

Before going any further, some details about my sources concerning these departures. Although our six characters were questioned about them, the following observations are based mainly on other encounters, about which I chose to keep silent in this book. Crisscrossing the field in an attempt to understand, I came into contact with people close to families affected by this phenomenon. They can be identified. They have daily discussions with friends, neighbors, colleagues, educators, elected officials, and local activists, who are still taken aback. Some of their children died in Syria. Others came back and are in some cases free. Some were imprisoned before they could take action. Here we should take stock of the courage involved in reporting one's own child for his or her own protection. Some families "cover" for their children through the use of ambiguous language, and in one specific case, a disturbing expression of pride.

My sources are drawn from this constellation, the result of little moments of conviviality, direct testimony, and secondhand accounts. I have chosen not to divulge them, out of respect for the individuals I met and in order to be able to continue this work. Who today can claim to have exhausted this issue? I'm aware of the trust this requires from the reader; I simply hope not to disappoint. A number of studies embody my argument better than I could: the work of David Thomson,²² who traced the trajectories of about 40 young people and their families before, during, and after their departures; the initial travel journals of Montasser Alde'Emeh,²³ who recounted the improvised arrangements for his own departure to Syria; or the ethnographic inquiry by Romain Huët.²⁴ Other studies are also in progress. They tend to corroborate what I have seen and heard at the neighborhood level. Let us be clear right off the bat: the major difference between departures for Syria or Iraq and attacks in France is the magnitude of the phenomenon. There are more departures, and they're more of a mix, both socially and in gender terms. There are also boys like Radouane who declare themselves open to going to Syria but are repulsed by the idea of committing an attack in France. Being a candidate for departure is a less limited phenomenon than attacks on native soil; treating them as if they were alike is a simplification.)

Desires for Syria: going off to war, over there

(*) To ask what this desire for Syria means is to ask about the power of attraction of a particular act – going off to war, over there – and about the driving force behind an aspiration: to flee and repudiate

one's country in order to live somewhere else, even if it means losing one's life.)

Runaways with a plan

For those seeking exile, departure to a war zone brings relief and liberation more than fear. Rather than a plan, it's more an intention to leave without any return envisioned. In this respect, it looks quite a lot like "running away from home." As Ian Hacking has shown, the emergence of that phenomenon – in France, in the late nineteenth century – represented a new synthesis between happy escape and dangerous secession.²⁵ On the "virtue" side, running away takes on aspects of romantic tourism and the joys of discovery. On the "vice" side, it has much in common with vagabondage, which frightens polite society. Running away allows one to escape the straitjackets of social conformism by undertaking a rash but limited action, a seductive prospect for a broad spectrum within society.²⁶

(We find this marriage of "vice" and "virtue" in those who leave for Syria. Between the excitement of initiates and the explanations of experts, the act of leaving involves actions that don't require any particular dispositions aside from strong desire and a little ingenuity.) A valid passport and some savings – from the sale of personal items or a credit card – have long been sufficient to make the jump. After a few hours of flying and layovers on the way to Turkey, another world becomes, if not yet possible, at least accessible. (The act of arranging the trip easily makes up for the lack of specific plans: getting past the authorities, planning one's itinerary, imagining a new task-profession for oneself (the soldiers of the "Caliphate" are rewarded with war booty), facing an unknown that one hopes will prove familiar. Many accounts resemble tourist guidebooks for specific communities with their own specific needs: the "French brothers" or "European sisters." Jihadists are frequently grouped by nationality or mother tongue. On the ground, casual discussions between battles help French arrivals get up to speed and make connections. Militarily, this seems to represent both an asset (communication is simpler) and a problem (delayed acquisition of Arabic, cultural misunderstandings). The picture this gives is not un-reminiscent of Radouane's experience in Mecca.

(*) (At the same time, it's running away *with* a plan: a desire for a radical break, an awareness of danger, an urge to fight, to help establish a more just society. When the trip begins, many kinds of excitements combine: the adventure of tourism, utopian politics, emancipation from family, and the call of the battlefield.) Hayat,