to plan and envisage both their present and future in Turkey.

While opinions differ on whether a future back in Syria is possible again, most refugees had not expected that their refuge in Turkey would have to last as long as it has. The same can be said about both the Turkish government and society−as is evident based on reception policies and political discourse. As remarked earlier, the reception of Syrian refugees was meant to be temporary−a description that failed to account for the prolonged con-

flict and insecurity across the border. The Turkish word *misafir,* meaning "guest," etymologically originates from the Arabic word *musafir* meaning "traveler." Transcending the borders of meaning, the word *misafir* has other implications in the context of a Turkish society that has growing numbers of Syrian refugees since the start of the Syrian uprising over a decade ago. The word *misafir* has been since commonly used in Turkish political discourse not only to characterize Syrian refugees as guests but also to define a specific temporal dimension to the legal status that they hold in Turkey, because guests are ultimately expected to leave.

Despite the seeming benevolence and humanitarianism with which the characterization of Syrian refugees as "guests" was originally used, it has created a vacuum for legal and political interpretation, generating a whirlwind of difficulties that refugees have had to maneuver to reconstruct their lives. While the designation of refugees as guests does not correspond to any legal definition, either under international refugee law or Turkish law, the label creates a great sense of ambiguity, making pathways toward integration and stable lives challenging for certain groups (Akar and Erdoğdu 2019; Baban, Ilcan, and Rygiel 2017; Üstübici 2019). In his auto-ethnography of border crossings and the creation of illegality, Shahram Khosravi (2010) explains that the problem with using the term "guest" as a metaphor in political discourse to characterize asylum seekers is that it is often translated into violent action between host societies and refugees. The terminology creates asymmetric power relations between "hosts" and "guests," ultimately placing refugees, who are by definition in a precarious situation, in a position of further subordination. Certainly, it has produced a lingering sense of temporariness and instability that young Syrians have had to endure as they simultaneously attempt to imagine and build a future.

Temporally speaking, waiting is a common experience for uprooted populations in receiving countries. One waits for identity cards and asylum papers; one waits for bureaucracy to slowly churn. Research shows that many asylum seekers face indeterminant time periods in bureaucratic limbos waiting for status determination (Conlon 2011; Kohli and Kaukko 2018; Mountz 2011). That determination may end in new futures opening, or it may end in deportation (Allsopp, Chase, and Mitchell 2015; Griffiths 2014), in which refugees endure a sense of lost futures (Brun 2015; Kvittingen et al. 2019). In the static condition of waiting in which many refugees find themselves, refugees often find it difficult to build long-term futures and instead engage in tactics to maneuver time (on the latter, see Moroşanu and Ringel 2016; Ringel 2016).

This chapter will look more closely at the impact of the permanent temporariness created by the Turkish state in its governance model. Foregrounding the personal narratives of dispossessed Syrian youth, we will discuss how young refugees attempt to maneuver through the system and instrumentalize

available resources to fill empty periods of waiting, survive the present, and build the future. While some of these tactics ultimately place certain refugees under greater conditions of precarity, we also recognize through our analysis that Syrian refugees are not a monolithic group. Though the conditions of their reception are the same, the possession by certain groups of refugees of varying degrees of cultural and economic capital has allowed them to better construct their lives and imagine a future in Turkey.

We draw on a vast body of literature relating to migrant precarity and agency, particularly concerning refugees and asylum seekers, to demonstrate how fluid and volatile refugee reception policies can increase the precarization of young refugees through introducing periods of waiting and indeterminacy (Allsopp et al. 2015; Bandak and Janeja 2018; Brun 2015; Hage 2009; Jefferson, Turner, and Jensen 2019; Safouane, Jünemann, and Göttsche 2020). We describe the temporal results of this context, one in which many youth describe a stalled present that seems to be going nowhere. Still other youth with more resources are able to speed up time, we show, demonstrating the role of differential socioeconomic and cultural capital in determining what Pierre Bourdieu (2000) calls the "objective chances governing the future." This limited power over the future in turn results in varying perceptions and experiences of time and in what is forthcoming on temporal horizons.

## Precarity and Permanent Temporariness

"Precarity" as a concept was initially used to describe and analyze socioeconomic conditions driven by neoliberalism, causing certain groups and social classes to be more vulnerable than others (Bourdieu 1998). Today, a growing body of scholarship seeks to conceptualize precarity with a focus on human (in)security. Instead of a focus primarily on economic precarity, a growing literature has examined the precarity of differently disenfranchised populations as a politically induced condition that makes certain groups more susceptible to violence (Butler 2004, 2009). Seeing precarity through the lens of insecurity can also help identify emancipatory social action to alleviate such conditions.

It is in this wider sense that scholars of migration have increasingly used the concept of precarity as a lens to understand the experiences of migrants and how structures and institutions reinforce and maintain the inequalities and challenges that migrants face (Bakewell 2010; Deshingkar 2019; Paret and Gleeson 2016). These works have emphasized the importance of the concept of precarity to help us understand how migrants mobilize to create social change and improve their status. Scholars of forced migration have also found the conceptualization of precarity helpful in redefining agency,

as expressed by refugees and asylum seekers. Susan Banki (2013) defines various levels of precarity experienced by refugees as driven by a set of formal and informal conditions, where the former includes legal and political processes while the latter involves social and cultural dimensions, all leading to a certain degree of (transnational) action and activism.

Waiting is an important part of precarity, in which vulnerable groups "are living in a time oriented to and manipulated by powerful agents" of the state (Auyero 2012: 4). As Javier Auyero describes in his ethnography of bureaucratic waiting among slumdwellers of Buenos Aires, Argentina, "Domination works . . . through yielding to the power of others; and it is experienced as a waiting time: waiting hopefully and then frustratedly for others to make decisions, and in effect surrendering to the authority of others" (Auyero 2012: 4). Patient compliance is important, he argues, even when–or perhaps especially when–the reason for the wait appears arbitrary.

Asylum seekers and refugees keenly experience the control of time as a tool of power, particularly through indeterminate waiting periods where many find themselves in political, legal, and bureaucratic limbo. Such limbo impedes the ability to build stable lives and integrate into communities (Ager and Strang 2008; Vrecer 2010). In some cases, such as that of refugees who cannot change their registration in a particular locale, being stuck in bureaucratic limbo also freezes them in space. Asylum seekers often experience prolonged periods of waiting with limited mobility while marginalized in confined spaces such as camps, temporary accommodation centers, or in the margins of host societies.

In the case of Turkey, the legal and political fluctuation in the status of Syrian refugees demonstrates imposed waiting can translate into prolonged periods of legal uncertainty and permanent temporariness. Whether it is in the initial label of "guests" or in the 2014 Temporary Protection Law, the emphasis within the state's humanitarian open border approach has been based on the idea that Syrians are residing in Turkey temporarily and will return to Syria (Baban et al. 2017). In both cases, the effect of Turkey's geographical limitation to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 protocol limits young Syrians' mobility and ability to seek international protection.

The impact of the changing regulations and criteria of eligibility in determining the legal status and documentation of refugees has had a significant impact on refugee youth. Sahel, a single man in his late twenties, defines the issue of obtaining an identity card as one of the biggest challenges that Syrians face:

> Our big problem here in Turkey is the *kimlik*. So many people are trying to register for a *kimlik* but . . . for example, they don't issue it for single men. This is the main problem here. And it's not new, the situation has been like this for

two or three years. People say that two or three years ago it was easier to issue a *kimlik* or to find a job but now everything has changed! The main problem [is] that many of our young friends don't have *kimlik* and sometimes the police stop them and ask them to show their *kimlik*. Sometimes they talk with them in a violent way and sometimes they do not say anything, sometimes they are nice . . . The problem is that we don't know what the problem is. I would take all the required documents to the police station–so maybe the police don't like my style and maybe the system is not working. And they say, "sistem kapalı." And sometimes they say, "You are single so come in another time!" or "Come tomorrow."

In addition to the lack of clarity regarding the criteria of eligibility, there seem to be numerous inconsistencies and arbitrarily imposed waiting times until young people can even have their applications processed, let alone obtain identity cards. This places them in increasingly precarious situations, including the possibility of being stopped and questioned by the police. Sahel further recounts his personal experience as he attempted to register for a *kimlik* himself, describing the bureaucratic limbo, being referred from one place to another to no avail, making the process impossible to understand and overcome:

They say go to the police station of Fatih, and when you go there, they say go to the Sultanbeyli police station, there they have a department for foreigners. Sometimes they ask you to bring a document from the *muhtar* of the neighborhood. I will tell you what happened to me. I wanted to register for a *kimlik,* so first they asked me to bring the rental contract, so I printed one and brought it. But then they asked me to invite the owner [of the apartment] to the police station, and he also came. Then they said that it's not enough, and I have to bring a document from the *muhtar* of my neighborhood to prove that I live in this neighborhood. I went there and asked him to issue a permission of residence, "oturma izni,"[1] so the *muhtar* told me that he can't give me it without having the TC number [the identity number] but I want to issue it to have a *kimlik*! I already don't have a *kimlik*! So the mayor asked us to go to the governorate. We went to the governorate, but they didn't allow us to enter.

Though the challenges faced by Syrian refugees to issue identification documents is not limited to those living in Istanbul, it became apparent through the interviews that those residing in Istanbul (and other big provinces hosting larger numbers of Syrian refugees) are more prone to facing such challenges, especially since Syrians gradually fled in larger numbers to Turkey over time. Sahel recounts the numerous attempts to obtain the *kimlik* over several months, as the issue remained unresolved: "We tried to apply again after two months but they stopped giving *kimlik* in Istanbul as there is a high percentage of Syrians in Istanbul. Gaziantep and, I think, Adana are the same."

It is important to note, however, that the discrepancies in the legal process imposing long periods of waiting marked by mounting insecurities has an unequal impact on refugees depending on numerous factors, including their socioeconomic status. In the aforementioned interviews, it was clear that the social/marital status of refugees is a determining factor of whether they are able to issue or renew the identification document, which became an increasing challenge as more refugees gradually entered Turkey and applied for protection. Zina, a widow in her late twenties and mother of four daughters, lives in Izmir in proximity to her in-laws. Before moving to Izmir she had lived in Reyhanlı, in Hatay Province, and she recounted that while there she received her identification documents quickly: "The *kimlik* issue was easier, because the number of Syrians was less there. We took the temporary IDs in one day, and we took the babies into the hospitals and stayed for a month there, then we came here [to Izmir]." Other interviewees reported similarly quick response rates in areas outside the large cities.

Although Zina's reasoning of a quick receipt of the *kimlik* because of lower numbers of applicants seems sound, we should note that Reyhanlı is one of the main cities on the Syrian border and hosts a significantly large number of refugees in relation to its size, reaching approximately 480,000 in 2019 (Can 2020). Another possible reason for Zina's experience might be Turkey's humanitarian approach in dealing with the refugee movement across its borders, which would have given Zina a different status from others, as a widowed mother of four children who entered Turkey immediately after the siege of Aleppo was broken in late 2016.

In Pierre Bourdieu's seminal essay on the relationship of time and power, he notes that "[t]he all-powerful is he who does not wait but who makes others wait" (2000: 183). Power is "the power to make oneself unpredictable and deny other people any reasonable anticipation" (183), and moreover "[p]ower over the objective changes governs aspirations, and therefore the relation to the future" (182). In contrast, those with fewer objective chances also face what he calls "one of the most painful of wants: the lack of a future" (182).

In the case of Syrian youth, we see that the bureaucratic power of the Turkish state is precisely one that controls time. This is visible not only in initial and continuing insistence on temporariness but also in the delays and impediments to those acts and plans that would enable refugees to go on with their lives. Moreover, youths experience this at a particularly critical period, when they would ordinarily be making plans and creating the foundation for their long-term futures. As a result, periods of waiting not only affect their immediate present but also their long-term prospects, while prolonged disruption delays their ability even to envisage a future. Taim, a thirty-year-old Syrian refugee living in Gaziantep, explained the impact of uncertainty caused by the inconsistences of the legal process and the ways that uncertainty creates a sense of insecurity:

> They are living in a state of waiting, fear, and what is the future? Are we going to return? Are we going to be expelled? Are we going to take the citizenship? So, this concern makes you always feel like even if you are going to stay in any country, even if you are going to stay in Sudan, the most important thing is that you have residence and a passport.

Here, Taim references one of the main challenges for Syrian youth after acquiring an identity card, which is the limitation on their mobility within Turkey. Following a series of terrorist attacks in various Turkish cities in 2016, the Turkish government clamped down on refugees' mobility on the pretext of implementing security measures. In 2017, Moaz, a twenty-six-year-old Syrian originally from Idlib living in Istanbul since 2012, explained to us his experience of the period before those limitations on mobility were introduced:

> There is one big gap: it is the residency. They give us the temporary protection cards, but we cannot even travel from one town to another without permission. Just give me normal residency and unleash me. We are obligated to do this and that; there is no flexibility any more as there used to be. In the past five years nobody stopped me to ask for my permit, only in the past few months.

For Moaz, the problem is the temporary protection regulation, which separates Syrians from other foreigners with residency in the country.

The changes in the legal status given to Syrian refugees has paralyzed certain groups. This demonstrates the precarization of refugees through the legal creation of irregularity in the status of refugees, leaving refugee youth vulnerable to the state, its institutions and (changing) regulations (Eriksen and Bendixsen 2018; Kelly 2006; Khosravi 2010). Both changes in protection laws and their inconsistent implementation frequently put refugees in a place of subordination where they are obliged to reaffirm their "legitimacy" and to repeatedly put their need for protection up for evaluation in front of the state and its institutions (Piipponen and Virkkunen 2020). This is perceived by many as a helpless waiting, what Auyero calls an "alienated time" where there is a distinct sense of the state's domination over one's life and future prospects, felt in having no choice but waiting and "surrendering to the authority of others" (2012: 4).

In addition to restricted mobility, both spatial and temporal, the irregularity of registration approvals and seeming arbitrariness of those approvals' speed or slowness is accompanied by fears of illegality, as well as a sense of shame or inferiority at being unable to acquire the "right" documents. In particular, refugees with no identity cards often feared being stopped by police forces or being unable to access social assistance such as health, housing, and education services (for comparison, see Khosravi 2017). At the same time, imposed waiting also represents an inferior social status. As Julie

Peteet, in her essay on Palestinian waiting, remarks (2018: 51), "If speed is a hallmark of modernity, Palestinians wait, endlessly suspended in a web of obstacles that often has them moving at a tempo from another century." This turns enforced waiting "into a stigma of inferiority" (Bauman 2005: 104). When Moaz suggests that a solution to their problem would be to give Syrian refugees regular residence permits like other foreigners residing in Turkey, he is also refusing this stigma.

In the case of young Syrian refugees, the delays and uncertainty of their resolution also create anxiety around potential deportation to Syria. Hilal is a young Syrian working in a Turkish factory in Mardin, where he lives while his family remains in the city of Hasakah, Syria, on the southeastern border with Turkey. Although he has an identity card because he arrived earlier, he described the problems that other family members have had:

> My cousin came here, and he wanted to get a *kimlik* card, as it is important for hospitals or for traveling to other cities. They refused to issue one for him. . . . He had all the required documents, like the address register document [*ikametgâh belgesi*] from the *muhtar* and a previous electricity bill, and he translated his identity documents. But they told him that they haven't issued *kimlik*s for over one and a half months. So he went to another city, I don't remember the name of the city, it's close to Izmir. I think it's Bodrum. But it's spending money in vain. They refused to issue a *kimlik* card for him. They send the people who don't have a *kimlik* back to Syria.

These practices translate to refugees feeling heightened anxiety in everyday encounters, as they face the risk of being stopped in the street and deported. Or, as Peteet (2018: 58) expresses it, "Daily life lurches forward in crisis mode."

The fear of being sent back to Syria for not having adequate Turkish identification was a recurrent sentiment expressed by several young refugees. Alma, a young Syrian mother from Idlib whom we quote earlier, recounts her experience as she attempted to change her identity registration, along with her daughter's, from Hatay to Istanbul. She had been told such a change would help settle her family's claims to citizenship through her husband's employment. At the police station, her *kimlik* was withdrawn from her under the pretext that she had been to Syria in 2015, a trip that she had made because of the death of a family member and with permission from the Hatay governorate. She was given only two options to "regularize" her status: either pay a large amount of money to travel to a third country and reenter Turkey or be deported back to Syria. Alma explains how the loss of her identity card has placed her in a highly precarious situation, and the possibility of being stopped by police officers outside her home overshadowed her daily life:

A while ago, I was in the street with my daughter, and she refused to go back home and cried, so a policeman came. I started shaking, as my daughter has an identity card [she was born in Turkey], and I don't have one! So how can I prove that she is my daughter? I don't have family documents. He asked me to show my identity card, but I told him that I forgot to bring it with me. I swear if this policeman had been a bad person, he would have asked me to leave [return to Syria]! This is my problem. All my life is restricted due to this problem! All my life! I can't go out of Istanbul, because if I travel illegally, they will send me to Syria.

In Hilal's case, discussed earlier, he expressed his conviction that his presence in Turkey is temporary as he understood the economic implications of the insecurity of the legal status of Syrians, making their lives in Turkey unsustainable. He explained that the legal status of refugees both under temporary protection and for those without identification documents has pushed them to seek employment under precarious conditions in return for very low wages and no work insurance, without work permits, at the mercy of employers:

For sure I will go back, but it's so hard in the current situation. But at the same time, I can't stay here! I can't stay here for a long time, because my family lives in Syria. And I've told you that the salaries are low! So, I can't build anything here, and I can't go back there. I am waiting for the solution, so maybe we can go back. For sure I will go back!

These sentiments reflect the weak prospects Syrian youth have of their future, as they are trapped in the present, living from day to day. Ghassan Hage (2009) describes the subjective experiences of migrants and asylum seekers in being confined under spatiotemporal borders as an existential experience of immobility, a sense of "stuckedness." This notion of being "stuck" has been further developed to emphasize that an understanding of being confined requires an examination of how both time and immobility are imposed on migrants in spatial and temporal terms, through physical immobility and the inability to imagine a future (Jefferson et al. 2019). In this sense, the uncertainties that Syrian youth face regarding the future in Turkey linked with their precarious legal status, which is subject to abrupt change, and caused many of them to feel increasingly insecure, with the constant fear of being forcibly returned to Syria. This fear, in turn, impacts their ability to foresee an imaginable future ahead.

Despite these obstacles, however, the Syrian youth with whom we spoke were not only passive in their waiting. Indeed, as we see below, despite uncertainties and protracted liminality, youth were active even as they waited, maneuvering imposed structures through hope for an aspired future (Bandak and Janeja 2018; Brun 2015) and action toward it (Conlon 2011).

## Maneuvering the Unknown

In recent years, migration scholarship has moved away from the notion that migrants as a general category (e.g., Paret and Gleeson 2016; Schenk 2020), and refugees more specifically (e.g., Banki 2013; Waite et al. 2015), are only vulnerable agents or passive actors in the face of powerful structures. Instead, this literature has begun to emphasize that migrants' precarious status does not preclude their ability to make decisions and act upon them. Agency may be visible in refugees' "active waiting" (Brun 2015), which may involve enduring challenges or using the time to plans one's life ahead (Hage 2009; Kohli and Kaukko 2018) or may include attempts to bypass obstacles levied by the state and its institutions (Allsopp et al. 2015; Mainwaring 2016; Safouane et al. 2020).

The Syrian youth in our study deployed three main tactics to circumvent the challenges foisted on their everyday lives due to the elusiveness of their status under temporary protection: (1) reconstructing their perception of their futures through personal narratives of possibilities and impossibilities; (2) having recourse to third-party actors, who assist in fast-tracking lagging bureaucratic and legal processes; and (3) getting by with what is possible by accepting waiting periods and anticipating status regulation.

In regard to personal narratives, we may return to Bourdieu's observations on the relationship between time and power. Those observations build on his earliest work on habitus, a concept used to show how, in everyday life, people perceive and take action within particular fields, which require actors to have a "sense of the game." Bourdieu uses the analogy of sports, in which a literal field defines how players act and react. In football, for instance, one's sense of the game determines how one reacts to oncoming players. In any such game, one must be able instantaneously to see what is "forthcoming," for example, to understand what is about to happen when another player swerves in a particular way. Instantaneously, because of their sense of the game, players evaluate possibilities and impossibilities and orient themselves anticipatorily toward other players.

Translated to social life, we can see that social actors build on their experiences and invest in their resources toward what Bourdieu calls "objective chances" and possibilities. Hence, the differences through which refugee youth perceive imposed time and take action to maneuver it is demonstrative of the different degrees of power and capital that they possess. Those different degrees of socioeconomic and cultural capital and power enable them to control time or to be controlled by it. While the previous section emphasized many of our interlocutors' sense of precarity through stuckness and powerlessness over time, others described the ability to move forward and perceive future opportunities.

Looked at through this lens, we may see more clearly how Syrian youth imagine their futures in Turkey depending on their own previously existing cultural and economic capital. This is most apparent in personal narratives of the reconstruction of lives and identities that emphasize the "ownership" of time. Being in possession of institutionalized cultural and symbolic capital, in the form of educational and academic credentials, and economic capital, in the form of material assets, proved to be a crucial determinant of refugees' ability to envision and plan a future.

Khaled, who is originally from Aleppo, fled Syria to Istanbul after having graduated with an engineering degree and having been unable to find suitable work opportunities in his war-torn city. When we asked him to describe himself, he made sure to emphasize his legal status and entry to Turkey, clearly defining the difference he perceived between himself and other Syrian youth:

> I came to Turkey three years ago by plane as an expat, not a refugee. I moved across borders in an official way. From Beirut to Istanbul, so I didn't come as a refugee. I applied for a residence and work permit. Everything I did was legal. I didn't get any help from the EU or anywhere. I tried to apply for Turkish courses–but they didn't accept me since I'm not a refugee . . . so I started working here. I work here as an architect. I didn't get a work permit for a long time. It costs too much [to get a work permit], and it has some rules, such as a quota [number of Turkish workers to foreigners] and having to pay high taxes. It is very difficult to work here. Workers must pay taxes and you need diploma equivalence–it was difficult for me. However, the Turkish government suspended the requirement of equivalence for Syrians in 2017, so I got it two months ago. I can work as an architect now. . . . Last year I started my master's degree at Mimar Sinan University.[2] It is very difficult to enter a good university, not only for Syrians but also for Turkish people.

Although Khaled recognizes the challenges that he faced in obtaining a work permit, he distinguishes it from the economic challenges regularly faced by his Syrian peers under temporary protection and explains it as a general challenge facing foreigners and expats in search of employment opportunities in Turkey. Despite these differences, Khaled acknowledges that, regardless of his status as an "expat," he was still able to benefit from the state's easing of certain regulations on Syrians to provide them with better employment opportunities, such as waiving the requirement to obtain diploma equivalencies for certain professions. He also places great emphasis on his ability to overcome certain challenges, such as the inability to access language classes provided to Syrians under temporary protection, and to progress both academically and professionally without hindrances to his prospects in Turkey.

Despite these differences from previous descriptions of everyday challenges, a commonality that we found between Khaled's experience and that of other interlocutors under temporary protection is the idea that the best resolution to problems faced in the labor market is to acquire Turkish citizenship. We discuss the issue of citizenship more in chapter 6, but for now it is worth noting that Khaled's invocation of it is also a recognition that his presence in Turkey is beyond temporary:

> Being a foreigner here, you have some closed doors. I had some interviews with very big companies here, but I didn't have the equivalence. How could I get a work permit as an engineer? . . . I lost many chances because of this. If I get the citizenship, I will not have these problems.

The importance of Syrians possessing economic capital to creating a future in Turkey despite their temporary legal status is also emphasized by Mazen, another informant residing in Istanbul. He comes from a wealthy Syrian family that was involved in trade activity with Turkey prior to the eruption of violence in Syria. He projects his personal experience, and the experiences of his personal acquaintances, onto his perception of the Syrian community as a group, claiming that most are generally well-off and capable of earning a decent living in Turkey independent of state support:

> There are 3.9 million refugees, and half of them are capable of making their own lives without getting any money from the government or EU. Many of them have many things. I have a friend who runs a business and earns twenty thousand dollars a month, even though he came illegally because he should have done his military service in Syria, now he has temporary protection. . . . If we look at Syrians in Gaziantep, half of them are making money in dollars, they are working for [international] organizations. They take more than one thousand dollars per month. In Mersin, more than 70 percent have homes, cars, shops. You can see many wealthy families.

Other informants also shared experiences related to the economic opportunities that they were provided due to the proliferation in the number of both international and local NGOs operating in Turkey in support of the Syrian cause. These organizations usually provided employment positions for Syrians with a certain degree of cultural capital in the form of academic credentials, prior experience in NGO operations, or having a set of international language skills.

Asala, a Syrian woman in her early thirties living in Gaziantep whose story we explained in a previous chapter, had come to Turkey with her husband in search of better employment opportunities due to the deteriorating economic situation in Syria. She had credentials and professional experience, having studied psychology and worked in the tourism sector in Damascus, the latter with a lot of exposure to international clients. These

credentials and experience enabled her to build a strong profile that qualified her to work in INGOs in Turkey. Hence, she explains that she was "destined" to finding a position as a psychosocial support officer at an international organization based in Antep:

> So I came here and hoped to find a job opportunity in an NGO, so I started applying for job opportunities. The IMC (International Medical Corps) accepted me after three interviews. The funny thing is that I was applying for another position. I didn't have enough knowledge about the positions here in Turkey, so the one that I applied to was working inside Syria. But the person who did the interview with me knew that I worked as a PSS (psychosocial support) officer before, so she said to me "You are a typical PSS officer! This is your job!" and it was the only open position, so it's about destiny!

Employment with such organizations provides Syrians with a "regular" and secure status through a work permit, meaning not only stable lives in the present but also the ability to construct stable futures unburdened by the anxiety of the unknown. In such examples, refugees tend to emphasize their own personal and professional progression as their time in Turkey moves by. These examples demonstrate that regardless of the numerous difficulties that refugees face related either to their legal or employment status, their possession of necessary resources reflects in their ownership of time.

For those with more limited resources, however, a second mode of gaining control over time is to maneuver through structures imposing indeterminant waiting periods by either skewing or accelerating time (Safouane et al. 2020). In many cases, refugees speed up lagging processes by resorting to third-party actors, either regularized or clandestine, such as brokers, agencies, and social networks. Particularly when it comes to employment opportunities, third-party actors play a crucial role, paving the way for refugees in the labor market. Our interlocutors commonly mentioned a particular employment agency operating in Turkey that helped refugees access regularized employment in various economic sectors. Khaled, the young Syrian architect from Istanbul, mentioned that this agency gave him significant help in finding job opportunities in construction companies. Through these, he was able to progress in comparison to his peers:

> Most of the refugees who came here are very different, majority are poor and not working. I worked with [agency name]–I know about their conditions–their procedures are very difficult to pass. For me, the conditions were very good and structured, everything [application requirements] should be 100 percent correct. They require a valid passport, valid information for everything.

For someone with Khaled's profile, these agencies can be very helpful resources in finding reliable employment. As previously mentioned, Khaled

had come to Turkey with an engineering degree in Syria and settled in Turkey without claiming temporary protection, hence, differentiating his experience from other Syrians who do not possess the same resources.

However, in some cases these agencies favor certain refugee profiles, increasing the precarity of those most vulnerable who have fled to Turkey with less economic and cultural capital (Awumbila et al. 2019; Deshingkar 2018). An example is Fouad, who was the same age as Khaled and also living in Istanbul but had a very different experience in finding work opportunities through the same agency:

> Once I went to a job interview at [an international fashion retail company operating in Turkey] organized by [agency name]. But unfortunately, they refused me and all the people that I know who also went to the job interviews [all Syrian], and I don't know the reason why.

Fouad had come to Turkey with his family prior to obtaining his university degree. The disruption in his higher education was prolonged during his displacement, as he was forced to seek employment in Turkey to provide for his family, making the only viable solution part-time higher education opportunities funded by a scholarship. His inability to secure regular work opportunities through the employment agency has led him to looking for irregular employment options and to accept a job without a work permit simply to make ends meet. When asked about whether he wants to obtain a permit, he explains:

> As Syrians, the most important thing for us is the present time, to receive 2,500 or 3,000 TL. I don't care about the future. But the work permit is very important to take the nationality. I don't prefer to take the work permit for the jobs that I'm doing right now, as I don't like it, but I must work. For example, the salary of the waiter in this café is low compared with my salary. In addition, this waiter has very long work hours and just one day holiday in the week, or sometimes none at all.

Although working without a permit places someone like Fouad in a situation of precarity, he rationalized his decision based on economic gains and control over time since, in his opinion, obtaining a work permit does not prevent employers from placing workers in precarious working conditions. As he pointed out, waiters working legally in the same business did so for longer hours and lower income. For Fouad, the ability to work without a permit allowed him to find flexible opportunities in the "meantime" (Jansen 2015a, 2016), earning enough to make it through but also allowing him to pursue part-time education and earn a degree, which he considers key to securing a future.

Resorting to third-party actors was also common among refugees struggling with legal and bureaucratic impediments to obtaining an identity card,

where refugees sought the help of clandestine brokers either to issue a *kimlik* or to have mobility within Turkey. This is explained by Anas, seen above in the cultural hub in Istanbul:

> In many cases people were smuggled into Turkey, they must have the right more than me to obtain a *kimlik*. But they weren't given one even though they came from the borders through Bab Al-Hawa. . . . There are people were able to issue it [legally], and there are people who had to pay bribes, and others forged fake *kimliks*. We don't want to stoop to this level, I mean to forge documents. We came to live and work! We don't want to be hurt.

Although brokers as third-party actors can help refugees accelerate the process toward obtaining legal documentation, which may be a source of empowerment for refugees, clandestine acts such as providing documents through bribery and counterfeiting official documentation can place young refugees in a situation of further precarity in the eyes of the state and its institutions should they get caught. Alma, the young Syrian mother from Istanbul, narrates the story of her friend who tried crossing to another Turkish city without a travel permit by bribing a bus driver:

> She [her friend] was coming from Hatay to Istanbul, and she had no travel permit. The bus driver asked them to pay more money to accept them without a travel permit. So, he took 500 TL from everyone although it isn't a plane ticket, it's just a bus! Normally it's 150 TL by bus. So, they paid him. In Adana, there was a checkpoint. They arrested them. She was put in jail for one week, and then they withdrew the *kimlik* from her and told her to go back to Syria. She paid $4,000 to go to Syria.

These instances demonstrate that recourse to such solutions is only tempting for refugees who are already in a vulnerable position with limited resources to capitalize on and to maneuver these challenges in a legal manner.

For those who have neither the capital to progress nor access to third-party help, the final tactic may be endurance. Notwithstanding the tactics deployed by Syrian youth to overcome prolonged periods of waiting and emphasize ownership over time, the situation of prolonged hyper-precarity in which many refugees find themselves often impedes the ability to imagine a future and act upon what they envision—what Bourdieu (2000: 182) calls "the most painful of wants." Salem, a young Syrian in his midtwenties residing in Istanbul, was uprooted in 2014 from Homs with no legal documentation. Because of this, he was unable either to join his family in Europe or to return to Syria and so was forced to work under extremely precarious conditions due to his irregular status. When asked about what steps he wishes to take to improve his standing, he explains that he does not imagine a future for himself in Turkey. This, in turn, results in lack of action on his part to pursue an education:

> I do not know if I want to complete my university here, maybe after what I have been through here, and my experience in this society, I had this feeling, maybe if I had the chance to enter the university when I came first to Turkey, I would have adapted and went on normally, and everything would have been great in Turkey, and I would not live [through] all that in these four years. . . . I feel tired and incapable of doing anything, due to these four years, I do not want to study here or find a job after graduation and settle down here, not after what I saw here. I refuse to do that.

Salem's sense of powerlessness in the present translates into an unwavering refusal of remedying his situation by seeking social mobility through education. Other young refugees shared similar experiences.

Nevertheless, even within this sense of stuckedness, many retained elements of hope. Musa, a young Syrian living in Istanbul and originally from a rural town on the outskirts of Damascus, describes his experience of stuckedness due to the lack of reliable employment opportunities and the inability to issue an identity card due to its high monetary cost. This results in an inability to conceive of a future with a family, which would entail responsibilities that he cannot meet under the circumstances:

> Let me tell you something. Every single day passes, it passes from our life, it passes in vain; we are losing it! Because, first of all, we don't benefit from it [employment]! We are just tiring ourselves in vain! For what? For 40 TL! There is no future in that! If we will have to return to Syria, we have nothing! It's impossible to have a family in a life like this! It's impossible. Because when you have a family, you will have children and you need to feed them and take care of them, but you can't do anything for them! They will die from starvation. We will lose our future if the situation stays like this!

Nevertheless, Musa expresses a determination to endure based in hope: "We believe in God. We have big hopes. We are waiting." This passive relation with time and attitude of endurance toward being "stuck" is what Hage (2009) describes as "waiting out" the crisis. In this period of "waiting out" or "waiting through," social actors demonstrate a certain degree of restraint toward imposed waiting periods, as they become accustomed to indefinite indeterminacy.

## Conclusion: Moving On?

The lives of young Syrian refugees stuck in precarious positions in Turkey show us how mobility is as much temporal as spatial, representing progress, both personal and historical, and in general a sense of moving on. In young Syrians' descriptions, having a future, or having a "normal" life, is about movement, about not being temporally stuck. In her eloquent study

of Palestinians' relation to time, Julie Peteet observes, "When Palestinians state that they want to lead 'normal' lives, they imagine a future without constraints on mobility and the appending of time to another's desire" (2018: 99). In order to gain control of one's future, one must also gain control of time. As we will see in the next chapters, it is precisely such control of time that refugee youth struggle to achieve in order to move on.

## Notes

1. Rather than a residence visa (*oturma izni*), what was no doubt requested was an *ikametgâh belgesi*, or certificate of residence, something issued by *muhtars*, or neighborhood "mayors." While the residence visa grants permission to reside and work in the country and is something generally granted through embassies, the certificate of residence merely documents that someone is in residence in a particular location. It is not clear from Sahel's story if he actually requested an *ikametgâh belgesi* or if there may have been a miscommunication regarding the necessary documents. In either case, the story demonstrates the ambiguities and uncertainties surrounding documents, something discussed in a later chapter.
2. Mimar Sinan University is Turkey's oldest fine arts university and is still considered its most prestigious.

# 5

# Uncertainty
## Navigating the Higher Education Dream

<hr>

> When I first came, I started working, education was not in my plans since I
> had to work due to our bad financial status. I worked a bit, and also there were
> no Syrian schools at that time, I had to study in Turkish schools if I wanted
> to study at all.
>
> <div align="right">–Dawood, twenty-one years old, Adana</div>

Dawood was twenty-one years old when we met him in Adana. Originally
from Aleppo, he had promptly responded to our post soliciting research
participants on a Facebook group for Çukorova University students. His
eagerness to participate in the project and share his experiences as a young
Syrian in Turkey became apparent in our first meeting. Indeed, we found
out during the interview that this topic is very close to his heart, since he had
witnessed injustices that he wanted to bring to light.

For our meeting, he chose an upscale café in the city center and led us to
a quiet booth. His fingers were stained, presumably from his work in a fur-
niture factory. He explained that he had to interrupt his high school studies
in Syria due to the war and that he crossed the border to Turkey with his
family in 2014. Under Temporary Protection, he worked at a furniture fac-
tory in the industrial area of Adana to support his family while studying. He
felt at ease and settled in Adana. Throughout the conversation, he explained
the many problems that Syrians face in accessing higher education, as well
as the formal and informal activities that some young students resort to in
order to secure admissions.[1]

This chapter explores the uncertainties with which young refugees
grapple as they try to shape their futures through education. The previous
chapter looked at permanent temporariness and the active waiting that it in-
duces. Here, we will explore uncertainty in its dual meaning of incomplete
knowledge and inability to see the future. Both epistemic uncertainty and

existential uncertainty are key elements of the refugee experience (see, e.g., Biehl 2015; Horst and Grabska 2015). In the case of the youth in this study, the intersection of these types of uncertainty comes through most clearly in their attempts to enter Turkey's universities. There, they encounter an unfamiliar system with few adequate means for obtaining information. At the same time, the question of whether or not they will access higher education creates a ripple effect of uncertainties regarding their longer-term futures. As they navigate these uncertainties and find ways to create clarity, they also begin to define new futures, often unexpected ones.

Like Dawood, many young Syrians had to interrupt their studies and engage in what they refer to as "unqualified" work to sustain their families, in some cases as the primary breadwinner. This, in turn, limits the ability of young refugees to pursue higher education, which can otherwise provide them with access to better economic opportunities in the future. Indeed, the 30 percent of young Syrians who had dreams of higher education prior to the war were faced in Turkey with new obstacles that delayed their potential path to university. However, what makes Dawood's case special is that he overcame these obstacles and played an important role in helping others, too, through his involvement in various associations.

Though refugees' access to university education is often perceived as "a luxury leading towards 'elitism'" (Pilkington 1986), higher education institutions play a vital role in the integration of migrants into the host country. For immigrants themselves, and for their new homeland, increased access to higher education can provide considerable opportunity for growth and less reliance on public services (Erisman and Looney 2007). Prior to the conflict, Syrians had been able to enter Turkish universities as international students. At time of writing, they continue to apply under the same international status and so compete with other international students under university quotas.

Early in the Syrian crisis, it is estimated that there were already about four thousand Syrian students enrolled in Turkish universities, most in Gaziantep and Istanbul (Biehl et al. 2016). That figure increased to more than twenty thousand in 2017–18,[2] and in the 2021–22 academic year had more than doubled to 48,192 in state universities.[3] Many studies have examined the barriers to higher education that Syrian young people face in Turkey (Erdoğan et al. 2017; Hohberger 2017, 2018; Watenpaugh, Fricke, and King 2014; Yavcan and El-Ghali 2017). These barriers do not differ much from those identified in other migrant contexts and fall under the main headlines of financial cost, language barrier, accreditation, and registration process (Erisman and Looney 2007; Muñoz 2013; Zeus 2011). However, these have been exacerbated in the Turkish context because of the decentralized nature of the application system for foreign students, the lack of centralized guidance, and the difficulties of acquiring the paperwork necessary to demonstrate their previous qualifications.[4]

We discuss in this chapter how, in this context, an informal and often illegal "migrant-supporting industry" (Cohen 2006) has developed around higher education in Turkey. Other studies have shown how certain individuals, groups, or institutions may take on the role of mediator between migrants and their employers or other institutions, often profiting from this role (Castles and Miller 2003). Literature specifically examining mobility and higher education focuses on the agents of the higher education sector, such as international student recruitment teams and other institutions selling an education overseas, and how these shape mobility flows (Beech 2018). Here, we instead examine the informal and often illegal mechanisms underlying access to higher education among migrants and refugees. While much of the literature on the migrant "illegality industry" (Andersson 2014b) focuses on the persons and institutions who profit from migrants' attempts to cross borders, we extend that concept here to look at the informal or illegal mechanisms that Syrian youth employ to overcome the epistemic and existential uncertainties produced by the higher education system in Turkey.

We focus on how the industry around higher education for refugees has emerged in Turkey, how it functions, and how it relates to other dimensions of migration facilitation, in this case integration. Indeed, a "migration industry" has emerged around higher education in which an ensemble of "entrepreneurs, firms and services . . . chiefly motivated by financial gain, facilitate international mobility, settlement and adaptation" (Hernández-León 2013: 25). Moreover, as Ruben Hernández-León notes for the United States–Mexico border case, it is often migrants themselves who identify opportunities because of their membership in the social networks of persons migrating. "In-group membership," he remarks, "offers the chance to commodify solidarity; that is, to use migratory human capital as well as the individual migrant's distinct position in a social network for personal monetary gain" (29).

Here, too, we find that actors in the particular migration industry that has developed around Turkish higher education are also often Syrians who build on their own previous skills and contacts, in the process "commodifying solidarity" and capitalizing on their in-group membership to sell migration services. This, in turn, gives an advantage to those young people who are financially better off. These young people generally have support from their families, available time, and social networks that inform them about the best opportunities. We illustrate how privilege is (re)produced for already privileged migrants (Cranston and Lloyd 2019; Koh and Wissink 2018;).

Higher education is an aspiration, and we could have discussed it in this chapter through the prism of that futural orientation. What we discuss instead is something prior to that: developing the capacity to aspire in a context of both epistemic and existential uncertainty. In his well-known article "The Capacity to Aspire," Arjun Appadurai (2013: 188) observed that our

horizons of expectation are not simply individual but are culturally shaped. They are also socioeconomically shaped, he explains, as the aspirational capacity is something that is unevenly distributed in society. "It is a sort of meta-capacity, and the relatively rich and powerful invariably have a more fully developed capacity to aspire." Appadurai calls this ability a navigational capacity, meaning that certain groups have a better-developed ability to make links between means and ends in pursuit of long-term goals.

We show here that in a context of rupture and disorientation, where one's ordinary means of orienting oneself in life are thrown into flux, this capacity is disrupted. Epistemic and existential uncertainty are great levelers. We demonstrate here, though, how those with more means learn to navigate this uncertain terrain more quickly. Regarding navigation, Appadurai (2013: 188) notes, "The more privileged in any society simply have used the map of its norms to explore the future more frequently and more realistically, and to share this knowledge with one another more routinely than their poorer and weaker neighbors." Access to higher education is very revealing of this, as a university diploma remains one of the main ways in which youth imagine reproducing their class position or improving it.

We rely here on data collected through interviews with administrators of higher education centers, as well as ethnographic observations in classrooms, discussions with teachers and students in these centers, and posts on social media groups. We first describe the limitations on Syrian access to higher education in Turkey before examining the informal and sometimes illegal practices, strategies, and industry that emerge to facilitate access. Such means, we show, reproduce inequalities but also have an appeal to youth, who tend to prefer them.

## Confronting Existential Uncertainty

Yazan is a young woman from Aleppo who studied arts in Damascus and was starting over in her studies at the time that we met her in Izmir. Not long after arriving in Turkey, she had attempted to enter similar programs there:

> I went to universities to ask how I can complete my studies, and they told me that there was no chance for me to complete my degree. There are only three or four universities that have an arts department–I believe they're Yıldız, Marmara, and Mimar Sinan. I went twice to Mimar Sinan, and they told me that your degree is Syrian, and we do not accept it. . . . This was despite showing them my drawings–I can show them to you. I got 90 out of 100 in Damascus, but when I came here, they said no. So, I thought it would be impossible to find a university. I worked for two years. . . . Even the Turks themselves find it difficult to get a place there [in those programs].

In her case, it appeared impossible to enter university through the standard route, which involved taking the Foreign Students Exam (Yabancı Uyruklu Öğrenci Sinavı, or YÖS), for reasons relating to her particular educational trajectory. This almost made her lose hope until she decided to change her career and study journalism and media.

> I already studied for one year and a half [in Syria], I could equalize the subjects and start studying. No university helped me. I can't do the YÖS test because I studied literary baccalaureate. So, if I took a YÖS course [the exam prep courses], it is really expensive, and I cannot study YÖS and work at the same time. Whatever money I will make, it will go to the YÖS. So, I lost hope of being able to complete my studies. Later, thank God that I got a place at Ege University. . . [studying] journalism and radio and TV.

It was only, then, by changing her educational trajectory and making a different decision about her career path that she was able to gain acceptance to a program.

Yazan's story illustrates the intersection of existential and epistemic uncertainty in young Syrians' paths to higher education in Turkey. On the one hand, there was much uncertainty that developed from what Yazan did not or could not know–how the system worked, how to gain admission, and how to fund an education, for example. We will discuss barriers to knowing in the next section. For now, we wish to focus on existential uncertainty, which we use here as an umbrella concept to conceptualize the uncertainties related to planning any sort of future. These uncertainties are existential in that they concern the future shape that one's life will take. However, in the case of refugees they are also existential in that they concern what one needs to do to live. Our particular concern is with how young Syrians in Turkey attempt to overcome these uncertainties, including the way they assess them *as* uncertainties and the paths that they try to find through them.

These uncertainties primarily emerge in the trade-off between living and studying; in questions around their certificates and whether or not they will have to start their education again; and in choices that they make about language learning. In contrast to epistemic uncertainty, all of these are characterized by indeterminacy and the need to make choices and plans in the face of potential outcomes that seem random, contingent, or changeable.

First, Syrian youth are faced with the indeterminacies of supporting themselves and their families and must make trade-offs in their medium-term pursuit of education. Financial difficulties become an obstacle at the very beginning of the decision-making process. Though public universities have waived fees for Syrians, most find studying impossible without a scholarship to cover living expenses. Moreover, with two-thirds of the Syrian population being under thirty years old, they have become important actors in labor market activity (Özerim and Kalem 2016). Many are the breadwinners

in their households. Many hold family responsibilities or need to provide for themselves and cannot afford to live for four years without work. This renders the option of balancing work and studies not viable, as work hours are generally long, and the pay rate is low.

As a result, those who are able to afford university usually receive support from family, ordinarily when other family members are earning income. We see the necessity of this in at least one survey conducted with Syrian university students in 2017 (Erdoğan et al.), which found that a full 48 percent of students they surveyed relied on their families. Of the rest, 18 percent received scholarships, and 25 percent worked while studying. We similarly see that about half of the students were able to study without working (56 percent), while the rest either work part-time (32 percent) or full-time (12 percent). While working and studying may be possible in other countries or for other groups in Turkey, it is particularly difficult for Syrian youth, given the work conditions and difficulty of taking evening classes.

Though financial assistance does exist in some universities for low-income students, this may not be an economically viable option for young refugees who still require a source of income to sustain themselves. Rasha, who left Syria in middle school, continued her studies in Turkey and registered to study political science at Yıldırım Beyazit University in Ankara. She describes these difficulties:

> If there is a scholarship, it is so easy. The student will be able to study supported by the scholarship. If there is no scholarship, the student should work and study at the same time, which is impossible in Turkey. No one gives a job to students who want to work and study at the same time. For example, the government universities are free of charge for Syrians but the evening classes are not. This also plays a big role.

Rasha refers here to what in Turkish is known as "second education" (*ikinci öğretim*), a form of continuing education whose admissions requirements tend to be lower but who charge fees, unlike the daytime classes (what is known in Turkish as *örgün eğitim*, or formal education).[5]

For Syrian youth, this difference makes working during the day and studying at night not a viable option, as Zad explains:

> You know Turks do not give a part-time job. Work is the most important thing for them. If the evening courses were free of charge, the student would be able to work and study. Now, it does not make sense to work and study, as you will pay what you get by working toward the university fees. And the day classes are free of charge, but the students won't be able to work.

Because of the costs and the difficulty of both working and studying, many youths put higher education on hold to support their families. In some cases, this means long periods of waiting, while in others it means a com-

plete change of life plans. Orwa is a young professional who works as a career coach, helping other Syrians navigate professional life in Turkey. At thirty years old, he already had a PhD in economics from Aleppo University when he arrived in Istanbul, and he says that he adapted easily to life in the country. We met him at a day-long training workshop that he was organizing at a hotel in an upper-middle-class Istanbul neighborhood. He observed,

> When we talk about the Syrian person from eighteen to thirty years of age, he's bound to a family. He's either a father or a brother, if he's not married, or he's the provider for the family in a complete way. He can be either a supporter or a provider for the family. . . . The families which have four or five guys or have girls or have a decent income, you walk into the house like, okay, these people are relaxed and even have savings. I, today, talk about a minimum of 7,000 TL[6] income for a family that is saving up in an essential way. However, where is the problem? The problem is for the family that has one guy, or one provider we call him. So, whether this provider is a man or a woman, we have a problem, because one salary can't possibly be enough. And this one salary, he's forced to work.

Indeed, many of the youth we interviewed were responsible for their family members, making prospects of seeking a higher education degree unimaginable. Zad, for instance, was in a similar position to that of Dawood, having witnessed a drastic shift in life course due to his dispossession from Syria. Zad interrupted his education in ninth grade, when he had to leave Syria, and then studied tenth and eleventh grades with his sister at home, without going to school. He found time for this on weekends while working to sustain his family, first in the textile industry and then in shoe manufacturing in Adana. "I was not thinking about myself," he told us. "I was just thinking about the family. That is the main difference with my life in Syria. There, I was studying, and here I am working."

It was only when his father finally arrived from Syria that he was able to return to his studies after having worked several years. The father began working as a teacher in the Temporary Education Centers (TECs) that the Turkish government had established to help ease Syrian children into the educational system, giving the family a second income. Zad's biggest fear at the time of our interview was that his father might lose his job if the TECs closed,[7] and that then he would have to go back to work instead of studying.

Even after his father's arrival, however, Zad had delays in returning to school. He described to us how he had saved enough money to be able to take a year off to study and had even gained acceptance to university. However, a sudden change in his family's housing situation meant that his savings were needed to pay for rent one year in advance, as such advance payments are a common practice in Adana.[8] This made moving to another

city impossible at that moment, and Zad had to postpone one more year. Although by the time we spoke to him he had finally been able to start his studies, he was already anticipating the closure of the TECs. "If I had a younger brother, I might let him help us a bit," he remarked, "but the only ones working now are my father and me." When we asked if his father could not find another job if the centers close, he explained that his father had become old and frail and could not engage in manual work, which would probably be the only other sort of work that he could find.

While those who are the only or necessary breadwinners bear responsibility for their families that often forces them to delay education or even change course, other youth that we interviewed were alone and had no one to support them. Orwa reflected on the economic pressures facing Syrian youth in Turkey without first-degree family members:

> The matter, in all honesty, is linked to education in a big way, and you also have, by the way, a big percentage of people without their parents. This percentage of young Syrians who are working, their parents are either in Syria or outside of Syria in Lebanon or in other countries. . . . It is impossible to manage working and studying at the same time, as it is very difficult to find part-time employment.

These difficulties were also commonly experienced by Syrian youth in various Turkish cities.

Initiatives emerged rapidly by state and non-state actors to remove financial barriers, though requirements still exclude many young Syrians from their benefits. The Turkish government has waived university tuition fees at state universities for Syrian students. Accordingly, Syrians students registered in Turkey and those who have become Turkish citizens do not pay university fees in public universities.[9] In addition, there are a large number of state scholarships through the Türkiye Bursları (Turkey Scholarships) program to international students in general,[10] and also participating in programs are international organizations, such as DAFI (Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative), HOPES (Higher and Further Education Opportunities and Perspectives for Syrians), and DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst; German Academic Exchange Service).[11] Similarly, some private actors such as the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation offer scholarships to Arab students interested in STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) programs to study at several Turkish universities.[12] However, there are not many of these scholarships. Official data shows that in 2017 only around four thousand Syrian students, or around 20 to 25 percent of the Syrian university population, obtained a scholarship (Erdoğan et al. 2017). By 2020–21, the number of Syrian university students had risen to 37,200, with 3,680 of those receiving full and 16,000 partial scholarships.[13] Because the partial scholarships generally do not alleviate the need to work,

this means that only 10 percent of the Syrian university population was able to focus exclusively on studies.

Because of this, many young Syrians with whom we spoke felt that these scholarships were unachievable, unrealistic. Several reported trying and not obtaining one. Zad expressed his frustration at the limited and highly competitive nature of these opportunities, saying that he applied twice for the Türkiye Bursları. When we asked him about the Dutch-funded SPARK Fellowship, he told us that he did not know about it. We will discuss the issue of knowing in the next section, but it is worth noting that in his case it was not that he had never heard of it but that he thought he would have no chance and so did not investigate it properly. He told us that he simply did not see it as a realistic option: "I felt it was like an organization, I do not know, people told me nothing came from it. I thought, if Türkiye Bursları did not accept me, I will not be accepted in SPARK for sure. There are many students applying for it as I can see on Facebook." Despite such efforts, then, many students still could not imagine ways to access them or to balance the work-study trade-off.

Apart from these financial uncertainties, however, there was also the problem of uncertainty in connecting their past education to their present and future. Nazem, for example, was in his early twenties at the time we met him and was working in a café in Gaziantep that specialized in the Turkish dessert *katmer*. Originally from the city of Manbij in northeastern Aleppo, Nazem had fled to Turkey with his brother and sisters, while his parents went to Lebanon. When we met him, he was living on his own, as his brothers and sisters had all married and established their own homes. Throughout the interview, he expressed that one of the biggest factors impeding his dreams of higher education was not wanting to burden his older siblings, who were already financially responsible for providing for their own families: "I don't have time to study and do exams anyway. I really wanted to, and even my brothers told me not to worry about money, we will help you, but I decided to work for this period of time and get some money for my expenses . . . and to decrease the load on my brothers." In addition to perceived financial constraints, however, there was also the problem of getting his diploma via the Syrian Coalition, which was not a certainty. As a result, he had not even begun studying for the university entrance exams (discussed more below), because he feared that he would waste time and money and ultimately not be admitted, as he could not produce a diploma to show his previous education.

The second existential uncertainty in relation to higher education, then, is whether or not young Syrians will be able to transfer their social and cultural capital from Syria to Turkey. For many, this is because diplomas and transcripts were missing or could not be obtained. Moneer, a young Syrian originally from Kobani whom we met in a café in Mardin, interrupted his

education in middle school prior to moving to Turkey. When asked about what documentation he possessed regarding his level of education, he expressed that he left Syria with no documents. "I do not have any," he explained. "Everything was in the house, and it was destroyed. We could not take anything from our house."

While numerous youth told us that it was impossible for them to obtain their certificates, others managed to take them or to get copies, but they then faced the difficulty of getting them accredited. In Turkey, if foreign students have a valid high school diploma, they need to acquire an equivalency certificate from the Ministry of Education or the Turkish embassy in their home country. The equivalency process invariably takes a very long time, especially the process of checking the validity of the degree (Erdoğan et al. 2017). The problem of checking the degree, and therefore the length of time of the process, are only exacerbated in the circumstances of bureaucratic confusion caused by the war in Syria. If students are not able to obtain their diplomas or cannot acquire the equivalency certificate, they will need to take yet another exam, the Foreign Students High School Proficiency and Equivalence Exam (Yabancı Öğrenciler Lise Yeterlilik ve Denklik Sınavı, or YÖLDS). We should note that this exam is given only once each year.

Although the Higher Education Council (YÖK) early on introduced the status of special students, allowing Syrians to be accepted to universities without academic records or identification documents (Watenpaugh et al. 2014; Yavcan and El-Ghali 2017), this only gives them time. Ultimately, they still need to produce the documents. Orwa explains the significant toll that this paperwork requirement has on the ability of young Syrians to pursue higher education, especially those who had already begun studying in universities in Syria: "The university students, a very high percentage, were refused the opportunity to continue their degrees, which means that you have to start all over again. So, when you're a third-year student and start again from the beginning it's honestly hard. This made many people think of not returning to education." Given the ongoing conflict in Syria, university students who wished to continue their education in Turkey found it extremely difficult to provide documentation for their previous studies. This often resulted in further putting their dreams on hold.

In such cases, young Syrians often find themselves reaching an impasse regarding their opportunities to continue education, thus having to pave alternative paths for their futures and aspirations. Yazan, for example, had to pause her initial plans for a few years and work at a real estate office before reconsidering the prospects of going back to university. When she did, she changed course, switching from art, in which she was unable to gain admission, to journalism and media.

A third uncertainty is the ability to obtain an adequate level of Turkish language, if one cannot be admitted to the relatively elite English-language

programs or to the still rare Arabic-language programs. While English-language programs exist in Turkey, especially in cities such as Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir, they obviously fill their foreign student quotas sooner than the Turkish language programs. While certain universities in Turkey's south, such as Gaziantep University or Mardin Artuklu, have opened Arabic-language programs, their offerings and student numbers are limited.

We frame language learning here as an existential uncertainty, because it relates both to elements over which the student has limited control, such as language-learning ability, and also to students' perceptions of possible futures. In general, we found that those young people who made the most effort to learn the language were those who saw their medium-term or long-term futures in Turkey.[14] As we discuss more in the next chapter, youth who imagined their futures in Turkey were motivated to integrate through language learning. However, the practical possibility of being able to learn was also surrounded with uncertainties, as it was something not always in their control.

Among the youth with whom we spoke, most appear not to have reached a sufficient level to study the subjects they wished to study at university, even among those who had taken Turkish classes.[15] Those who have sufficient financial means study in TÖMER,[16] affiliated with Ankara University, and pay the required fees. This is the case with Salih, a young man from an economically and culturally privileged Aleppan family, who was living in Adana. He had attended private schools in Syria before coming to Turkey and had begun one year of an industrial engineering degree at Aleppo University. As soon as he arrived in Turkey in 2012, he began learning Turkish in TÖMER. He then took the YÖS exam and managed to get into one of the universities of his choice, Çukurova University, while working for the International Labor Organization, first as a translator and then as an adviser.

Such cases represented an exception in our sample of interviewees. Most other young people struggled to get access to such education. Ruqa, a young woman from Aleppo living with her parents in Adana, works full-time as a translator and outreach worker for international projects and is not considering going to university because of the difficulties involved. Although she was fluent in spoken Turkish, she explains that she thinks about going to a TÖMER course to improve her grammar, but this costs money. She thinks that going to the free course options, which are not of high quality, would not provide her with sufficient knowledge of Turkish to be able to get into higher education.

Some students manage to get into a Turkish language program but then find that the Turkish in the classes is different from that spoken elsewhere. The ones who face the most difficulties try to transfer to other universities in which the language of instruction is not Turkish. In such cases, English be-

comes the linguistic capital, as in the case of Sumbul, originally from an area near Aleppo, who had interrupted her studies in tenth grade but managed to continue in a Syrian high school and was admitted to the management program at Çukurova University. She says it is not hard for her to study in English because she was well prepared in Syria: "Our basics are better, and we are used to taking exams in English, even the Turkish students are aware of these advantages."

Whether finances, language, or paperwork, then, young Syrians face a host of uncertainties that throw the entire dream of acquiring a higher education into doubt and often cause them to rethink life goals. Tamim, for instance, had left school in ninth grade because of financial difficulties within his family before the war in Syria. Although he has dreamed of continuing his education, he explained to us that his chances of going to university are slim. He would have to do four years of open education to complete high school, and he knows that this will be difficult for him, because his Turkish is not good enough. Instead, he has begun working with a Syrian NGO, organizing festivals and training Turkish and Syrian students to perform.

Not all are as lucky as Tamim, however, and here we return to Dawood, who confirmed our own observations that many young people had given up on university because they could not get their certificates or could not learn the language. Even for those who stick to their plans, however, there are significant barriers, what we call here epistemic uncertainties, that all must overcome.

## Epistemic Uncertainty

Fadi is a young man from Aleppo whose studies were interrupted in the eighth grade. Once he arrived in Turkey, he continued in open education while working, and he ultimately managed to gain admission to Çukurova University. His observations were particularly pertinent on this topic because he also worked part-time advising other youth on how to navigate the application process. According to him, the biggest problem for young people trying to continue their education is the complex and decentralized nature of the admission process for non-Turkish students. In addition, there are changing national and university-specific regulations, often only available in Turkish on university or government websites. The key, according to Fadi, is research:

> It is a matter of research, not more nor less. I mean, as a person researches more, the more he learns. I cannot say more than this at all. Before I left Syria, I had started researching universities in Turkey. I had a complete understanding about it before I even came here. It's research, the more a person researches, like you are now researching information, the more you research,

the more you have a depot of information, right? It's a matter of accumulation of information, not more nor less.

Knowing the rules, for instance, allowed a student who was accepted to a university in a major he did not want, to transfer his scholarship to another university the following year. There are even many students who are surprised at how I did this, because they don't know the rules.

The research Fadi refers to is necessary because of the decentralized nature of university applications for foreign students. Although Turkish students enter a central exam that places them in university programs, non-citizen applicants must apply through each university's individual route. In addition, state universities tend not to have offices set up for the purpose of recruiting eligible foreign students. This means that Syrians looking at education in public universities must research the application process on their own and apply individually (Hohberger 2018). Indeed, our analysis of the contents of several Facebook groups revealed that students were often confused by the procedures. They asked basic questions about application processes, dates, and general requirements. They also asked for more specific information, such as exam result dates, and previous experience in applying for scholarships.

The lack of a central source for information on the higher education system for international students in general, and for Syrian refugees in particular, makes it very difficult for students to gain information about or understand the opaque university application and registration process. In addition to this, the decentralized nature of the system leads to logistical difficulties. Although the entrance exam for foreign students has a single acronym, YÖS, since 2010, this exam has become decentralized, with each university choosing its own version of the YÖS and the languages in which it is offered (Watenpaugh et al. 2014). Although the YÖS exam has been waived for students by the government, universities often encourage students to take the exam to increase their chances of acceptance (Yavcan and el-Ghali 2017: 30). Each of these exams generally costs a significant amount of money.[17]

Once they figure out the exam system and which university accepts which exam, students must prepare for them. Entrance exams usually require a year of preparation, especially for those who had to interrupt high school and make up for the interruption. For this, students ordinarily take extra courses, adding to the financial strain on students who, upon failing to receive a scholarship or financial aid, need to finance their own university entrance preparation. In addition, students will need to prepare for and take a language competency exam, which may be in Turkish or English, depending on the academic program's language of instruction.

Many students, then, must prepare for each exam, particularly as entry to academic programs such as medicine and engineering can be very competi-

tive. For most, it is particularly important to try to win a scholarship that will enable them to study without working. In a private exam preparation center that we visited in Mardin, the director explained to us how competitive it had become for students to get such scholarships, especially in Mardin, where students could select programs in Arabic: "Very few got scholarships last year. I had twenty students, their points were very high, not one of them could win a scholarship. One of them was Muhammad, he had 95 points, and he did not get a scholarship."

The difficulties of acceptance, particularly with a scholarship, mean that Syrian students usually apply to more than one university to increase their chances of acceptance. Indeed, the application process becomes a type of gamble, where students try to increase their chances by applying to as many universities as they can. Janin is a young woman from Hama who was working at a private teaching center when we met her. She told us that she had prepared for university entrance exams alone while working in parallel. She considers herself lucky for having been accepted to a program after applying to twenty-eight universities. She tells us that other young people she knows applied to seventy or eighty universities without being accepted to any of them.

A final epistemic uncertainty arises precisely because of the perceived necessity of applying to as many schools as possible. Because the entrance exams take place on location, students need to travel to different universities across the country in order to take them. This requires that students navigate cities that they do not know, often with limited knowledge of the Turkish language.

Tala is another student who applied to multiple universities before finally gaining an acceptance. She had interrupted her studies in tenth grade in Aleppo when the war came to her city and later continued in a religious high school (imam hatip) in Turkey. At the time of our interview, she was a student in biology at Çukurova University. She complained that the level of difficulty of the entrance exam varied from one place to another, forcing students to take multiple exams. Not only does the cost of the exams add up, but students also have to travel to different locations, as they all apply to numerous universities to maximize their chances of being accepted. This involves not only transport between cities but also often transport to universities located outside city centers. Tala remarked, "Going to all the universities outside the city was the hard part. Like I had to go to Kütahya, Konya, and other cities, and my brother had to go to Istanbul, Ankara, and Kahraman Maraş."

In sum, then, young people are faced with considerable epistemic uncertainties that arise from the decentralized nature of university entrance for foreign students and the requirements, preparation, and costs that arise from that. Given this, it should not be surprising that enterprising actors emerged

to help young people navigate this complex situation. Many of them were young people like Fadi who had themselves found ways through the application maze and who played an instrumental role in developing an informal industry aimed at securing university spots for students.

## Navigating Uncertainty

When we interviewed him, Fadi had already made his way through the university maze, graduated, and begun work helping other young people enter higher education. Some of the problems that youths experienced he attributed not to the complexities of the system but rather to the context of refugeehood, which he asserted produces a reliance on assistance, as well as a lack of professional know-how among the youth. The latter, he says, is creating a market for exploitative centers.

> The problem among the youth is their full reliance on donations or on the support that they are receiving. It has led to a lot of ignorance in our community. In my experience interacting with the young ones, a high school student does not know the word "email," or what email is, or doesn't know how to use email. What is the reason for this? Of course, it is the comfort that is being provided from assistance or financial support to these youth.
>
> The subject of registration to university is not a difficult subject at all; it is an online form about my information, nothing more. But the ignorance among our youth is what is causing these centers of exploitation that are being opened: the need of someone to come and register me. So, these are the problems that we are facing– the weakness of the youth, weakness in technology to a weird point.

Whether for the reasons Fadi suggests or others, it was certainly the case that most of the youth we interviewed used intermediaries or services of some kind at some point in their university trajectory.

These services were often informal, such as social media groups, or private, such as persons working as entrance counselors or centers for exam preparation. Some of them, however, were semi-legal or even illegal, particularly those that promised documents. While the literature usually covers informality in terms of employment or illegal border crossing through smuggling (e.g., Andersson 2014b), little is known about these types of semi-legal industries that emerge to serve a particular purpose (here providing access to higher education). These options, though often inadequate and exploitative, are also in many cases appealing to prospective students and respond to an existing need. In this case, we show that they appear very quickly in response to a need and then slowly lose importance as the moment of urgency subsides and as students, who are slowly integrated into the system, are better informed of their options.

As discussed above, most of the youth in our study had their education interrupted in some way. For some, their high school education was interrupted, while others had already begun university when violence broke out. In only a few cases in our eighteen to thirty age group, individuals had completed their university degree before fleeing for Turkey. In all such cases, including those of graduates, youth faced difficulties in obtaining diploma equivalency or transferring credits. In order to overcome these difficulties, transnational services emerged to provide diplomas and credits from Syria.

Youth mentioned individuals in Syria who either did them a favor or asked to be paid to get them their documents from their universities. Belal, whom we met in Mardin, explained the process he went through to bring his diplomas from Syria, as well as the middlemen who helped him:

> In 2017, I realized that I have to change my life and to study, so I had to bring my certificates and official papers from Syria. I knew people who do these things and take money. They are bad people and have close connections with the regime, but I was forced to pay them money and bring my papers. It cost me 800 USD. I then registered in many universities.

While Belal was successful, some youth do not have acquaintances in regime-occupied areas, or their requests to obtain their diplomas are rejected by universities because they are wanted by the Syrian regime. We met with Omar, who had graduated as an electrical engineer from the city of Homs in Syria. Although he was able to secure temporary jobs with his skills in computer companies in Turkey, he still needed to provide official certification of his qualifications. However, it was difficult for him to obtain his transcripts and diploma from Homs University, which at the time was under "Alawite and Hezbollah control," as he phrased it. Students in this situation can also get an equivalence from the authorities in "liberated" areas in Northern Syria or from the office of the interim government in Gaziantep, Turkey. However, several students described the latter as also difficult. Indeed, one student said that it is "as bad as the regime, as it charges a lot and takes time. There was never anyone in the office, and it offers poor service."

One option for students who cannot obtain documents showing their high school degrees is to sit the Libyan high school completion exam, which is accredited by the Turkish government and enables students to apply to universities. We spoke to Dunya, a twenty-one-year-old originally from Deir Ezzor studying in Çukurova University in Adana, who explained the difference between Syrian and Libyan certifications in Turkey:

> The students before us, when they came to Turkey, were taught according to the Libyan curricula here in Turkey. They were doing their exams and being awarded with Libyan certificates. Because the Libyan certificate was accredited worldwide, whereas the coalition certificate was only accredited in Turkey. So, most of the students preferred the Libyan certificate. In my year, they were

indecisive whether to continue giving accreditation to the Libyan certificate or not, finally they decided to continue. So, the students were divided—some obtained the Syrian certificate, some the Libyan certificate. I am from the students who studied the Libyan.

While some students are able to use this option, others utilize the gray market that has emerged to help students with the hassle of formalities and certification. Ibrahim, a young man studying in Mardin, described to us how many youths resort to counterfeit certificates and diplomas due to the obstacles they face in retrieving original copies from Syria. While this may seem to be a faster route, these cases ultimately face longer periods of waiting until the authenticity of their diplomas are verified. Ibrahim explained, "Due to the war, some people started to fake their certificates and papers, so when we went to the ratification it was hard and took time. . . . The temporary government in Gaziantep must confirm the secondary certificate, and then send it to the Turkish ministry of education for equivalency."[18]

Social media pages are where those offering these otherwise illegal services advertise them and where youth learn about them. However, these online services are not limited to this type of activity, as many online platforms offer students guidance in terms of exams and registration. These platforms are mainly run by students who themselves experienced the difficulties and obstacles posed by long bureaucratic processes, demanding university acceptance criteria, and a generally competitive environment for a chance to access higher education.

> There are groups like TÖĞRENCİT—I'm not sure if you've heard of it—they're doing very good work. They're giving all the information in Arabic and all the students are required to do is to go ahead and register. . . . This is just one example of an organization that came to my mind, but there are many others that offer the same services and are doing a very nice job. (Fadi)

There were rumors that circulated of criminal activities and forging diplomas (high school and university). One young man complained that forged certificates and diplomas only created difficulties, as Turkish official offices needed to certify the authenticity of these documents, skills, and academic training. Similarly, Dawood reported a case in Gaziantep University where four diplomas were discovered to have been forged, and the students were expelled from the university. According to him, all Syrian documents can be forged and are being forged, including passports, diplomas, and identity cards. He also gave the example of an individual with a fake diploma in mechanical engineering that he used to obtain work in Turkey. According to Dawood, these forgeries are causing a lot of problems for others, who have to deal with more bureaucracy as a result.

In addition to the provision of services by third-party actors, there has been a proliferation of information groups on Facebook and other social

media through which Syrian youth share knowledge and experiences. We explored some of these groups, particularly on Facebook, where prospective students ask questions and are provided tips and answers by others who may have gone through the same process.[19]

Several non-profit non-governmental organizations also give training or counseling advice and advertise these services through social media platforms, making them accessible to students. Hemmeh, for instance, is a Syrian youth association established in 2012 that provides language programs and training sessions. In addition to Syrian organizations, international organizations including UNHCR (through TÖMER scholarships) and the EU (through a program called HOPES) offered free language courses.[20] Some Turkish NGOs also provided university preparation courses.

For instance, we met Munsef at an exam prep course offered by a Turkish NGO in Adana. He had graduated from Syria with a bachelor in mathematics and was working at the organization's community center in the old part of the city. As a math graduate, he had been recruited to work full-time at the center teaching free math classes to students prepping for the YÖS exam. Free TÖMER classes are also given to students at that particular center, which has a teaching capacity of around 150 YÖS students and 50 TÖMER students.

When asked about the performance of students attending his classes, Munsef mentioned being quite pleased by both performance and turn-out: "My students do not have to come to class, but they come to class willingly and lovingly. I try to keep the classes going, try to explain everything clearly to the students from different levels. They like our courses, I think. The number of students is high." Despite Munsef's enthusiasm, however, paid courses and services usually have a better reputation. Moreover, the lack of state supervision over the teaching at courses offered by NGOs leaves students uncertain about their level of preparation.

As a result of these practical uncertainties, certain groups that began as solidarity initiatives aimed at mutual aid progressively turned into market-oriented enterprises. Young people may start charging others for "helping" students. Fadi, for instance, had created an online social media account through which he offered services.

> Since I came to Turkey, . . . as I had a lot of information about universities in Turkey etc., I noticed that students had a lack of information or weak information. They have this, the essential subject is about searching—they didn't know how to search for information—so I was helping them and through my help, I was learning something new. So, I reached a stage where I tried to transform this help to a service that I can benefit from as partial income and at the same time I help students. So here, of course, after two years of working completely for free, I opened an office online, on Facebook with the goal of providing university services, asking for really very low amounts, for registration to universities.

He further explains that individuals who might have started as volunteers, or in solidarity, then moved on to an exam prep center, where their skills are in high demand, and get paid for providing these services. "A lot of offices offered me work with them for very high amounts, but I refused because of the abuse that is happening in registration and so on," Fadi remarked. We see here, then, how solidarity may be commodified, and individuals may capitalize on the trust of in-group membership to provide services for monetary gain (see also Hernández-León 2013).

Of course, much depends on reputation and word of mouth. Private centers compete with NGOs to offer exam preparation for the YÖS or SAT exam as well as TÖMER classes for students approaching the university level. These courses are costly and require students and their families to make a big financial investment toward their education—an investment that many students cannot afford. It should be noted that such for-profit "cram schools" have long been a part of university preparation in Turkey, where one's university place for Turkish studies is decided by a centralized exam. Such "cram schools" are expensive for Turkish students, as well, and many delay university entrance until they can afford to spend a year preparing for the exams through such schools. In the case of exam prep schools directed at Syrian students, their relatively high cost has meant that these centers or service providers employ strategies to make themselves known to the public and increase their credibility. These often imitate those of other Turkish "cram schools," such as advertising on social media the names of their former students who did well on exams and were accepted to prestigious fields in recognized universities.

The ones that have the best reputation are able to increase their prices and maintain their clientele, as explained by Zad through the case of a teaching center with which he had experience.

> There is a famous educational center in Mersin called Mersin Scientific Center. From that center alone ten students are in the medicine department . . . They started advertising and posting on Facebook. The owner of the educational center that I studied in is the brother of the owner of Mersin Scientific Center. So, the brother brought the teacher here. The teacher is now here in Mersin. That is why he raised the prices by 75 percent, which is exploitation.

Many interviewees reported that they themselves or people they knew were struggling to be able to afford these centers, as their cost seems disproportionate with the income level of young Syrians. Rasha, a young woman who works as an accountant in one of these centers in Gaziantep, also reported seeing students struggling to make ends meet, and yet trying to pay for these courses.

> We even have a student who lives in the industrial area, an area with slums and factories and very far from the city. . . . So, imagine what she is doing to study. . . . Of course, she is studying with a scholarship, but there are others

who don't even have the money for the bus to come from her house to here. Since I am responsible for the accounting in the institution, I know their conditions, and I get into bad situations. Sometimes I try to support the people I know, even with something small, but the problem is that the numbers are huge, and the conditions are so bad. These were able to get to the center. . . . Others can't even get out of the house because they can't pay for the bus. We really don't know what we can offer them . . . and the Turkish scholarships are very few.

Most of the students in such cram centers need to work to be able to pay the fees. While those who do not work struggle to be able to afford them, this situation is exacerbated for young women, who are less likely to work and as a result often cannot afford to access these centers.

## Re-Imagining Futures

We have so far traced the struggles of young Syrians in Turkey to access the higher education that for most had been part of their imagined life trajectory before displacement. While most of the youth we have met in this chapter were successful in getting to university, their experience of being uprooted at a formative age still resulted in many forging new paths to reimagine their futures. Many reoriented their educational ambitions, even in cases where they had already started university or held higher education degrees from Syria.

Jawad, for instance, is originally from Deir Ezzor, near the Turkish border, and was working in an NGO in Mardin when we met him. Jawad explained that he had other ambitions and plans when he was graduating high school in Syria. Deir Ezzor is well-known as a base for energy and oil companies, and his aim before displacement was to work in one of these companies as a translator.

My dream, honestly, was to study languages, translation. I had that dream since Syria. When I had drawn a path for my life, I wanted English literature because at high school level I really liked English literature, so I had planned to do that, finish and then go work as a translator in a petrol company.

These plans, however, changed after his displacement to Turkey, where employment opportunities for young people with language skills centered on (I)NGOs, which offered relatively high salaries. Seeing this, Jawad changed his plans when it came time to enroll in in higher education:

When I decided to enroll here, I chose international relations and political science. I had the points to enroll in sociology, business administration, history, and political science. I don't like history very much. I like geography a lot. I don't like math, either, so I didn't think about business administration. So, I

considered the issue this way: either sociology or political science. I thought of sociology, how would it help me? Would it help me in my work in the NGO? . . . So, I asked them, with sociology would I focus on children? They said that the program is more general, not that specific. I didn't want to study for long years until I specialize in this field [children]. So, I chose this department [international relations and political sciences].

He further recounts how the prospect of employment in international organizations with a focus on children's issues has become his main goal, for which he continues to develop his profile and skills.

Many Syrian youth describe the humanitarian sector as highly attractive, both because it offers stable employment and because it impacts their own community. Zeyad is a young Syrian who, at the time of our interview, was completing secondary education in Izmir while working in factories and shops. He was a volunteer in NGOs, distributing aid to Syrian families during his free time. This experience motivated him to pursue higher education and obtain a degree that would qualify him for a career as a humanitarian worker.

I have two ideas in my head: international relations and English literature. And I will continue in this field. Whatever I study, my goal is to work in the humanitarian field. I will try my best to help people. This is my concern after the things that I did with the organization.

These experiences are shared by a number of young Syrians who have found an affinity for studying political sciences. The change in interest is driven by their experience with the Syrian revolution, which many think proved the need to have more seasoned Syrian politicians to reshape the future of Syria. Hamed, whom we met in Mardin, was originally from Aleppo and was displaced at a young age to Turkey, where he completed his secondary education. He explains that the situation in Syria was his main driver to enroll in the political science undergraduate program in one of Mardin's universities:

As a Syrian student of political studies, you see the situation in Syria is complicated politically. There is a big shortage, and everybody talks in politics. People are using one another. I want to be a man of power so I can solve these things. I hope I can fulfill this [goal] one day.

## Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the challenge of education, and particularly on the difficulties Syrian youth face in trying to pursue higher education in a country where the language is unfamiliar, the system is complex and decen-

tralized, and where they must make critical decisions about the future in a situation of existential and epistemic uncertainty. Those who continued to pursue the university dream often used various services that have emerged to help them navigate the complex terrain of Turkish higher education. Yet we see how Syrians' position in the Turkish higher education landscape penalizes those who are the main breadwinners of their families or who migrated alone. In contrast, young students who have some type of family support usually have a better chance of acquiring scholarships, as they have the time and financial support to take advantage of counseling services and training courses.

While higher education is often considered an elite privilege, we have seen in this chapter how young people from various classes and backgrounds have aspired to it, always with the knowledge that their decisions in that moment would shape their futures. Indeed, many of the youth with whom we spoke viewed higher education as a way to contribute not only to their own futures but to those of their families and to the future of Syria. Maher, who was studying engineering in Istanbul when we met him, told us,

> The most important thing is to get back to the country that needs us, the country is always in need of educated people, and in my case, my major in civil engineering specifically is so helpful for my country now. For sure, if I have the chance to accomplish something here, I wouldn't refuse to do that, but the priority remains for my own country, because it needs us more than anything.

Quite a number of young people gave their own desire to contribute to rebuilding their country as the reason for studying subjects like political science and sociology.

For these reasons, we may view this decisive moment as another critical threshold at which youth are poised. Youth themselves saw it this way, viewing the decision to continue education or to work as life-determining. As a result, quite a few of the youths in our interviews began to reimagine their futures in new ways and to reshape their aspirations in response to the opportunities that they found or failed to find. As we will see in the next two chapters, the ability to pursue those aspirations was also directly related to where they imagined pursuing them.

## Notes

1. He was also of great help to us throughout the project. He remained in constant contact with us after the interview, adding points that he thought would be important contributions. He told us that he was driven by his personal experience and that of his peers, and he felt a duty to share what he knows, hoping to improve the situation for himself and others.

2. Given that the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey aged eighteen to twenty-four years old was around 443,244 for the same year (Yavcan and El-Ghali 2017), this meant that only about 3 percent were enrolled in higher education (Murray 2015). The participation of university age young adults is particularly low in comparison to 20 percent in pre-war Syria (Hohberger 2018).

3. These figures appear to concern only state universities ("Number of Syrians in Turkey November 2023." *Refugees and Asylum Seekers Assistance and Solidarity Association*, 30 November 2023. Retrieved 26 December from https://multeciler .org.tr/turkiyedeki-suriyeli-sayisi/).

4. As explained in this chapter, unlike the very centralized higher education national examination and settlement system for Turkish nationals, the admission of foreign students, including refugees, is administered by individual universities, based on rules that are again centrally defined by the Council of Higher Education (YÖK).

5. In Turkish state universities, evening classes are generally not part of the standard curriculum and are considered a type of continuing education. So, while it is possible to be admitted to a "formal education" program for daytime study without fees, there are relatively high fees for the evening program, also for Turkish students.

6. The interview took place in 2018, before the Turkish lira began to lose value and before the economic crisis in Turkey, ongoing at time of writing. The amount that Orwa suggests, 7,000 TL, would have been equivalent to around 1,500 USD in 2018.

7. Since the time of the interview, the government has, indeed, closed the Temporary Education Centers and expects Syrian children to enter regular government schools.

8. Demanding rents for long periods in advance is a common practice in Turkey but has reportedly become more widespread among those renting to Syrians.

9. Note that Syrians registered with open education and second education programs are not exempted from tuition fees.

10. The package includes tuition, a year of preparatory Turkish language training, housing, and other supplemental support. The Turkish government announced that it will offer five thousand scholarships for Syrian students as part of the Türkiye Scholarship program. As of publication, the stipend amount is 3,500 TL (around 115 USD) per month for undergraduate studies, 5000 TL (165 USD) for masters-level education, and 6,500 TL (215 USD) for PhD studies. The scholarship amounts have lost value with the decline of the Turkish lira, but accommodation remains important. These scholarships are funded by a combination of 15 percent national funds and 85 percent by EU funds (Erdoğan et al. 2017).

11. HOPES, funded by the EU, offers around 300 full academic scholarships and higher education short courses for more than 3,500 student refugees. The SPARK fellowship program supported by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides student tuition fees, other allowances such as local transportation, study materials, and monthly stipend.

12. These scholarships are very few in number, taking only twenty undergraduate and ten graduate students (of Arab country nationality) based on SAT/TOEFL or GRE. Another scholarship by IIE (Institute of International Education) offers only a 50 percent reduction on tuition fees.

13. See "How Much Is the Scholarship Given to Syrian Students?" *Refugees and Asylum Seekers Assistance and Solidarity Association*, 9 September 2021. Retrieved 26 December 2023 from https://multeciler.org.tr/suriyeli-ogrencilere-veri len-burs-ne-kadar/; Behlül Çetinkaya and Mehmet Şah Yılmaz, "Approximately 170 Thousand Applications Were Made from 171 Countries for Türkiye Scholarships in 2022." *AA*, 30 December 2022. Retrieved 26 December 2023 from https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/gundem/turkiye-burslarina-2022de-171-ulkeden-yakl asik-170-bin-basvuru-yapildi/2776032.

14. The opposite was not necessarily the case, however, as there were youth, especially relatively educated ones, who reported plans to stay in Turkey but also that they had difficulty learning Turkish. This was often because they worked in English, usually for international companies or (I)NGOs, and socialized with Syrians.

15. The Ministry of National Education's Department of Lifelong Learning generally oversees Turkish courses for foreigners, while some courses are offered by NGOs. In general the number of courses is limited, and the percentage of foreigners attending is usually low. Individuals decide whether they want to participate or not in these courses, in the absence of a national policy (Nimer and Oruç 2019).

16. The Turkish and Foreign Languages Research and Application Center (Türkçe ve Yabancı Dil Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi), a part of Ankara University.

17. The Turkish language competence exam (TÖMER) costs the equivalent of 200 USD (at the time of the interviews), and the YÖS exam was 50 USD.

18. Foreign diplomas must be certified through a process that ensures their equivalency (*denklik*) to a similar Turkish degree.

19. The Facebook pages (such as *tajamo' el talabeh fi terkya* or "Gathering of students in Turkey") are free and mostly open access but sometimes require permission.

20. By 2019, UNHCR had awarded 1,600 TÖMER scholarships across eleven cities. HOPES, funded by the EU, includes academic counseling to up to 42,000 young Syrians regionally and language courses to 4,000 students.

# 6

# Homing

## Potentiality, Hope, and (Be)Coming Home

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> Home is not where you were born; home is where all attempts to escape cease.
> —attributed to Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz

Over the course of the past decade, as major Syrian cities were leveled one after the other, the scenes of distraught civilians fleeing their homeland reminded many in the region of the mass displacement of Palestinians in what is known as the Nakba, or Catastrophe. The Nakba was the scattering of Palestinians around the world, but particularly to neighboring Arab countries, in the years following the 1948 establishment of Israel. Like Palestinians, Syrians left their country with the few belongings that they were able to carry. These included the keys to their houses, which represented hope of one day returning to their homes (see also Slyomovics 1998).

In a small NGO dedicated to refugee children's education in Turkey's border province of Gaziantep, the organization's director, who was of Palestinian descent, welcomed us in his office and pointed to a set of keys hanging on the wall. The director was one of many Palestinians who had first taken refuge in Syria and had then been displaced yet again to Turkey. "Now, we hang two keys on our walls," he remarked, in reference to the keys he inherited from his family home in Jaffa and to the keys to his home in Syria's Yarmouk camp.

The keys on the wall symbolize home, which in turn stands for an imagined continuity between a past that was disrupted and a present on hold. The keys also stand for an imagined future that will restore what once was. The keys, then, represent home as something self-evident: a place that exists elsewhere, to which one has a claim, and which represents one's past and identity. Hanging the keys on the wall, moreover, becomes a rejection of rupture, a refusal to mourn, and a statement that one intends to reclaim one's home in the future. Keeping the keys in sight is a way of rejecting loss

and insisting on continuity between the past that made one and the future self that one will become.

In contrast to this act of suspending the future in the keys hanging on the wall, many youths told a rather different story. "Most young people won't go back," a young woman, Ahlam, observed. We were sitting with Ahlam and two of her friends in a café, and they all seemed reluctantly to agree. "Our parents want to go back. They'll definitely try to go back. They haven't adjusted to life here. But we've gotten used to the openness here. We've grown up here, and even if people say they'll go back, I don't believe them."

Openness is a theme that would return again and again in our conversations with youth, and we discuss it more in the next chapter. Here, we focus on the process of *homing*, or the everyday ways in which we create new homes in exile. In popular discourse, *home* is usually seen as a place, and particularly as the place from which one emerged and to which one presumably wants to return. For most young Syrians, the assumption is that their home is in Syria–an assumption that the NGO director confirms through the keys on his wall. However, much recent literature on the migrant experience describes not *home* as a noun and as something that can be found in a place, but hom*ing* as a verb that describes the action of home-*making* (Blunt and Dowling 2006) or "(be)coming home" (Hayes 2007). In using *homing* as a verb, this literature focuses on what people see as home-like and on how "people orient themselves towards what they feel, see, or claim as home, or at least as homely-enough" (Boccagni 2022: 585).

Looked at in this way, home is not only the place we have left–indeed, may not ever have been the place we left–but is the place where we imagine our futures. For some, home is "a lifelong, existential becoming towards an aspired state of things" (Boccagni 2022: 590), a "future-oriented life project" that entails "existential and resilient efforts to reach it" (591). While talk of home may appear nostalgic, this literature argues, ultimately homing may be seen as having a futural orientation. "Home might always contain elements of *having been*, but its main significance lies in our *becoming*" (Hayes 2007: 14, emphasis in original).

The home for which many migrants are striving may not be a particular place but rather "should coalesce conditions of stability, security, and predictability–much of what is perceived as an 'ordinary life'" (Boccagni 2022: 591). In the terms that we have used in the rest of the book, then, home is a space where one can expect to expect, where one does not need to anticipate. Or in the words attributed to Egyptian writer Naguib Mahfouz, "Home is not where you were born; home is where all attempts to escape cease."

This chapter examines homing as a futural orientation, one concerned with creating conditions for ordinary lives and the expectation of expectation. In its most immediate sense, the desire to escape and its cessation to which Mah-

fouz refers is about safety, both in the home and outside of it. Whether we are trying to escape violence in the home or some natural catastrophe, the anticipation that the lack of safety produces makes homes unhomely.

However, a place becoming a home is not only about immediate safety. A desire to escape, or lack of such desire, is also about belonging and about where and how we imagine our futures unfolding. It is at this juncture that ideas of the social imaginary become important. For Charles Taylor, the social imaginary concerns how we imagine ourselves as members of society, or "the ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations" (2002: 106). As Henrik Vigh remarks, social imaginaries engage a particular type of futural orientation: "The social imaginary is the key faculty through which we anticipate the unfolding of the social environments our lives are set in—evolving positively or negatively from the *potentialities* of its current state" (Vigh 2009b: 100). Social imaginaries, in other words, shape how we orient ourselves to collective futures by giving us ways to evaluate the potentialities of the present and how they may be expected to unfold.

In this chapter, we look at how certain environments in Turkey are becoming home for young Syrians. In particular, we look at how youth evaluate potentiality and how it may unfold in the future. As we will see, planning for life in Turkey is very much related to the loss of potential for return to Syria. We saw at the end of the last chapter that some young people study subjects at university that they believe will eventually be of use to a new Syria, when the country can finally be rebuilt. Yet those same youth who dream of contributing one day to their home country plan their own lives in Turkey, in the absence of potential for return in even the medium-term future. At the same time, they recognize that their own developing sense of belonging in Turkey is generally not reciprocated, and they remain marginalized in Turkish society. We look, then, at how youth evaluate the potential for a future in Turkey that also includes them.

## Return to Syria as Defeated Potentiality

Salma was a twenty-one-year-old woman from Damascus who was studying in Istanbul when we met her. She had already been in Turkey for five years at that time. She told us of how her family had first settled in the Taksim area of Istanbul, a shopping and entertainment district in the city center with a high volume of tourism. Taksim and the surrounding areas are also considered some of the most "Western" parts of the city. For Salma, the life-

style there was too different from her home and too much of a shock when they first arrived.

> Because when I first left, I didn't want to leave Syria in the first place. When I found out that we were looking at plane tickets, I started crying and started telling my mother that I don't want to leave; I want to stay in Damascus. I'm too connected to my city. When I arrived in Taksim, here my psychological state was very bad, I missed my country and my friends and my grandmother and my aunts. I was not happy at all . . . It didn't feel comfortable in Taksim at all. It was way too free, like dancing till the morning, and drinking, and it was way too hard.

Later, she and her family moved to another, more conservative part of the city, where she felt more at home, and where many Syrians ultimately began to settle. Gradually, she says, "The missing feeling faded."

Later, Salma's father left for France to work and put in a request for family reunification, which was approved. Salma, however, refused to go. "I had started university, and I was not ready to leave all the work I had done and go to France, after all this time." We asked her if she thought at all about going abroad after university. "Not at all," she replied. "If I wanted to go abroad, I would think of Damascus. I want to go there a lot."

We asked her if she meant return, to settle. She replied, "No, a visit only . . . Returning is too hard for me . . . The same situation with my family. They can't go back. We've settled down here." We asked her if she felt now that Turkey is her country, and she replied positively. "Yes, exactly," she agreed.

> What I mean is that Turkey, it's the country that I grew up in. What I mean is that when I came here, I was young. So, I have a lot of memories and events that I remember, and it's more important to me than the sixteen years I lived in Syria. I was too young then and not conscious of anything. For sure, now the years that I lived in Turkey are more important.

In the conclusion, we discuss the ways that the changes that youth experienced in Turkey were often, in their minds, part of the experience of growing up. Here, though, we wish to focus on Salma's experience of homing, or how, over five years, Salma's longing for Damascus became "normal," as she put it, so that both she and her family could miss their homeland but imagine their future homes elsewhere.

The process was a slow one, often met with denial at first. Just as Syrians in Turkey were long-term "guests," resulting in a perception that they would eventually leave, so many Syrians described how they had expected a short-term stay and found years passing. Faiz, for instance, was twenty-two years old when we met him. Of Kurdish origin from Aleppo, he was then living and working in Izmir:

> We aren't rich, but we are from the middle class. We had a three-story house. We are three men. My father was a bit old, so we didn't allow him to work. And you know that when the incidents started there was no work, and my work had stopped. Materially it was so hard. Like my father said, "We put away some money." And he was worried about us so he said, "Pack your bags, we will leave." My father said something funny, that we would come here for one month or two and then we would come back . . . And it lasted for years . . .

Surprise at being unexpectedly stuck is a feeling Faiz shared with many others. As a young man living in Gaziantep, Nazem, also originally from the Aleppo region, explained that when he first arrived in Turkey, he was expecting to return to Syria in the very near future, or "when ISIS would be cleared out of the area." He had no plans of settling in Turkey at all.

Because of this, refugees' own decisions and actions in the first years often reflected their own perception of themselves as temporary guests. For instance, initially young parents preferred to send their children to Temporary Education Centers, which had opened to cater to the needs of Syrian children by offering education taught by Syrian teachers in Arabic and following a slightly modified Syrian curriculum.[1] The curriculum in these schools contained very few hours of Turkish language courses, meaning that schoolchildren in those first years learned very little formal Turkish, despite being of an age when language learning is easier. Going to such schools has been described as "living in an aquarium" (Çelik and Içduygu 2019); students "wait" in limbo until their own schools re-open, and they can return to their regular lives.

Yet, as time passed in this liminal situation and a peaceful resolution to the Syrian conflict remained elusive, the certainty of returning to Syria progressively diminished. The situation in Syria became less safe and lessened the potential for return. The ongoing conflict continued to cause extensive damage to the physical infrastructure of the country, affecting basic services like water and electricity provision, or the infrastructure of education and health. In addition, there was significant economic loss, as people's homes and investments were irrevocably destroyed. With the interference of foreign powers, the rise and subsequent fall of ISIS in some areas of the country was followed by the dominance of the Assad regime, which remains in power and at time of writing controls a large part of the total territory. In 2016, Turkey's military also crossed the border and began establishing a "safe zone" in the country's northwest, intended to keep Kurdish fighters away from the border and also to encourage Syrians in Turkey to "return." Of course, this "return" would only be to a place called Syria and not to the areas many refugees had left.

Despite rising xenophobia in Turkey and the Turkish government's encouragement of Syrians to start resettling in the Turkish-controlled zone,

repatriation has been slow. For many, leaving safe and settled lives in Turkey and returning to a politically fragile area that is not their original home is not an option. While earlier surveys indicated that a majority of Syrians would like to return as soon as the situation in Syria improved, this desire has gradually faded over time. For some, perceived difficulties of return relate to everyday life concerns such as infrastructural issues. Salih, a twenty-five-year-old man from Aleppo who was studying in Adana when we met him, explained,

> I don't think [I can go back] . . . I cannot go there to live because the lifestyle there is different from here. You are now used to a standard of living; you cannot go back. There is no electricity six to seven hours per day; you don't experience this here. Or there is no internet for a couple of weeks.

Similarly, Dawood, a twenty-one-year-old young man from Aleppo, thinks it is impossible to return due to the fact that his city, and his neighborhood in particular, had been occupied and effectively destroyed.

> The area in which we lived in Aleppo has no one living in it now. The Syrian army occupied all of Aleppo. Our area was a front line, and it is badly ruined. There is nothing there, no electricity, no water. Even the electrical wire connections are all destroyed. A start from zero.

When asked if he might go back if the area was rebuilt, he answered that it is possible, but that "going back is hard." He explains, "For my parents, I think it is possible that they would go back. But for me, impossible."

Even more than the lack of infrastructure, however, most people mentioned the general security risk due to continuing fighting. The widespread availability of weapons means that their safety and that of their families are at risk if they return.

> If the war ended or a solution was found, that does not mean that the country is stable. Stability is first and foremost taking weapons away from militias. There is an abundance of guns in Syria now, and the situation is bad. It's possible for a citizen who has nothing to do with politics to get kidnapped for a ransom. It's possible that just from a small fight between my son and someone else's son. Right now, fights immediately escalate into gunfights. This is how the situation will remain. (Alma, twenty-five years old, living in Istanbul)

> We wanted to return, and we thought about it, but the situation in Idlib is especially so bad. I mean, if you step out of your door you are not sure you will come back. The situation there is so difficult. Until now, there is a war and bombing there. We escaped for our children. (Basma, twenty-eight years old, living in Izmir)

A young woman residing in Adana, Bahar, explains that her return is impossible, because she would be facing different sorts of risks.

> I would not go back [to Syria]. If I went, I would have to go to Raqqa,[2] my husband's place, but the situation is too bad. In Aleppo, the situation is better, but it is too risky for me, since it is under Assad's control. So, no, I don't think about going back.

According to the Syrian Barometer survey, too, the strongest reasons people have for not considering return are related to security. The response "because it is not a safe place" (42.9 percent) was the first reason respondents gave for not going back, followed by "because the war still continues" (31.2 percent) (Erdogan 2020).

Compulsory military service also comes up among many young men as a major inhibitor in planning for a life in Syria. Basma, quoted above, told us that she and her family would return,

> Only if the regime changes . . . To make sure that they won't take the youth, because until now they are forcing them to join the war . . . My husband–until he becomes forty-two years old, it does not matter, even if you did the military service before, you still have to go [to war].

Return is rendered especially difficult for government opposition members. Indeed, the Syrian regime claims that there are "definitely" terrorists among the refugees, referring to the opposition. In 2018, the regime introduced a law (Law No. 10 of 2018) that requires property holders in Syria to formally prove ownership of their private property within a period of thirty days (later extended to one year) or face confiscation. At the same time, Assad and his allies have promoted the idea of return to fuel the perception that the war is ending. As such, if Assad stays in power, the opposition members will not want or be able to return, even less so in the absence of property rights.

Syrian young people such as Yazan, who was mentioned in the previous chapter, cannot imagine going back to rebuild the country as long as the Syrian regime is still in power:

> I may go back if there is no Assad. Because we were so humiliated, I do not want to go back to that humiliation. My friends tell me about nationalism, "you should go back to rebuild it." How will I rebuild it if Assad is still in power? Even he does not want to rebuild it. If he really decided to rebuild it, he could have rebuilt it by now. All the rubble is still there. The city [Aleppo], its history, the castle and the surrounding buildings have gone away. He cut off water and electricity supply to make us move out, and we did. How would we come back? No, I do not think of going back.

The instability in Syria meant that many young people with whom we spoke talked about not knowing what to expect there. This is a particularly important factor among the youth who, as Dalia, a young woman from Daraa living in Adana, expresses it, are currently in the process of shaping their future. Syria, which still needs several years to get back to normal, is not

perceived to be a good place to prepare the groundwork for the future in the present:

> It is difficult to build a future once again, especially in the first years, and Syria needs at least ten years, and these are the most important years in my life. So, for me, it's better to live them here [in Turkey].

As these young people are in the process of rebuilding their lives, often having accumulated several years of delay in their education and work plans, they often prioritized their own current endeavors over making plans of return. Yazan remarked,

> Honestly, I do not see a future for myself apart from here. Currently, I am thinking here, I would like to continue a masters and Ph.D., and I do not want to take a risk to find something else. Before finishing my studies at university, it is impossible to go back.

The situation was similar for Motaz, working in Istanbul, who had progressed in his job and did not want to start again. Motaz and others fear that going back will set them back on all the progress they have made.

> The situation there is not stable, and nothing is clear. What can happen can be similar to Iraq. I even thought about it: I would either go back to Damascus with nothing or I can [stay and] work [in Turkey]. And I have the Turkish language and English and Arabic and I'm working, but if I go back, I will fall behind on everything.

While expressed as a lack of security, we also see in these accounts by youth that the future plans of many Syrians are increasingly becoming independent of the developments within Syria. Although some express this as a matter of instability, lack of security, and ruined infrastructure, at the same time they talk about not wanting to give up what they have managed to achieve—or as many expressed it, "I don't want to start from zero." In that context, they tend to weigh the long period of time that they believe it will take to rebuild the country against the period of their own youth, when they are establishing themselves. This means that, even if a solution is reached in Syria, it is likely to have limited effect on Syrian youth's tendency to return.

## Hope and Homing in Turkey

Zuher is from a Turkmen region of Syria near Latakia and was displaced with his parents and siblings to Turkey as early as 2012. By the time we met him, he had already been in Turkey for seven years. When his family first arrived in the Hatay region, where they have relatives, they were put in a refugee camp. Zuher explained to us the long struggle that he had to

get from a refugee camp to study nursing at university, and from there to working as a nurse in state hospitals.

> I am a refugee, and all the property we had in Syria and the luxurious situation we were living, it all stayed in Syria. Through revolution, we did not come by choice. If we had come with our own choice, we would have sold all our properties in Syria and built a future and companies in Turkey. But unfortunately, we have this situation, starting from zero, below zero.

Although he lived in a village before displacement, he describes his family as well-off and explains the shock of starting again with only the clothes on one's back. The only capital he had upon arrival in Turkey was the language, since his mother only spoke Turkish, and he had grown up with it. They also had some relatives in Hatay, though apparently those relatives did not help them as much as the family had expected. Through much struggle, he managed to prove his knowledge of Turkish bureaucratically and gain a scholarship to university, though at the time that he applied, scholarships were limited, and he had no choice but to study nursing. He says that he would have preferred a subject like international relations, but he has grown to like his work. "It is like humanitarian work," Zuher tells us. "It is true that everyone works for money, even though it is not all about money. You serve and get something in return . . . This is the life of a human being, not a company's work. It is not like other jobs and companies."

The problem that he experienced when we met him was that he could find only precarious or contract work as a nurse in Turkey, given his legal status. He was waiting to see if his citizenship application would be approved, and if so, he looked forward to permanent work. If not, he considered learning German and going to Germany, where he had relatives, though he imagined this as only temporary, because his parents would never follow.

> They won't move from Turkey, because they love Turkey. They have adjusted to the Turkish environment and Turkish society since we are originally Turks. Syria is okay, Syria is our homeland, too, but if they live in a European country like Germany and so on, they would not adjust to life there, it is impossible.

Since Zuher imagined his own life in a more European environment, his ideal solution was to find permanent work in Izmir, where we met him, and to bring up his own family there, with his parents not too far away:

> I feel that Izmir is European, honestly, whether it's the coasts, the beaches, the touristic areas–and it is terrific when it comes to tourism. And the people act like Europeans . . . if I wanted to settle down in Izmir as a Syrian, I would have no problem. But when it comes to family, since I am the only boy, I cannot bring them to live in Izmir, honestly. For my father and mother, it would be really difficult. I cannot bring them to an area where they dress like that (*laughing*), they cannot. But for me, I would get married, settle down, and build

my life here. I feel like Izmir is very developed after Istanbul–not right after Istanbul, that's Ankara, but then Izmir.

We have described Zuher's journey at length to show what it means to differing youth to "start from zero," and how they weigh present potentialities and the way these might unfold in the future. They do so in relation to their own desires and aspirations, as well as through the prism of certain social imaginaries, such as what it means for Izmir to be a "European" city. Zuher's story has an unusual element, which is his knowledge of the language on arrival in the country. Nevertheless, that does not guarantee that he will remain. Although it may be a preference, he also considers job stability as the most important factor to be able to settle down. At the same time, he weighs this factor in relation to his role as an only son and an expected future when his parents will age and need him near them.

His hope is to remain in Turkey, imagined as a future life in Izmir, a cosmopolitan city where he can see himself raising a family separately from the conservatism of his parents but still close to them. His dream is contingent, but at the same time it is based on a very real potentiality, and one that he is actively working to realize. For this reason, Rebecca Bryant and Daniel Knight (2019: 134) call hope a form of futural momentum: "Hope is about something that doesn't presently exist but potentially could; hope is based on more than a possibility and less than a probability. In that sense, hope is a way of virtually pushing potentiality into actuality." Moreover, we may see homing and hope as linked: both are intrinsically positive ways of orienting futures. If we often view the idea of home with a rose-colored nostalgia, it is because for a home to be homely it needs also to have hope.

It is for this reason, we see, that Syrian youth today who have given up hope of return to Syria instead have begun to create homes in Turkey. One sees this in all recent surveys, which show that the majority of Syrians in Turkey today intend to remain there.[3] Indeed, all studies of Syrians in Turkey have shown that despite being in limbo, the passage of time has meant that families have settled, children have grown, and youth have made plans for the future. For example, a 2019 survey published by the UNHCR noted that 63.4 percent of respondents said that they wanted to receive Turkish citizenship, while 54 percent said that they wanted to remain in Turkey. This was in line with the findings from our own study, in which 61 percent said that they wished to apply for Turkish citizenship, while 6 percent had already done so. Of those who wished to apply, 46 percent said that it was because they planned to settle in Turkey. When asked what they would do if the situation remained the same, 72 percent said that they planned to remain in Turkey, while only 20 percent planned to move to a third country and only 8 percent would return to Syria. If the situation in Syria improved, 44 percent planned to return to the country, but 30 percent still made plans to

remain in Turkey. The same UNHCR study conducted in 2017 had shown 61 percent of refugees saying that they would return to Syria only if the war ended. Findings of the Syrian Barometer survey suggest that Syrians believe that there is a future in Turkey for themselves and for their families, a question to which over 60 percent of the respondents answering affirmatively.

We can draw several tentative conclusions from these statistics, taken in surveys several years apart (2016, 2017, and 2019). The first is that the continuing uncertainties of the Syrian situation mean that the large majority of Syrians currently in Turkey are likely to remain there. Even if conditions in Syria improve, our study conducted in 2016 showed that at least 30 percent of youth planned to remain, while a study conducted three years later showed that this rose to more than half of the general population of Syrian refugees in the country. In general, we see that as time passes, the numbers of Syrian refugees planning to remain in Turkey rises, as do their demands for citizenship.

There are many cases in which interviewees expressed that they had started to feel at home in Turkey. In general, they seemed to appreciate the political climate in the host country and the position of the Turkish state in the war (in 2018). Many progressively developed an attachment and a sense of belonging to the country, which pushed the idea of return further away. Echoing findings by Susan Rottmann and Ayhan Kaya (2020), cultural similarity and geographical proximity to Syria were emphasized as factors that encourage them to stay in Turkey. This is reflected in the interview with Janin, a strong-minded, very articulate young woman who works part time as a secretary of a private education center in Antep.

> I had opportunities to go outside of Turkey, but I feel that Syria and Turkey are one country. Turkish people stood by us during the war, and for the revolution. [In terms of] education, they offered good services, despite some kind of arbitrary matters. Honestly, I'm really comfortable here; I don't think of leaving at all. I even started feeling that I belong to Turkey, a country of freedom and justice and democracy. At least the people here choose their president. This thing is really brilliant. (Janin)

Similarly, Dunya is a young woman originally from Deir el Zor whose protective father had not allowed her to take part in the revolution in Syria or to study in Sakarya, Turkey, as it was too far from their home. Instead, she was studying at Çukurova University in Adana when we interviewed her, and she also expressed intentions to remain:

> We thought of going to another country, for example, Germany or Sweden, like those who emigrated via the sea. However, when my dad came to Turkey, he found that its culture is close to the one in Syria, at least they have some of the Islamic aspects, you hear the ezan [call to prayer], there are veiled women . . . So their traditions and habits are somehow similar to ours . . . My father didn't like living elsewhere, in any European country . . . and I kind of agree

with him. Of course, it all depends on the rearing, but child-rearing is very hard in Europe, very hard, the traditions, habits, culture . . . and those who are there are suffering from this.

In addition, youth viewed the services provided by the Turkish state as having improved over the years and generally appreciated attempts to help them pursue higher education (see chapter 5). In turn, as we saw with Zuher, working as a nurse in Izmir, traveling to Europe was no longer a preferred option, even if it meant gaining more opportunities.

> Of course, there are European universities that are great but there are ones in Turkey, too. The way I see it is that I prefer Turkey over anything. Now for example, I do not prefer Germany or France or any European country. If I am getting one lira in Turkey, and they want to give me ten liras in Germany, as long as I have a job or job opportunities in Turkey, I would work for this one lira rather than for ten, and it is better and more honorable for me than the ten in Europe. This is my thinking.

We discussed Yazan's story at length in the previous chapter, as she struggled to find a university place in arts and design and eventually chose to study journalism and media. At the time that we met her, she had just finished her one-year language preparation in a public university and would start the following year with a scholarship. She wants to obtain the Turkish nationality, and if she continues further education abroad, in Europe, she still wants to come back to Turkey and find a good job.

As we will see even more in the following chapter, young Syrians like Yazan, who have found opportunities that encouraged their stay in Turkey, are not unusual. For instance, Ruqa is attached to her work, and she wants to complete projects she is involved in. She invested in social capital, in improving herself and her career, and she does not want to start over again.

> If the Syrians leave, I do not want to go, because I work in a public institution on projects. I do not want to go without finishing this. Also, I don't want to go back to Syria, because I haven't done anything there. I improved myself in everything here; I did a lot, I got to know a lot of people . . . If I go back to Syria, I will start all over again. It would be very difficult.

This sense of belonging and planning for a future life in Turkey also started to reflect on the education strategies of families for their children. Zina mentioned that even though her daughter wanted to be in a Syrian school, she preferred for her to start learning Turkish now for her to have better opportunities in the future. She decided to register her in a Turkish school instead.

> I just want them to study, I want them to learn Turkish, as we live here. It will be better for them, otherwise they will reach nowhere, I always tell them. Now my thirteen-year-old girl tells me to put her in a Syrian school and that

she would do better there. She insists, but I refused. We are here now, and they might stay here in the future; I want them to reach a good level in their studies and be fine.

Indeed, the idea of return became progressively more distant among young Syrians not only because of being unable to see an end to the Syrian conflict but also because they began to feel like they belonged in their host country. This was especially the case for individuals whose situation is relatively stable. One such instance is Zahra, who came to Turkey in 2014 from Aleppo and settled in Izmir after Gaziantep. She is taking vocational courses at the local public education center, and her husband has a permanent job as a painter. She told us that she feels like the salaries are better in Turkey than other places they had considered, and that, in any case, they were building a life and could not relocate again.

Such individuals, who are in relatively favorable situations, did not want to uproot themselves again, as they felt like they were doing fine in Turkey, even without the benefits that refugees are perceived to receive in Europe. Nazem told us, "The problem with Europe is . . . my siblings went there. but I did not want to go because most people that thought of going there, they went for the money. Like I'd go there and sit all day and get a salary." Indeed, as more youth heard from their friends and family about life in Europe, the desire to leave what they had established in Turkey diminished. Even as Turkey began to feel more home-like for them, however, tensions regarding their presence in the country made them scapegoats for political problems. Opposition parties promised to "send them back," particularly during election periods.

Hazim, a young man from a Kurdish background, has a high school education and at the time of our interview was working as a translator in Izmir. He remarked,

> For example, to gain more votes in the election these people [the opposition parties] are publishing like those videos to say to other Turkish people, "Look what the Syrians are doing! Our youth are going to war and you still vote for this president, and he brought all these Syrians here!" They think that by filling up the people's minds with negatives images of Syrians, they can gain more votes.

Youths such as Hazim, then, were very much aware of their own political divisiveness, and in the context of that they assessed paths and developed strategies to make their own lives in the country more secure.

## Hoping and Homing in the Context of Marginalization

"The country [Turkey] is very similar to us culturally speaking, but it's very hard for us to adjust to the people, there is a large barrier between them and

us. The barrier is their view of us as lesser humans." These were the words of a young woman, Safia, living in Adana. Another young man in her same group remarked, "It disturbs me because I always feel that I am a stranger. We always get this look that you are a stranger; you are not from us; you are not like us."

Indeed, by the time of our research, "Suriyeli," or Syrian, had become a stigma. Unlike Zuher, at the beginning of the chapter, others who were not so fluent in Turkish found themselves often ostracized. Another young man working as a welder in Izmir remarked,

> Here it is like you have no value, and no one sees you, no one cares about you. Whoever sees you keeps saying "Suriyeli," and from this concept they hate us . . . Most of the Turkish people they don't want us, maybe half of the society they don't want us, if not more.

Although many of the youth with whom we spoke reported experiencing discrimination, most of those same youth expressed a desire to remain in Turkey and to integrate into Turkish society. This desire was more strongly expressed among higher educated youth and/or those who were in relatively stable paid employment, echoing the social patterning of staying aspirations identified by Kerilyn Schewel and Sonja Fransen (2022). There were also those who expressed gratitude for the opportunities and "hospitality" that the Turkish state has offered, particularly compared to other countries in the region, even as they wished that the "guest" status would change. In our survey, when asked if Syrians living in Turkey are treated well by the government, an overwhelming 82 percent said that they either agreed or definitely agreed. In this instance, 62 percent think that Syrians who live in "Western" countries are treated well by the government, while 31 percent are not sure. Although this percentage is high, it remains considerably lower than the percentage who approved of the Turkish state's treatment.

In contrast, when we asked if Syrians in Turkey were treated well by the people, 42 percent of respondents chose not to take a position, while 16 percent responded negatively. While it is difficult to interpret the high number of respondents who did not take a position on the question, it may indicate the confusion of being "guests," as well as the ways in which the Turkish public has been divided over the Syrian refugee issue. In contrast, when we asked if Syrians who went to "Western" countries were treated well by the people there, 49 percent said that they were, and 41 percent did not have an opinion. Only 10 percent answered negatively.

The clear difference between approval of the Turkish state's position and a feeling of being excluded by Turkish society could help explain the contradiction of young Syrians feeling more at home in Turkey while still experiencing marginalization and discrimination. Moreover, parts of our research took place during general elections in spring 2018, when political

parties explicated their positions on the "Syrian issue." In particular, polls show that many supporters of the main opposition parties believe that if Syrians receive citizenship, they will vote for the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). For this and other populist reasons, opposition parties have tended to promise their constituents that they will send Syrian refugees home if elected.

> During elections . . . the other candidates, besides Erdoğan and his party . . . in case they won, they said they will kick out all Syrians. They said it, they said it openly . . . "We will make them have breakfast with their families [in Syria] next Eid."[4] They said it. (Ghaith, twenty-five years old, living in Gaziantep)

Syrian youth participants in our study were aware of the ways that this rhetoric, particularly employed during election periods, increased tension and led to further hostility toward the Syrian community.

> For the purpose of gaining more votes in the elections . . . these people are publishing, like, those videos to say, "Look what the Syrians are doing! Our youth are going to war [in Syria], and you still vote for this president who brought all these Syrians here!" They [political parties] think that by filling up the people's minds with a negative attitude about Syrians, they can gain more votes. (Hazim, twenty-six years old, smuggled to Turkey in 2012 from the Aleppo region, living in Izmir)

Many youth recognized that the political instrumentalization of their plight had a longer history. A young married man from a communist family in the Aleppo region explained to us that the polarization already existed but that Syrians had just become a concrete focus for the opposition's anger:

> Of course, the government is very good compared to other governments, but still, it's not completely a democratic government. They do have some suppression of freedom, but it's better than the Arab countries in general. From the point of view of the government, there was already a lot of anger in the Turkish people from the opposition, and they now have a strong argument, which is the Syrians in the country.

The polarization and instrumentalization of the refugee issue has also made it difficult for Syrian youth to become politically active or engaged within the context of Turkey. One young man commented,

> There are always these discussions between Syrians about the consequences of supporting a specific political party, and how such support can create obstacles toward integration with the host community in Turkey. (Male, twenty-four years old, from al-Raqqa district, living in Gaziantep)

Moreover, participants shared their concerns about their sense of safety, particularly during highly contested and tense election periods, or as a re-

sult of politicized rhetoric. Several mentioned the way that personal clashes could result in communal polarization. Some reported witnessing that this had led to physical violence and property damage.

> If two people fight together . . . the whole city will start to say, "Go back to Syria," or they start in breaking the Syrian shops . . . No guarantee! I don't feel safe . . . My uncle has a car, and someone else has a mini market . . . Maybe one day their properties will be destroyed . . . I am afraid of that! At any second, someone can come and ask you to leave!

As a result of the negative representation of Syrian refugees in public discourse, which influences daily interactions with the Turkish community, young people expressed feeling stigmatized by the undesirable labels attached to the Syrian identity. When asked about their social relations and level of interaction with the Turkish community, many youths reported that the level of contact remained minimal and mainly superficial. In the university context, for instance, Syrian students expressed that they were unable to interact with their Turkish classmates beyond the classroom setting. Salma, from the beginning of the chapter, remarked,

> They [Turkish students] see you as different . . . as a stranger; they don't come near you. They are satisfied with their Turkish friends . . . It has been two years for me here at the university. I know a lot of Turks, but the relationship is superficial, not a deep one.

Some of the youth interviewed reported not having the sorts of neighborly interactions to which they were accustomed in Syria. Even when engaging in conversations with Turkish neighbors, the social contact seems to remain on a superficial level. As a result, the young people had to regulate what they have to expect from their neighbors. Salma, quoted earlier, told us,

> They treat us like foreigners . . . We don't talk to or bother anyone, and they do the same . . . If I had harmed them or bothered them in any way, they would get annoyed . . . they would just take it as "an Arab bothered me." That's why I never bother them, and they never bother me . . . I never visit my neighbors, and no one visits me, but from a distance the relationship is good.

The apparent lack of engagement reported by interviewees was also reflected in our survey, which showed that while 57 percent of participants reported having persons that they could trust in Syria, only 22 percent found such relationships in Turkey. Moreover, while 81 percent of those surveyed said that they were socially active back home, only 32 percent of participants mentioned that they are engaging in social activities in Turkey. Although many youth explain the latter difference by referencing long work hours, the social environment also clearly plays a role.

As a result, many of the youth in our study pointed out that the Syrian community mainly sticks to in-group interaction. Kamal arrived in Turkey when he was only thirteen years old. When we met him, he was nineteen and had lived in both Istanbul and Mardin, a city near the Syrian border where many people already spoke Arabic. He told us in very clear terms that he had no desire to return to Syria and wanted to stay in Turkey, but also that he recognized that he and other Syrians were living in a communal "shell":

> Honestly, about returning to Syria. I think about returning to Syria when I can get my rights, and can be effective, serve and help. I cannot return and be silent . . . Life in Damascus is good now; and they live, and they are happy. But the people I know who stayed have the ambition to live comfortably. Their ambition is not to be effective or to be . . . here I can be effective even though I am a foreigner. I am a refugee. I do not feel that I am a refugee here but as a refugee I am able to be effective and able to work. Not with the Turkish community, with the Syrian community. Here in Turkey the Syrians built their own communities, as you may have noticed . . . They integrate with Turks, but they keep the Syrian community closed. There is integration, but it is still a shell. They go out of it and return back to it.

When we asked him to explain, he expanded based on his previous experiences living in Istanbul:

> As a guy who lives in Istanbul, I buy the Syrian bread from a Syrian guy, because I cannot eat Turkish food. I go to Syrians for my food, the house stuff, and to cut my hair. When do I meet with Turks? In the market next to my house or with my neighbors. When I work, I meet with my workmates, I do when I study in a Turkish school, but I did not study in a Turkish school. I do meet with Turks, but still, the Syrian community is like a shell. They deal with Turks, but they deal with Syrians in most things.

Reasons for this "shell" include not only the failure to establish meaningful interactions with Turks and negative encounters or lack of trust, but also the language barrier. Those with the time and opportunity to learn the language described more success in social interaction:

> Some of them [Turkish people] had a bad perception of Syrians. And when they met, they started to have a certain perception, so I discovered that the Syrian is afraid to engage with a Turk and the Turk is the same. So, since I was motivated by the knowledge of the language and the desire to meet Turks, I was able to have good relationships with people who stand beside me, support me and are very close to me and they would have the courage to meet Syrians other than me. (Hisham, twenty-three years old, from Aleppo and living in Adana)

Along with the language, there was a recognition among many youths that they also needed to perform cultural "translation," and many showed

a willingness to culturally adapt. Young people reflected on the micro changes that they made in their daily behaviors, such as contact with the opposite gender, dress code, and work habits. In some cases, these changes were easy and normalized, while in others they produced reflection on what was sustainable for them.

> The community in Aleppo is conservative more than the community in Damascus or any other community in Syria. I came from a conservative environment to a liberal environment, so I lived the cultural shock during my second month in Istanbul. My interaction with people made me do things that I never used to do in Aleppo. For example, I didn't use to shake hands with women in Aleppo. I'm not going to say that this thing is religious because I understood in the end that this is a cultural thing, I mean the culture of the city was like that. It was not common that you would extend your hand to a woman to shake her hand; it was not common unless she was the one who extended her hand. So, I was feeling that weird feeling when a woman extended her hand, and I was like "oh, okay." So, this was one of the things that I adapted to here in Istanbul, one of the cultural differences that I changed to. Hugging also, hugging is not a common thing in Aleppo. It is not common that you hug a woman unless you're in a relationship and so on. It's not common, and I came to Istanbul, where it is very common and normal, so I became like Istanbul. That's why when I think about going back to Aleppo, I think how am I going to fit in the society? (Sahban, twenty-four years old)

In some cases, adapting to Turkish culture has given young Syrians, and women in particular, a space to challenge their belief system and obtain a more liberal approach in their lifestyle. Again, the headscarf was highlighted as a common example.

> Some women took off their headscarves because they weren't convinced about it when they were in Syria, so when they found this opportunity, they got comfortable. They wanted to do what they believe, especially that there no one is keeping track of them. (Asala, thirty years old)

Based on their own observations, numerous young people expressed that maintaining a balance between their own cultural practices and a respect for Turkish norms and culture can enhance the acculturation process and lead to better social acceptance. Zuher, whose story was explained at the beginning of the chapter, told us, "In Istanbul, in my home, I do the traditions and habits I want, but outside home even if it is my clothes or the way I talk or walk, I must, I am forced to, I am supposed to become like Turks."

As a result of the cultural interaction between youth groups, new forms of relationship have gradually started to emerge. While some of the young people have perceived it as a slow process, others shared an optimistic view. Subhi, for instance, quoted above, continued,

The current generation is becoming a part of the Turks. They will become a Syrian-Turkish community. They will borrow ideas from all over the place, Syrians and Turkish people, and of course there will be a balance. They will accept ideas that Syrians wouldn't accept, or Turks wouldn't accept, there will be openness and acceptance of ideas.

Not only did many youth reflect on the need to adapt culturally, but they also were keen to create a counter-narrative where they feel actively engaged in negotiating their presence in the social world. Some did this at the individual level, through working on their Turkish acquaintances. Alma crossed the border with her family at the age of fifteen, first staying in Antakya before moving with her family to Adana. She tells us:

I have four Turkish friends, and I love them to death. They come here, and we have sleepovers. They come from Hatay and stay with me here. Why do I do that? It's not just because I love them, but also to make them understand that we are just like them–we eat the same food and we buy the same things. I love them, and I got close to them to show them that we are not all the same. When they visit me, they tell me "Alma, in Hatay we don't see many people like you." And I agree with them on this. "The Syrians living below us are very nasty, their children write on the walls. Alma, the Syrian women are taking our men."

Alma tries, then, to use interpersonal contact as a way to break down barriers.

Other youths told us of organized activities in which they participated that aimed at creating more such contact:

There is the Çukurova student group, and they do many events. One time we did an event in which we distributed flowers to Adana hospitals . . . The initiative was to improve relations, and we brought four hundred roses. And we wrote cards on them and distributed them to the patients in hospitals. It was an initiative by Syrian students to improve the image of Syrians. (Dalia, from Daraa, living in Adana)

Others reported on similar volunteer activities:

It all started with a group of friends, where they met and suggested to do an activity for the orphans. Then they wrote on Facebook to try and get a number of volunteers for the activity, then they talk to the municipalities to make it official and legal. (Sumbul, from Aleppo district, living in Adana)

Their engagement in such activities seems to have a crucial role in creating a sense of autonomy and purpose despite their adversities.

I honestly was scared because of my education. The language is hard; you need to study and memorize and interact with people, interacting with peo-

ple is frightening to me. However, when I felt that I could be useful for the community and give something, it made me try as much as I can. (Janin, twenty-one years old, living in Gaziantep)

In all these cases, then, we see youth attempting to achieve agency in a context of marginalization. Although few of our interviewees spoke Turkish enough to fully follow news and political events, they were highly aware of the political instrumentalization of their own presence in the country, and that awareness was heightened during election periods. In response to these hardships, like many other migrant communities, Syrians have developed communal "shells," bubbles in which they support each other, and services are in their own language. However, as we saw from the previous chapter, such solidarity can also produce its own forms of exploitation. Many youth with whom we spoke recognized this problem and understood that language learning was the key to fully independent lives. Moreover, those who were able to make the effort to learn the language reported more success in social interaction with the Turkish community. Hisham, a young man living in Adana, told us,

> The solution is learning the language . . . the language . . . the language. The Turks are not going to learn Arabic. We are here in a Turkish-speaking country, and we must learn the language.

Although Hisham emphasizes that Syrians must learn the language and accommodate to their new country, he also remarks that Turks could do a bit of accommodating themselves. He repeats an impression that many Syrians have that Turkish people only work and do not know how to enjoy life:

> For example, we in Syria like to stay up, like to have fun. We do not wait for the weekend to pick up moments of happiness or joy. Here in Turkey, everything has its time. It isn't wrong, but they went too far with it. We in Syria are living our lifestyle, and we have doctors and successful people, and we have brains, although our lifestyle isn't European.

He thinks, though, that Syrians have changed the atmosphere around them:

> We very much changed Turks' habits. Three or four years ago, you would walk in Antep, and you would find only Syrians after 9:00 p.m. Now we started to see a lot of Turks, and they started to be motivated to do things in the evenings even during the week.

As scholars of integration have also noted, integrating cannot be only a one-way street and must also have an element of reciprocity. While "home" has the connotation of a welcome when one crosses the threshold, we see how hom*ing* is not necessarily about expecting a welcome but about creating one.

# Conclusion

This chapter has shown how youth engage in active practices of creating home in Turkey, using the tools of their own social imaginaries to evaluate the potentialities of the present and how they may be expected to unfold. While at the beginning most youth perceived the move to Turkey as temporary and expected an imminent return to their home country, progressively, youth began to abandon the possibility of return to Syria. Many described even the end of conflict as insufficient, since they could not imagine the potential to build their own lives in the conflict's ruins. Since they are at an important threshold in their lives, and many have already spent formative years in Turkey, for most this means building their lives there. Many also viewed the potentialities of Europe as limited, if what they wanted was not only education or a career but also a particular lifestyle, especially with family near them.

As we have shown, homing is not only about evaluating potentialities but also about spaces of hope. In this context, hope plays a particularly important role, as the integration of youth in Turkey is still incomplete. These hopes went through ebbs and flows with the changing political landscape in the host country. We see, though, youth using hope to propel them into the future, imagining a day when, as one young woman told us, it would no longer be Syrians and Turks but "a Syrian-Turkish community."

# Notes

1. With the arrival of Syrians to Turkey starting in 2011, the Turkish government opened Temporary Education Centers (TECs) as an emergency response. As the situation in their country did not improve, the government decided to centralize Syrians' education . A circular issued by the Turkish Ministry of National Education (MoNE) in September 2014 provided a legal framework for the supervision and monitoring of the TECs (Aras and Yasun 2016). The 2013 Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) allowed more centralization of Syrians' education, through access to public schools. As a consequence, TECs were shut down progressively, and Syrian students were encouraged to register in public schools. This move was supported financially by EU-funded programs such as Promoting Integration of Syrian Children into the Turkish Education System (PICTES) and Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE), as well as by non-governmental organizations. As a consequence, the number of Syrian students in public schools increased systematically from 2014 to 2018 (UNHCR 2018).
2. Raqqa was still the bastion of ISIS, at the time of the interview.
3. This was as of 2022, but we recognize that the February 2023 earthquake and political polarization leading to the May 2023 election have created an increa-

singly unwelcoming atmosphere for Syrian refugees. More research is needed to determine how these events are affecting Syrians' attitudes toward remaining in the country today.

4. "I promise you from here that the Syrian refugees who are in Turkey will have their Ramadan breakfast in 2019 together with their brothers in Syria," by Head of Turkey's İYİ Party (the Good Party) Meral Akşener. "Turkey's Presidential Candidate Vows to Repatriate Syrian Refugees If Elected." *Middle East Monitor*, 7 May 2018. Retrieved 26 December 2023 from https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180507-turkeys-presidential-candidate-vows-to-repatriate-syrian-refugees-if-elected/.

# 7

# Aspiration
## Migration and Mobility

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Majida is a young teacher in a state-run children's center in Gaziantep who arrived in Turkey with her family when she was an adolescent. Now engaged, she and her fiancé are making plans for their future in Turkey.

> My fiancé wanted to go to Holland, but I don't want to change–Belgium, France, yet another language. I want to start university; I will be faced with different ideas. We are integrated now here.

Her fiancé studied law in Syria but today works in an optician's shop cutting lenses. Both have received calls to apply for citizenship. When we ask if she would consider returning to Syria, only 100 kilometers across the border, she remarks, "Maybe for a visit in the future, to show my children. But not more than that."

This chapter examines youth aspirations almost a decade from the start of the Syrian war. While the young people in our study arrived in Turkey at differing moments and underwent varying degrees of difficulty in adjusting to life in a new country, what many shared by the time of our study was a sense that life had become normalized–in other words, that the passage of time had made their situation resistant to change. Within the context of a lack of hope for return to Syria and their own gradual adjustment to life in Turkey in the meantime, youth were beginning to aspire to futures different from what they had imagined before the war. Most of these youth were imagining those futures in Turkey.

While public discourse in Europe tends to assume that Syrians are only held back from migrating to the West by the 2016 EU-Turkey deal, recent research in Turkey has converged on quite a different finding: that as time passes, European futures have become less desirable (e.g., Düvell 2019; Er-

doğan 2017a, 2017b, 2020; Üstübici, Kirişçioğlu, and Elçi 2021). The majority of Syrians in Turkey today express a desire to remain in the country, and this number is especially high for the Syrian youth in our study.

Indeed, as young Syrians in Turkey go on with their lives, an increasing sense of normalization enables aspirations to build lives in Turkey. This chapter examines how youth aspire in the context of constraint, and how their aspirations relate to mobility and to what Arjun Appadurai refers to as "cosmopolitanism from below" (2013: 198). In his seminal essay on "the capacity to aspire," Appadurai noted that aspirations regarding the good life are not individual but are shaped by cultural norms and opportunities. Because of this, he calls the capacity to aspire "a navigational capacity" (2013: 189). While acknowledging that socioeconomic opportunities shape that navigational capacity, Appadurai also argues for a vernacular cosmopolitanism that "begins close to home and builds on the practices of the local, the everyday, and the familiar," but that stretches the boundaries of what one might consider possible (198). As Samuli Schielke shows in his ethnography of Egyptian youth in the wake of the Arab Spring, cosmopolitanism "is not only about life trajectories that exceed borders but also about expectations that exceed borders" (2015: 153). Through cinema, the internet, and popular culture, youth develop ideas of globality. Cosmopolitanism, then, "is about aspiring to the world, a sense of there being a wider array of paths, possibilities, styles and aims 'out there'" (Schielke 2012: 29).

While youth in marginalized spaces often imagine fulfilling their cosmopolitan dreams in "the Outside" (Elliott 2021), and many such youth in the Middle East and Africa have focused on Europe as the space to realize such dreams, this chapter shows how many displaced Syrian youth have begun to view Turkey as a place where they can realize vernacular cosmopolitan aspirations. For instance, the number of those wanting Turkish citizenship is high across the board (see also Koser Akcapar and Simsek 2018). For the youth we interviewed, this was in part because it would give them mobility, though not as in the possibility to take refuge elsewhere. Rather, they saw mobility both as moving forward and as a key aspect of a "normal" life (see Greenberg 2011), one where they can study and travel abroad.

However, as we suggested at the end of the last chapter, there is also a group of youth that hopes to move on from Turkey. We examine here the aspirations that give shape to those hopes, and why they perceive that they cannot fulfill those aspirations in Turkey. As Jørgen Carling and Francis Collins (2018: 917) highlight, "People do not aspire to migrate; they aspire to something which migration might help them achieve." The chapter, then, analyzes aspirations to move on and to stay in relation to broader life goals.

## Mobility and Freedom

> From Syria to Turkey, it was something great in my life to be honest. How to
> say that. We were not connected with the world and here in Turkey we feel
> freer and we saw things that I have never seen. For example, I love movies,
> but I have never entered a cinema, and I did not know how to buy a film on
> the internet. Now I can go to the cinema and buy films online. This idea was
> invisible but now films are my passion. . . . The internet in Syria was . . . It
> was available in the end, but there were no things . . . Things like free speech,
> free opinions. Sometimes when I open a political subject with my friends in
> Arab countries, they change the subject. I do not have this idea in Turkey. I
> am not afraid to speak about my political opinion in Turkey. . . . So moving
> to Turkey opened doors that I have never known and helped me to grow up
> as I moved without my family. Moving to Turkey was the main factor to build
> a new personality.

Turkish youth may balk at the idea that today's Turkey is a space of
openness and political freedom. Indeed, according to the measurements
of Freedom House, Turkey is considered "not free." Both political rights
and civil liberties have been severely compromised in the country, initially
following the Gezi Park protests in 2013 and then increasingly in the wake
of the 2016 coup attempt. The views of youths such as Kamal, above, show
how relative such freedom is. Originally from Aleppo, Kamal experienced
the availability of internet and films in Turkey, as well as the freedom to
express political opinions regarding their home country,[1] as an openness to
new ideas that seemed revelatory.

Many of the youth with whom we spoke found that life in Turkey pro-
vided them with what Michael Jackson (2013) refers to as existential mo-
bility. Mobility, Jackson notes, is not only about survival but must also be
understood as "a metaphor for freedom" (144). For many youths with whom
we spoke, this freedom could also mean the freedom to develop oneself in
new ways. For instance, Ruqa, a young woman from a wealthy Syrian fam-
ily, had remained in Adana with her mother while her father had moved
to Germany for business. Her father had developed his business there but
planned to return, while she had become increasingly engaged in civil so-
ciety organizations. "I think I have two countries," Ruqa remarked. "I'm
already like a citizen here. This place is like my country." At that moment,
she was working on a project for a civil society organization and felt that
she was accomplishing something. "I don't want to return to Syria, because
I didn't accomplish anything there. Here, I developed myself in everything.
I've done a lot, met a lot of people."

Ruqa, then, saw her experiences in Turkey as important to her own for-
mation. While she thought of going abroad potentially to study in a course
or gain work experience, the fact that she had already spent such a sig-

nificant part of her life in Turkey that she already felt like a citizen made any thought of migration elsewhere something only temporary. The idea of going abroad to earn money or to develop a career and then returning to Turkey was not uncommon among the youth we interviewed. Most voiced the aim of ultimately returning to Turkey, especially in order to raise their children there. For instance, computer programmer Musa has had chances to emigrate, but he says that as he has gotten older and seen what other Syrians have experienced in Europe, this idea has become less appealing. "I became certain that I want to raise my children here, in an environment like this, which is conservative but not restrictive."

Indeed, for youth whose lives were becoming normalized, it became possible to think in terms of expectations of the longer-term future, particularly of a time when they would have their own children and how they would raise them. This longer-term prospect led them to weigh what they expected from their lives in Turkey against what they might expect abroad, ideas about which they had gained from friends and relatives who had moved on to Europe. As a result, questions such as the ability to maintain their culture and to bring up their children in it were prevalent in many people's minds. In our survey, 39 percent of respondents believed that they would not be able to maintain their culture should they make the journey to Europe, while 34 percent of participants were not sure. In contrast, 55 percent of participants said that they can maintain their culture in Turkey, while only 20 percent said that this was not possible. Moreover, cultural and religious similarities were the main reasons given for wanting to establish a life in Turkey. More than 30 percent of participants mentioned that cultural closeness to Syrian traditions is the main reason behind wanting to stay in Turkey, the second reason being that it is a Muslim country.

In other words, as time passed and refugees became more settled, their lives more "normal," it became possible for many to make informed choices based on expectations of the long-term future. The cost in terms of uprooting seemed too high, and the cultural differences with Europe too great. While some expressed this as a cultural similarity and ability to maintain traditions, for others it was about what they understood to be different lifestyles and rhythms of everyday life. For instance, Pasha, a twenty-three-year-old man of Circassian background from Damascus whose story was discussed in an earlier chapter, had established himself in a job he enjoyed in one of Turkey's southern cities and declared,

> I don't like Europe at all. I don't know. I'm a social person. As far as I understand, there is not much of a social life there. Because I am talking with my friends who are there, like no, there is no social life there for real. You either study or work, there is nothing else. Here you study, work, wander around, get together with friends. You can do everything here. Why would I go there?

Okay, maybe my financial situation would be better there, but you cannot only look at the finances. I would die of boredom there. I would really get bored.

The expectation of boredom in Europe seemed quite widespread among youth who valued their time with friends and family. For example, Heyam, who was twenty-eight years old when we spoke to her and working for an NGO in Gaziantep, remarked that she would like to live for a while in Tunisia, just for the experience. When we asked her why Tunisia but not Europe, she replied,

I do not like Europe, why? I feel that lifestyle is so monotonous. . . . Life in Turkey is nice. Let's say it is exciting. Life here is interesting. If I lived in Europe my life would be sleeping and waking up. The biggest excitement would be if the dustman did not collect the rubbish for a day. And I am like, I do not think that is my lifestyle. Here you are always waiting for something, or there is something happening. . . . Life here is more beautiful.

For Heyam and other youth, then, the routinization of life could lead to boredom and staleness. One young woman studying in Adana, Dalia, thought that life in Europe would be stifling:

I feel like it is a prison there. I know many people who went to Germany and cannot return. I feel like, yeah, they are offering them everything but to stay, not to leave. I do not want something to limit me because my soul is still attached to my homeland. I do not want anyone to prevent me from returning. I did not see in Turkey what I saw in Europe. Thank God, it is good, and I do not feel like it is a prison or a suffocating place and that it would keep me in the future.

Quite a number of the youths we interviewed similarly mentioned the negative reports that they had received about the difficulty and isolation of life in Europe as what discouraged them from thinking about it as an option.

For many youths, then, there was a sense of existential mobility, or having greater freedom in comparison to Syria, that was also available within a culturally familiar environment with a familiar lifestyle and rhythm. In addition to this, however, certain youth found Turkey to be a space where they could pursue social mobility and develop themselves. Young Syrians often remark, "I do not want to start from zero," meaning that they already invested considerable time and resources for their current standing. Indeed, our interviews reveal that among Syrian youth, those who found room for self-improvement, either through work or education, are more satisfied with their lives in Turkey and more likely to aspire to stay (see Üstübici and Elçi 2022 for a more detailed discussion on social class and aspirations to stay).

Indeed, many young people who settled down in Turkey see "starting from scratch" in a new country as a waste of time. Salih, who is about to graduate from the engineering faculty in Adana, wants to continue his ca-

reer in Turkey. He answers the question of whether he has ever thought of going to Europe as follows:

> Neither then, nor now. When you look at it, I graduated from high school in 2011, now it is 2018, and I still didn't graduate from university, didn't take my degree yet. Okay, if I leave everything and go there, I will start over. First, I will learn German, and it takes time. You lose seven years and still are a high school graduate. There is also that. This would be the hardest thing for me.

Salih built a life for himself in Adana, acquired professional experience and has become socially and professionally connected. For him, starting all over as a high school graduate with no social ties in a new place means downward mobility, an experience he wants to avoid.

Similarly, Hilal, a young single man of twenty years old, works as a tailor in Mardin, a city bordering Syria, and has never considered moving on to Europe, as he thinks he cannot adjust to life there. His willingness to stay in Turkey is also conditional, as he is waiting for suitable circumstances to return to Syria. In the meantime, and despite difficulties, he believes that he can improve his work conditions in Turkey and dreams of establishing his own business.

> I had the possibility to go there [Europe]. . . . In that time, I had some money! But I didn't go. I didn't like to go there. . . . To be honest . . . the people told us about there . . . like . . . there are different people! We got used to our atmosphere like we are Muslims. . . . I don't mean that there is a racism but . . . like . . . we will go to a different world! We said maybe the situation would be better here, and—thank God!—our situation is better than many people. There are people who have a worse situation!

In sum, many of the youth in our study felt increasingly settled in Turkey and told us that the country provided them with the right sort of freedom—"conservative but not restrictive"—and opportunities to pursue social mobility in a context of cultural familiarity. Nevertheless, their ability to remain in the country was also temporalized by the legal uncertainties of their permanently temporary situation. For this reason, the desire for citizenship was high across the board. As we will see, almost all youth with whom we spoke mentioned that they either had applied or would apply for Turkish citizenship, which they viewed as a solution to their temporal and physical "stuckedness."

## Mobility as Moving Forward

"Of course, I would get the citizenship if they offered it," remarked Sahban, a mechanical engineering graduate from Aleppo who currently works in

the human resources office of an international company in Istanbul. The company had originally offered him a position in his own field that would have required him to move abroad, to Pakistan or Oman. When they found out that he only had a Syrian passport, they instead offered him a position in the Istanbul office. The experience left him with a lasting desire to have a "real" passport, one that would allow him to travel "normally," as anyone else with his aspirations would do. He wanted citizenship, he said, "For one reason only, or for two reasons. The first is the horizons that the citizenship would open for me. . . . The second is that I want to be done with the curse of having a Syrian passport. . . . I want to be a citizen who will receive it [a visa to travel] in a normal manner like all the others."

Refugee youth most often expressed the desire for citizenship as a desire for mobility. This was mobility as aspiration: simultaneously social mobility, as they expected it to provide them with better jobs and opportunities, and physical mobility, giving them the opportunity to freely travel for work or education–part of what they imagined as a "normal," middle-class life. Sahban dismissed his own country's passport as abnormal and wanted one that would allow him to go to an embassy and receive a visa without having them "investigate me many times to see why I'm coming [to that country]." As other anthropological work has shown, the hierarchical position of various passports in the global order makes particular ones into "a symbol of free movement and travel" (Jansen 2009: 822) and representative of "a high quality of life" and "respected geopolitical position" (Greenberg 2011: 88).

Indeed, for many of our interviewees, Syrian documents were associated with immobility and abnormality, and Turkish documents were associated with mobility and "normal lives." Unlike in the former Yugoslav case described by Stef Jansen and Jessica Greenberg, however, this was initially and immediately about ensuring their permanent status in Turkey, their unquestioned right to live and work there and to realize their aspirations there. As stated by Munsef, a Syrian of Turkmen origin who was working as a translator in Adana, "For me, it doesn't differ much, but only in the future, if there would be any send-backs, staying under temporary protection would be difficult. It is in the name: temporary protection is temporary."

Turkish citizenship is initially, then, a guarantee protecting them from being returned to Syria and establishing their permanence in Turkey. For instance, Hiba, a mother of two living in Adana, told us that receiving Turkish citizenship altered her aspirations for the future. Hiba's husband is pursuing an academic career and doing private tutoring on the side. After the war, her sister joined her husband who was already settled in Germany. At first, Hiba was also thinking of joining them, but receiving Turkish citizenship enabled her and her husband to be more settled in Turkey and changed their perceptions on moving onward:

> They [the sister's family] always tell us to come to Germany since we would not have to pay rent, and that they would give the children money. When we got to Turkey, I really wanted to go, since my husband had no job. But now with the citizenship, I don't think about leaving anymore.

The sense of permanence is significant in altering visions of the future, also in the way that citizenship enables certain types of jobs and the ability to move up the social ladder. Yasser, who graduated from the law faculty in Syria, supports his family by working as a translator, since his law degree is not recognized in Turkey. The most important expectation of Yasser, who is originally a Turkmen, from citizenship is the opportunity to be able to practice law in Turkey, preferably as a lawyer: "Since they started giving citizenship to Syrians, now they can apply to jobs here. . . . It is possible to be employed." He adds, "If I get the citizenship, there will be many doors opened for me." Similarly, twenty-five-year-old Khaled, who wants to settle in Turkey and works in a company in Istanbul, thinks that citizenship will make his life plans easier if he stays in Turkey. "If I have a citizenship here, I can get married easily; I can invite her [his fiancée, still in Syria] easily. I have my equivalence here, no one will say that my documents are fake." Or Ihsan, a young man living in Adana who had just lost his job when we spoke to him, explained to us why he was seeking to become a Turkish citizen:

> My situation depends on finding a job where I can make good money and live comfortably. Only then will I be able to realize my dreams. But if I can't find a job like that, it will be hard. I don't know what the future will bring, and my biggest fear is the future. I'm very hopeful about citizenship.

In the immediate term, then, citizenship opened doors to work opportunities. However, when asked about his dreams for the future, Ihsan also said that the kind of life he imagined was one in which he would be able to travel, and for that reason citizenship was not only a way to a better job, but also the key to free movement and a better life. Indeed, throughout our interviews it became clear that in the years since the EU-Turkey deal was put in place, not only had the desire to move on to Europe significantly declined among Syrian youth, but also their dreams of a normal life—now seemingly reachable from where they found themselves in Turkey—included a passport that would allow them to travel. Yazan, who had been invited to apply for citizenship as a university student in Izmir, commented that he just wanted a passport with which he could travel and be able to see his sister in London. Omaya, another university student in Mardin, explained, "We don't need your citizenship and aren't so keen to get it, but we have to if we want to go anywhere. . . . Moving around will be easier."

This mobility, it should be noted, was primarily class-based, an opportunity to develop oneself. Mobility, in this sense, is imagined as part of a "normal," middle-class life—something that many of our interviews de-

fined as their goal. As Stef Jansen (2009: 817) notes for postwar Yugoslavia, "Paradoxically, while passport applications are usually intended as a first step towards cross-border travel, ever since their creation in the 1990s Bosnian-Herzegovinian and Serbian passports actually certified bodies as immobilized." Jansen continues by remarking that for those who possessed those documents, "Bosnian and Serbian passports were intimately experienced as rendering people collectively guilty until proven innocent (their future 'crime' being the 'threat of mobility')." The former Yugoslavia's red passport, on the other hand, came to be nostalgically viewed as "a symbol of free movement and travel" (2009: 822), something that his informants claim to have used frequently, not only as workers, but also as tourists and shoppers (823). As a result, "Throughout the former Yugoslavia, the Yugoslav red passport (*crveni pasoš*) has become iconic with a high quality of life and the respected geopolitical position of the socialist Yugoslav state" (Greenberg 2011: 88). As both of these articles note, the ability to travel beyond the borders of one's own state also signaled the ability to have a "normal" life.

Many youths in our study discussed plans to make a life in Turkey but wanted a passport that would allow them to study and travel abroad, in other words, to have the expectations of middle-class normality. Unlike the "entrapment" (Jansen 2009) of the Syrian passport, which many of our interviewees associated with a lack of mobility, most perceived the Turkish passport as one that would enable them to study, visit family, go on vacation—in other words, pursue the aspirations of a "normal" life.

This was especially true of young men, many of whom saw their futures in Turkey but found that the immobility of carrying a Syrian passport limited the options to realize their dreams, or act in agentive ways. One young man commented,

> Because I want to stay in Turkey, I want the citizenship so that I can go abroad, and work abroad, and succeed in my dreams abroad. But when I go to Europe, I don't think to become a European citizen, because that would be hard, I couldn't live that life or follow those laws. For me, the laws are too strict. But from the perspective of the market, it's a great market.

Similarly, Zuher, the young nurse living in Izmir from a previous chapter, weighed the possibility that the international organization that sponsors the clinic where he works might not renew his contract, and that, without citizenship, he would not be employable in the Turkish state hospital system. He not only wants Turkish citizenship but also to learn German, which will open the path for him to migrate temporarily to Germany, where his uncle works as a doctor.

> For that reason, I'll apply to work in the German hospitals. . . . I'll work six or seven years in Germany then return to Turkey and establish my own business.

I don't have to work in my own field. I'll have developed myself, and at least I'll have some property. Or I'll have enough savings to start a family or begin a project. These are my thoughts at the moment.

For some, then, the passport offered them the opportunity to work abroad, build up capital, and return to Turkey. For others, however, it offered the opportunity to study elsewhere. While for some these plans may reflect longer-term migration aspirations, many expressed a desire to develop themselves through education abroad before returning to Turkey. Isra, a medical student whose family is settled in Gaziantep explains:

I want to finish my education and go specialize in England. I have this as a dream for myself. Inshallah, I get the chance to achieve it, I want to get specialized there and come back and work here in Turkey. I want to have the experience in medicine in a developed country, this is what I want.

Similarly, Sumbul is a twenty-two-year-old university student studying management in Adana who comes from an upper-middle-class family near Aleppo. Her father is a businessman who managed to transfer his business to Mersin and get citizenship for the family. The family has no aspirations to move to Europe. "Because we are settled here, I'm in the university, my siblings are in school, and my father's job is stable, so no need for going to a new country and starting everything all over again," Sumbul tells us. Although she never thought about moving on, Sumbul herself is working hard to spend a semester in Germany or France through the Erasmus program: "My parents did not have any problems with me studying here; my father is even telling me to apply for the Erasmus program."

In these various visions of futures, then, we see that the desire for mobility has shifted from one that would enable them to emigrate elsewhere to one that would enable them to "normalize" their lives in Turkey. "Normal," comments Jessica Greenberg, "thus points to the gap between how people see themselves and how they must conform to conditions and realities not of their choosing. Normal serves as a diagnostic category for shifting social, political, and economic relations and the kind of agentive possibilities that emerge in those contexts" (Greenberg 2011: 89). In regard to refugee youths who have now spent a significant part of their adolescent and adult lives in Turkey, "normal" also points to the options available to Turkish citizens of their same class background and education.

Overall, then, aspirations to stay in Turkey are prominent among Syrian youth. Such aspirations may result from lack of capabilities to go elsewhere, but also from a sense of familiarity with the environment or from prospects for social mobility through education or work. At this point, Turkish citizenship gains an instrumental and intrinsic value to ensure permanence and settlement but also to facilitate further mobility if not migration. The pros-

pect of Turkish citizenship may also induce aspirations to stay, as it gives a sense of permanence and offers opportunities specific to Turkey.

## Mobility as Moving On

There were, of course, some youth in our study who had not yet established in Turkey the sort of life that they had imagined for themselves and who still considered finding ways to Europe. For the most part, these were young men who had not been able to acquire the education that they wanted or to find jobs compatible with their experience and qualifications. Moneer, a young man of twenty-three living in Mardin, told us about his brother, who was about to begin his studies in Sweden on a scholarship:

> Yes, I want [to go to Sweden]. There is a big difference. Here they give you a broom and tell you "congratulations for your new work," and you start working in bad conditions. When you go there, they give you a pen and a book and they tell you go and study. Which one would you choose? I have my cousins– they were also living in Damascus. They were not good boys. They went there, and now they are studying and really changed for the best.

Other young men in our study had already attempted the trip to Europe during the so-called refugee crisis of 2015–16, when the number of border crossings was high, but could not realize their plans due to lack of financial resources or for family reasons. As such, those mobility aspirations have not been fulfilled, and they remain "involuntarily immobile" (Carling 2002). As Jørgen Carling notes, while much attention is focused on those who migrate, increasing border restrictions also produce large numbers of persons who cannot move. "Indeed," remarks Carling (2002: 5), "one of the most striking aspects of today's migration order, compared to the recent past, is the degree of conflict over mobility and the frustration about immobility among people in many traditional countries of emigration."

While Carling refers primarily to increasing restrictions on migration from countries that have traditionally been sources of labor for Europe, Syrian youth have experienced both prolonged forced migration and potential secondary migration that would enable them to fulfill their life aspirations. For young men, in particular, the potential for that secondary migration is today impeded by migration controls but also by family expectations and responsibilities. Yahya, for instance, was twenty-nine years old at the time of our interview and working in manufacture in Istanbul. Although he had saved money to go to Europe, he had to use those funds to settle his family members instead of traveling. He is still considering going, especially for the job opportunities in Germany.

*Yahya:* So, my idea was to take my bag and travel. But when my brother, his wife and her brother told me that they are coming to Turkey . . . I couldn't do anything! And my family also wanted to come . . . so I didn't do anything. I endured a lot for all these years! I have saved some money, but I had to spend it when my family came. It's not about money, but I wanted to use this money to travel.

*Interviewer:* You mean that you wanted to go to Europe.

*Yahya:* Of course! And moreover . . . there people could open cafés. For example, I know someone from my village; he opened a café in Germany. The government helped him, and he is studying now. He also studied in Syria, but I don't know what his department was. So, the government helped him, and he opened two cafés! Now he is comfortable.

The bad job market experiences of this group, who stayed in Turkey against their will, increase their desire to leave Turkey. For young refugees deprived of durable solutions in Turkey, migration elsewhere appears as the only solution to improve their working conditions and income. Musa, for instance, is a young single man who already crossed to Greece through smuggling once and then was deported back to Turkey. He later joined his childhood friend Hashem in Istanbul, where they were working and living together as day laborers in a restaurant. Both were very discontented with their current conditions and think that going to Europe–to "heaven on earth," in Musa's words–is the only solution to their problems. Hashem elaborates his frustration as follows:

Let me tell you something. Every single day that passes . . . it passes from our life. It passes in vain. We are losing it! We don't benefit from it! We are just tiring ourselves in vain! For what? For 40 TL a day [around 10 USD in May 2018]! There is no future in that! We want to travel and be able to rest. We don't want to work for twelve hours every day! The maximum work hours in any country are eight hours, and you also have days off weekly. But we have a day off every fourteen days! And sometimes we are asked to work even more.

Being stuck in dead-end jobs, their aspirations to move on are shaped by perceptions of a better life in other destinations (de Haas 2011). "Why did I go to Greece? Because I didn't want to remain a failed person here in Turkey," Musa explained, saying that his main motivation in trying to reach Germany is to be able to pursue his studies.

It is worth emphasizing that, for the most part, aspirations to move on are gendered. Our own survey and other research have indicated that men are more likely to leave Turkey compared to women (see Üstübici and Elçi 2022; Üstübici, Kirişçioğlu, Elçi 2021; Düvell 2019 among others). From our own interviews, we also see that men are not only more inclined to move to new destinations but also are more likely to aspire to return to Syria. Hazem, for instance, was twenty-five years old at the time of our inter-

view and working as a daywork electrician in Izmir. Unable to afford a place to live for himself, he originally wanted to return to Syria but ultimately accepted that this was not realistic. At the time that we spoke, he was trying to reach Germany to join family members there and was pursuing both legal routes and potential smuggling. At the same time, his desire to migrate prevents him from taking steps to establish a more settled life in Turkey:

> I am waiting for my passport to be issued, if I could go there legally, it would be great for me. But if I can't, I will search for the illegal way. It's not just dangerous. There are many other problems, but I took my decision! I live here, but I didn't settle down. I sleep two nights here, and I go to another place to sleep for two days. . . . I don't have a place of my own. My sister and her husband are very good to me, but I don't want to bother them. I am shy.

Unlike Musa, who considers Europe as heaven on earth, Taim, a twenty-five-year-old shop owner in Gaziantep, had a more realistic account.

> It [Europe] is not heaven at all. . . . There is a group of Syrians who see Europe as the salvation, but it is not. Europe is like Turkey. The only difference is that the European government can help you until you can stand on your feet. Here they are not able to help you stand on your feet. This is what distinguishes Europe from Turkey. But if you do not work or build something, they will kick you out. There are many people who want to return and many people who will be deported. . . . So, the definition of Europe for me is a passport and an ID. This is what I want from Europe, I do not want anything from it.

Such expressions of utilitarian reasons for wishing to move on also confirm studies from throughout the region, which show young men immigrating in order to establish themselves, send remittances to their families, and ensure their futures, including marriage. "To tell a young man in an Egyptian village not to dream of migration is like telling him not to hope," Samuli Schielke (2020: 54) remarks. For young men throughout the region, going abroad to work is effectively a rite of passage to manhood that enables one to establish a married adult life (Elliott 2021).

For young men, then, aspirations to move on are also aspirations to move forward in one's life, to have the means to become an independent adult who can establish himself and also help support his family. However, the importance of family in such aspirations is not only present among young men. Although fewer women wished to risk moving on to Europe, there were some who considered it to ensure a good quality education for their children. Amar, a twenty-nine-year-old young woman living apart from her abusive husband, stated that because she works as a cleaner, she could lose her job at any time, and she could go to Europe for her children's future and education, even if she didn't want to. For her, Europe means support for her children until they grow up and go to school.

One of the main differences between young men who are planning to move on and families with young children is in how they now consider realizing their migration aspirations. Rather than crossing the borders through smuggling, several families with migration aspirations were considering resettlement to a third country, even though the latter is not guaranteed and may involve years of waiting. Sama, for instance, is a young woman from Aleppo who has been waiting to be placed in the United States through UNHCR, because her father is very ill. Because of changes in the United States' refugee admission policies, they are now waiting to be placed on the resettlement lists of other countries such as Canada[2] and the UK. Although they know that this process may take many years, they do not think of crossing the border illegally and going to Europe: "We thought about that [going to Europe in 2015]. But my father said, 'It is better for me to spend my life here than something to happen to any of you in the sea. I will not risk my children's lives.'"

## Conclusion

At time of writing, more than a decade has passed since the Syrian conflict began and the first Syrian families took refuge in Turkey. This chapter has looked at refugee youth aspirations after the passage of time, when gradual normalization of their situation has made the status quo resistant to change. Even in a state of temporariness, life must go on. People build houses and have children, and they provide for and school those children. They establish businesses, start careers, and aspire to better lives.

Along the way, anticipation gives way to expectation. While anticipation is based on a sense that the future is bearing down on one and that one needs to act in order to shape an oncoming event (Bryant and Knight 2019: 31), expectation is the basis for "the normal" and for "ordinary lives," of "being able to await the future, rather than having always to anticipate it" (52). Expectation's role in defining normality is that the ordinary becomes the expectation of expectation: "One *should* be able to expect, one *ought* to be able to expect, e.g., a state that works, a certain standard of living, or that one can pass on property to one's children without legal challenge" (52). In the context at hand, we see how even temporary arrangements may be normalized and the expectation of expectation may begin to outweigh desires to create lives anew.

Indeed, we can see that it is this shift from anticipation (of violence, poverty, or exclusion) to expectation (the capacity to expect certain types of future and build normal lives) that defines youth mobility aspirations. Those who now have developed expectations (of social mobility, or particular lifestyles) tend to desire to stay where they are, not to "start from zero." The

main aspiration of most is acquiring Turkish citizenship, which will further "normalize" their lives by making it possible for them to realize dreams of further social mobility through increased job and educational opportunities, as well as physical mobility that will give them freedom to see family, take holidays, and study abroad. For those who aim at moving on beyond Turkey, it is generally the continuing entrapment in a state of anticipation–constantly moving house or fear about one's job–and inability to establish oneself, with stable expectations, that pushes them to look elsewhere.

## Notes

1. The crackdown on political dissent in Turkey is limited to Turkish politics and tends not to affect Arabic speakers expressing political opinions about politics outside Turkey.
2. Among those intending to move on, Canada is the most desired destination for resettlement, along with Germany. Canada, especially, is seen as a place one can reach by legal means, establish oneself in the society and build a future for oneself and one's family.

# Conclusion
## Growing Up and Moving On

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> There is nothing left [in Aleppo]. The main challenge is the length of time it takes a person to realize that we are unable to set a plan. For me it took four years to reach such a realization. You are living, but at the same time everything is on temporary mode. You maybe don't realize it until many years have passed by.
>
> <div align="right">–Mustafa, lives in Gaziantep</div>

These are the words of Mustafa, a young man working in the humanitarian sector in Gaziantep, whom we quoted earlier expressing his surprising love for his adopted city. Like Mustafa, Kamal was from Syria's border region with Turkey, and because of that he had known the country through visits before the conflict but had never expected to settle there. For several years, he also remained in "temporary mode," working precarious jobs and hoping that he would be able to return to Syria and enter university there. Eventually, however, he recognized that this temporariness was becoming permanent:

> In the beginning, we thought it would be temporary. Because it was a difficult situation and things can return to the right situation after a while, we thought. But after we left, things became worse instead of being better, which told us that the end would be bad. So, this cancelled the idea of us being here only temporarily, and now we are living here.

At the time that we spoke to him, life had become more settled, and in the absence of a clear resolution to the Syrian conflict, he could not imagine leaving his life in Mardin.

This book has traced the lives of young Syrians forced to uproot themselves and take refuge in Turkey. Throughout this book, we have seen that most of the youth who participated in our study recognized the unlikelihood of reconstructing the communal lives that they had lived before conflict. Families had been scattered and even shattered; neighborhoods and cities had been destroyed. In the process, people had lost savings and livelihoods, but for very many people they had more importantly lost a way of life.

The possibility of "return"–either to a place or to the past–seemed unlikely to most youth in our study, and many perceived this as a loss of bearings and struggled to find ways to orient themselves toward the future. This was a result not only of the uncertainties of their situation in Turkey but also of the social and cultural losses resulting from the scattering of families and communities. Almost all participants experienced what has been termed "cultural bereavement" (Eisenbruch 1990, 1991), or grief at the loss of one's social structure and culture. This resulted in a lack of temporal and social orientation. Nevertheless, we have also shown how for many of our interlocutors, such as Mustafa or Kamal, the passage of time has normalized what they otherwise considered an abnormal situation. In the absence of hope for return, young people have put down roots and have begun to make new plans for their lives.

Throughout the book, we have also argued that youth as a generational category is important to understand the process of turning permanence into temporariness and to planning communal futures. We often say that "youth are the future," and this is at least in part because youth are "a critical indicator of the state of a nation" (Honwana 2012: 3). In the case of Syrian youth in Turkey, we can see how their own preferences will guide families as they make decisions about staying put, moving on, or attempting to return. We also see, then, how the decisions that youth make, and their ability to succeed, have the ability to shape the future of Turkey and the region.

## Youth and Liminality

We suggested in the introduction that youth is an age category that deserves more attention in forced migration studies, because youth experience a dual liminality. Youth are already liminal between childhood and adulthood, with young people around the world feeling the weight of the future that they still need to shape. On top of this, refugee youth experience the liminality of exile, a period often described as "permanent temporariness," when expectations of return are on hold and people often find themselves scraping by in the present, not sure how to plan for the future.

As the previous chapters have shown, however, youth are also adaptable, capable of rethinking their ambitions as they struggle to build adult lives. In many of the examples that we gave, the need to exit the liminality of youth and become full adults often forces them to make decisions that will resolve their permanent temporariness and direct them toward the future. The last two chapters, particularly, showed Syrian youth in Turkey today losing hope that they will return to their home country in the near future. Instead, we see many of them planning for lives in Turkey, where they have already spent a large part of their formative years. In some cases, we saw

them planning to move on, but these were mostly cases where young men had found it impossible to establish adult lives in Turkey–lives where they could have a stable job, a home of their own, and the promise of marriage and a family. For those who were able to temporally move on, settling down and building that adult life began to take precedence over fulfilling the ambitions of youth.

We saw many young people claiming that Turkey had changed them. For some, it was the relative openness of the country and discovering things that they had not known in Syria. For others, it was being away from family and taking on the responsibilities entailed by being alone. Nazem, for instance, was originally from Manbij and was working as a cook in Gaziantep when we met him. He remarked,

> Before in Syria, to be frank, I wasn't a responsible guy. I didn't have any burden to think about, like money or anything else, because my family was providing for me. When I came here, at first I didn't feel it. After a while, I started working, and I felt like . . . even though I'm not studying–I would've loved to do so, though–but I'm doing something, I'm helping my parents. I'm providing for myself; I don't need anyone. I would never think of begging or asking anyone for money.

Nazem, then, found himself becoming "a responsible guy," an adult, through the experience of exile. Even though he had to give up ambitions to study, he took pride in being able to provide for his family.

Those who were able to study, though, reported similar experiences. For some, their experience of Turkey was one of growing up, and it was difficult to say if the different person that they had become was a result of being in a different country or taking on the responsibilities of an adult. Amal, for instance, whom we met in chapter 1, had left her family in Jordan and was studying at a university in Adana when we met her. We asked her what she found positive in her experience in Turkey, as someone who was just at the end of her teenage years when she arrived:

> You mean that I grew up. Honestly, it is the university and the university environment. I am certain that if I was in Damascus University or here, I would feel the same to be among students. It is a different feeling. I do not relate it to Adana. I relate it to a stage, that you move to a different stage.

Nevertheless, Amal also described how as a young person she had not been very social, and when her family initially left Syria for Jordan, she had felt very much alone.

> Coming here was the turning point in my life, as they say. I got to know so many friends from different cultures. I learned many things. My personality changed a lot, *bambaşka* ["very different" in Turkish]. Thank God I became more social and became more optimistic. Because I started university, my

ambitions got bigger. Thank God, these are positive things, I feel like it was a good change. I got stronger.

Being in the multicultural environment of her university in Adana, then, was important for her in breaking out of her teenage shell and emerging as an adult, with a new personality. Still, however, she attributes this largely to the university experience itself:

Yes, it [her personality] changed, but honestly if I was in Syria it would be the same, because when you are at university, you become more responsible. Like, it is no more the father would bring the stuff home and the mother would cook. Like, I am responsible for all these things. It is not being more open, but rather more depending on oneself.

We see, then, in Amal's story, that her experience in Turkey is inextricably intertwined with the experience of growing up that comes with living alone at university. This sense of the inevitability of growing up that is also intertwined with the experience of finding themselves in Turkey at that moment is expressed in a different way by Pasha, a university student also living in Adana, who came from a Circassian background. We encountered Pasha in chapter 2, when he explained how the Circassian networks in Adana helped him integrate there. When we asked him how his Circassian identity changed in Turkey, he remarked that he began to feel more Circassian because of having grown up more:

It is not related to Syria or Turkey, it is related to me. I have matured here: I was a child, a teenager, there. I didn't dwell upon the subject at that time. I have matured here, started to think about where I came from, about where I belong. Thinking about this, and also going to the Association helped. Otherwise, I could have remained the same here. We had our Association also back there [in Syria], where everyone was going to.

Although he mostly attributes the change to his own maturation, Pasha also acknowledges that his exile and finding Circassian associations in Turkey caused him to think more about the meaning of his Circassian roots.

Others more openly acknowledged this combination of growing up and becoming a different person as a result of their changed environment. Kamal was forced to grow up because of being alone, having left his family behind in Aleppo. But he also observed that the openness in Turkey compared to Aleppo had changed him:

Moving to Turkey opened doors that I had never known and helped me to grow up, because I moved without my family. Moving to Turkey was the main factor to build a new personality. My personality in Syria was completely different. Even the religion, freedom and these things were not available in Syria . . . How to say it, things were just more closed . . .

In all three cases, then, we see how young people acknowledge the way that they have grown into adults, though we also see how becoming a particular kind of adult is shaped by the different environment in which they find themselves. While Amal says that her personality has changed for the better, she also considered that others had become too integrated and even "Turk-like":

> Many people have changed, like, Turkey is different in regard to being open and behaviors, and I don't know what. There are many different things. Many people got influenced, like, some say there is integration and more than integration—I don't know the word. Like, I can tell you that I am integrated, thank God there are not many problems, but there are people who melted and became Turk-like and got very influenced by their surroundings to the extent that they forgot their principles, behaviors.

Amal particularly mentioned young women who chose not to wear the hijab, and she attributed this to the influence of Turkish culture.

Other young people observed that a generational gap was already emerging between young people who had spent formative years in Turkey and their parents, who often adhered to tradition and clung to ideas of return. Alma, for instance, was working and preparing for university entrance exams when we met her in Istanbul. She observed optimistically,

> The generations are getting divided. The current generation is becoming a part of the Turks; they will become a Syrian-Turkish community. They will borrow ideas from all over the place, Syrians and Turkish people, and of course there will be balance. They will accept ideas that Syrians wouldn't accept, or Turks wouldn't accept, there will be openness and acceptance of ideas.

Of course, Alma's optimism is not always shared, particularly in a context of economic crisis and rising tension in Turkey, when political parties in Turkey are pushing ever more strongly to send Syrians "home." It is in this sense that everyday temporality—the time in which we make plans about ourselves and our families—conflicts with geopolitical time, or the time in which states act in view of the long-term future.

## The "Youth Bulge" and the Challenges of Integration

At time of writing, Turkey is moving toward a general election, and tensions around immigration have been high. Moreover, the country is in economic crisis, with youth unemployment soaring. We have argued throughout the book that within this context youth become the primary stigmatized group. Media portrays young Syrian men as engaged in crime or taking away jobs from Turkish youth, while it portrays young women as overly fertile. And while many Syrian young people see their attempts to integrate as producing

a hybrid culture, what Alma called a "Syrian-Turkish community," Turkish public discourse portrays any remnant of Syrian culture as a failure to assimilate. The idea that even youth, who might otherwise be seen as malleable, fail or refuse to assimilate then appears in public discourse as a threat to the future Turkishness of Turkey.

Indeed, we see how "young people become indices of social change" or "figures through which people disseminated common-sense sociologies about what was happening to them" (Thiranagama 2013: 35). Within the Syrian community itself, this may be visible in, for instance, parental fears about the morals of young women in exile; the inability of parents to act as protectors and the shifting of generational roles; or adult fears of a "loss of culture" projected onto the changing norms and roles of youth. The last, especially, may have consequences for youth when, for instance, families proactively or preemptively attempt to maintain cultural norms against the perceived threat from the host society. It may also have effects when youth view themselves as responsible for maintaining such norms.

In conclusion, then, we may reiterate youth emphasis on the need for reciprocal integration, as well as observations from our own and other research on the importance of funding and projects that benefit not only refugees but also the communities in which they live. The latter is particularly important in a period of economic crisis, political polarization, and the "youth bulge" that affects both Turkey and the Syrians living there.

Reciprocal integration is something that youth claim is gradually taking place when polarization can be contained. For instance, we observed in earlier chapters that many young people were surprised by their Turkish neighbors' reactions to noise. Many also remarked that their Turkish neighbors, friends, and colleagues did not spend their evenings outdoors in the way that they were accustomed to do, particularly in conservative areas. Youths observed, however, that gradually their presence was changing urban space. Or as Taim, the young man who had lived in Gaziantep remarked to us, "We very much changed Turks' habits," in that case referring to the growing tendency that he had perceived for Turkish neighbors and acquaintances to be out in the evenings.

There was some hopefulness, then, that the passage of time would enable more interaction, mixing, and integration. However, many youth remained frustrated at their Turkish acquaintances' preconceptions of what Syria was like before the war–preconceptions that youth seemed unable to crack. Nazem, a twenty-year-old man living in Gaziantep, commented,

> I want them to have a good idea about Syrians. Because frankly . . . we have lots of educated people, academics. They don't know that. Sometimes I wish that they'd have the curiosity to know. Like, I came to Turkey, I try to find what Turkey is famous for. . . . They don't have the curiosity to know what Syria has or how it was before.

Youths related to us that such preconceptions extended to the belief that Syria was a desert with none of the comforts of "modern" life. As one young woman expressed it, "There are many times when they asked us if we have houses and types of fruit. Do you have buildings—can you imagine, to this extent of detail?"

This same young woman also related her dream to make a movie about Syria before and after the war "so that Syria is introduced properly." She frustratedly remarked, "We did not leave out of nothing, no culture. They think we are seeing these things for the first time in our life, the simplest things to the extent that it makes you laugh, like the question about fruit." It is noteworthy that in this perception Turks see Syrians as having "no culture" and having come from a life of deprivation to one of riches, in which they saw things that they would not have seen before.

## Final Thoughts

The theme of making a movie to show Syria to Turks is one that repeatedly returned in our interviews, showing young people's desire to share cultural knowledge and contribute to enhancing social relationships with the Turkish community. It also underlines youth rejection of the refugee label: "We did not leave out of nothing, no culture," the young woman quoted above remarked. This resentment of the idea that they were destitute and dependent was reiterated many times, as young people insisted, "We were not people who had nothing."

For some youth, it was the ability to make a home and have a community in Turkey that led them to stay. Kamal remarked that he did not go to Europe "because I do not want to live as a refugee or as a burden on the society. I mean, I do not want to be a refugee, and in Turkey, I did not feel that." For others, however, it is not up to them to decide. In chapter 3, we quoted Ihsan, a twenty-six-year-old from Antep Province working in a café in Mardin, saying that he had decided to remain in Turkey because he thought that work opportunities for Syrians were better than in Europe. Nevertheless, he thought that Europeans treated refugees with more respect than they received in Turkey: "The Turkish people treat you like you're immigrant scum, as if you're less than them, a second-class citizen."

We would hear again and again that Turks view Syrian refugees as "second-class citizens" or, more particularly, as "immigrant scum." In an earlier chapter, we quoted one young man who had recently married and was living in Adana saying, "As long as your name is 'refugee,' you are different, and they will look at you in a different way."

Listening to youth who see their futures in Turkey, then, we see that while immediate economic and social support remain important, many

struggle to obtain a dignified life in the context of political polarization, economic crisis, and exclusion. Moreover, Turkish government policies have been inconsistent, initially welcoming refugees and later, in a populist way, competing with opposition parties in their promises to send refugees back. As a result, reciprocal integration that includes language learning, open education, and opportunities for socializing between Syrian and Turkish youth are particularly important. An inclusive approach would include outreach to host communities, who often experience similar adversities and would benefit from services and resource provision. Providing those services only to Syrian refugees has created a ground for resentment and feelings of being left out from potential opportunities.

We end as we began, with the words of a young woman who called herself Mia and who had been in Izmir for five years when we met her. She described to us her desire for more freedom as a woman, even before the war. In Turkey, she says, she has more freedom but still has not found ways to realize herself:

> I am confused: I am more free, but I do not have a stable life. My fear about the future is controlling me. I have dreams, and sometimes I live in my dreams, not in the reality. It is different from the dreams; it is hard.

# Afterword

# Refugees in Limbo

## A Question of Ontological Insecurity

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*Ahmet İçduygu*

The Syrian refugee population in Turkey is a young community; nearly four-fifths of the population is under the age of thirty-five.[1] Young refugees' experiences and perceptions about their displacement, settlement, and integration are crucial in exploring the successes and failures in refugee situations and the prospects of the entire refugee community in the coming years. In this context, this book conveys two main sets of empirically distinct yet analytically and theoretically interconnected arguments. First, the importance and significance of studying the precarious lives of Syrian youth in Turkey is underscored. Second, the centrality of permanent temporariness to the precarious lives of refugee youth is highlighted. As we observed in earlier studies, refugees exhibit a distinct age distribution compared to other international migrants, with a marked prevalence of young individuals in the former group (Hugo, Abbasi-Shavazi, and Kraly 2017). According to the Pew Research Center Data Sets, in contrast to the mostly middle-aged adult makeup of the global migrant population, children and young people make up a significant proportion of refugees, comprising more than three-fourths of their demographic.[2] This observation suggests that the refugee issue is primarily a matter of concern for children and young people and necessitates a specific focus from both scholarly and policy perspectives.

It is crucial to point out that the precarious lives of refugee youth are shaped by a range of factors that generate poor and insufficient conditions regarding housing, education, working life, and social and health-related

services (Baban, Ilcan, and Rygiel 2021). What is also very crucial is the fact that these young cohorts of refugees are continuously tested by a state of permanent temporariness (İçduygu and Sert 2019). The inadequacy of the international refugee regime, as outlined by the 1951 Convention, in effectively addressing the protection requirements of extensive refugee movements has compelled numerous states to adopt temporary protection measures for cases that have become prolonged. While the prevalence of temporariness has become the predominant norm within contemporary refugee protection regimes, many refugees find themselves enduring prolonged periods of waiting for a formal and permanent status. Although this practice of keeping refugees in a state of limbo may serve the interests of states, there is no doubt that it not only inflicts harm upon refugees but also constitutes a fundamental injustice (Buxton 2023). The injustice of maintaining such a legal and political limbo is one that we hear throughout this book in the voices of Syrian youth in Turkey.

It has been over a decade since the initial arrival of Syrian refugees in Turkey. Throughout this period, the Turkish government's policies toward these refugees have undergone numerous shifts and transformations. Consequently, the experiences and perceptions of individual Syrian refugees have also had significant changes within the framework of these policies and the responses of refugees to these policies. It appears that precariousness, a condition of uncertainty and unpredictability often experienced by refugees because of their displacement and lack of resources, is very central to the lives of Syrian youth in Turkey. This book demonstrates how and to what extent precarious lives emerge in relation to housing conditions, education, working life, and access to various social services. As the vast majority of Syrians in Turkey have not lived in camps but resided in various neighborhoods of urban areas, one of the most significant challenges for refugee youth is finding adequate housing (Balkan et al. 2018). Many young refugees and their families are forced to live in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions, which can lead to health problems and exacerbate existing mental health issues. Some aspects of precariousness emerge in relation to housing conditions when refugees are forced to live in unsafe and unstable city environments with limited access to basic services. Access to education is another critical factor that contributes to the precarious lives of refugee youth (Çelik and İçduygu, 2019). Many refugees have limited access to formal education because of language barriers, problems of recognition of their prior education, financial constraints, and discrimination. There is no doubt that the question of no or limited schooling can have long-term consequences, because it limits their opportunities for working life, social mobility, and economic stability.

It is obvious that the ability to work and earn a living is crucial for refugee youth to achieve economic stability and independence. However, it

is found that many young refugees face significant barriers to employment due to the lack of recognition of their occupational skills, discrimination, absence or limitations of work permits, and limited access to job training and support services. This leads to a cycle of poverty and precariousness as refugees struggle to make ends meet and are forced to rely on informal and exploitative work. Precariousness emerges in relation to working life when refugees are denied access to decent work and fair wages, which can perpetuate their marginalization and exclusion from native communities (Caro 2020). Moreover, it seems that the precarious lives of refugee youth are also shaped by their access to social and health-related services, which is essential for them to maintain their physical and mental well-being. Many refugees face hurdles in accessing these services due to language barriers, lack of documentation, and discrimination (Baban, Ilcan, and Rygiel 2017). In short, a wide range of factors, mainly related to housing conditions, education, working life, and access to social and health-related services, interact to create a complex web of challenges that can perpetuate the marginalization and exclusion of refugee youth from mainstream society. Addressing the precariousness of refugee youth requires a multifaceted approach that tackles the limits of structural economic, political, social, and cultural conditions surrounding them and provides them with the support and resources they need to achieve economic stability, social inclusion, and physical and mental well-being.

At the core of the precarious lives of Syrian youth lies the formation of a state of temporariness, wherein refugees are confronted with escalating feelings of uncertainty and insecurity. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the outcomes of these sentiments are not always negative or disheartening; they also contribute, to a certain extent, to the development of resilience, wherein we witness the active agency of the refugees. The chapters in this book unequivocally demonstrate the complex ramifications of displacement on the lives of Syrian youth residing in Turkey. Although their experiences are undeniably influenced by structural factors, including policies and the broader economic, social, political, and cultural dynamics and mechanisms surrounding them, it is important to note that they have not become resigned captives of these structural frameworks. This work also attentively offers varying perspectives on the nature and limits of refugee youth agency within the boundaries of migratory structures.

In this context, to better understand the perceptions and experiences of Syrian refugee youth in Turkey, let us first look at the main structural factors that contribute to their experienced state of permanent temporariness. Selectively, one can name four main structural factors here: the informal, ad hoc, and instrumentalized nature of Turkish state policies; the failures of established international refugee protection regimes; the lack of international concern and responsibility sharing; and the protracted nature of the

refugee situation. These factors create an environment where Syrian refugee youth are confronted with challenging options for their future, leading to uncertainty and insecurity and resulting in a sense of permanent temporariness. One of the key factors contributing to this limbo is the nature of the Turkish state policies, which have been mostly informal, reactive, ad hoc, and politically instrumentalized (İçduygu and Aksel, 2021). In the early stages of the Syrian refugee crisis, Turkey initially treated Syrians as guests rather than refugees, often referring to religious (Islamic) values. This informal approach was influenced by cultural and historical ties between the two countries, as well as the expectation that the conflict in Syria would be short-lived. Meanwhile, as the political crisis in Syria was prolonged and the number of refugees increased, Turkey shifted its policies and introduced the Temporary Protection Regulation in 2014. This has provided Syrians with a relatively formal temporary protection status, opening the way to granting them access to some basic formal services and opportunities, such as those in the fields of education, work, and health. While this policy was a significant step toward addressing the needs of Syrian refugees, it also meant the institutionalization of the temporariness of their stay.

However, there have also been contradictory signals sent by Turkish authorities that have further exacerbated the sense of limbo experienced by Syrian refugees. While efforts have been made to integrate refugees into Turkish society through language courses, vocational training, and employment programs, and even with the development of an arbitrarily operating naturalization program that gives some chances of obtaining citizenship for selected Syrian refugees, there have also been rising instances of discourse and actions, signaling potential repatriation or encouraging onward migrations to Europe. The Turkish government's 2016 refugee agreement with the European Union, its decision to open the Greek border to enable the movement of refugees to Europe in early 2020, and its continuously escalated military interventions in northern Syria over the last five years all serve as illustrative instances highlighting the ad hoc, reactive, and instrumentalized nature of Turkish policies toward Syrian refugees. These policies clearly reflect contradictory elements in government policies, particularly when one considers them with the coexistence of integration measures also being implemented. These policy inconsistencies have left Syrians uncertain about their prospects and contributed to their feeling of being in limbo.

The state of permanent temporariness experienced by Syrian refugees, particularly by Syrian refugee youth, is further worsened by limited international concern and responsibility sharing (Şahin Mencütek 2021). Despite the enormity of the Syrian crisis, the responsibility of hosting millions of refugees has predominantly fallen upon Syria's neighboring countries, including Turkey. The absence of a comprehensive and coordinated global response has severely constrained the resources and support available to address the

needs of Syrian refugees, especially those of young people. For instance, as mentioned earlier in this volume, many Syrian youth aspire to seek educational and employment opportunities in third countries. However, the stringent admission policies imposed by various countries, particularly those in the Global North, hinder their mobility and leave them stranded between Turkey, their current country of asylum with seemingly uncertain prospects for them, and Syria, their home country that lacks viable conditions for voluntary, safe, and sustainable repatriation. This predicament underscores the need for a global solution that prioritizes responsibility sharing rather than responsibility shifting. Such a solution is crucial not only to alleviate the challenges faced by Turkey but also to ensure a more sustainable future for Syrian refugee youth in other parts of the world.

Moreover, the protracted nature of the refugee situation further aggravates feelings of temporariness for Syrian refugee youth. As protracted refugee situations are defined as those in which refugees find themselves in a long-lasting and intractable state of limbo (Gibárti 2021), it is obvious that with no end in sight to the conflict in Syria, these youths find themselves confronted with limited options for their future. As noted earlier, they could consider only three options: integrating into the country of asylum, returning home, or seeking resettlement in third countries. However, none of these options currently offer a promising outlook. Integration in Turkey is hindered by limited access to education and employment opportunities, while the prospect of returning home is marred by ongoing conflict and instability. Resettlement in third countries is highly competitive and uncertain, leaving Syrian refugee youth in a state of limbo.

As their displacement continues, the Syrian refugees' plight has been compounded by multiple crises that have hit their host country, Turkey, in recent years–first by COVID-19, then a severe economic downturn, and finally by a devastating earthquake. The first of these crises was the COVID-19 pandemic, which swept across the globe in early 2020. The pandemic significantly impacted Syrian refugees in Turkey, who were already living in precarious conditions (Elçi, Kirişçioglu, and Üstübici 2021). The pandemic led to economic and social disruptions, with many losing their jobs and struggling to access basic necessities such as food and healthcare. The pandemic also led to the closure of schools and other educational facilities, which affected the education of refugee children. According to various studies, the pandemic has had a severe impact on refugees worldwide, with many facing increased risks of poverty, exploitation, and abuse (Schomaker and Bauer 2020). It is reported that refugees' access to healthcare has been severely affected by the pandemic, with many struggling to access essential medical services. Moreover, the economic crisis that has deepened in Turkey in recent years has had a profound impact on Syrian refugees in the country: first, refugees' economic and social lives have been harshly

affected by the worsening economic conditions; second, they have been unjustly blamed for the country's economic downturn, becoming a convenient scapegoat for public reactions; and third, consequently, rising anti-refugee sentiments, which were strikingly visible in the 2023 election period, have sparked intense debate on returning them to Syria. Such debates have further compounded refugees' already precarious situation. More recently, in early 2023, Turkey was hit by a devastating earthquake that caused widespread destruction and loss of life. The earthquake affected Syrian refugees living in the impacted areas, with many losing their homes and possessions. The earthquake also significantly disrupted essential services such as water and electricity, further worsening refugees' living conditions.

In conclusion, if one refers to Anthony Giddens's (1990: 92) definition of the term "ontological security" as "a sense of confidence and trust in the world as it appears to be . . . The confidence that most human beings have in continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of their social and material environments," it is possible to argue that refugees often experience a loss of ontological security during the displacement process as they are removed from their familiar social environment, leading to feelings of vulnerability and dependency that contribute to an intensified sense of uncertainty and insecurity. As emphasized above, as contemporary international refugee protection regimes have made temporariness the norm, which is widely seen in the form of temporary protection status applied to Syrians in Turkey or Ukrainians in Europe, many refugees experience and endure prolonged waiting periods for more stable status. Consequently, one of the most significant challenges that refugees face is the feeling of permanent temporariness. The lack of legal status, uncertainty about the future, and lack of integration are just a few factors contributing to this feeling. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that involves providing refugees with legal status, access to basic rights and services, and opportunities for integration. By addressing these challenges, we can help refugees overcome the feeling of permanent temporariness and feel a sense of stability and security in their new homes.

## Notes

1. See, Webpage of Presidency of Migration Management, Türkiye. Retrieved 27 December 2023 from https://en.goc.gov.tr/#.
2. Pew Research Center, "Asylum Seeker Demography: Young and Male." *Pew Research Center*, 2 August 2016. Retrieved 27 December 2023 from https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2016/08/02/4-asylum-seeker-demography-young-and-male/.

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