Preface

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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