

## Post-Script

### Ruptures in Time and Space

*Simon Turner*

We all know that conflict creates displacement. Life becomes untenable in different ways, and people are forced to move; the majority ending up as internally displaced people within the nation-state, while others wind up in refugee camps in neighboring countries, and a very few seek asylum in faraway places. The recent war in Ukraine and the conflict in Syria since 2011 seemingly fit into this classical conception of why and how people are displaced. Sudden violent events forced them to run for their lives. Often, we perceive the flight as a one-way movement in space and time, as people move from hot spaces in search of cool ground. However, the journeys are most often more complicated—even in seemingly straightforward cases like Ukraine and Syria. Decisions to move are made gradually, in steps and at times in leaps, sometimes stopping along the way, at other times being temporarily reversed, as individuals and families continue to engage with the conflict, assessing its potential to diffuse, escalate or morph into something else (Bredeloup 2012; Collyer and de Haas 2012). This collection engages closely with these processes as they unfold in the intimate sphere of family and friends while keeping in mind that the conflict in Syria is still there and it still plays an active role in displaced Syrians' present lives and plans for futures.

The special section's attentiveness to ethnographic detail combined with its curiosity toward exploring new conceptual fields makes it a valuable contribution to theories on migration, diaspora, conflict and displacement. While they may not engage explicitly with these bodies of literature, I believe that they make important contributions to them. In this postscript, I reflect on four themes that I found particularly inspiring and that got me rethinking old assumptions. First, the special section speaks to the roles of families in migration studies. Where migration studies acknowledge the role of families in migration decisions and discuss transnational family ties, the contributions in this special section show how families become sites of politics, as the conflict morphs in exile. Second, the special issue shows how diasporas are not just the product of past conflicts—creating a nostalgia for a past—but also in constant relation to present changes in the conflict. Third, the collection speaks to questions of crisis, rupture and events, which takes me to my final thoughts on the special section; namely the question of studying futures. While much research on conflict and displacement is concerned with conflicts creating displacement and diasporas looking back at their loss, this collection nicely challenges this temporality and points to the ongoing changes in the conflict, the ambiguous nature of rupture and the role of futures in present practices. The case studies analyze how changes in the conflict—past, present and potential—play into the lives of Syrians wherever they are. The choices that families make might be based on past experiences and the present state of affairs in Syria, but they are equally concerned with assessing what might happen in the future, in order to make their decisions meaningful. Much of the time, they are assessing and re-assessing the situation and their options in order to make the right move at the right time.



The contributors to the special section explore ethnographically how politics moves scales in situations of critical events. They argue that the spatial ruptures “displace politics itself from the national to the intimate and from the collective to the personal” (Holst and Al-Khalili *this issue*). They explore the political in the private and the private in the political, as the displacements of people also become the displacement of statecraft, looking for the political in “marriage arrangements, friendships, burial rites, gender and social norms” (ibid.). What is important here is that conflicts do not just mutate and transform as they are measured on different scales. Instead, new layers of the conflict appear and are super-imposed upon one another. In the careful ethnographic contributions to this special issue, we see how different layers come to the fore at different moments.

Family dynamics are central to this special section, bringing in new perspectives to debates in migration studies. Migration scholars have for decades acknowledged that migration is a family decision; that families diversify economic risk by sending a family member away to the city or abroad. Particularly the literature on transnational families has foregrounded intergenerational relations to explain migrant decisions and aspirations, arguing for instance that “the first generation invests in the health and education of their children in the hopes of later returns” (Levitt and Jaworski 2007). This literature is cognizant also of the possible enduring influence of transnational ties, often across generations. Sometimes this may result in tensions because of differences between practices and goals in the home country and in the new environment. As such, parental child-rearing goals and techniques with roots in the home country often continue to have a strong impact on family relations in the adopted country. Yet, few studies have explored how conflict and crisis in the home country may disrupt or affect such processes of social reproduction (for exceptions, see Berckmoes and Turner 2021; D’Alisera 2009; Lubkemann 2008). This special section digs deeper into the familial and wider social dynamics at play, as the crisis unfolds—not just in the initial stages of flight but also later. It shows that the conflict affects such social relations among the displaced long after they have been displaced. Furthermore, it contends that the conflict itself is transformed through these relations.

Making migration decisions can cause tensions and conflicts within families—tensions that inevitably get entangled in the political. For example, my Burundian research assistant in Kigali in 2015 and 2016 had fled the potential violence in Burundi alone because her family believed that she as a young, Tutsi woman could be targeted by the youth wing of the ruling party, the *imbonerakure*, or the secret service. Had she been a young man, the family would further fear that she could be recruited by one faction or the other. Furthermore, she had just graduated, was unmarried and did not contribute to the family household in Burundi, which meant that the family could afford to send her to Kigali. Her move was, in other words, a result of the family’s analysis of the political situation and its potential escalation and her position in the family hierarchy. If we dig a bit deeper, we discover that family decisions are often contested. In another case, my interview with a woman in Kigali was interrupted by a phone call. The woman seemed very distressed and later I was told that her employer had warned her to return, lest she lose her job as a school teacher back home in Burundi. And while she wanted to return, assessing that the situation would calm down soon, her husband warned her to stay in Kigali, as he believed that the situation in Burundi would only deteriorate. Their disagreement was based in part on different readings of the political situation and in part on different positions in the family. Birgitte Stampe Holst’s finetuned ethnography of a moderate Syrian family in Turkey with slightly differing political outlooks, demonstrates nicely how questions of if, when and where to relocate are linked both to positions in the political field and in the patriarchal family. Their struggles to decide whether to stay, return or move on play into questions of what it means to be a good father, mother, son and daughter, drawing on different repertoires that are linked to political

identities and visions about citizenship, progress, respectability, and more. Ethics and politics intersect, as ideas about what a good life in the future would be, shape political views. And in this way the conflict not only intersects family life, it is also reshaped by family life. The stakes in the conflict become about what would be best for the family.

Another body of literature that the special issue contributes to—although it is not explicitly addressed—is the theorization of diasporas. Diaspora studies have explored how diasporas were created by an original rupture and displacement that created a subsequent sense of loss and longing around which identity is created (Safran 1991; Sheffer 1986; Werbner 2004). They may also explore the diaspora's engagement in “long-distance nationalism” and how they contribute to conflicts in the homeland (Skrbis 1999, Tölölyan 2007). What is interesting about this collection of articles is that they are exploring not only the genesis of diasporic belonging through conflict but also how the ongoing conflict inflects family dynamics and politics in the present. The ethnographies in this collection seek to unpack these dynamics as they explore how the conflict and politics in Syria follow these families and individuals not only beyond the borders of Syria but also beyond the initial rupture that caused the displacement.

In their exploration of Druze communities who were not displaced by the conflict, Maria Kastrinou, Salam Said, Rawad Jarboub, and Steven Emery show how the conflict affects their lives in the Golan Heights and Jaramana, Damascus, and how the conflict is transformed by the social dynamics it itself affects. Cut off from everyday engagements with friends, colleagues and lovers, their relation to Damascus changes, as does their relation to the state. They argue that the conflict itself is displaced. As the conflict creates shifts in the social relations, it creates shifts in the relation between the national and the sectarian, changing the stakes of the conflict. In her contribution, Lana Askari explores how the liberation of Kobani in Northern Syria played into the life of the main character, a Kurdish Syrian man, displaced to Iraq. She explores how he is constantly recalibrating his plans for futures and demonstrates how he senses an “opening and closing of different paths” each time the conflict takes a new turn. At each intensification or escalation, he has to adapt his plans. The conflict becomes intensely personal for this Kurdish man, who reads all developments on the battlefield in terms of how and where he can live his life. My colleague Lidewyde Berckmoes and I have similarly explored how the 2015 crisis in Burundi not only affected families in Burundi, who had to decide whether, when and where to flee, but also how families who had lived abroad for decades, fleeing previous crises, were sucked into the conflict. The constant flow of knowledge via digital media—and the sense of obligation toward relatives in Burundi—put families in Belgium and the Netherlands under emotional strain, creating conflicts that were simultaneously about positions in the family and about political affiliation in Burundi (Turner and Berckmoes 2020). In other words, political changes in the homeland—whether Burundi or Syria—continue to play into intimate relations in exile. More importantly, the contributions to this special section show that the opposite process is also at play and how everyday life reshapes what is at stake in the conflict.

My final comments concern the issues of temporality. While displacement is obviously about movement across space, it becomes apparent through the examples in the special section that time is also severely disrupted and calls for analytical attention. The concept of rupture is prominent in the argument proposed in this special section, exploring how the rupture in the political in Syria in 2011 has affected politics inside and outside the country. The rupture not only created new political fault lines, it also profoundly changed the scale and place of the political. Thus, the Syrians we meet in the articles, who were not concerned with politics prior to the rupture, are now forced to take sides and become “political”. Likewise, the political might transform into something else. Veronica Ferreri shows in her contribution how Syrian politics continues unabatedly inside Lebanon in the first years after the uprising. However, changes in

the policies of the Lebanese state force the activities into the non-political domains of humanitarian assistance. Furthermore, the shift in the political field in Lebanon affects the everyday relationships and alliances between Syrian and Lebanese activists. In other words, ruptures in space—between Syria and Lebanon—are entangled with political ruptures that mutually deflect one another.

The idea of rupture has been theorized in various ways as “critical event” (Das 1995) and “generative event” (Kapferer 2015). They mark a qualitative shift that divides a before and an after. Moreover, time itself changes during such moments/ruptures/events. They create an openness toward multiple futures. Holst’s case of the family negotiating their next move can also be read as family members assessing possible, viable futures in a situation where everything is in flux. This open future might create anxiety (Turner 2020) but may also open new possibilities and hope (Crapanzano 2003; Kleist and Jansen 2016; Miyazaki 2005; Webb 2007). Bryant and Knight argue that in “times of war” the future is pulled into the present (Bryant and Knight 2019). As the future can no longer be predicted through past experience, the future is anticipated rather than expected and the present becomes “thin”. We sense this presence of unpredictable futures in the ethnographies of this special section, as people try to scan the present for signs of the future. In certain situations, the rupture is so massive that it becomes impossible to imagine a future. Rebecca Bryant proposes the notion of the “uncanny present”, which “refers to a particular sense of presentness produced by futures that cannot be anticipated” (Bryant 2016: 20). Daniel Knight (2016) talks about “temporal vertigo” to capture these situations where the future seems beyond hope. In Askari’s contribution to the special section, we see how critical events can enable accelerations that lead to openings and hope as well as to stasis and closure. Rupture can, in other words, be productive of new possibilities—whether good or bad—but can also lead to a closure of options.

A question arises about the longevity of ruptures. A question to which I have no answers, but which deserves attention. We may indeed see the Arab Spring as a critical event or a rupture that irreversibly changed the scale and shape of the political field. But what about the eleven years that have passed since then? Can we call this a long-term rupture similar to the idea of chronic crises (Vigh 2008)? For, it is evident from the ethnographies in the special section that politics continue to morph inside Syria and beyond, and that the future continues to be uncertain whether in Syria, on the Golan Heights or in Turkey. Can we talk of continued rupture without losing the salience of the concept? On the one hand, rupture is a moment in time that irreversibly changes both the scale of a political antagonism and its nature. On the other hand, although such ruptures are limited in time—like critical events—they also leave the political order “open” and undecided, leaving its transformative abilities undetermined for a long time. We might, in other words, pinpoint specific ruptures in 2011 that changed the political field, but we may also see the rupture as ongoing more than ten years on. How long does the rupture continue to be open, and when is it more like a permanent stalemate? When the exception becomes permanent, the sense of possibility diminishes.

Finally, we may ask how space and time are entangled in such spaces of rupture where futures are open. The answer cannot be theorized and must always be subject to concrete ethnographic inquiry. In Kastrinou et al.’s contribution, they reflect on being “still there”, referring concretely to the Druze populations in the Golan Heights and in Jaramana, Damascus, who did not move during or after the 2011 conflict. They are “still there” while everything around them has changed. In this situation, it is politics rather than people that are displaced, and yet the displaced politics continue to affect and “unsettle” their lives while they are still there. We may argue that they are “displaced in place” (Lubkemann 2008). They have not been forced to move

due to the rupture, but it has affected their livelihoods, their mobilities and their future plans to study or to marry, for instance.

“Still there”, however, also implies other associations. Stillness implies stagnation and a lack of movement whether temporally or spatially, and is associated with lack of progress and development. The article argues that structural injustices in terms of capitalism and conflict are the root causes of the stuckness of the Druze populations, structurally and existentially. But could one also read “still there” in a different way, where rather than being stuck, it signifies steadfastness and a kind of stoic “sticking it out”? In this manner, we may argue that just as displacement can in some instances create opportunities, so may staying put and remaining still there be both stigmatizing and emancipatory, crushing and liberating. We can assume either and must explore it concretely and ethnographically.

The Arab Spring took many by surprise and marked a rupture in the political fields across the Maghreb and the Levant. Starting with a very localized event in Tunisia, it spread first all over Tunisia and then across the region illustrating the classical spark that ignites a fire, fueled by cumulated discontent with nepotism, despotism and corruption. However, although the uprisings were caused by much the same social injustices and discontent, and although they inspired one another, the results were very different. In some cases, regime change was swift, although structural issues were not addressed. In other cases, the regime collapsed, leaving the country in a power vacuum. In Syria the regime has clung to power by all means pushing the country into complex civil war with many actors with support from across the world. Ruptures have the potential to change societies, but it is not given how they will do so. It is important to recall that although such critical events shake the given order and have the potential to radically change it—through what I have termed an openness toward multiple futures—this does not mean that all political, social and cultural orders have been eliminated. Instead, they have been thrown up in the air. By studying the political through the intimate and juxtaposing the displacement of people and politics, the contributions to this special section are able to unpack the ways in which social and political orders and orders of meaning-making are re-assembled in new ways in order to deal with situations of permanent rupture—and point toward other futures.

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