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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-

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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

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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,

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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-

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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,

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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.

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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

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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:

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> I care about Syrian people, and I wish them goodness. I believe that the revolution 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 international NGO remarked, “When I was in Syria, especially after the crisis, revolution, or war–different names. This concept changed in my eyes. Before 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 ‘sabotage.’ 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 immediate 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 families in other parts of Turkey to live and study in the small city of Mardin,

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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

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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:

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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

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> 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

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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.

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