Conclusion

Growing Up and Moving On

> There is nothing left [in Aleppo]. The main challenge is the length of time it takes a person to realize that we are unable to set a plan. For me it took four years to reach such a realization. You are living, but at the same time everything is on temporary mode. You maybe don't realize it until many years have passed by.
>
> –Mustafa, lives in Gaziantep

These are the words of Mustafa, a young man working in the humanitarian sector in Gaziantep, whom we quoted earlier expressing his surprising love for his adopted city. Like Mustafa, Kamal was from Syria's border region with Turkey, and because of that he had known the country through visits before the conflict but had never expected to settle there. For several years, he also remained in "temporary mode," working precarious jobs and hoping that he would be able to return to Syria and enter university there. Eventually, however, he recognized that this temporariness was becoming permanent:

> In the beginning, we thought it would be temporary. Because it was a difficult situation and things can return to the right situation after a while, we thought. But after we left, things became worse instead of being better, which told us that the end would be bad. So, this cancelled the idea of us being here only temporarily, and now we are living here.

At the time that we spoke to him, life had become more settled, and in the absence of a clear resolution to the Syrian conflict, he could not imagine leaving his life in Mardin.

This book has traced the lives of young Syrians forced to uproot themselves and take refuge in Turkey. Throughout this book, we have seen that most of the youth who participated in our study recognized the unlikelihood of reconstructing the communal lives that they had lived before 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 very many people they had more importantly lost a way of life.

The possibility of "return"—either to a place or to the past—seemed unlikely to most youth in our study, and many 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), or grief at the loss of one's social structure and culture. This resulted in a lack of temporal and social orientation. Nevertheless, we have also shown how for many of our interlocutors, such as Mustafa or Kamal, the passage of time has normalized what they otherwise considered an abnormal situation. In the absence of hope for return, young people have put down roots and have begun to make new plans for their lives.

Throughout the book, we have also argued that youth as a generational category is important to understand the process of turning permanence into temporariness and to planning communal futures. We often say that "youth are the future," and this is at least in part because youth are "a critical indicator of the state of a nation" (Honwana 2012: 3). In the case of Syrian youth in Turkey, we can see how their own preferences will guide families as they make decisions about staying put, moving on, or attempting to return. We also see, then, how the decisions that youth make, and their ability to succeed, have the ability to shape the future of Turkey and the region.

Youth and Liminality

We suggested in the introduction that youth is an age category that deserves more attention in forced migration studies, because youth experience a dual liminality. Youth are already liminal between childhood and adulthood, with young people around the world feeling the weight of the future that they still need to shape. On top of this, refugee youth experience the liminality of exile, a period often described as "permanent temporariness," when expectations of return are on hold and people often find themselves scraping by in the present, not sure how to plan for the future.

As the previous chapters have shown, however, youth are also adaptable, capable of rethinking their ambitions as they struggle to build adult lives. In many of the examples that we gave, the need to exit the liminality of youth and become full adults often forces them to make decisions that will resolve their permanent temporariness and direct them toward the future. The last two chapters, particularly, showed Syrian youth in Turkey today losing hope that they will return to their home country in the near future. Instead, we see many of them planning for lives in Turkey, where they have already spent a large part of their formative years. In some cases, we saw

them planning to move on, but these were mostly cases where young men had found it impossible to establish adult lives in Turkey–lives where they could have a stable job, a home of their own, and the promise of marriage and a family. For those who were able to temporally move on, settling down and building that adult life began to take precedence over fulfilling the ambitions of youth.

We saw many young people claiming that Turkey had changed them. For some, it was the relative openness of the country and discovering things that they had not known in Syria. For others, it was being away from family and taking on the responsibilities entailed by being alone. Nazem, for instance, was originally from Manbij and was working as a cook in Gaziantep when we met him. He remarked,

> Before in Syria, to be frank, I wasn't a responsible guy. I didn't have any burden to think about, like money or anything else, because my family was providing for me. When I came here, at first I didn't feel it. After a while, I started working, and I felt like . . . even though I'm not studying–I would've loved to do so, though–but I'm doing something, I'm helping my parents. I'm providing for myself; I don't need anyone. I would never think of begging or asking anyone for money.

Nazem, then, found himself becoming "a responsible guy," an adult, through the experience of exile. Even though he had to give up ambitions to study, he took pride in being able to provide for his family.

Those who were able to study, though, reported similar experiences. For some, their experience of Turkey was one of growing up, and it was difficult to say if the different person that they had become was a result of being in a different country or taking on the responsibilities of an adult. Amal, for instance, whom we met in chapter 1, had left her family in Jordan and was studying at a university in Adana when we met her. We asked her what she found positive in her experience in Turkey, as someone who was just at the end of her teenage years when she arrived:

> You mean that I grew up. Honestly, it is the university and the university environment. I am certain that if I was in Damascus University or here, I would feel the same to be among students. It is a different feeling. I do not relate it to Adana. I relate it to a stage, that you move to a different stage.

Nevertheless, Amal also described how as a young person she had not been very social, and when her family initially left Syria for Jordan, she had felt very much alone.

> Coming here was the turning point in my life, as they say. I got to know so many friends from different cultures. I learned many things. My personality changed a lot, *bambaşka* ["very different" in Turkish]. Thank God I became more social and became more optimistic. Because I started university, my

> ambitions got bigger. Thank God, these are positive things, I feel like it was a good change. I got stronger.

Being in the multicultural environment of her university in Adana, then, was important for her in breaking out of her teenage shell and emerging as an adult, with a new personality. Still, however, she attributes this largely to the university experience itself:

> Yes, it [her personality] changed, but honestly if I was in Syria it would be the same, because when you are at university, you become more responsible. Like, it is no more the father would bring the stuff home and the mother would cook. Like, I am responsible for all these things. It is not being more open, but rather more depending on oneself.

We see, then, in Amal's story, that her experience in Turkey is inextricably intertwined with the experience of growing up that comes with living alone at university. This sense of the inevitability of growing up that is also intertwined with the experience of finding themselves in Turkey at that moment is expressed in a different way by Pasha, a university student also living in Adana, who came from a Circassian background. We encountered Pasha in chapter 2, when he explained how the Circassian networks in Adana helped him integrate there. When we asked him how his Circassian identity changed in Turkey, he remarked that he began to feel more Circassian because of having grown up more:

> It is not related to Syria or Turkey, it is related to me. I have matured here: I was a child, a teenager, there. I didn't dwell upon the subject at that time. I have matured here, started to think about where I came from, about where I belong. Thinking about this, and also going to the Association helped. Otherwise, I could have remained the same here. We had our Association also back there [in Syria], where everyone was going to.

Although he mostly attributes the change to his own maturation, Pasha also acknowledges that his exile and finding Circassian associations in Turkey caused him to think more about the meaning of his Circassian roots.

Others more openly acknowledged this combination of growing up and becoming a different person as a result of their changed environment. Kamal was forced to grow up because of being alone, having left his family behind in Aleppo. But he also observed that the openness in Turkey compared to Aleppo had changed him:

> Moving to Turkey opened doors that I had never known and helped me to grow up, because I moved without my family. Moving to Turkey was the main factor to build a new personality. My personality in Syria was completely different. Even the religion, freedom and these things were not available in Syria . . . How to say it, things were just more closed . . .

In all three cases, then, we see how young people acknowledge the way that they have grown into adults, though we also see how becoming a particular kind of adult is shaped by the different environment in which they find themselves. While Amal says that her personality has changed for the better, she also considered that others had become too integrated and even "Turk-like":

> Many people have changed, like, Turkey is different in regard to being open and behaviors, and I don't know what. There are many different things. Many people got influenced, like, some say there is integration and more than integration–I don't know the word. Like, I can tell you that I am integrated, thank God there are not many problems, but there are people who melted and became Turk-like and got very influenced by their surroundings to the extent that they forgot their principles, behaviors.

Amal particularly mentioned young women who chose not to wear the hijab, and she attributed this to the influence of Turkish culture.

Other young people observed that a generational gap was already emerging between young people who had spent formative years in Turkey and their parents, who often adhered to tradition and clung to ideas of return. Alma, for instance, was working and preparing for university entrance exams when we met her in Istanbul. She observed optimistically,

> The generations are getting divided. The current generation is becoming a part of the Turks; they will become a Syrian-Turkish community. They will borrow ideas from all over the place, Syrians and Turkish people, and of course there will be balance. They will accept ideas that Syrians wouldn't accept, or Turks wouldn't accept, there will be openness and acceptance of ideas.

Of course, Alma's optimism is not always shared, particularly in a context of economic crisis and rising tension in Turkey, when political parties in Turkey are pushing ever more strongly to send Syrians "home." It is in this sense that everyday temporality–the time in which we make plans about ourselves and our families–conflicts with geopolitical time, or the time in which states act in view of the long-term future.

The "Youth Bulge" and the Challenges of Integration

At time of writing, Turkey is moving toward a general election, and tensions around immigration have been high. Moreover, the country is in economic crisis, with youth unemployment soaring. We have argued throughout the book that within this context youth become the primary stigmatized group. Media portrays young Syrian men as engaged in crime or taking away jobs from Turkish youth, while it portrays young women as overly fertile. And while many Syrian young people see their attempts to integrate as producing

a hybrid culture, what Alma called a "Syrian-Turkish community," Turkish public discourse portrays any remnant of Syrian culture as a failure to assimilate. The idea that even youth, who might otherwise be seen as malleable, fail or refuse to assimilate then appears in public discourse as a threat to the future Turkishness of Turkey.

Indeed, we see how "young people become indices of social change" or "figures through which people disseminated common-sense sociologies about what was happening to them" (Thiranagama 2013: 35). Within the Syrian community itself, this may be visible in, for instance, parental fears about the morals of young women in exile; the inability of parents to act as protectors and the shifting of generational roles; or adult fears of a "loss of culture" projected onto the changing norms and roles of youth. The last, especially, may have consequences for youth when, for instance, families proactively or preemptively attempt to maintain cultural norms against the perceived threat from the host society. It may also have effects when youth view themselves as responsible for maintaining such norms.

In conclusion, then, we may reiterate youth emphasis on the need for reciprocal integration, as well as observations from our own and other research on the importance of funding and projects that benefit not only refugees but also the communities in which they live. The latter is particularly important in a period of economic crisis, political polarization, and the "youth bulge" that affects both Turkey and the Syrians living there.

Reciprocal integration is something that youth claim is gradually taking place when polarization can be contained. For instance, we observed in earlier chapters that many young people were surprised by their Turkish neighbors' reactions to noise. Many also remarked that their Turkish neighbors, friends, and colleagues did not spend their evenings outdoors in the way that they were accustomed to do, particularly in conservative areas. Youths observed, however, that gradually their presence was changing urban space. Or as Taim, the young man who had lived in Gaziantep remarked to us, "We very much changed Turks' habits," in that case referring to the growing tendency that he had perceived for Turkish neighbors and acquaintances to be out in the evenings.

There was some hopefulness, then, that the passage of time would enable more interaction, mixing, and integration. However, many youth remained frustrated at their Turkish acquaintances' preconceptions of what Syria was like before the war–preconceptions that youth seemed unable to crack. Nazem, a twenty-year-old man living in Gaziantep, commented,

> I want them to have a good idea about Syrians. Because frankly . . . we have lots of educated people, academics. They don't know that. Sometimes I wish that they'd have the curiosity to know. Like, I came to Turkey, I try to find what Turkey is famous for. . . . They don't have the curiosity to know what Syria has or how it was before.

Youths related to us that such preconceptions extended to the belief that Syria was a desert with none of the comforts of "modern" life. As one young woman expressed it, "There are many times when they asked us if we have houses and types of fruit. Do you have buildings–can you imagine, to this extent of detail?"

This same young woman also related her dream to make a movie about Syria before and after the war "so that Syria is introduced properly." She frustratedly remarked, "We did not leave out of nothing, no culture. They think we are seeing these things for the first time in our life, the simplest things to the extent that it makes you laugh, like the question about fruit." It is noteworthy that in this perception Turks see Syrians as having "no culture" and having come from a life of deprivation to one of riches, in which they saw things that they would not have seen before.

Final Thoughts

The theme of making a movie to show Syria to Turks is one that repeatedly returned in our interviews, showing young people's desire to share cultural knowledge and contribute to enhancing social relationships with the Turkish community. It also underlines youth rejection of the refugee label: "We did not leave out of nothing, no culture," the young woman quoted above remarked. This resentment of the idea that they were destitute and dependent was reiterated many times, as young people insisted, "We were not people who had nothing."

For some youth, it was the ability to make a home and have a community in Turkey that led them to stay. Kamal remarked that he did not go to Europe "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." For others, however, it is not up to them to decide. In chapter 3, we quoted Ihsan, a twenty-six-year-old from Antep Province working in a café in Mardin, saying that he had decided to remain in Turkey because he thought that work opportunities for Syrians were better than in Europe. Nevertheless, he thought that Europeans treated refugees with more respect than they received in Turkey: "The Turkish people treat you like you're immigrant scum, as if you're less than them, a second-class citizen."

We would hear again and again that Turks view Syrian refugees as "second-class citizens" or, more particularly, as "immigrant scum." In an earlier chapter, we quoted one young man who had recently married and was living in Adana saying, "As long as your name is 'refugee,' you are different, and they will look at you in a different way."

Listening to youth who see their futures in Turkey, then, we see that while immediate economic and social support remain important, many

struggle to obtain a dignified life in the context of political polarization, economic crisis, and exclusion. Moreover, Turkish government policies have been inconsistent, initially welcoming refugees and later, in a populist way, competing with opposition parties in their promises to send refugees back. As a result, reciprocal integration that includes language learning, open education, and opportunities for socializing between Syrian and Turkish youth are particularly important. An inclusive approach would include outreach to host communities, who often experience similar adversities and would benefit from services and resource provision. Providing those services only to Syrian refugees has created a ground for resentment and feelings of being left out from potential opportunities.

We end as we began, with the words of a young woman who called herself Mia and who had been in Izmir for five years when we met her. She described to us her desire for more freedom as a woman, even before the war. In Turkey, she says, she has more freedom but still has not found ways to realize herself:

> I am confused: I am more free, but I do not have a stable life. My fear about the future is controlling me. I have dreams, and sometimes I live in my dreams, not in the reality. It is different from the dreams; it is hard.