# 3

# Rupture

## Discontinuity and Disorientation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## Liminality: Crossing into Refugeehood

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Cultural Bereavement and Loss of Moral Orientation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Norms in Flux

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Disorientation and Continuity

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

## Notes

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

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