Introduction

Syrian Pasts, Turkish Futures

> 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.

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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

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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.

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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

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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-

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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

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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.

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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-

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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

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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

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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

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questioned the analysis of violence that sees it as an "eruption" or exception to "the normal," thereby casting return as the only "normal" or nonpathological 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

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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

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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.

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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/regionalyouthscenes/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.

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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).

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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://multeciler.org.tr/turkiyedeki-suriyeli-sayisi/#:~:text=%C4%B0%C3%A7i%C5%9Fleri%20Bakanl%C4%B1%C4%9F%C4%B1%20taraf%C4%B1ndan%2019%20Aral%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-construction-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/1WYn4N7STdP2eW3EYdX86Gsb6lxE4VrcNvZ4aEczsFwI/edit?pli=1#gid=833561282.
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/.

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