

4

Waiting

On Permanent Temporariness

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

—Anas, twenty-four years old, Istanbul

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Precarity and Permanent Temporariness

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Maneuvering the Unknown

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion: Moving On?

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

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

Notes

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