BEYOND A FOOTRACE:

ULTRAMARATHON AS A LIMINOID PERFORMANCE

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PLAGIARISM STATEMENT

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the experience of becoming an ultramarathoner and the codes of ultramarathon culture in Turkey through the lenses of symbolic and interpretive anthropology and performance studies. It identifies the meaning, value, and significance of ultramarathons for runners, and presents an ethnographic description of ultramarathon racing. The anthropological fieldwork was conducted from April 2018 to March 2022, employing in-person and online interviews, and participant observations at İznik Ultra Marathon, Salomon Cappadocia Ultra-Trail and Uludağ Premium Ultra Trail organisations. In total 28 in-depth interviews were conducted with 22 ultramarathoners (13 men and 9 women), ranging in age from 34 to 60 years old, from İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir, Adana and Eskişehir. The results have shown that running ultramarathons is far beyond a pass time activity for recreational runners. It is an integral element of their identity and a lifestyle choice for them. Ultrarunning is an additional social space in their lives outside of the home and work environments. It gives ultrarunners a breathing space away from crowded city life, providing them with uninterrupted space for thinking and contemplation in nature. It turns into a vehicle for pushing their limits and seeing what they are truly capable of. It allows them to thrive physically, mentally, and spiritually, ultimately reinforcing their adherence to the neoliberal structure. The present study also revealed insights into the dynamics of ultramarathon races and the cultural norms, values and characteristics of the ultramarathon community.

Keywords: ultramarathon, performance, liminality, liminoid, communitas

ÖZET

Bu çalışma sembolik ve yorumsamacı antropoloji ile performans çalışmaları perspektifinden ultramaratoncu olma deneyimini ve Türkiye'deki ultramaraton kültürünün kodlarını keşfetmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışmada ultramaraton koşmanın anlamı ve yaşamlarındaki öneminin yanı sıra, ultramaraton yarışlarının etnografik bir tanımı da sunulmuştur. Antropolojik saha çalışması Nisan 2018-Mart 2022 tarihleri arasında İznik Ultra Maratonu, Salomon Kapadokya Ultra-Trail ve Uludağ Premium Ultra Trail organizasyonlarında yüz yüze ve çevrimiçi görüşmeler ve katılımcı gözlemler yoluyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir, Adana ve Eskişehir illerinde yaşayan, 34-60 yaş aralığındaki 22 ultramaratoncu (13 erkek ve 9 kadın) ile toplamda 28 derinlemesine görüşme yapılmıştır. Sonuçlar, ultramaraton koşmanın amatör koşucular için bir boş zaman geçirme etkinliğinin ötesine geçtiğini göstermiştir. Ultramaraton koşmak onların kimliklerinin ayrılmaz bir unsuru ve bir yaşam tarzı seçimidir. Uzun mesafe koşuları, ultramaratonculara ev ve iş ortamlarına ek bir sosyal yaşam alanı daha sağlar. Bu alan onlara kalabalık şehir hayatından uzakta, doğanın içinde, bölünmeden düşünme ve tefekkür olanağı sunar. Ultramaraton koşmak sınırlarını zorlayabilecekleri ve gerçekten neler yapabileceklerini deneyimledikleri bir araca dönüşür. Fiziksel, zihinsel ve ruhsal olarak gelişmelerini ve nihayetinde neoliberal yapıya olan uyumlarının güçlenmesini sağlar. Çalışma bu bulguların yanı sıra ultramaraton yarışlarının dinamikleri ve ultramaraton topluluğunun kültürel normları, değerleri ve özelliklerine dair içgörüler de sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ultramaraton, performans, liminalite, liminoid, komünitas

This thesis is dedicated to my son Bahadır,
my source of peace, joy, and wisdom.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Running is a simple exercise and one of the most widely practised sports in the world. While many people still view running a marathon as the greatest challenge, ultramarathons have been attracting an increasing number of athletes as the ultimate test of their endurance. This anthropological research aims to explore the experiences of ultramarathon runners and the emerging ultramarathon culture in Turkey.

1.1. Background of the Study

In the earliest stages of human life, running follows shortly after crawling and walking. Running is one of the basic bodily motions that our ancestors needed for hunting. From the first humans until today, running has been one of the essential components of human existence. The faster one could run, the more valuable they became in the social groups based on the hunt. Scientists have not reached a consensus yet on the role of long-distance running capabilities in the history of the human race. Mainstream arguments suggest that it is merely the by-product of enhanced walking capabilities, whereas scientists like Daniel Lieberman, position running as an important behaviour in human evolution (Bramble & Lieberman, 2004).

Running was utilised as a hunting tool in early ages and a communication system until 20th century. Hemerodromes of ancient Greek, Hikyakus of Japan, native American Rarámuri (a.k.a. Tarahumara) runners of Mexico and Peyks of Ottoman empire were among the long-distance runners, carrying messages day and night (Christensen, 2009 ; Distelrath, 2000 ; Lieberman, et al., 2020 ; Pakalın, 1993). Long-distance running has also been seen a way to reaching enlightenment. In Japan, the monks of Mount Hiei, have to run 30 km a day for 100 consecutive days, or 3000 km (1860 miles) per year (Stevens, 1988).

Prior to the 1970s, marathon running (42.2 km) was a competitive event mostly for serious athletes. In 1970s, number of distance-running events as well as number of running or jogging people were exploded. This development transformed marathons into a sports event for two distinct groups with separate purposes: A leisure activity for large numbers of recreational runners, and a competition for the elite runners (Chase, 2012, p. 245). Following the commoditization of marathons, running marathons lost its position of ‘genuinely impressive feat of human’ especially in the West and almost

became a standard level of sporting achievement for many recreational runners. In the ‘post-marathon’ era, extreme endurance sporting events like ultratriathlons, ultra distance cycling, and ultramarathons have taken over the legacy of the marathon, and they have been growing exponentially across the globe (Eren, 2017). From 2011 to 2016, the number of people who finished an ultramarathon in the world was doubled. More than one hundred thousand ultrarunners compete in more than a thousand ultramarathon races around the world (Waśkiewicz, et al., 2019).

Ultramarathon is a footrace covering distances beyond the 42.2 km of a traditional marathon, ranging from 50 km to almost 5.000 km. An ultramarathon may take less than a half day to complete or as long as six days. Unlike marathons which are organised on paved roads in urban settings, ultramarathons are mostly performed on trails and in changing environmental conditions. Ultramarathon running is a sport that is accessible to everyone and is currently practiced by people of a diverse range of skills, ages, and occupations. It is a popular form of active leisure, especially among male, married, well-educated runners (Knechtle & Nikolaidis, 2018).

Ultramarathon running is not a mainstream sports activity; it is rather a lifestyle sport. Lifestyle sports mostly emerged over the past few decades. They are fundamentally about participation- not spectating, based around the consumption of new objects often involving new technologies (e.g., GPS watches in ultramarathons), commitment in time, money and a style of life, promoting self-actualisation, being in the moment/flow and other intrinsic rewards (Wheaton, 2004). They are non-aggressive activities that do not involve bodily contact, and occur in non-urban environments, which its participants ‘blends with’ or ‘becomes one’ with nature (Wheaton, 2004).

Ultramarathon running can be classified as "serious leisure" activity through the lens of leisure studies (Lee, et al., 2016, p. 491). Serious leisure is “the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity. It is sufficiently substantial, interesting, and fulfilling for the participant to find a career there by acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience” (Stebbins, 2014, p. 4). Ultramarathoners spend substantial time and energy on training for ultramarathon races in their free time. They learn and rehearse running techniques that will help them to perform and help prevent injuries on different types of terrain. They develop race-specific strategies with no major expectation of winning a prize.

Ultramarathon sporting events were introduced to Turkey's running scene comparatively late. The first offical ultramarathon, Lycia Ultra, was organised in 2010 in multi-stage format, running 250 kms in 6 days (Damcı, 2018). Following year, Turkey's first single-stage ultramarathon race (50-km) was held in Çekmeköy Istanbul with the participation of 67 runners (Çelikbaş, Ultra kitap, 2017). Since then, there has been a growing interest in trail running activities in Turkey. From 2010 to 2022, around 2,500 runners successfully finished an ultramarathon race, and the number of ultramarathon distance races grew exponentially from 2 to 45 (Deutsche Ultramarathon Vereinigung, 2022).

Recently, there has been a growing body of academic literature examining the ultramarathon phenomena. However, scholarly studies on ultramarathon running in Turkey are rather limited, with no study from a phenomenological perspective currently available. The perception and meaning of ultramarathon running can be accessed only through the books written by ultramarathoners or by their postings on social media or personal blogs. The first book written on ultramarathon running, 'Cesaret Yalnızdır / Courage is Alone', was published by an ultramarathoner Bakiye Duran. In her book, she shared her journey of becoming the first ultramarahoner of Turkey, and her thoughts on what is meant to be an ultramarathoner. Another leading figure in the ultramarathon world, Aykut Çelikbaş, published his book 'Ultra Kitap – Uzun mesafe koşu kılavuzu / Ultra Book – A guide to long distance running) in 2017 to raise awareness of ultramarathon running and train for ultramarathon races. He also shared his training and race experiences, as well as his memoirs on the Spartathlon 2014 race in this book. Taner Damcı, a medical doctor who is also an ultramarathoner and the organiser of the first official ultramarathon of Turkey, published a book about running in 2018. The book contained information about the motives, benefits, and the physiology of running, aiming to address the what and the why of running. In this book, he positioned running as the peak point of body and mind which creates its own culture and eventually impacts the culture of the society (Damcı, 2018, p. 17). Since then, ultramarathoners continue to publish books to share their training and race experiences, and reflect their thoughts about running ultramarathons. A repeatedly overarching theme in these books is the elements of 'ultrarunning spirit' and 'ultra way of living', in other words the mindset and attitude dimensions of ultramarathon running from the practitioner point of view.

A study on ultramarathon was chosen given the fact that there is limited amount of scholarly research on ultramarathon running in Turkey. It is a relatively new field of study, and no previous research was conducted in Turkey from anthropological lens to explore the experiences of these recreational athletes and their community.

1.2. Research Objectives, Problems and Its Significance

This anthropological research set out to explore the experience of becoming an ultramarathoner and the emerging ultramarathon culture in Turkey. The following six objectives would facilitate the achievement of this aim:

- Identifying definition and meaning of being an ultramarathon runner
- Providing ethnographic description of an ultramarathon race
- Identifying the dynamics of participating and performing in ultramarathon events for ultrarunners
- Exploring impact of ultramarathon running in ultrarunners' lives
- Exploring characteristics of ultramarathon community
- Identifying the cultural codes of ultramarathon running in Turkey

In order to address these objectives, the following research questions will be answered:

- Who is an ultramarathoner?
- What does it mean to be an ultramarathoner?
- What are the reasons that runners take part in ultramarathons?
- How do ultrarunners perform an ultramarathon?
- How does running ultramarathons have an impact on ultrarunners' lives?
- How do ultrarunners create a sense of community?
- What are the cultural behaviours and norms of ultramarathon running?

The study focuses on recreational female and male runners, namely individuals competing at ultramarathons as a leisure activity. Professional athletes are excluded from the scope of this inquiry.

It is hoped that this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of ultramarathon running. It not only contributes to the limited literature on sport anthropology but also holds the position of the first anthropological inquiry on ultramarathons in Turkey. Academically, it also adds to the fields of sports science, sport management, sport psychology, and doing sport ethnography in moving fields. The present research also contributes to the body of knowledge concerning the

application of performance studies to sporting events. Being the first study to reveal the entire process of ultramarathon racing in detail, from preparation to performing, it may also help individuals venturing into the sport of ultramarathon running.

1.3. Thesis Outline

In the first chapter, I contextualize the research problem by presenting the background, main objectives, and chosen research questions. The second chapter aims to present a brief overview of ultramarathon running and the development of ultramarathons in Turkey. Chapter Three begins by laying out the two theoretical dimensions of the research, namely Victor Turner's liminality, liminoid and communitas concepts and Richard Schechner's performance process framework. It also provides an overview on previous scholar research on ultramarathons with regard to research objectives. The fourth chapter presents the overall design of this anthropological research with a focus on the research methods used to gather and analyse the primary data. The fifth chapter presents the results and discusses the findings of the research in three sections. In the last chapter, final conclusions are shared and the recommendations for future research are provided.

In this thesis, the terms 'ultramarathoner' and 'ultrarunner' are used interchangeably to mean individuals who run distances beyond 42.195 km. Additionally, the terms 'ultramarathon distance' and 'ultra distances' refer to any distance beyond 42.195 km.

2. ULTRAMARATHON RUNNING

2.1. What is an Ultramarathon?

Ultramarathon refers to any running event longer than marathon distance (42.195 km) that occurs over a single day or multiple days in any terrain and surface (Scheer, 2019). It is associated with multiple categories including endurance sports, off-road running or trail running. In the context of endurance sports, an ultramarathon is a running competition that lasts longer than six hours. Among the other endurance sports such as ultra triathlon, ultra distance swimming, ultra cycling, and cross-country skiing, ultramarathon by far the fastest growing endurance discipline worldwide (Scheer, 2019).

Footraces can be categorised by various characteristics such as surface, distance, time, terrain, elevation gain, and support. All these variables determine the demands and challenges of a footrace. In the greater scheme of running events, ultramarathons are mostly organised in off-road conditions, and to a lesser extent, on tracks or roads. While a marathon is always a road race, an ultramarathon may include both road and trail segments.

There are some overlaps between the off-road running events. Most ultramarathons fall under the trail running category. A trail running event can be any distance taking place in natural environments with less than 20%–25% of paved or asphalted roads (Scheer, et al., 2020). Trail running events take place in natural environments such as forests, jungles, deserts, arctic areas, mountains, coastal areas, grassy or arid plains (Scheer, et al., 2020). The distinct feature of an ultramarathon is its distance. If the distance of a trail running race is longer than 42.195 km, it is an ultramarathon.

Ultramarathons are organised all around the world, often in locations placing physiological stress and demands on the human body (Hoffman, et al., 2014). Ultramarathons are run on surfaces like scree, rocky, muddy, sandy, salt flats or in extreme weather conditions ranging from 50 °C in the Sahara Desert to -40 °C in the Yukon.

The most common ultramarathon distances are 50 km, 50 miles, 100 km, and 100 miles. 50 km is the most popular ultra distance worldwide, just above the marathon distance and widely accepted as the entry level for ultramarathons (Scheer, 2019). In

the world of ultramarathons, a 160-kilometer race is called a 160K race. Kilometre is replaced by the letter 'K.' The letter M is used in the same way. A "100M" race means a 100-mile race. Throughout this research, all distances will be reported in this format.

An ultramarathon race can be single-stage or multi-staged. In multi-stage format, a race is broken into specific, shorter segments to be completed over multiple days, e.g., Marathon De Sables at Sahara Desert is a six-day, 251 km ultramarathon. In such ultramarathons, the contestants spend the nights at the same location resting, and they start the next stage together the following morning. A single-stage ultramarathon is a nonstop running event that can last a single day or multiple days, with runners defining their break periods while the race clock is running.

Ultramarathons are either distance-limited runs measured in kilometres or miles, or timed races measured in hours or days. Timed ultramarathons are held as 6-hour, 12-hour, 24-hour, 48-hour, 72-hour, 6-day, and 10-day races. In a timed race, the goal is to cover the longest distance within a given time. Timed ultramarathons may take place in a stadium or in nature. The most frequently performed ultramarathons are distance-limited events, where runners are expected to run a specific distance in a set time, e.g., a 171-kilometre race in maximum 46.5 hours. The longest official ultra-marathon in the world, is the “Self-Transcendence 3,100 Mile Race” covering the total distance of 4,989 km (3,100 miles) over a maximum 52 days (Knechtle & Nikolaidis, 2018).

An ultramarathon can be self-sufficient, semi-supported or fully supported. At self-sufficient races, the contestant is required to carry all equipment and sustenance with them (Scheer, et al., 2020). In semi-supported race format, event organiser provides the transport of additional equipment to a designated location for runners or support them with food and water supplies at specific locations.

Ultramarathons are run on marked courses. The marks ensure that ultrarunners stay on the same path until they cross the finish line. Race organisers announce the racecourse information on the race websites. A racecourse can be a single loop or point to point. A single-loop racecourse is where the start and finish are in the same location, whereas a point-to-point race is where the race starts in one location and ends in another. The progress of ultramarathoners on the racecourse is tracked by the race organiser at checkpoints. A checkpoint (CP) is a temporary control station in ultramarathons where the event organiser records the runner’s arrival time at a specific location on the

racecourse. If a runner does not show up at a CP before the pre-determined time, i.e., the cut-off time, the runner is taken out of the race and marked DNF (Did Not Finish). The checkpoints who serve refreshments are called aid stations. The number of CPs varies significantly in ultramarathons. The total number of CPs could be 5 or 75, depending on the distance and difficulty of the race.

Course topography and environmental extremes contribute physiological stress on ultramarathon bodies. Success in these events is determined by a complex interplay among physical and psychological factors. Training methods for ultramarathon races vary widely due to the variability of ultramarathon race settings, distances, and courses (Spittler & Oberle, 2019). For a satisfying race experience, preparations and race strategy, self-management, discoveries of performance, personal performance and a sense of community play an essential role (Simpson et al., 2014).

Ultramarathons are becoming increasingly popular around the world. Participation to ultramarathon races has increased exponentially by 345% from 137,234 participants in 2009 to 611,098 participants in 2018 (Ronto, 2021). Almost one fourth of ultramarathon contestants preferred competing in distances over 80 kilometres while the majority experienced such races in shorter ultra distances in 2018 globally. In contrast to road races like marathons, winning cash prizes in ultramarathons is uncommon.

Demographic analysis of ultramarathoners reveals a typical ultra-marathoner as male, married, well-educated, and ~45 years old (Knechtle & Nikolaidis, 2018). Approximately 70% of ultrarunners are in their 30s and 40s. The female runners constitute 23% of the ultramarathon race participants worldwide (Ronto, 2021). Ultrarunning is not a sport led by youngest athletes. For both women and men, the fastest ultra-marathon race times are usually attained when they are 35–45 years old or older, and the age of peak performance rises with increasing race distance or duration (Knechtle & Nikolaidis, 2018).

The Comrades Marathon, which was organised in 1921 for the first time, is the oldest and largest documented ultramarathon race, and over 300,000 runners have completed the race so far (Scheer, 2019). Vic Clapham, a World War I veteran, created the event to honour the South African troops who died during the war.

Ultra Trail du Mont Blanc, Marathon de Sables, Comrades Marathon, Western States Endurance Run, Badwater and Spartathlon are among the most acknowledged

ultramarathon races in the world. The number of contestants in an ultramarathon race varies greatly, ranging from two-digit numbers to four-digit numbers, e.g., 22 runners at the Kaçkar Ultra 2021 45K race and 2,347 runners at the UTMB 2021 170K race.

The international bodies governing rules and definitions in ultramarathon running are World Athletics, formerly known as the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF), the International Association of Ultrarunners (IAU), and International Trail Running Association (ITRA). There are several national bodies or federations for ultramarathon running. In Turkey, there is no dedicated federation for ultramarathons; Turkish Athletics Federation (TAF) is the governing body for such events.

2.2. Development of Ultramarathons in Turkey

Ultramarathon is an emerging footrace category in Turkey and ultra trail organisations have been growing since their introduction to Turkish sports arena in 2010. The first official ultramarathon event, Lycian Way Ultramarathon, was a multi-stage race (250K in 6 days) held in 2010 in southwestern Turkey, at ancient Lycian region, with ten finishers (Damcı, 2018). One year later, first single-stage official ultramarathon race, Sigma Cam 50K Ultramarathon was organised in Çekmeköy İstanbul with the participation of 67 runners (Çelikbaş, Sigma Cam 50K Ultramaraton - Yarış Raporu, 2011). The number of ultramarathon events offering trail running experience at ultra and sub-ultra distances has grown over the years.

In 2022, 30 ultramarathon events were scheduled in Turkey (see Appendix D). They hosted a total of 122 races under their umbrella, 47 of which were ultramarathon distances and 75 of which were trail courses shorter than ultra distances (Race websites; Team Run.Bo, 2022; Deutsche Ultramarathon Vereinigung, 2022). Table 1 shows the chronological development of ultramarathon organisations in Turkey. It is worth to emphasise that 7 new ultramarathon events entered to the ultrarunning scene in 2022, indicating a growing interest in trail running in Turkey, after the Covid-19 pandemic. The ultramarathon organisations highlighted in colour yellow in Table 1 show the races that have not been active at least for the past two years. In creating the table, I used Balce's (2020) work as the starting point. I expanded, or where necessary, revised it with the data I gathered through researching the race reports of the ultrarunners, the posts on online forums, news on the internet, and reviewing race statistics on the

websites of International Trail Association (ITRA) and Deutsche Ultramarathon Vereinigung (DUV).

Table 1.

Development of Ultramarathon Organisations in Turkey

2010	Lycian Way multi-staged Ultra Marathon
2011	Çekmeköy Ultra Marathon
2012	İznik Ultra Marathon
	Run Fire Cappadocia Ultra
	Elbistan Ultra Marathon
2013	Istiklal Way Ultra Marathon
2014	Kars Ultra
	Çekmeköy Timed Ultra Marathons (48h/24h/12h/6h)
	Cappadocia Ultra Trail
	Longest Night Run
2015	Aladaglar Sky Trail Marathon
	Kackar Ultra Marathon
	Tahtalı Run to Sky Trail Marathon
2016	Manavgat Nashira Ultra
	Bodrun Ultra Marathon
	Erciyes Sky Trail Marathon
	Sapanca Ultra Marathon
	Ida Ultra Trail Marathon
2017	Alanya Ultra
	Ephesus Ultra Marathon
	Ecological Artvin Ultra Marathon
	Phrygian Ultra Marathon
	Run Fire Salt Lake Ultra Trail Marathon
	Pamukkale Ultra Marathon
	Uludag Ultra Trail Marathon
2018	Istanbul Ultra Trail Marathon
	Ordu Ultra
	Salda Ultra

2019	Kartal Gölü Ultra Karia Ultra Fethiye Ultra
	Latmos Ultra Marathon Kyzikos Ultra Marathon
2020	Dağyenice Ultra
2021	Backyard Ultra Antalya Ultra
2022	Nif Ultra Trail Gebze Ultra Trail Şahin Yurdu Ultra Marathon Yesemek Ultra Trail Artos Sky Trail Kilikya Ultra Marathon Tantalos Ultra

It is worth noting that the "Terapi Ultra Trail of İzmir" is not included in the table. Despite their announcement of having a 55K race in early 2022, this organisation has not yet held any ultramarathon distance races, hence being excluded from the table.

When the timing of 2022 ultramarathon events was examined, spring and autumn appeared to be the most popular seasons for ultramarathon races. Two-thirds of all ultramarathon races took place during these seasons, with the winter having the fewest (see appendix D). Marmara is the leading region in hosting ultrarunning events. In 2022, 11 out of 30 ultramarathon events (37%) took place in Marmara region, followed by Mediterranean region with 8 events (27%) and Aegean region with 6 events (20%). The offerings in other regions were limited, namely 3 organisations in Central Anatolia, 1 organisation in Black Sea and Eastern Anatolia regions. In these regions, many ultramarathon racecourses pass through historical sites of Anatolian civilisations, such Phrygian settlings, Olympos and UNESCO world heritage sites Cappadocia, Ephesus, Cumalıkızık, Xanthos-Letoon and İznik.

Among the 122 race options offered by 30 ultramarathon organisations, 47 (38%) had an ultra distance racecourse; the rest were shorter distances. Slightly more than half of the ultramarathon organisations had only one ultra distance racecourse. 13

organizations offered two or three ultra distance courses for ultrarunners to choose from. With three ultramarathon racecourse options, İznik Ultra and Kyzikos Ultra provided the most options for ultramarathoners. In 47 ultramarathon racecourses, the majority of the offerings were distances between 44K and 90K. The total number of 100K or longer distance races was 11, of which 2 were 160K (100M) races.

The longest ultramarathon available in Turkey is 160 kilometers. Both the Garmin Runfire Salt Lake RSFL 100M and İznik Ultra 160K races fulfil the expectations of ultrarunners who want to complete a 100-mile ultramarathon, an important threshold in the ultramarathon world. The shortest ultramarathon distance available in Turkey is 44K at Frig Ultra. There is a wide range of race offerings taking place in a variety of terrain conditions, altitudes, and geographical formations. An ultramarathoner can experience a 5,459-meter elevation gain at Tahtalı Run to Sky 113K, while another can put their endurance to the test by running on the salt flats in hot August temperatures at RSFL 100M. The muddy terrains of İznik Ultra, the volcanic sands of Cappadocia Ultra, and the mixture of scree and talus terrains of Aladağlar 50K Sky Marathon provide versatile ultrarunning experiences.

Salomon Cappadocia Ultra Trail is the leading ultramarathon race in Turkey in terms of both the total number of contestants and the number of ultrarunners coming from around the world. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2019, the total number of ultramarathon distance race (119K and 63K) contestants in Cappadocia Ultra was 1,029 runners. Despite the travel restrictions and the health-related concerns due to Covid-19 pandemic, in 2021, Cappadocia Ultra managed to host 769 ultramarathon distance contestants.

Some ultramarathons, such as İznik Ultra and Cappadocia Ultra, organise “Kids runs” on the award ceremony day to invite the local families and kids to participate in the excitement and inspire them to become runners. The ultramarathoners mingle with the local spectators to encourage and cheer the kids in these mini-competitions.

In 2022, the ultramarathon distance race fees varied from 305 TL (Sapanca Ultra early registration price for 60K) at the lowest end to 1,050 TL (Cappadocia Ultra late registration price for 119K) at the highest end. The races offer different price levels depending on the registration period, on an earliest-cheapest basis. In 2019, İznik Ultra 90K race price range was between 300 TL and 500 TL, depending on one registered for the race in October 2018 or April 2019.

A key problem with regard to reaching ultramarathoner population numbers is the absence of official statistics locally available in Turkey. The race organiser I interviewed estimated the total ultramarathoner population at around 500, whereas a seasoned ultrarunner who has been running ultramarathons for more than 10 years in Turkey and abroad estimated it at around 1,000-1,500 people. The participants of ultramarathons can be traced through the race websites. Ultramarathon organisations announce the race results on their websites. The rankings are reported in total group, sex, and age group. Some organisations, like Cappadocia Ultra, provide results by nationality too. Balce argues that race organisers use different metrics and groupings in reporting the results on their websites, so the data is highly fragmented and has gaps, causing difficulties in doing statistical analysis (Balce, 2020). According to Balce's analysis, between 2010 and 2019, trail races (both sub-ultra and ultra distances) ultra-trail events hosted a total of 22,199 participants. 70.8% of these participants attended trail races only once, and 16.5% twice in 10 years' time span. This is a critical piece of data highlighting the volatile nature of participation in trail running events in Turkey. It appears that despite the high trial rates of trail races, only a small portion of these trialists convert into regular trail runners.

In Turkey, around 3000 participants competed in ultramarathon distances in 2019 (Balce, 2020). This data does not provide the ultramarathoner population in Turkey for two reasons. Firstly, one runner may choose to compete in more than one race in a calendar year. Among the in-depth interview participants of the present research, the average number of races participated in 2019 was four. Secondly, some ultramarathons host participants from other countries to a great extent (e.g., Cappadocia Ultra); therefore, 3,000 participants include the ultrarunners from Turkey and the runners visiting from other countries.

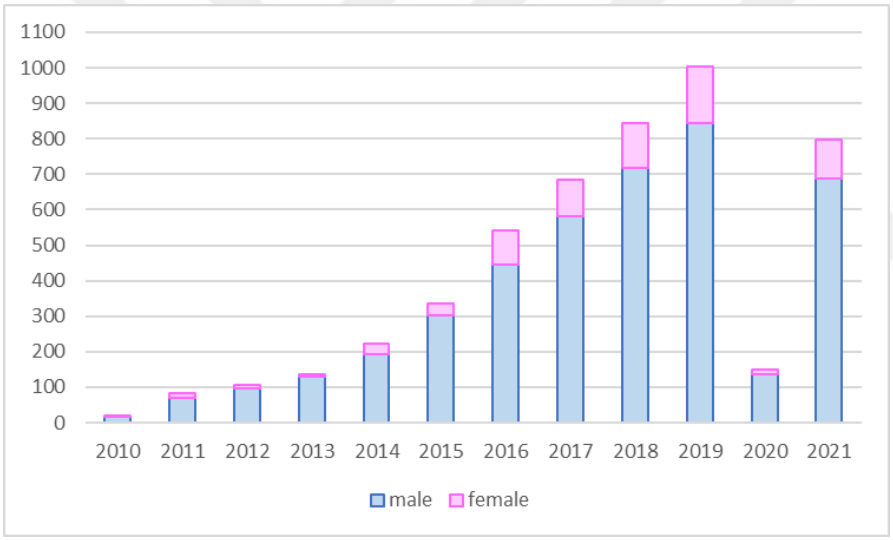
In reaching the total number of ultramarathoners in Turkey, I decided to use a global website called 'Deutsche Ultramarathon Vereinigung' (DUV). This website records the race results from the majority of ultra-marathons held worldwide. It is the largest dataset on ultrarunning worldwide and has been frequently evaluated within the scientific literature. The website covers a significant number of the ultramarathon distance races in Turkey. When I cross checked the dataset available on the website against the list of ultramarathons held in Turkey, I noticed that the results of a few small-scale organisations are missing in the dataset (e.g., Salda Ultra).

On the DUV country statistics page, the total number of Turkish runners who have ever participated in an ultramarathon is reported as 2,419, of which 399 are female runners and 2,020 are male runners (Deutsche Ultramarathon Vereinigung, 2022). It is worth to note that the site counts only the finishers of ultramarathons, not the ones that attempted to race in an ultramarathon but failed to finish.

The development of number of ultramarathoners who successfully finished at least one ultramarathon in a given year in Turkey was shown in Figure.1 Until Covid-19, the total number of ultramarathoners were on the rise steadily. 2019 stood out as the peak year of active ultrarunners with 1,001 runners (840 males and 161 females) (Deutsche Ultramarathon Vereinigung, 2022).

Figure 1.

Number of Ultramarathoners by Year in Turkey



As expected, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted these numbers negatively in following years. In 2021, adult population of Turkey (i.e., 20 years and older) was 59.2 million and the number of active ultramarathoners were merely 797 runners (686 males and 111 females) (TÜİK, 2018). Giving a basis for comparison of the ultramarathoner population in other countries may help the reader a context for the infancy of the sport in Turkey. In 2021, there were 45, 395 active ultramarathoners in U.S.A, 44,819 in France, and 9,466 in Japan (Deutsche Ultramarathon Vereinigung, 2022). The adult population of these countries in 2021 were 258.3 million in U.S.A, 56.3 million in France, and 107.5 million in Japan. (United States Cencus Bureau, 2021; INED, 2022; Statistics Bureau of Japan, 2021).

One word of caution on the data set is the parameters taken into account on the DUV site. On top of the omission of some small-scale ultra distance race results and reporting only the ultrarunners who successfully finished a race, the site reports Turkey results based on nationality angle. Non-Turkish ultrarunners living and racing in Turkey are not counted in the Turkey data set. Therefore, 2,419 ultrarunners cannot be interpreted as the actual number of all Turkey based ultrarunners. This statistic shows the number of Turkish ultramarathoners who have successfully finished at least one ultramarathon distance race.

Ultramarathons are heavily male-populated organisations globally, and Turkey is no different than the global picture (David & Lehecka, 2013; MacNairn, 2019). Globally, between 2000 and 2017, the percentage of women who participated in a 50K ultramarathon was 26% (Scheer, 2019). According to Ronto (2021), the female participation in ultramarathons across all distances was 23% worldwide in 2018. Looking at the Turkey numbers, in 2021, the female ultrarunner contestant percentages varied between 0 to 32 % in races, with an average of 15% female vs 85% male participation rates. The numbers are calculated from the results of 32 ultramarathon distance races out of a total of 37 ultramarathon distances offered in 2021 (Source: race websites). Although Turkey's first ever ultramarathon runner is a woman (Bakiye Duran), the development of the female ultramarathon runner population did not divert from the global trends in Turkey, which is currently even lower than the 2018 global average of 23% (Ronto, 2021).

Until 2019, one out of four female runners participated in an ultramarathon race only once, and they did not continue running ultras in 2019 and onwards (Deutsche Ultramarathon Vereinigung, 2022). I set this cut-off point in the dataset to eliminate the COVID-19 pandemic impact on participation statistics as these female runners had opportunities to participate in another ultramarathon in 2018 or 2019 before the pandemic started. One possible explanation of this significant dropout rate among one-timer females could be the high demands of ultrarunning on their personal time, causing clashes with family and social lives. The ultrarunners train for approximately four months for an ultramarathon race, with 6 to 12 hours of training per week. Given the gender roles of Turkish women, the female runners may have found it difficult to dedicate so much time to ultramarathon training if they lacked a supporting 'ecosystem' in their lives. Therefore, after 'becoming an ultrarunner', they may not prefer to

continue competing in these distances. Another possible explanation could be the risks involved, such as major traumas from fall. As the stakes are high, they may have decided not to take such risks in the future. When I extended the time period until 2020, the dropout rate of one-timers increased to 36% from 25%. Given the COVID-19 impact on sports events, female runners who started running ultras in 2019 may not have preferred to continue in 2020 and 2021 to prevent the risk of infection.

Ultrarunners are a well-educated group and tend to have an above average income (David & Lehecka, 2013; MacNairn, 2019). Given the costs involved with participating in ultramarathons (travel, accommodation, entry fee, race outfits and gear, supplements), it did not come as a surprise to observe that the majority of the ultrarunners I spoke with at the events had white-collar jobs or were business owners. During our discussion, the race organiser that I interviewed also confirmed this observation.

3. THEORY AND LITERATURE

3.1. Theoretical Frameworks

In this section I summarise the theoretical frameworks that I employed to discuss the phenomenon of becoming an ultramarathoner and the ultramarathon community culture in Turkey. In order to theorise the participants' experiences as ultramarathon runners, I draw on Victor Turner's and Richard Schechner's theoretical frameworks.

The theoretical model of this research is based on symbolic and interpretive anthropology and performance studies. Using Victor Turner's liminality, liminoid, and communitas concepts provided a fertile ground for discussing the dynamics of the transitional state that ultramarathoners experience during a race. It also helped to interpret the transformational impact of ultramarathon running experiences on runners' lives and elucidate how the interactions among ultrarunners support building a community. Schechner's performance process framework provided a wider lens to describe an ultramarathon event beyond the series of actions happening in between start and finish lines. Using performance studies perspective in providing ethnographic description of an ultramarathon, specifically taking the whole seven-phase performance sequence of Schechner as the basis of the narration, served well to emphasise the significance of preparation stage as well as the post-race stage in ultramarathon running phenomenon. It helped in structuring a discussion about when ultramarathoners wrap up a specific ultramarathon race experience, i.e., is it right after crossing the finish line or when they make sense of their experience?

3.1.1. Liminality, Liminoid and Communitas (Victor Turner)

The term liminality was coined by Van Gennep in 1909; however, it became popular only after 1960 when his book was translated into English and his work adopted by Victor Turner. According to Van Gennep (1960), every individual in any society goes through a series of passages that define their position, and as a matter of fact, an individual's life is a succession of stages (p. 3). Rites of passage are formal ceremonies that mark transitional moments in individuals' life, moving them from one life stage to another and one social situation to the next. Van Gennep (1960) subdivided the rites of passage into three types (p. 11):

1- Rites of separation such as funerals help the community to accept that the passed-on individual is no longer a living member of the community.

2- Rites of incorporation, such as marriage ceremonies, establish a family unit and move a couple from the status of dating to the status of married.

3- Rites of transition, such as graduation from college, indicate that the individual is no longer a student and ready to enter professional life.

He examined the ceremonial processes as a whole and comparison to be based on upon similarities in structure (Thomassen, 2015, p. 45). Van Gennep posited three processual stages of rituals at physical and psychological levels: separation/ pre-liminal, transition / liminal (limen), and incorporation / post-liminal (McGee & Warms, 2013, p. 703).

The separation/preliminal phase is characterised by symbolic behaviour that denotes the individual's or group's separation from a prior fixed position in the social structure or a relatively stable set of cultural conditions (Turner & Turner, 1978, p. 2). During the transition/ liminal phase, the individual leaves the old identity behind, their status becomes ambiguous. They keep a few or none of their past attributes or the future state while passing through a realm or dimension. They are “betwixt and between” identities (Turner & Turner, 1978, p. 2). Finally at the incorporation / post liminal stage the individual incorporates both physically and psychologically back to the group with a new status. They are in a relatively more stable state once more and expected to act in line with certain customary norms and ethical standards of their new position (Turner, 1991, p. 95).

After Van Gennep’s work was translated into English, Turner read *Rites of Passage* in the summer of 1963 when he was in a liminal state, waiting for his visa to move to the United States (Thomassen, 2014, p. 79). He found the concept of liminality as a “major innovative, transformative dimension of the social” (Turner & Turner, 1978, p. 2). He advanced his understanding of three stages of rites of passage through focusing on the liminal phase. Turner (1991) argued that liminality is neither here nor there, betwixt and between positions. (p. 95). At liminality, the structure of social order is suspended temporarily, and structural uncertainty is created. Liminality leads to an anti-structure state, where normal configurations of political, economic and social life cease to function. While ordinary life events help maintain the structure through

repeated patterns of actions, special events like rituals, create a space for creative possibility.

During ritual passages, the neophytes or the initiands challenge the social order by setting themselves apart from it. They become socially unstructured, lacking an identity, status, property, and clothing indicating a particular social class or their rank; they exist in a transitionary, floating, powerless state. The participants of liminality are invisible, either structurally or physically, in a form of social death. They are defined by a name or by a set of symbols (Turner, 1986, p. 95). They are exposed to emotional and physical difficulties, and expected to obey their instructors (Turner, 1991, p. 95). They are on a journey to acquire the necessary knowledge and experience to be transformed before re-entering society and taking up their new roles.

Liminality is a state when single individuals, social groups or whole societies, even entire populations experience themselves at a boundary or in a 'betwixt-between' position, either spatially or temporally (Thomassen, 2015, p. 48). Turner argued (1978) that liminality is not only about transition and what is going to be. It also contains potentiality and what may be (p. 3). It refers to transitional moments or periods in which conventional ways of thinking, self-understanding and behaviour are relaxed, opening doors to novelty, imagination, construction and destruction (Thomassen, 2014). It is a state leading to contradictory emotions. Hope and new possibilities as well discomfort and disorienting go hand in hand in liminal space. A liminal experience is being in a move through the in-between, putting effort to overcome difficult encounters and leaving them behind.

Liminality is nested within human existence. Every individual goes through a series of liminal experiences in their life, from daily events such as waiting in a queue or expecting guests for dinner, to major turning points in their lives, such as the COVID-19 global pandemic or being pregnant.

The individuals in liminal phase tend to develop an intense egalitarianism and social bonding. Worldly distinctions with regards to their background, social class or status disappear. The liminal phenomenon contains lowliness and sacred as well as homogeneity and camaraderie. Turner (1991) called this communion of equal individuals emerging from the liminality, who submit together to the general authority, as communitas (p. 96). He emphasised the importance of status-free experiences in this phase for the emergence of communitas: "Liminality implies that the high could not be

high unless the low existed, and he who is high must experience what it is like to be low" (p. 97). He argued that challenging rituals help building communitas as they facilitate bonding and a feeling of camaraderie.

Turner (1982) identified three distinct forms of communitas in relation to liminal and limonoid phenomena (p. 47):

1- Spontaneous communitas: In this type of communitas, interactions among individuals generally unhindered by societal divisions of position, prestige, reputation, class, caste, sex, age, and other structural niches. The level of personal interactions is deep, rather than intense, characterised by honesty and openness with no room for pretentious behaviour. It usually happens during counter-cultures rituals or gatherings.
2- Normative communitas: This type of communitas is organised into an official, permanent social system. It is formed when a spontaneous communitas is maintained or fostered by a subculture or group.
3- Ideological communitas: It is emerged in utopian models of based on normative communitas. It is situated within the structural realm.

The term liminoid (quasi-liminal) was coined by Turner to describe the emergence of liminal in modern societies. He used this term to differentiate ritual-like symbolic actions taking place in leisure activities. He associated 'liminality' with the rituals of small-scale foraging and horticultural societies and called the leisure genres of the secularised and industrialised world 'liminoid' (Turner, 1982). He argued that in tribal and agrarian cultures work and play are almost inseparable. In such cultures, the rituals are obligatory social mechanisms. They have a sacred nature, and authentic liminality is a property of such rituals (Turner, 1982). Turner (1985) noted that "as society increases in scale and complexity…these strands of symbolic action are torn from their original connection in ritual and become independent modes of expression" (p. 31). In modern and postmodern cultures, with the industrialisation and division of labour, arts, entertainment, and recreation have fragmentedly taken over the functions of rituals (Schechner, 2020, p. 148). Turner claimed that in modern consumerist society, liminal experiences have largely been replaced by "liminoid" moments, in which creativity and uncertainty manifest themselves in art and leisure activities (Thomassen, 2015, p. 47).

Turner (1982) classified all leisure activities (e.g., games, sports), arts, and religion (e.g., religious services and pilgrimage) as liminoid. He defined leisure as mostly an urban phenomenon and associated it with the two types of freedom: “Freedom-from” leisure is a get-away from institutional obligations as prescribed by the basic forms of society or workplace forced chronologically regulated rhythms and “freedom to” leisure, which is transcending limitations of social structures, temporarily transitioning into new worlds or originating new symbolic worlds of entertainment, sports, games (Turner, 1982, p. 37).

Apart from taking the type of society as the first point of reference for liminal and liminoid phenomena, Turner drawn a distinction between them through a set of criteria as follows: (Turner, 1982, pp. 53-54)

1- In liminal phenomena, the entire community participates in a ritual not by optation but by obligation while the attendance is on a voluntary basis in liminoid.
2- Liminal phenomena tend to be collective, functional, deal with crises in social processes, and have calendrical, biological, or social-structural rhythms. On the other hand, liminoid phenomena tend to deal with small sets of individuals, driven by individual agendas and take place in a fragmented, intermittent time frame.
3- In liminal phenomena are integral part of the total social process, liminoid phenomena are developed independently of political and economic processes along the margins
4- Liminal phenomena share a collective character, symbols are associated with common intellectual and emotional meaning for the entire group whereas liminoid phenomena are more on the idiosyncratic side of the continuum, and the group members compete one another for recognition.
5- Liminal phenomena are eufunctional and contribute to the maintenance of the social system as a whole, while limonoid phenomena expose the injustices, incompetencies, and violations of moral laws, norms, and standards for revolutionary manifestos or social critiques.
6- At liminal one works. It requires membership or elitist loyalty. Liminoid is where one plays. It is freer than liminal and is commodity, where one pays for participation.

Liminality, liminoid and communitas have been studied within the context of sports such as sea kayaking (Varley, 2011), surfing (Beaumont & Brown, 2016), long distance running (Shipway 2012; MacNairn 2019), ultra endurance sports (Jetmarová, 2017), and serious sports events (Lee et al.,2016).

3.1.2. Performance Process (Richard Schechner)

Richard Schechner met with Victor Turner in 1977 at the "Ritual, Drama, and Spectacle" conference, where he was invited by Turner. From that point on, the two scholars began collaborating on performance studies. Schechner is influenced by Turner's theories of social drama, the ritual process, liminal and liminoid, and communitas in further developing his work in performance studies.

Performance is a wide spectrum of activities where play at one end and rituals at the opposite end, encompassing a wide range of activities, including games, sports, popular entertainments, performing arts, professional roles, and everyday constructions of race, gender, and identity (Schechner, 2020 p. 7).

Human ritualisation falls under three categories, namely aesthetic ritual, religious ritual and social ritual (Schechner, 1993, p. 229). Schechner considered sport under the social ritual along with politics and everyday life rituals. He argued that in animal rituals the actions are genetically defined, following particular patterns while human rituals involve learning, improvisation, inventing new behaviours and testing them, and rehearsing.

Schechner (2020) considered performances and performance studies under four main categories: being, doing, showing doing, and explaining showing doing. While being refers to existence and doing all activities, he defined showing doing as "pointing to, underlining, and displaying doing" and explaining showing doing with performance studies (Schechner, 2020, p. 4). Performances falls between doing and showing doing. If showing is more prominent, then it is closer to performance. Performance is showing oneself to oneself and others, and sometimes it is concealing oneself from others.

Schechner (1985) suggests that a performance is never a first time, and all performances are "twice-behaved behaviour" or "restored behaviour", meaning that all performances are rehearsed, recited and reactualised (p. 36). Performance behaviour can be traced to rehearsals, previous experiences, masters who reveal it during a performance, and the rules that govern the outcomes (Schechner, 1985, p.

118). Therefore, a performance never belongs to the performer completely. The strips of behaviour are subject to rearrangement and reconstruction to be able to present a performance. They may no longer be traced back to the source of behaviour.

According to Schechner (2020), the performance process sequence consists of proto-performance, performance and aftermath (p. 38). A good performance often requires thorough planning and elaborate rehearsals, which gives rise to a performance. Proto-performance is all preparation activities prior to public performance involving training, workshops and rehearsals (Schechner, 2020, p. 39). Performance is where the end product of all the preparations and acquired skills finally meets with its audience. It encompasses warm-up, performance, and cooldown. Every performance takes place in a larger context, such as during a ritual like, a commercial enterprise, or a social occasion (Schechner, 2020, p. 54). The context of the performance impact both performers and the individuals exposed to the performance. Once the performance comes to an end and the performer cool downs, evaluation process commences. Aftermath stage is the post evaluation and archiving the visuals, objects and memories of the performance.

Schechner (1985) suggests two types of performances in an event: Transported and transformed (p. 130). A transportation performance occurs when a performer returns to the point of entrance, implying that the performer does not change; they return to their regular lives with no significant changes as a result of their performance. On the other hand, a transformation performance is when the performer is changed permanently as a result of the performance experience. The attention of both the transported and the spectators is drawn to the transformed during transformation performances (Schechner, 1985, p. 131). Schechner (2020) drew a distinction between transformed and transported by referring to Turner's liminal and liminoid phenomena. He stated that transformations happen only a few times in one's life and through a liminal rite, whereas liminoid rituals leads to transportations (p. 150).

3.2. Literature Review: Ultramarathon Studies

In this section, after briefly introducing the development of the anthropology of sport, I summarise and discuss the previous research on the various aspects of the ultramarathon running experience, with a particular focus on the motivations for participating in ultramarathon races, the effects of running ultramarathons on ultrarunners' lives, the factors considered in preparation for running ultramarathons, and the significance of pain and suffering in ultrarunning.

The study of sport through the perspectives and methodologies of anthropology is known as anthropology of sport. Although sport is intertwined into every aspect of culture, it has often been overlooked by the anthropologists as a subject for cultural inquiry. While sociology and psychology have devoted considerable attention to the study of sport, anthropology was slow to recognise the symbolic capacity of sport in generating meaning and tapping into social and economic conditions (Palmer, 2002). Sport was not acknowledged as a topic holding potential for enabling significant theoretical advances in the discipline (Besnier et al., 2018). The early attempts on exploring sports culture were rather limited. Edward Burnett Tylor, one of the founding figures of anthropology, was among the first social scientist who recognized the importance of games as an area of scholarly investigation in the late 19th century. He treated the phenomenon of sport as a tool to explore the broader cultural processes, however his research did not lead the way for the development of a framework to guide the future anthropological studies on sports (Blanchard, 1995).

In 1959, with the publication of the article "Games in culture" by John Roberts, Malcolm Arth, and Robert Bush, the history of sport anthropology took a critical turn as this seminal work was the first systematic attempt in the discipline that initiated a theoretical debate on the general role of play and the specific role of sport in human society (Blanchard, 1995). In 60s and 70s, more detailed ethnographic studies of play and sport started to appear, e.g., Clifford Geertz' seminal work on Balinese cockfight, published in 1972, became a classic reading in the discipline, employing symbolic anthropology model. Play became a source for developing significant theoretical insights in anthropology (e.g., Turner, 1982 [1991]). The establishment of the Association for the Anthropological Study of Play, led by a group of interdisciplinary scholars in 1974, was the first indicator of the actual emergence of the anthropology of sports (Blanchard, 1995). They published the first dedicated book on the discipline of

sport anthropology in an attempt to define the field, namely *The Anthropology of Sports* by Blanchard and Cheska in 1985 (Besnier & Brownell, 2012). Full ethnographic monographs on sport started to be published only in the early 1980s (e.g., Blanchard 1981, Mandle & Mandle 1988), and such publications continued in the following decades. Another turning point in the development of sport anthropology occurred in 1998 when anthropologists Kang Shin-pyo and John MacAloon managed to garner a considerable support from the Seoul Olympics committee to organize an international conference that hosted anthropologists including Edith Turner, Sahlins, Bourdieu, Hannerz, and Appadurai (Besnier & Brownell, Sport, modernity, and the body, 2012, p. 448). Finally attracting the interest of influential scholars contributed to the advancement of the sport anthropology. In 2002, Alan Klein criticised the reluctance of anthropologists to employ the "diagnostic" capability of the discipline to study sport in the context of culture and society, highlighting the necessity to build a critical anthropology of sport (Sands, 2012, p. 7). Although in recent years sport has earned significant recognition as a serious topic in the discipline, there is need for more ethnographically informed work, particularly on subjects that situate sport and sport-like activities within inquiries of central importance to the discipline (Besnier et al., 2018, p. 9).

The majority of the studies on ultramarathoners focus on the physiological aspect of ultrarunning. At the global scale, much of the available literature on ultramarathon deals with cardiovascular implications and other physiological effect of ultrarunning. There is relatively lower interest in psychology, sociology, philosophy, and anthropology of ultrarunning. In his book *Running Cultures*, John Bale underlines the comparatively lower interest of humanities and social sciences on running as a body-cultural phenomenon: “As a body-cultural phenomenon, running has eluded serious study in the humanities and social sciences…interpretative studies of running remain limited” (Bale, 2004).

Heinrich (2009) positions running more of a cultural phenomenon than a biological capacity of human beings. Running has long been known to give trance-like state, providing significant emotional or mental benefits, including stress reduction, mood and self-image improvement, and enhanced creative thinking (Callen, 1983). The studies show that ultramarathon runners have high levels of intrinsic motivation; life meaning, and affiliation are particularly important source of motivations for running ultramarathons, whilst recognition and competition are not driving forces for running

ultra distances (Hoffman & Krouse, 2018 ; Waśkiewicz et al., 2019). Running ultramarathons is associated with a psychological drive to explore physical and mental limits (Roebucka, et al., 2018). Ultramarathoners tend to be highly task oriented and relatively low for ego orientation with their running (Hoffman & Krouse, 2018).

The motivation behind performing in endurance sports was examined from the neoliberal perspective as well. Neoliberalism emphasises individual empowerment and being unequivocally accountable for one's actions (Hanold, 2016). The social interactions among ultrarunners foster individual success, favour flexibility and providing solutions to setbacks. As a result, individualism paradoxically gets stronger through them. In this context, Hanold (2016) considered ultrarunning practices as "visible markers of the ideal citizen in a neoliberal context" (p. 181). Eren (2017) pointed out the link between neoliberalism and the rise of endurance sports with the changing context of labour. The change in the nature of labour (i.e., from physically expressive, manual labour to sedentary white-collar jobs) and the relationship of the labourer to that work (i.e., the estrangement from aspects of human nature and lack of sensuality at work) created the need for engaging in extreme physicality and sensuousness to feel human in leisure time (Eren, 2017). She argues that while fulfilling the need already created by neoliberal structures, competing in endurance sports also serves back as a physical and mental training ground for participation in neoliberal economy.

No significant differences emerge between female and male ultrarunners with regards to barriers and enablers experienced in ultrarunning (Valentin, et al., 2021). The conflicts between family time and time to train are observed as common concerns for long-distance runners (Harris & Goodsell, 2011). Effective time management is identified as an imperative to plan training sessions in and around work and family commitments for both genders (Valentin, et al., 2021).

Preparation for ultramarathons requires long hours of training, often in solitude. Given the demanding nature of ultramarathons, ultrarunners place a high priority on mental training and prepare themselves to acquire the necessary mental toughness to be able to deal with unpredictable course and weather conditions as well as their physical and psychological conditions (Simpson et al., 2014, p. 180). For ultramarathoners, mental toughness is the embodiment of persistence, ability to cope with physical fatigue or perceived exertion, and managing a positive self-talk in such demanding times,

physical and psychological awareness, ability to being flexible, and commitment to the goal relentlessly (Jaeschke et al., 2016, p. 248).

‘Serious leisure’ is a term used for describing leisure activities that are “sufficiently substantial and interesting in nature for the participant to find a career there, acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge and experience” (Stebbins R. , 1992, p. 3). Some scholars explained the devotion of recreational athletes to endurance sports, and the way they develop an identity and community within the framework of serious leisure perspective (Shipway, 2012). Participation to sport events can provide recreational athletes a way to construct as well as confirm their leisure identity, and encourage and facilitate career development and progression in a sport activity (Green & Jones, 2005). Examining the experiences of triathletes at a long-distance triathlon event, Miller (2012) points out the reinforcement of a sense of identity through the extreme physical challenge of event participation and the support provided by the fellow participants. In another study conducted among triathletes, Atkinson (2008) argues that "a desire to push the body to the next level often emerges" when people experience greater satisfaction from having a sporting body (p. 176).

Pain has been a research area in distance running in the past couple of decades. Some studies focused on the phenomenology of pain and identity which addressed essential issues about dealing with physical pain and suffering in long-distance running (Allen Collinson & Hockey, 2007; Shipway et al., 2012). Bale points out the linkage between pain and enjoyment in sports (2004). Lev (2019) argues that getting pleasure from physical discomfort and pain while long-distance running is not a spontaneous outcome, but rather a complex social process that requires learning. Le Breton (2000) suggests that people participating in extreme physical and sporting activities look for intensity of feeling and reinforcing their will-power. He argues that in a society where “values are in crisis,” those who participate in extreme sports events develop an intense relationship with their bodies, push its physical limits as they seek truth and meaning in life through sacrifice and suffering. According to Le Breton (2000) “physical limit has come to replace the moral limit that present-day society no longer provides” (p. 1).

Few studies have been published on ultramarathon organisations in Turkey and the ultramarathoners. These studies approached ultramarathon running from different angles, including the factors influencing motivation towards ultramarathon

organisations (Çalıkuşu, 2020), participation analysis of trail running events (Balce, 2020), the risk management in ultramarathons (Ocakoğlu, 2019) and the relationship between somatotype and ultramarathoners' performance (Odabaş et al., 2021). One quantitative study looked at the factors that motivate ultramarathon runners and their impact on their life satisfaction and success perceptions. This study revealed that intrinsic factors such as exceeding own limits, adding meaning to life, improving self-respect, achieving personal goals, and improving psychological resilience, play a significant role in motivation towards running ultras (Çalışkan, 2018). Another quantitative study that looked into what drives people to participate in ultramarathon events found a strong relationship between these driving forces and improved life satisfaction and success perception. (Çetin & Özman, 2019).

While doing the literature review, I noticed a lack of consensus on the descriptive terms used in ultramarathon running. In research papers, the name of the sport was written in a variety of ways, including ultramarathon, ultra-marathon, ultra marathon. The ultramarathon formats were also named differently, e.g., single-stage, single stage, continuous. In 2020, the Ultra Sports Science Foundation published a position statement on the definition and classification of off-road running events to bring attention to the use of terminologies interchangeably and without precision, and to propose a universal language for discussing these events, as scientific interest in them has been growing (Scheer et al., 2020). In this statement, both the criteria for defining ultramarathon events and the naming convention of the sport were proposed, i.e., 'ultramarathon' and 'ultramarathon running'. In this research, the name of the sport is spelled as ultramarathon, following the Ultra Sports Science Foundation's recommendation.

In the following chapter, I discuss the methodology I employed to explore the experience of running ultramarathons and its significance for ultramarathoners as well as the cultural codes in the Turkish ultramarathon community.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study aims to develop a deeper understanding on the experiences of ultramarathoners and the emerging ultramarathon culture in Turkey. It is based on a qualitative research approach. Anthropological data collection methods were employed to identify the definition and meaning of being an ultramarathoner, understand the dynamics behind participation in ultramarathon events, explore the impact of running ultra distances on runners' lives, and identify the characteristics and cultural codes of the ultramarathon community. The research was undertaken over a 4-year period using a variety of qualitative data sources, most notably participant observation, in-depth interviews, and digital ethnography.

According to Georges and Jones (1980), fieldwork does not start with face-to-face encounters with informants, it commences as soon as the ethnographer decides to work on the subject. My first encounter with an ultramarathoner was in 2016 just before my participation in a footrace for the first time. He was a professional athlete, and a sports coach at the company I worked for back then. From the limited interaction I had with him and another ultrarunner I met at a sports event, I formed an ultramarathoner persona in my mind, who is either a professional athlete or someone with a particular lifestyle who can afford to spend considerable time on training for races, e.g., a young, high-performance runner whose work life is not hectic. A surgeon, a white-collar employee married with kids or a retired person in their sixties were not in the picture I created in my mind.

My second interaction with ultramarathoners was in 2017 when I was training for a race with my running partners. That morning, a couple of ultramarathoners joined us and I had the opportunity to train with them. They were in their thirties, working in the private sector and had a family. They clearly did not fit into the ultramarathoner persona I created in my mind back then. I was intrigued by their talks about running ultramarathons and the experiences they were going through. I was planning to write my thesis on a sports-related topic, however, I was undecided between archery and running, as both were gaining growing popularity in Turkey in recent years. I continued training with ultramarathoners in the following weeks and our discussions went deeper. Being a runner, I identified various commonalities among us with respect to running. However, the more I talked to them, the more I noticed that the differentiation point between my concept of running and theirs was not the running distances but the way

they approached running and racing. As I grew a profound curiosity in the ultrarunning world, I decided to research the ultrarunner community in Turkey.

4.1. Fieldwork

I conducted anthropological fieldwork from April 2018 to March 2022 in three ultramarathon organizations, namely İznik Ultra Marathon, Salomon Cappadocia Ultra Trail and Uludağ Premium Ultra Trail. I observed ten ultramarathon distance races varying from 55K to 160K in these organizations across the years.

I chose the field sites based on the criteria of total contestant numbers, geographical features of the racecourse, the presence of ultramarathon distances below and above 100K. The advantage of this approach was to capture the complexities of the phenomenon from different interacting factors, which I discussed in detail in the findings section.

Among all the ultramarathons for which I was able to obtain the racecourse information and the total number of registered runners from the race websites or the race news posted on the internet, Cappadocia Ultra Trail and Iznik Ultra emerged as the best candidates fulfilling all the criteria given above. These races were the two highest-ranked organisations in terms of participation, with 833 runners and 343 runners, respectively in 2018. In İznik Ultra, among the six courses in the running event, three of them were ultramarathon distances (55K, 90K, 160K) and two out of three courses (63K, 119K) were in Cappadocia Ultra Trail. The two races had a different variety of terrain features (high plateaus, mountains, hills, cliffs, coastal tracks, forest trails, volcanic terrain, rugged terrain, sand terrains), giving an opportunity to observe the reaction of the ultramarathoners to terrain conditions at the checkpoints and after the finish.

Cappadocia Ultra Trail had a high number of international contestants thanks to being the only race in the Ultra-Trail World Tour calendar from Turkey and the area's touristic attractions (UNESCO heritage site) (Sahin, 2019). Considering the prominent participation of ultrarunners from other countries, I found the event particularly beneficial for observing Turkish ultrarunners in the wider ultramarathoner community context.

The observation dates of the ultramarathon organizations and the races observed at these events are shown in Figure 2. The total number of ultramarathon distance

participants I observed across the four years was 1.882. A note of caution in reading this number is that with the total number of participants, I refer to the number of total runners in ten races, not individuals, meaning that a runner had the potential to contest five out of ten races during my fieldwork.

Figure 2.

Timeline for Ultramarathon Participant Observations

Initially, I intended to conduct the second year of fieldwork in April and October 2020, when Iznik Ultra and Cappadocia Ultra races are held annually. With the COVID-19 outbreak, most of the ultramarathon organisations, including the ones I observe, were cancelled.

In line the progression of COVID-19 cases in Turkey in 2021, the ultramarathon races could have been cancelled. I was not sure if I'd be able to observe the Cappadocia Ultra Trail which takes place every October. As a precaution, I decided to include Uludağ Premium Ultra Trail in my fieldwork plans. I chose this race for two reasons: 1- To observe an ultramarathon at a high altitude with terrain conditions different than İznik and Cappadocia races 2- To reduce the risk of becoming infected with COVID-19 by being in the field during the summer months. Despite the fact that Cappadocia Ultra Trail was not cancelled in 2021, due to my COVID-19 related concerns, I did not feel comfortable travelling to Cappadocia with public transportation and conducting one more participant observation in an event attended by 1.971 runners (of which 769 were competing in ultramarathon distances).

The interviewing process began with the first ultramarathon race I observed in April 2018 at İznik and concluded in March 2022 (see Figure 3).

Figure 3.

Timeline for Interviews

The first stage of interviews was about developing a relationship with key informants, gaining their trust and support, getting their input into the participant observation field plan, and doing the short interviews at the two races observed. In the second phase, I started the in-depth interviews, and the plan was to complete the in-depth interviews by the end of 2020. In March 2020, with the first COVID-19 incidence was seen in Turkey, the lockdown periods and race cancellations started. By mid-year, it was clear to me that the pandemic was not coming to an end soon. From social media sharing of the ultrarunners, I noticed that they were longing for training in trails, and racing. Talking about a topic for one to two hours that they are restricted from did not appear ethical to me, i.e., a potential violation of the 'do no harm' principle. As a matter of fact, I decided to postpone the interviews until 2021.

The majority of the in-depth interviews took place at the third stage along with the short interviews I conducted at the races. The focus of the final stage of interviews was getting feedback from the key informants to the insights I identified during the analysis.

During the fieldwork in total, I travelled 2.930 kilometres in five trips, of which 1.250 kilometres with my car, and 1.680 kilometres with other means of transportation.

4.2. Research Design

When deciding which online and offline spaces to include and exclude, ethnographers should consider their object of study and the nature of their research

question (Snodgrass, 2016, p. 470). In doing this research, I employed three research methods for data collection: The literature review, field research, and social media analysis.

From offline and online sources, I acquired information on the essentials of the ultrarunning world such as the challenges and rewards of running an ultramarathon and the way it impacts ultrarunners at physical, psychological, and mental dimensions.

The participant observation provided access to ultramarathon events and experience of participating in an ultramarathon from a variety of perspectives, including event organizers, race crew, and volunteers. It also facilitated the construction of the questionnaire process. In-depth interviews provided me with access to insights into ultrarunners' conscious interpretations of their experiences.

Social media data complimented my analysis with observations from ultrarunners' online presence of self and their interactions with the ultrarunning community.

4.2.1. Participant Observation

Participant observation was a key component of this project. Participant observation requires the researcher's body immersed in the field and it "obliges its practitioners to experience, at a bodily as well as an intellectual level, the vicissitudes of translation" (Clifford, 1988, p. 24). Witnessing the moments that the ultrarunners felt challenged or rewarded, hearing their interactions with others about what they were going through, and talking to them at different moments of the race from beginning to the end, provided a vantage point in researching the ultrarunning phenomenon. Given the time-bounded nature of ultramarathons, my physical strength, agility, and planning skills were almost put to the test. I'll elaborate on these points as I share the details of my participant observation approach.

My pilot study for participant observation was at the İznik Ultra race on April 21, 2018. My objective was to foretaste the elements of an ultramarathon and plan for the full-scale fieldwork. It was a day trip to İznik from Istanbul. I conducted observations in three locations, namely: İznik city centre, Narlıca town and Göllüce village. 50K race was starting from Narlıca at 10.30 am therefore I chose it as the first location of the field trip. All participant observations require a social situation, and every social situation has three primary elements, which are a place, actors, and

activities (Spradley, 1980). In some cases, a set of activities are linked together into a larger pattern called events, and the events often take place in a variety of social situations. The nature of an ultramarathon suggests an event, with its actors moving from one place to one another and performing many different activities.

When I arrived in the town, I realised the first challenge of conducting participant observation in an ultramarathon: Observing multiple social situations throughout the race and even within one location. An aid station was established next to the start line area of 50K race. This station was serving the other two ultramarathon races (140K and 90K) that started earlier in the morning, and the evening of the day before. The runners were seated, choosing the food and beverages to consume, filling their bottles with the mixture of cola and water, chatting with the fellow runners and the volunteers working at the aid station. In the meantime, 50K contestants were arriving at the start line with shuttle buses or cars, warming up their muscles, attaching the bib numbers to their t-shirts, and catching up with other contestants, exchanging jokes. It was clear to me that I had multiple social situations to observe, happening side by side, namely the life at the start line of a race and life at the race aid station. When conducting the second phase of the fieldwork in 2019, I needed to consider this fact when working on my field plan.

The second critical point to consider was paying attention to the colour code on the race bibs. There was a 9-hour difference between the start times of the 140K and 90K races and the total distance ran by the runners until Narlıca. As a result, the runners arriving at Narlıca aid station were handling different physical, mental, and psychological issues. Since each race had a separate colour code (blue for 140K, green for 0K, and crimson for 50K), while observing the runners, paying attention to this detail was particularly critical to being able to observe their interactions and condition with justice at the aid stations. A runner arriving at a station after running 88K and a runner arriving after 37K had different needs, hence the way they presented themselves.

In the second half of the day, I went to İznik city centre to observe runners crossing the finish line. İznik was the finish line for all three ultramarathon courses of İznik Ultra Marathon. The start of each race was at different locations at different times in a 24-hour time frame around Lake İznik. Depending on the total distance of the course, the time limit for each race was different, and so was the time window for crossing the finish line. This posed the third challenge of the participant observation in

an ultramarathon: deciding on the observation points and the time to be spent at these points.

Spradley categorises types of observation according to their degree of involvement with people and in the activities observed (Spradley, 1980). Throughout the fieldwork, I covered four out of five categories as suggested by Spradley:

1. Non-participation is collecting data with no involvement with people or activities: I followed ultrarunners on social media (heavily on Instagram and to a lesser extent on Facebook) and read their posts regularly. On YouTube, I watched race videos of event organisers as well as ultramarathoners' race preparation and post-race videos (26 videos). I read ultramarathoners' interactions on an online platform called Koşu Forum. I read their race reports and reflections in their personal and team blogs. I read books about ultrarunning written by Turkey-based ultramarathoners. I listened to Koşturmaca and Ayarı Kaçanlar podcasts presented by an ultramarathoner (7 episodes and 15 episodes respectively). I listened to the recordings of radio programs featuring ultrarunners (3 programs).
2. Passive participation: During COVID-19 lockdowns, I attended 18 Instagram live broadcasts of ultramarathon race organisers, trail running coaches and ultramarathoners between April 10th and September 3rd, 2020. I attended race crew and volunteers briefing meeting at İznik Ultra, observed race briefing to runners at İznik and Cappadocia, conducted observations at race registration area, marathon fair, pre-race pasta party, and award ceremonies.
3. Moderate participation: I travelled with the ultrarunners to the races and back to Istanbul. I shared my hotel room and had pre and post-race meals with them. I worked as a volunteer at the aid stations of İznik Ultra and Cappadocia Ultra. I worked at the registration desk of Salomon Cappadocia Ultra Trail and checked runners' mandatory equipment before their race kit delivery. I worked as a sales assistant at a sportswear kiosk at the Cappadocia Ultra Trail fair. I drove İznik Ultra race medical director to the aid stations and followed her orders on medical aid needs.
4. Active participation: I ran with ultramarathoners at their 1-1.5-hour short training sessions on the road. I trained for a marathon to gain personal experience of running for relatively long periods (2.5 to 4 hours). During

marathon training and running at the race, I went through a whole new level of physical and mental challenges that I had never experienced before when I was running half marathons.

5. Complete Participation: Spradley defines this type of participation as the highest level of involvement as the researcher becomes a participant (Spradley, 1980). In the context of my research, this was running an ultramarathon. However, I chose to limit my experience to running a marathon to be able to keep a distance with the research subject.

Observing an ultramarathon performance is a physiologically and psychologically demanding activity. The observations start with warm-up stage and continues until the closure with award ceremony, which is in total a 2–3-day event. Almost all observations are done in outdoor conditions and mostly standing. The weather conditions sometimes can be challenging (e.g., strong wind, rain showers, hail, extreme temperature differences between daytime and night, high humidity, above 30 C or below 10 C temperatures), making observations an arduous task. In some races, reaching to checkpoints demands travelling in isolated country roads after midnight or before sunrise, with limited signal reception on the mobile phone. In some races, reaching an aid station by car either requires a long travel time or simply is not possible. Given my plans for pre-race and post-race events observations requiring long hours on foot and outdoor conditions, physically it was not feasible for me to do observations during the entire race time. Therefore, I made conscious choices on when, where, how long to conduct observations as well as when and how long to take rest for my well-being for a successful fieldwork.

When I was doing participant observation at ultramarathon races, I chose to wear casual or sports outfits such as running t-shirts, running shoes, sports GPS smartwatch). During fieldwork, wearing appropriate clothing helps build rapport with the community (Welsch & Vivanco, 2016). By wearing casual or sports outfits, I was able to blend in with the environment. While spending long hours outdoor on foot, I needed to feel comfortable to be able to focus on the observation task.

Doing fieldwork in ultramarathon events are costly. Car expenses (intercity toll fees, fuel oil), airline tickets, accommodation, meal expenses, and taxi/public transportation expenses require a substantial budget. In doing this research, no

monetary support was received from any institution. I covered all the costs from my personal resources.

In İznik Ultra, the race organizer provided me with the race crew name tag and in Cappadocia Ultra I was given the crew t-shirt. Wearing an item indicating me as a crew member facilitated my participant observation tasks in a variety of ways. It made it smoother for me to integrate with the aid station teams. It helped me to pass through certain police checkpoints with my car where roads are blocked for the racers. At the aid stations, I was able to approach and interact with the ultrarunners with ease.

On some occasions such as sitting at the lobby of the hotel, walking in the race town, spending time at marathon fairs, or having meals at the restaurants or coffees before and after the race, I chose not to wear the t-shirt and name tag provided by the organizer. By doing so, I was able to observe and interact with the racers solely as a researcher.

A researcher needs to adopt a variety of methods and techniques in fieldwork to ensure the integrity of the data. I initiated the fieldwork for a chosen ultramarathon race as soon as the online registration of the race was started. Until the race day, I watched the Instagram live broadcasts about the race, read ultrarunners' posts and Instagram stories about their training for the race, and read the Instagram posts of the race organizer and their interactions with the runners. The fieldwork continued post-race period for another month as ultramarathoners continued to post race-related content on their blogs and social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and YouTube.

One of the biggest challenges for a researcher is to decide when to leave the field. The researcher feels that there is always one more interview that needs to be conducted, another hunch to be followed, one more area to be pursued or another area to be dug deeper for further insights, hence their study never gives them the sense of completion (Taylor et al., 2016). Since I have started the fieldwork of my research, the circumstances in which the Turkey ultrarunner community live have changed with the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters such as wildfires, and economic issues such as increasing inflation rate and the devaluation of the Turkish Lira. These developments have impacted their daily lives and inevitably their ultrarunning activities and choices, hence my fieldwork process. I closely connected with the ultrarunners post-Covid 19 lockdown and the wildfires periods. When the economic issues arose, I was in the process of wrapping up the fieldwork. I considered conducting the second round of

interviews with my informants to explore their experiences of ultrarunning in light of the recent economic developments in Turkey, affecting the cost of participating in an ultramarathon race in and outside Turkey. However, I accepted the fact there will always be new developments as long as I continue the fieldwork. I decided to make peace with not investigating this aspect of their lives and moved my focus and efforts on analysing the data I have at hand.

4.2.2. Interviews

Informal in-depth interviews were conducted with a partially structured interview approach. The arrangement of questions was tailored to the respondent's unique circumstances. The researcher paid attention allowing freedom of expression through open-ended questions.

The initial contact was made through a telephone call, WhatsApp messaging, email or social media accounts of the ultrarunners (Instagram messaging or Facebook messaging). The potential participant was informed about the researcher's status as a graduate student and the purposes of the study. If the potential participant expressed written or verbal interest, an interview time and date was arranged. Prior to the interview date, the informants received the consent form electronically. Only a few informants sent a message to confirm their consent in written form. The form was read to the informants at the beginning of the interview for their verbal approval.

The first set of in-depth interviews were conducted with the key informants who have different experience levels at ultramarathons: A seasoned ultrarunner, an inexperienced ultrarunner and a trail runner who failed to finish her first ultramarathon (55K race at 2019 İznik Ultra).

Before the COVID-19 outbreak, three in-depth interviews were conducted face-to-face at cafes on the Asian side of Istanbul. During the COVID-19 outbreak, the majority of the interviews were conducted online via Google Meet or Zoom as per the participants' request; the majority connected to the calls from their homes. Only two ultrarunners connected to the online interviews from their workplace. In all online interviews, both my and their cameras were on throughout the interviews. Two informants did not prefer online interviews; therefore, I interviewed them over the phone. During the COVID-19 outbreak, one informant preferred to meet at a bookstore café close to her home, and another one chose his office for the interview to take place.

I continued the in-depth interviews until no significant new information was expected to come from additional interviews. I recorded the interviews with the voice recording application on my smartphone. After each interview, the audio recording was transcribed verbatim.

Online interviewing enabled me to expand the geographical coverage beyond İstanbul. I was able to conduct in-depth interviews with informants living in Ankara, İzmir, Adana, and Eskişehir.

During the race observations, short interviews were conducted with race crew, aid station volunteers, race photographers, race medical team members, ultrarunners' crew and relatives, race presenter, marathon fair vendors and villagers.

The methodological notes are taken for the conduct of the field inquiry itself. They are "about our own growth as an instrument of data collection" (Bernard, 2006, pp. 396-398). I was either recording voice memos or jotting down notes about the way the ultrarunners approached running versus my experience of running as a roadrunner. The change I experienced was in the way I articulated the questions. At the beginning of the fieldwork while asking the questions, I used the words 'racing' (yarışmak), 'contestants' (rakipler) or 'running pace'. I eventually realised that such words are not favoured much, especially when they were referring to fellow runners in the context of ultramarathon. I learnt to replace 'racing' with 'running in ultras' and 'contestants' with 'other runners' as they hesitated to call ultramarathons 'competition'.

Malinowski defines the ethnographer's role as "to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world" (Malinowski, 2002, p. 19). Within the scope of this research, I used autoethnography to gain a deeper understanding on what does 'pushing own limits' mean in the context of running and what happens when one runs for long hours. When I began the fieldwork, I had been a road-runner for two years and had not attempted to run a race longer than a half marathon (21.1 kilometres). My longest running experience was around 2 hours. In 2018, every week I was training 4 to 5 times with a mixed group of marathoners and ultramarathoners at Feneryolu-Bostancı promenade route and I was listening to their stories about how the running experience change dramatically over long distances. These discussions inspired me to leave my comfort zone and have a first-hand experience in pushing my own limits. I started to train for marathon in July 2018 and successfully finished my first marathon in November 2018. Although it was not a fully matched experience, during my

marathon training and running, I grasped what ultramarathon runners told me about the sensations and experiences of running for long hours. During my relatively long hours of running, I had very low and high moments, like the ultramarathoners reported. I had to deal with voices in my head telling me to stop running when I was feeling very tired or in pain. I developed mental coping mechanisms to deal with these voices, much like ultramarathoners do, so that I could continue my marathon adventure. I had to wake up at 5 a.m. for months to be able to start running before the sunrise and sleep early to allow my muscles to recover at night, which eventually led me to minimise my social activities. I experienced very intense emotions while training for and eventually running a marathon. Sometimes I felt very strong, as if I'm on top of the world and then there were times, I was very fragile, about to quit. Sometimes I shouted, laughed, or even cried while running. I had moments of feeling deeply connected to nature. Multiple times I experienced 'runner's high' in the middle of a run and this sensation almost made me addicted to running. Runner's high is described as "a euphoric sensation of heightened wellbeing, an enhanced appreciation of nature and transcendence of time and space" (Bale, 2004, p. 105). I felt both excitement and fear at the start line, as ultramarathoners expressed during the interviews. Going through all these experiences brought me to a position where I could relate to what my participants were sharing and probe further to learn more.

It is a widely held view that the key competencies of an ethnographer are non-judgemental orientation, ability to establish a good rapport, flexibility, curiosity, making good observations, listening with undivided attention, asking good questions, and probing for deeper meaning. It is worth noting that while I continue the fieldwork, I attended three training programmes for professional purposes which honed my observation and interviewing skills for a rich fieldwork:

- I completed a coaching training program and received professional certified coach (PCC) accreditation from International Coaching Federation (ICF). As per ICF assessment markers, a PCC accredited coach is expected to be "observant, noticing and exploring energy shifts in the coachee, exhibiting curiosity with the intent to learn more, and exploring the coachee's use of language and how the coachee perceive their world" (PCC Markers, 2022). A professional coach is expected to be fully present at coaching sessions and establish a good rapport with the coachee. Presence is a term used in coaching to describe a state of being beyond just physical

presence. It is about focusing on what is happening right here and right now, giving full attention to the context and the coachee (Halpern & Lubar, 2003). At the interviews, my coaching skills helped me to be more present and asking open-ended questions that were helping informants to open up to me.

- I attended the two-year Gestalt Training Program presented by a clinical psychologist. The gestalt approach is based on the phenomenological method of inquiry. It requires approaching others with a genuine curiosity and open mind, staying as close to the other's experiences as possible, staying in the here-and-now moment, bracketing-off own assumptions and values and becoming aware of how they are making sense of the world (Joyce & Sills, 2014). This training equipped me well to fully embrace the phenomenological inquiry approach. Apart from its contribution to the way I listen to and ask questions, Gestalt training also helped me to observe the impact of what I heard and saw on me, as a researcher.
- I completed the 6-month Chief Question Officer Training from Inquiry Institute. The focus of this program was to build capacity for intentional and skilful question asking and to improve the quality of the question we ask others and ourselves. The method aims to slow down the automaticity of internal questions and answers, be more aware of the assumptions and cultivate a resilient "learner mindset" which is inquisitive, collaborative, flexible and discerning (Inquiry Institute, 2020). This training helped me, especially when I was exhausted from rough fieldwork conditions and began to have negative self-talk. At such times, I was able to spring back from the judger mindset to the learner mindset swiftly.

4.2.3. Sampling and Recruitment

Given my research question, I chose to employ both snowball and judgement sampling. This approach helped me to elucidate the insights on ultrarunners from all walks of life and ultrarunning experience. The sample was selected on the basis of participation to İznik Ultra or Cappadocia Ultra Trail races at ultramarathon distances. My focus was on amateur athletes for whom sport is not a source of income and on the contrary investing time and money into ultrarunning. My key informant introduced me to an ultramarathon organizer and several other ultrarunners. I also used race participant lists for recruiting female ultrarunners as my key informant was able to introduce me only a few female ultrarunners.

I interviewed 22 ultrarunners (13 male and 9 female), single or married, working or retired, ranging in age from 34 to 60 years old. The majority of participants were white collar employees with a university degree. I paid attention to interview informants having a range of different experiences in ultramarathon running with respect to type of race (i.e., single-stage vs multi-stage, distance-limited vs. timed ultramarathons), race location (raced only in Turkey vs. raced both in Turkey and outside Turkey), and maximum race distance (50K vs 240K). The study included ultrarunners living in İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir, Adana, and Eskişehir. A total of 28 interviews were conducted with 22 participants in offline (at café, private office) and online settings (through Zoom, GoogleMeet and phone calls). With six ultrarunners I conducted a second round of interviews. Three of them were ultrarunners I interviewed early in the research process (late 2019-early 2020). My aim in interviewing them one more time was to hear about their experiences after 1-1.5 years. With two ultrarunners I conducted the interviews in two rounds within a week time as their interviews took longer than the others. I also had the opportunity to interview an ultrarunner one more time when we met in person at the 2021 İznik Ultramarathon. She was there on a volunteer assignment and my goal this time was to hear her thoughts on ultramarathoners and ultramarathon organisations since she was more of an observer in that context; she did not have a race to finish. I drove her from Istanbul to İznik in my car. We talked at the race headquarters, six different aid stations, the race start and finish areas, and while she was socialising with her runner friends before and after the race. I observed her interactions with the ultramarathoners and the other volunteers. We shared a hotel room for a night too. I gained a deeper grasp of the ultramarathon community and race dynamics during the two days I spent with her.

The interviews ranged in length from 60 to 150 minutes. The final number of participants was determined by data saturation, which occurred when information obtained in interviews became redundant. The details of the participants' profiles are given in Table 2.

Table 2

In-depth Interviews List and Dates

Participant #	Gender	Age	Marital Status	City	Occupation	IDI - 1	IDI - 2
Participant 1	Male	55	Married	Istanbul	Retired (Merchant)	11/10/2019	08/08/2021
Participant 2	Female	42	Married	Istanbul	Marketing Manager	29/02/2020	
Participant 3	Male	45	Married	Istanbul	IT specialist	15/03/2020	29/03/2021
Participant 4	Female	31	Single	Ankara	Sport psychologist	18/08/2020	
Participant 5	Female	51	Single	Istanbul	Freelancer (Marketing)	28/04/2020	28/03/2021
Participant 6	Male	46	Married	Istanbul	Lawyer	26/03/2021	
Participant 7	Male	48	Single	İzmir	Technician	29/04/2021	01/05/2021
Participant 8	Male	41	Married	İzmir	Engineer	17/05/2021	
Participant 9	Female	47	Married	İzmir	Doctor	19/05/2021	06/08/2021
Participant 10	Male	42	Married	Istanbul	Procurement Manager	27/05/2021	
Participant 11	Male	42	Married	Adana	Software developer	30/05/2021	
Participant 12	Male	46	Married	Istanbul	Sales Manager	02/06/2021	
Participant 13	Male	59	Married	İstanbul	Retired (Engineer)	26/06/2021	
Participant 14	Male	47	Single	İstanbul	Race Organiser	22/07/2021	
Participant 15	Female	60	Single	İstanbul	Retired (Bank Manager)	24/07/2021	
Participant 16	Male	53	Single	İstanbul	Machine operator	18/08/2021	19/08/2021
Participant 17	Female	39	Single	İstanbul	High school teacher	04/09/2021	
Participant 18	Female	48	Married	Adana	Entrepreneur	09/09/2021	
Participant 19	Male	34	Single	Eskişehir	Engineer	09/09/2021	
Participant 20	Female	42	Single	Ankara	Private teacher	17/09/2021	
Participant 21	Female	37	Married	İstanbul	Beautician	19/09/2021	
Participant 22	Male	45	Single	İstanbul	Business Analyst	31/03/2022	

All the ultrarunners I approached agreed to take part in my research project. Given their hectic schedules due to long training hours on top of their work, family, and social life commitments, their positive attitude is noteworthy. I was unable to interview only two ultrarunners who initially accepted to participate but eventually had to decline my request. Both gave me COVID-19 lock-downs as the driver behind the change in the interview plans. One of the runners was a health professional and was working under challenging conditions. He found it hard to commit to a specific time for the in-depth interview. The other ultrarunner was a personal trainer. She needed to make up for the business she lost during the lockdowns, so declined to spare time for an in-depth interview.

4.2.4. Analysis

The verbatim transcription of the in-depth interviews was done and saved in separate Word files. Coding was the first step of the data analysis. I employed a hybrid approach in creating the codes, i.e., deductive and inductive coding. I started with a set of a priori codes and throughout the transcript reading process I added new codes. Using the notes that I captured while conducting the fieldwork, reading ultramarathoners' blogs and books, and watching the Instagram live broadcasts of ultramarathoners, I developed the initial ideas for coding. I used these ideas as a starting point for drafting the code list (deductive coding). The initial code list had 13 items. I familiarised myself with the data by reading, re-reading the transcripts and listening to the audio-recordings of the interviews. This enabled me to add new codes and expand the code list (inductive coding). I organised and stored the 'codebook' in an excel file. While reading the transcripts, I underlined words and phrases with coloured pens that had the potential to lead to a theme. I captured short notes on sticky notes and hung them on a wall in my study room as a visual prompt to use later in thematic analysis. I added more notes on the wall after reading and listening to both written and audio notes from the fieldwork and the desk research.

Prior to the process of interpretation of the data, I created a Word file containing all the transcripts. I executed complete coding, i.e., assigning the codes to the verbatims that potentially address my research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 210). Some verbatims contained more than one code when an informant referred to multiple topics in a sentence. The coding of the transcripts was an iterative process. While applying the codes, I had the opportunity to go deeper into the data set, and I added a few more new codes to the codebook. The final codebook contained 24 items which was listed in Appendix B. I revisited previously coded transcripts to ensure the codes were fully applied. After the completion of the detailed coding, I scanned the text through these codes to identify themes and patterns within the data set with related to the research questions. I also went over the notes that I had hung on the wall to enhance my analysis. For visual people, using a thematic map is a helpful tool for exploring the relationship between the codes, themes, and subthemes (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 232). As a researcher, I frequently use drawings or mind maps to organise my thoughts. Therefore, while conducting the analysis, I employed mind maps to aid my thinking process in identifying and refining themes and sub-themes. As the final step of the thematic

analysis, I created a Word document and captured expressions of these themes and the supporting verbatims.

While reading the interviews, in a separate Word file, I also noted the terms and the specific ways ultramarathoners use language. I expanded the list through reading ultramarathoners' race reports, books, blogs, Instagram posts, online forum discussions, and listening to their podcasts and watching their videos on YouTube.

For the triangulation of the data, I used my observations from and social media and other online sources (Instagram, Facebook, ultrarunners' blogs, race reports, YouTube videos), the data I gathered during the fieldwork (observations, mini-interviews, photographs, videos, voice memos, written notes), and the statistics from ultramarathon websites (DUV, ITRA).

4.3. Ethical Considerations

The present research involved participant observations, short interviews at ultramarathon races, and face-to-face and online in-depth interviews. Given the physically, mentally and emotionally challenging and volatile conditions of an ultramarathon race, many ethical issues needed to be considered and handled with utmost care. It is worth noting that COVID-19 pandemic brought additional ethical areas to consider on top of the existing ones. As an anthropologist, I have moral obligations to the people involved in ultrarunning organizations, the academic community and future researchers. Every step of the research I considered this foundational ethical principle and acted accordingly.

Before I travel to ultramarathon races, I contacted the race organisers and asked their consent about doing fieldwork at all locations involved in the race. With no exception, all race organisers granted me access to their event as an academic observer.

The majority of the ultrarunners I talked to was starting the interview by disclosing others' perceptions of them. Throughout the fieldwork, after introducing myself, I frequently heard that "Like many people, you may think that we are crazy or maniac". I emphasised my neutral position in doing this research, and in some cases I shared with them my marathon running experience, which made them comfortable as some stated "If you ran marathon, you know how it feels to run long distances".

I paid attention to the participants' well-being by observing the shifts in their mood and body language. When in doubt, I checked directly with them. During the in-

depth interviews, the questions triggered an introspective evaluation process in my informants' lives to a varying degree. While answering my questions, some mentioned "having a moment of insight" or "making sense" of the experience about the way they feel, think and act about being an ultrarunner, ultrarunner community and ultramarathon races. I did not observe any negative change in the mood of the participants at such moments.

When I was working at Cappadocia Ultra Trail 2019 as a volunteer at the equipment control desk of the race registration area, some ultrarunners asked me to bend the rules, i.e., tolerate the mandatory items that they failed to present to me and give them go ahead for getting the bib number. While my objective was to develop rapport with the runners, I acted responsibly and requested them to fetch the missing items. I did not prioritise the ease of my fieldwork over the well-being of runners and the race organization team as any equipment missing in a runner's race bag might lead to a health emergency or forced the runners to quit the race.

Once, the race organiser called me for specific help for an aid station, as the aid station volunteers forgot to take medical supplies with them. Despite leaving the city centre at 5.00 a.m. for an early morning observation at another aid station, I made an ethical decision and returned to the race headquarters from half-way to carry supplies to that aid station.

I paid attention to staying positive at the CPs despite exhaustion and keeping a neutral stand despite the aggressive attitude of some ultrarunners towards me. I did not share my view when they asked "Should I leave the race? / Should I carry on"? I did not overwhelm the runners with my questions while they were resting at the aid stations.

At CPs, I paid attention not to consume the resources of the organisation with minimal or no consumption of food and beverages supplied at the aid station. I carried my food and drinks with me. I did not consume any food in front of the ultrarunners that they have no access at the aid stations. I did not offer my own food or beverages to the runners at certain aid stations as it was against the race rules (reason for disqualification).

At CPs, when there was a health emergency or a shortage of volunteer, I offered help, e.g., provided chairs stored at the trunk of my car to the ultrarunners feeling sick at a CP that was not built for runners to spend long time or found a blood pressure monitor from the village chief (mukhtar) as per race doctor's request.

Spending four years with the ultrarunner community has transformed my understanding of running and more importantly increased my self-awareness of how I interact with nature. Before I conduct this research, my understanding of running was to spend time outdoors in an urban setting, to have 'sterile' interactions with nature and to work towards improving my pace like many road runners. Listening to the stories of ultrarunners made me realise how monotonous my running experience was, and my interaction with nature was rather limited. I have also noticed my tendency towards prioritising safety over exploration and my lack of willingness to take risks in natural settings. I learnt from ultrarunners that one can both perform in a race and savour a peaceful moment in the presence of natural beauties. Observing them at the aid stations, I comprehended that no matter how hard one trains themselves for an upcoming challenge, even the strongest ones encounter difficulties and despair. In the end, what makes a difference is finding a way to spring back from this mood and get back to the race.

4.4. Reflections on the Research Process

At the early stages of the research projects, I had considered ultramarathon runners to be almost a special breed of human beings, having an extraordinary physiology compared to an average person. Being a road runner, I assumed that they could be more competitive and determined than a marathon runner and prioritise race targets above everything else. I was worrying about if they would spare time from their busy training schedule for a long in-depth interview with me. Throughout the research process, some of my initial thoughts changed, I was even pulled to the opposite end of the spectrum. I realised that the concept of extraordinary body features that enables someone to finish an ultramarathon does not exist. I found that it was more about developing a smart race strategy, executing the training plan with rigour, and having the right mindset that makes an individual run an ultramarathon. I eventually realised that being competitive is not at the heart of this sport. In contrary, camaraderie, being supportive one another came out as the main characteristics engrained to the ultramarathon culture. I witnessed multiple times ultramarathoners motivating fellow runners that were about to abandon the race by offering to run with them until they regain their motivation.

When I first started researching ultramarathoners, I had a tendency to admire the willpower and the effort they put forward to run such distances. I was particularly impressed with their humble attitude about the way they were talking about their achievements, and the positive remarks they made about the other ultrarunners. Recognising this made me concerned about whether it would affect my value-neutral lens in gathering observations and deriving insights. As my fieldwork progressed, I noticed that I was not looking for evidence to confirm my existing beliefs about them and ignoring the contradictions. For instance, during in-depth interviews the participants were consistently referring to the virtuous attitude and worldview of ultramarathon community. However, when I asked a group of ultrarunners gathered after a race whether they witnessed anything unpleasant during the race, I heard discussions about a few runners who cheated on the racecourse or mistreated other contestants. This gave me assurance that I was unbiased towards them and was able to collect data with a neutral mindset. Having regular conversations with my thesis supervisor and sharing my observations with her also provided me a platform to double check if I had any bias in my inquiries and analysis.

The use of phenomenology has been highly instrumental for a good ethnography (Van Maanen, 1988). Researchers using ethnography have been increasingly becoming aware of how phenomenological experience might affect the information gathered and written down. One drawback of phenomenological perspective is that the insights discovered through self-examination could be too closely related to the researcher's experience and cultural categories. When I began this project, I was running four to five times a week around 10 kilometres, and had the experience of competing at 10 km, 15 km and half marathon (21,1 km) distances. For me, running was not only about participating in races but also a gateway to healthy living, spending time alone outdoor, exploring the limits of my physical strength and raising fund for charities. Due to my running experience, I had my preconceived ideas of what running is and means. At the initial stage of the research, the first thing I did was to step back from these preconceived notions. In order to facilitate this internal process, I noted down these ideas on a piece of paper, such as ‘improving finish time / running pace is the measure of success”, “when running, pausing at a spot more than a few minutes to enjoy the view makes the task harder for the rest of the training”. I wanted to set a distance between my runner identity and the researcher identity by creating a medium upfront,

constantly reminding me of the potential pitfalls I may have in conducting this research project.

In order to get closer to ultrarunners' perspective on their long-distance running experience, in 2018 I trained for my first marathon (42.195 km). This experience carried my understanding of running into a whole different level and helped me significantly in connecting with ultramarathoners at a deeper level. Being a half-marathoner back then, training for a marathon was a significant effort for me, overstretching my limits as I started running only 2 years prior to this challenge. My personal experience of finishing a marathon helped me immensely during the fieldwork and the in-depth interviews. I was able to probe deeper when ultramarathoners talked about the physiological and psychological difficulties they encountered during a race or mentioned the personal sacrifices they made in order to find time for training or commented about the sentimental value of a race medal or t-shirt because I had similar experiences during my marathon training. Multiple times I heard from the participants that their views and context would be better understood by a researcher who personally had a similar experience.

Being able to maintain an interpretive perspective while fully engaged in the daily lives of participants is the strength of ethnographic thinking (Hasbrouck, 2018). However, when ethnographers cross a critical line, namely, when they are immersed in the culture to such a level that they adopt it in their daily lives, they may go native. This eventually leads them losing their critical perspective. During the field observations, I experienced some emotionally charged moments, gravitating me towards going native, especially at times when I saw an ultrarunner looking extremely exhausted and in severe pain at the aid stations, an ultrarunner crossing the finish line in tears, or when I joined the celebration gathering of the success of an ultrarunner. Such moments happened especially at the early stages of the fieldwork. I caught myself reacting with my runner identity and time to time found it hard to keep my position as a researcher observing a social situation. Since ultramarathons are time-bounded events and I had a relatively short window for observations, during fieldwork I kept an audio-journal to capture my feelings as soon as I noticed them. In such moments, I physically moved away from my observation point and vent out my thoughts and feelings through using my smartphone's voice memo function and swiftly got back to the observations with my researcher identity.

The present research project had a significant impact on me on a number of levels. Beyond the experience of writing a master's thesis, I feel blessed for having finished a marathon, which makes me the only person in my entire family to have accomplished such a challenging target. The research project turned out to be an ultramarathon for me, from its conception to finally writing it. Observing ultrarunners during races, listening to their training and race stories, and finally analysing the information I gathered convinced me that I had gone through a similar experience as ultrarunners do. The planning process for the participant observation was analogous to setting the race targets, forming a race calendar, choosing the training plan, and opting for the challenges I faced along the way. The scholarly reading and conducting the fieldwork resembled training for an ultramarathon through reading race reports, following a training program, testing the race strategy on the long runs, and making improvements as needed. Writing the thesis was like finally performing in my target ultramarathon race despite the major setbacks along the way due to unexpected weather conditions, losing motivation for the race and considering quitting, and checking into the last aid station barely a few minutes before the cut-off time.

The entire process gave me many high moments like an ultrarunner: I experienced the euphoria of finding a theoretical framework bringing all the pieces together and the joy of reading a statement in an article firing neurons in my brain for new insights. At the aid stations, witnessing an exhausted ultrarunner feeling much stronger after handing him a cup of soup made me happy instantly. I was amused with the race stories of ultramarathoners that were shared with me at breakfast or dinner tables I sat with them during the fieldwork. I was emotionally touched by the stories of the fathers, spouses and friends of ultrarunners who followed them from one aid station to another, day and night, just to be there for their loved while runners moving towards their dreams.

Like an ultrarunner, I had my share of low moments too: Feeling miserable and exhausted standing at the start and finish lines and aid stations under pressing weather conditions, losing the meaning of doing fieldwork with COVID-19 pandemic, being immersed into the agony of forcing myself to sit for long hours in front of my laptop despite my hyperactive nature, and giving up on writing at times feeling lost and isolated.

Finishing the writing stage of this thesis was like arriving at the last check point of a 100-mile ultramarathon race. As soon as I crossed the finish line (i.e., getting approval), as many ultrarunners do, I promised myself not to run another ultramarathon for a while (/not to be involved in another academic research) while I was suffering from injuries and muscle pain (/feeling mentally exhausted). Once the stiffness and soreness of the muscles are abated (/a new research idea comes out of the shadows), I will probably look for a new ultramarathon to sign up (/an opportunity to continue my postgraduate studies).

In this chapter I presented the details of the multiple ways I collected and analysed the data, the ethical considerations I took into account, as well as my personal reflection on the research process. In the subsequent chapter, I present and discuss the results I gathered from using these methods.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Popularity of ultra-endurance sport events (i.e., sporting events lasting more than six hours) have been on the rise in the past few decades globally (Scheer, 2019). There is an exponential rise in participation to these events, particularly in ultramarathon running races. This study set out with the aim of understanding the experiences of ultramarathoner runners, identifying the meaning, value and significance of running ultra distances for them, and exploring the ultramarathon culture in Turkey.

In this chapter, the result of my research is presented with accompanying discussion. The chapter begins with a discussion on the definition and meaning of being an ultramarathoner. It continues with the attitudes and values that an ultramarathoner is expected to exhibit.

In the second section, the ethnographic description of an ultramarathon event is presented. The performance process framework developed by Richard Schechner is used to present how ultrarunners perform an ultramarathon, including their physiological, cognitive, and emotional experiences, as well as interactions with other actors in an ultramarathon event.

The third section answers the three related research questions through Victor Turner's liminality, liminoid, and communitas concepts as well as Schechner's approach on the functions of performance: What are the reasons that runners take part in ultramarathons? How does running ultramarathons impact ultramarathoners' lives? How do they create a community?

The research question "what are the cultural norms and behaviours in ultramarathoner community?" will be answered through bringing all pieces together one by one in each section.

5.1. Being or Becoming: Who is an Ultramarathoner?

In this section, I specifically aim to address the two questions of the study: "Who is an ultramarathoner?", "and "What does it mean to be an ultramarathoner?". I will also start answering the two questions "How does one become an ultramarathoner?", "What are the cultural behaviours and norms of ultramarathon running?" and continue elaborating on these in the following sections. I will discuss various definitions of

ultramarathoner that emerged from the interviews, address the ways how ultrarunners started their ultramarathon running journey, and present my findings on the traits, attitudes, and values that ultramarathoners display to themselves and to the community.

It is worth noting that the demographic information on ultramarathoners was provided in the second chapter, under the "development of ultramarathons in Turkey" heading. This section thus approaches the issue "Who is an ultramarathoner?" from emic and etic perspectives rather than from a demographic information point of point.

5.1.1. Who is an Ultramarathoner?

While the dictionary definition of ultramarathon is any footrace longer than the standard 42.195-km marathon distance, this official definition might not fully reflect the views of community ultramarathon (Merriam-Webster). Beyond this formal definition, what qualifies a runner as an ultramarathoner from the perspectives of ultrarunners? Is it a matter of distance, or is it both distance and the presence of challenging conditions on the racecourse? The participants of the present study approached the topic from several angles. The emic definitions were provided covering various facets of ultramarathon running.

There are a range of discourses among ultrarunners that negotiate and construct the ultramarathoner identity. Some participants stated that the distance is the key element in calling a runner ‘ultramarathoner’. On the other hand, there was no consensus among these participants on the exact distance they referred to. For some, running beyond 42.2 km makes a runner an ultramarathoner, whereas some argued that it only starts with performing at 100 km and beyond. Some even stretched the concept to the level of competing at 100 km and beyond more than once: “Bir tane 50 üstü diyelim bir yarış koşup ben ultra maratoncuyum diye gezinen birçok insan var. Bence 100 km üzerindeki yarışları yapmak lazım. Bu işleri birkaç sefer yapmadan, bu işleri yapmadan önce bunu söylemek mantıklı değil” *[There are many people who run a race over 50 km and walk around saying that I am an ultramarathoner. I think it is necessary to run races over 100 km. It doesn't make sense to say this without doing these things a few times]* (Participant 3, male, 45, 15/3/2020*)*

One participant added another layer to the definition. He emphasised the distinction between ultramarathon runner and endurance runner. He called a runner as an ultramarathoner if the distance is between 42.2 km and 100 km. For any distance

beyond 100 km, he preferred to use the term endurance runner: “60 km koştu ultra maratondur. 70 koşmuştur ultra maratondur. Ama artık 100 ü geçtikten sonra vücudun dayanaklılık sınırlarına limitlere geliyorsunuz. Bu artık dayanıklılık yarışına giriyor” *[Running 60 km is an ultramarathon. Running 70 km is an ultramarathon. But when you pass the 100 km, you reach to the limits of the body's endurance. This is where you enter to the endurance race territory]* (Participant-13, male, 59, 26/6/2021).

There were other responses emphasising the effort dimension of ultrarunning in addition to the distance criteria: “100 km’yi 24 saatte bitiriyorsa ben ona ultramaratoncu demeyi tercih etmiyorum. O güzel bir etkinlik yapmış, trekking yapmış” *[If he finishes 100 km in 24 hours, I don't prefer to call him an ultramarathoner. He completed a good activity, he did trekking]* (Participant 19, male, 34, 9/9/2021). According to this view, a relatively comfortable way of moving forward along the racecourse does not reflect the spirit of ultramarathon running, i.e., pushing one’s limits. When running ultramarathon distances, an ultramarathoner is expected to give their all and do not prioritise their comfort over improvement in personal performance. Demonstrating a considerable effort not only imposed by external factors (e.g., weather conditions) but also stemmed from inner motivation appeared to be the discriminating factor between ultramarathoners and non-ultramarathoners for this group.

Some participants argued that running the official distance of an ultramarathon does not qualify the person an ultramarathoner; runner's mindset and attitude towards running do matter in defining an ultramarathoner: “Bence şehrin dışında koşan herkes ultramaratoncu…Çünkü ultramaratoncu kendine yetebilen, kendi ihtiyaçlarını karşılayabilen insan zaten. Mesafe değil ki yani.! Bence mesafe olarak tanımlamak yanlış. Yani ultra maratonun tanımı belki olabilir, ama ultramaratoncunun tanımına uymuyor” [*I think anyone running outside the city is an ultramarathoner… Because an ultramarathoner is a person who is self-sufficient, can meet his own needs. It is not about the distance! It's wrong to define it based on distance. So it might be the definition of ultramarathon, but it doesn't fit to the definition of ultramarathoner*] (Participant 11, male, 42, 30/5/2021).

They expressed their concern about qualifying someone as an ultramarathoner solely based on the distance they run. The ultrarunners believe that the attitude towards running (not pace or rank-obsessed, competes with oneself-not with others), the mindset (solution-oriented, open to learning, self-sufficient, self-motivated, self-

controlled, persistent, resilient, patient, committed, determined, adaptable) and the demeanour of a runner (e.g., being supportive to fellow runners, respectful to nature, humble, easy going) are crucial components in becoming an ultramarathoner. Unless a runner possesses these additional elements, they find it hard to see this person as an ultrarunner. These attitudes, behaviours, and mindset of ultrarunners will be reviewed in larger detail in the subsequent section.

Even within the 'pro-distance' group, who define ultrarunners primarily by distance, many of them spontaneously added behavioural features to complete their definition. An example of this came from a participant who drew a sharp line at 100 km to be able to call someone an ultramarathoner. Despite having positioned 100 km as the main determinant, he also added a few attitudinal statements to round out his definition: "Pes etmemek, kendinle ve şartlarla mücadele etmek… Etrafındaki insanları rakip değil de o yoldaki yoldaşın gibi görmek. " [*not giving up, battling against yourself and the circumstances… Seeing the people around you as companions instead of rivals*] (Participant 8, male, 41, 17/5/2021). While on the surface, the 'pro-distance' and 'anti-distance' approaches may seem to represent the two different and opposing definitions of ultramarathoner, within the ultramarathon ethos, both approaches are complimentary to one another. Both approaches take into account the essence of running ultramarathons: Seeking one's limits while competing with oneself rather than others as well as being self-sufficient, respectful, and supportive. These traits of ultramarathon running will be further discussed in the following sections.

In summary, the findings suggest that there is no consensus on a single definition of ultramarathoner within ultramarathon community. They seem to emphasise the different elements of running ultramarathons in providing a definition. While some ultrarunners preferred to prioritise the distance and set different thresholds (i.e., anyone running beyond 42.2 km or beyond 100 km), for others an ultramarathoner is a runner bringing ultramarathon values and attitudes to life while running on trails. Having defined what is meant by ultramarathoner, I will now move on to discuss how runners transition into ultramarathon running and what sort of attitudes, behaviours and mindsets stand out on the way becoming an ultramarathoner.

5.1.2. On the Way of Becoming an Ultramarathoner

> *We are, in sum, incomplete or unfinished animals who complete or finish ourselves through culture—and not through culture in general but through highly particular forms of it: Dobuan and Javanese, Hopi and Italian, upper-class and lower-class, academic and commercial (Geertz, 2010, p.55).*

Having defined what is meant by "ultramarathoner," I will now move on to discuss the paths that runners took in becoming ultramarathoners and the identities they built around ultramarathon running. Every participant had a different story about how they first started running and how they eventually transitioned into ultra distance running. The themes for starting to run included physical health improvement or maintenance, weight loss or weight management, quitting smoking, becoming bored with walking as a way of exercise, its convenience compared to going to the gym, the desire to spend time outdoors, socialising, and psychological benefits such as fighting depression or the need to relieve stress.

Some participants became interested in ultrarunning after having a physical encounter with an ultramarathoner, while others got curious about ultrarunning after reading ultramarathoners' blogs and race reports. Some received an invitation to one of their training runs from an ultramarathoner and were encouraged by the ultramarathoner to sign up for an ultramarathon race. Participating in a short-distance trail race also gave some participants the courage to try ultramarathon running: “Geyik Koşularına falan gelmeye başlamıştım. 28K parkurlarına. O zaman ben zehri aldım aslında” [*I had started to participate to the Deer Runs. To 28K course. That's when I got poisoned*] (Participant 8, male, 41, 17/5/2021). Some heard about ultramarathon running in their running groups and were intrigued. Social media posts were also influential on them in signing up for their first ultramarathon.

Another source of motivation for ultrarunners to become interested in ultramarathons was to break the monotony of road running. The participants reported that instead of specialising in one type of setting (i.e., running on asphalt roads in a city) and repeatedly trying to push the envelope on one goal (i.e., faster finish time), ultramarathon running provided them a space for trying new ways of running on a variety of surfaces, being exposed to the beauty of nature, experimenting with themselves, and exploring their limits on a large variety of terrains and altitudes. As

one participant put it: “Bunu koştuktan sonra bir daha asla yola dönmezsin demişti. Aklımda kaldı ve haklıymış.. Çok daha zevkli çünkü, yol koşusu yoruyor” *[She said to me that “Once you run this, you'll never be back on the road again”. I remember her, and she was right. It's much more enjoyable because road running is tiring]* (Participant 15, female, 60, 24/7/2021)

Prior to entering the ultramarathon world, some participants thought that ultramarathoners were a unique breed of people. They struggled to grasp the motivations, mindset, and physical capacity of ultrarunners:

> “Ya nasıl insan 24 saat koşabilir falan diye düşünüyordum. Veyahut insan nasıl bu kadar mesafe koşabilir diye düşünüyordum. Yok arkadaş ya, 150 km 200 km koşulur mu ya diyordum. Hatta ilk Girgin Kardeşlerle tanıştığımda bana 340 km TOR’a gideceğiz dediler. Abi akıl işi mi ya dedim.”
>
> *I was thinking how one can run for 24 hours. Or I was thinking how can one run such a distance. I was wondering if it is possible to run 150 km or 200 km. In fact, when I first met the Girgin Brothers, they told me that we will go to TOR 340 km. I said to them, "Dude, are you sane?* (Participant 3, male, 45, 15/03/2020)

On the other hand, some participants attached a deeper meaning to ultramarathoners and attributed to them specific personality traits, including virtuousness:

> “Bunu yapabilen insanların çok daha erdemli insanlar, çok daha içe dönük insanlar, işte birçok şeyi kafasında çözmüş insanlar olduğunu düşünüyordum…Bu da bir atletizm olayı. Tamam mental kısmı çok önemli, ama bunu yapmak için de belli bir erdeme ulaşmaya gerek yok.”
>
> *I used to think that the people who can do this are much more virtuous people, much more introverted, people who have figured out a lot of things in their minds...This is an athletic event. Okay, the mental part is very important, but you don't need to attain a certain virtue to accomplish this. (Participant 19, male, 34, 9/9/2021)*

Prior to my research project, as a road runner, I had similar thoughts. I was stunned by the distances ultramarathoners cover in one day. I was thinking that having a specific skeleton and muscle type is required to be able to finish an ultramarathon, which I eventually realised was irrelevant.

The participants shared a variety of paths about their transition from sub-ultra distances to their first ultramarathon. Some participants had prior trail running experience, therefore, the biggest challenge for them was the distance, whereas some participants had no experience on trails, so they had to deal with two firsts: adapting to running on trails and running an ultra distance. With regard to past experience on running distance, a few participants preferred to take a bold decision to run an ultramarathon after having competed in short distances (e.g., 10K) while others attempted their first ultramarathon after running a half or full marathon. I observed another tendency among participants towards choosing an ultra distance for the first time. While many runners increased their ultra distances gradually from 50 km to 100K km level, some participants skipped the entry level for ultramarathon running (i.e., 50K) and started with 80+ km races. The common influence behind this decision was another runner encouraging the participant to try the longer distances.

For ultrarunners, an ultramarathon is not just a race that they participate in from time to time. Ultrarunning reflects an integral part of their identity, an embodiment of specific values, and a signature of their life view. As runners gain experience in ultrarunning and observe other ultrarunners during training runs and ultramarathon events, they start to develop an image of an ultrarunner in their minds. During the interviews, the ultramarathoners shared with me a long list of traits they expected an ultramarathoner to have. These were as follows: believing in oneself, self-sufficient, self-confident, having a positive/can do mindset, open to challenges, challenging their limits, patient, having self-control/strong willpower, having high self-esteem, well organized, good planner, good listener, good observer, target-oriented, focused, bold, and humble.

One skill considered essential for ultrarunners is the capacity to withstand discomfort without complaining. In ultramarathon world, running despite the pain is a skill to be developed and a critical tool for surpassing limits. An ultrarunner is expected to endure pain and deal with health issues without raising a fuss. Having bruises or scars, such as toenails that were bruised, turned black, and eventually fell off after an ultramarathon, is regarded as a trophy, a memoir, of a highly demanding race.

The definitions of ultramarathoner and the various perspectives on how a runner could receive this title were discussed in relation to distance and attitude in the preceding subsection. There is one more component of this topic to be covered, and that

is how ultrarunners view the title of ‘ultramarathoner’ in the sense of owning it. Perhaps one of the most striking findings of the present research is the ever-transitional state of this title. Ingold (2015) points out that “when there is human life, there is never anything but happening,” and a result “their becoming is continually overtaking their being” (pp. 117-118). The ultrarunners I spoke to at the marathon fairs, check points and in-depth interviews stressed the transitional nature of being an ultramarathoner. In the world of ultramarathon running, the goals, hence the thresholds continuously move farther as the ultrarunners explore their limits. In every race and beyond, an ultramarathoner is ideally expected to bring ultramarathon values to life sustainably and more profoundly. Therefore, ultramarathoners prefer to describe their state as "becoming an ultramarathoner,” not "being an ultramarathoner." For them, there is no static threshold to pass and no fixed position to rest upon; it is a “work in progress” status. It could be argued that the title "ultramarathoner" is structurally transitional and fluid; it is a multifaceted concept that represents a way of life, almost an ideal form of existence that is hard to reach:

> “Bazen arkadaşların Instagram’ına bakıyorum, ‘ultramaratoncu’ diye yazıyor. Ben yazmadım şahsen, çünkü ben henüz oraya kendimi daha layık görmüyorum. Yani benim için o büyük bir kavram. Ben çok uzun mesafeler koşuyorum, ama kendimi ultracı olarak görmüyorum…Maratonun felsefesini öğrenmek, onları anlayıp yaşayabilmek aslında ultramaratoncu olabilmek.”
>
> *Sometimes I look at the Instagram accounts of runner friends, it says ‘ultra marathoner’. I did not write it personally, because I do not consider myself worthy of it yet. So, it's a major thing for me. I run very long distances, but I don't consider myself as an ultramarathoner… Learning the philosophy of the marathon, understanding and living it, being an ultramarathoner*. (Participant 7, male, 48, 29/4/2021)

Sport serves as a platform for the expression of the norms and values fundamental to the culture of a society (Blanchard, 2000). Ultrarunner community tend to differentiate their identity from the rest of the running world. Some romanticise their identity by suggesting that they are more virtuous, benevolent, and community-centred than road runners, and some position themselves as more distinguished than road runners. Some ultrarunners feel irritated when ultrarunners brag about their victories on

social media or the way they find sponsorship through becoming a social media influencer.

> "Ultra koşan insanlar bir şekilde kendiyle yarışıyor benim gördüğüm. Ama mesela yol yarışlarında hep bir rekabet vardır, itiş kakış vardır. Yol koşularında önünüzdeki düşse belki mutlu olmazsınız ama bir engeli aştığınızı düşünürsünüz. O adamın düşmesi size çok da ilgilendirmez. Siz tamamen finişe odaklanmışsınız. Ama ultra öyle değil. Ultrada o adama önce "neyin var" diye sormanız, durumuna göre gerekli yerleri yardım gelmesi için arayıp, gerekirse yardım aracı gelene kadar onun başında beklemeniz gerekir."
>
> *As far as I see, the ultrarunning people somehow compete with themselves. But, for example, in road races, there is always competition, there is hustle and bustle. You may not be happy if the person in front of you trips and falls during road runs, but you may think that you have overcome an obstacle. That man's fall is none of your concern. You are completely focused on your own finish. But ultra is not like that. In Ultra, you must ask the man "what's wrong," summon the appropriate help, and wait him until it arrives.* (Participant-16, male, 53, 18/8/2021)

The participants repeatedly mentioned the importance of having a solution-oriented, not giving-up-easily mindset for an ultrarunner. Turkey's first ultramarathoner Bakiye Duran also refers to this mindset in her book: "Ultra yarışçı olmak budur işte. Vazgeçmemek, direnmek, acıya katlanmak, çözüm aramak, bulmak, her engele rağmen finişi görmek, yani sonuç odaklı olmak… Ultra yarışçı olmanın en önemli özelliği ise şartlar ne olursa olsun yarışmaya devam edebilmek" (Duran, 2010). *[That's what it's like to be an ultra-racer. Not giving up, resisting, enduring pain, seeking and finding solutions, seeing the finish line despite every obstacle, that is, being result-oriented... The most important feature of being an ultra-racer is to continue racing no matter what the conditions are]* (Duran, 2010).

According to ultramarathoners, ultrarunning has a different set of values, goals, and etiquette compared to road races. From ultrarunners' perspective, an average road runner has only one target: Running as fast as possible and in doing so the ends justify the means, e.g., demonstrating a rough attitude towards fellow runners to keep the pace. Ultramarathoners position themselves more on the experience-oriented, not prize-driven end of the continuum: "Beyaz yaka olmayan adamlar belki kendini farklı türlü

ispat etmenin, kısa vadeli ödül almanın, maddi manevi ödül almanın peşinde olabiliyorlar… zaten çok yoğun iş hayatı yaşayan insanlarız. Bizim kafamızı boşaltmaya ihtiyacımız var" *[Non-white-collar workers may be looking for a different way to prove themselves, to gain short-term rewards, to receive material or non-material rewards...We are already very busy in our business lives. All we need is to clear our minds. (Participant 8, male, 41, 17/5/2021).*

Table 3 provides an overview of how research participants perceived the attitudes and behaviours of road runners versus how they claimed their own. As a researcher and a road runner, I was able to observe not only ultrarunners at the ultramarathons, but also road runners at half-marathons and marathons in which I contested. I personally witnessed some of the traits that the ultrarunners attributed to road runners (see Table 3), such as massive littering on the roads, neglect for sportsmanship (e.g., pushing other runners with their shoulders to pass by), being pace-centric, and prioritising their own race performance goals over supporting the other runners. On the other hand, I've noticed that some of the characteristics associated with road runners also apply to some ultrarunners (e.g., pushing limits for speed, ranking as a source of anxiety, minimal time spent at the aid stations). Therefore, it is recommended to view these traits given in the table as more of a tendency than an absolute distinction factors between the two groups.

Table 3.

Road Runner vs Ultrarunner described by ultramarathoners

Ultrarunner	**Road Runner**
Pushing limits in multiple ways (distance, weather, terrain, altitude)	Pushing limits for speed
Prioritise exploration in a performance	Prioritise excellence in performance
Prioritise Risky/ Unpredictable settings	Prioritise Safe/Predictable running settings
Prefer Trails/Nature /Rural settings	Prefer Asphalt roads / Urban settings
Environment friendly during race	Littering on roads during race

Distance-oriented	Pace-oriented
Experience-oriented	Result-oriented
Easy-going / calm	High-adrenaline / aggressive
DNF as a source of anxiety	Ranking as a source of anxiety
Walking is part of race strategy	Walking is a source of shame
Race gear to support survival	Race gear to enhance performance
Other runners are primarily companions	Other runners are primarily competitors
Competing with self	Competing with others
Value sportsmanship	May ignore sportsmanship
Community-first	Individual-first
Attentive to fellow runners	Ignorance of fellow runners
Socialise with other runners during race	Limited interaction with other runners
Long chats during race	No/limited talking during race
Spend time at aid stations to recharge	No/minimal time spent at aid stations

There is an invisible hierarchy among ultrarunners hence there is more than one initiation threshold in the ultramarathon world. The first threshold is running a distance beyond the marathon, i.e., 50K, the second threshold is 50M, third threshold 100K, and fourth is 100M.

> "Teknik olarak 42 km üzerindeki yarışlar ultra maraton. Ama bana göre ultra maratoncu 100 km üzeri koşan bir kişidir. Bence çünkü 100 km biraz daha psikolojik bir sınır. O kadar çok insan ultra maraton koştuğu için 100 km üzeri sınır koyup aslında biraz altını elemek istiyorum."
>
> *Technically, races over 42 km are ultramarathons. But to me, an ultramarathoner is someone who runs over 100 km. I think 100 km is a bit more of a psychological limit. Since so many people are running ultramarathons, I want to set a limit of over 100 km and actually eliminate those who fall under it. (Participant 8, male, 41, 17/5/2021)*

Other thresholds come with a variety of challenges, like running in a desert, running at high altitudes, and running for 24 hours at track ultras. Among ultramarathoners, the UTMB is regarded as a pilgrimage site. It is a race that almost every ultrarunner I spoke with aspired to putting their bodies and wills to the test there. The finishers of UTMB races are highly regarded among the ultramarathon community. As ultrarunners set new goals, new limits unfold, and ultrarunners meet their new ultramarathoner persona as they explore these limits. Ultrarunning enables them to differentiate their way of life from the majority and provides them with an authentic experience that is difficult to come by, as if it were a membership in a private club.

As their ultrarunning career unfolds, ultrarunners' motivations and attitudes towards ultramarathon running tend to shift over time. Inexperienced ultrarunners prone to sign up for as many races as possible in the early years of their ultramarathon career, while seasoned runners are more selective in their race choices and racing frequency. Some participants indicated that their tendency toward participating in too many ultramarathons in the early years of their ultrarunning caused them problems. They highlighted that their desire to gain experience in ultrarunning took a toll on their health and sometimes their relationships until they reached a balanced state between ultrarunning and other aspects of their lives.

Ultrarunners often encourage shorter distance trail runners to sign up for longer distances or more challenging races. They also motivate ultrarunners to raise the bar of distance as well as difficulty (e.g., elevation gain). They gain a sense of personal gratification from being instrumental in the story of another runner pushing their boundaries. Experienced ultrarunners act as sports coaches for the inexperienced ones wanting to step up their games. They coach other ultrarunners on how to improve their performance and take the next step in their 'ultrarunning careers'. Growing the number of ultra distance runners in Turkey is a shared objective among ultramarathoners. They have a tendency to promote trail running (not road running) in their social circles to be able to win new members to ultramarathon world. After all, it is a small community and more ultrarunners means more potential for ultramarathon organisations to thrive, and more runners on the trails to support one another during races.

However, there is no consensus on the terms of growing the ultrarunner community. Making a race "finish-able" with loosened cut off times for the sake of

attracting more contestants to ultra distance races is not a favoured approach for some ultrarunners. There is an emerging discussion in ultramarathon world about whether ultramarathon is the new marathon. One participant expressed this concern as: “20 sene önce 42.2 km üstü yarış tanımı yeterliydi, ancak ultranın tanımları dünyada artık sorgulanmaya başlandı!” [20 years ago, the definition of over 42.2 km race was sufficient, but the definitions of ultra are now being questioned in the world!] (Participant 5, female, 51, 28/3/2021). Participating in ultramarathon events has been gaining more traction among road runners. The experienced ultrarunners raised their concerns on the attitude of the new generation ultrarunners as they believe that the road runners tend to bring their running and competition codes to ultramarathon events. In the short run, the ultrarunners are at peace with tolerating the uncompliant attitudes of the road runners. They are keen to put effort into orienting road runners to ultramarathon running culture by sharing their experiences while running with them at the races. If newcomers insist on maintaining road runner attitudes (e.g., very limited or no support provided to other runners) in ultramarathon races despite their accumulated experience in ultra distance running, then experienced ultramarathoners tend to keep a distance from such runners. The participants claimed that road runners eventually either adopt ultrarunning codes or do not continue racing at ultramarathons.

While some experienced ultrarunners highlighted their contentment at the growing interest of road runners in ultramarathons, they were also worried about the health and wellbeing of these newcomers, as they tend to sign up for distances for which they are not trained enough. They mentioned that they saw some inexperienced trail runners at the races who were not prepared to deal with the health emergencies that come with long-distance running.

The respondents also expressed their discontentment about the way some road runners promote their ultramarathon event participation on social media or other channels (e.g., in their CVs). They indicated that although the road runners compete at sub-ultramarathon courses at an ultramarathon organisation, they ‘create’ an ultramarathon story about their experiences, e.g., the social media posts stating: “This weekend I ran ultra”. They viewed such an attitude as disrespectful of their efforts and hard work, as well as a short cut to gaining reputation without effort. During my research, I witnessed more and more fitness trainers and running coaches engaged in ultramarathons. One potential reason behind this development could be to differentiate

their personal brand image in a crowded fitness market to be able to attract more clients to their core business.

After discussing who an ultramarathoner is and what values they share in common, in the following subsection I will move on to a detailed description of how an ultramarathon is performed.

5.2. Cycle of Ultrarunning: How to Perform an Ultramarathon?

Before proceeding to discuss the meaning and impact of ultrarunning on ultramarathoners' lives and the ways they create a sense of community, it is necessary to provide a descriptive information on how an ultramarathon event proceeds and how ultramarathoners prepare for and perform in such events. This will provide a rich context to the reader on the dynamics of ultramarathon events that ultrarunners are subject to. Therefore, the aim of this section is to answer the fourth research question, which is "How do ultrarunners perform an ultramarathon?" I will describe and discuss these within the context of one event, the 2019 İznik Ultra Marathon. The photographs shared in this section are mostly from İznik Ultra 2019 races; however, I have also included images from İznik Ultra 2021 and Cappadocia Ultra 2019 races where I found relevant. While introducing an ultramarathon event, I will continue providing insights on becoming an ultramarathoner. The cultural behaviours and norms of ultrarunning will also be addressed in the context of an ultramarathon performance.

Sporting activities exceeding 6 hours in duration are defined as ultra-endurance sports (Zaryski & Smith, 2005). An ultramarathon is an ultra-endurance performance event with a duration ranging from 6 hours to multiple days. Schechner (2020) argues that performance encompasses a wide range of activities, extending beyond the performing arts. He depicts performance as a continuum and positions sport closer to the "play" end of it while "ritual" is at the opposite end (Schechner, 2020, p. 23). According to him, all performances follow a three-phase sequence: proto-performance, public performance and aftermath, and each phase consist of sub-stages (Schechner, 2020, p. 39). Schechner suggests that these three phases can be mapped onto the rites of passage framework (separation, liminality, and re-integration), a theoretical construct identified by Arnold van Gennep and further developed by Victor Turner with a particular emphasis on the liminal stage. In this section, I will focus on the flow of an ultramarathon performance in detail and the ultrarunners' interactions with other

runners, race organisation crew and the volunteers with regard to their race performance through Schechner's three-phase sequence of performance approach. The transformative impact of running ultramarathons on runners will be covered briefly in this section, and in more detail in the subsequent section through Turner's liminality, liminoid and communitas concepts.

In Schnechner's model, the performance process commences with the preparation stage for a specific performance, in other words, after the decision on what, where and to whom to perform is made. Before elucidating the phases of ultramarathon running, it is critical to emphasise that the ultramarathon performance cycle is initiated with the choice of an ultramarathon race. Understanding the factors in decision making would provide the necessary context for the dynamics of the ultramarathon performance process. For ultrarunners, the selection of race is a critical decision that must be made after careful consideration of numerous factors, as it will have a direct impact on their lives on personal and social levels at all stages of the performance process. I will discuss these in detail at the relevant stages.

5.2.1. The dynamics of Selecting a Race

Ultramarathon races give ultrarunners motivation to set running goals and train rigorously for them. In the absence of a race on the horizon, the participants reported difficulty motivating themselves to train early in the morning or late at night, on weekdays and weekends, eventually leading to skipping training.

The race selection criteria can vary depending on the experience level of an ultrarunner. Seasoned ultrarunners tend to create a race calendar early in the year, some even before the year starts, driven by their ultramarathon goals. In this calendar, they categorise the races as a target race, qualifying race, or rehearsal/training race. Some races can also be added to the calendar to have a good time with ultrarunner friends or enjoy a run on a favourite racecourse.

A 'target race' (hedef yarış) could be an ultramarathon where runners desire to reach a new milestone in their ultrarunning experience. This could be a new distance (e.g. 100K, 100M, 330K), a new race format (e.g. multi-day ultra, 12-hour track race), a race with tough cut-off times, or a challenging terrain, altitude or weather condition (e.g. desert, mountain, extremely hot weather). Attending the same race another year as a tradition, experiencing ultrarunning in another country, finishing a previously failed

race (i.e., marked DNF), improving finish time, or being a podium finisher (i.e., ranked in the top three in overall results or age group results) are among the other motivations for a target race. Seasoned ultrarunners first mark target races in their race calendar, and then they place other ultramarathons and road races around these races that will either prepare them for the target races or would not create a negative impact on their performance for the target races.

A 'qualifying race' is a race in which an ultrarunner participates to be eligible for another race. Participating in qualifying races is the prerequisite for prestigious ultramarathon races outside Turkey, such as UTMB or Spartathlon. If UTMB is taken as an example to explain the qualifying race concept, the ultrarunners who wish to participate in the UTMB World Series finals must go through a lottery. To enter this lottery, they need to collect at least one 'running stone' and have a valid UTMB index in the category they want to race (50K, 50M, 100M). Collecting more stones increases the chances of appearing an ultrarunner's name in the lottery list. Therefore, a runner may decide to participate in some races just to collect more stones or to improve their UTMB index for a specific race category, e.g., by participating in Cappadocia Ultra Trail CMT 63K, which is a UTMB World Series qualifier race for 50K where the runners also collect one 'runner stone'. No matter how challenging or tedious a qualifying race is, as long as it provides necessary points or performance markers, ultrarunners bear to run it to be eligible for their target ultramarathon race.

A 'training race' (antrenman yarışı /hazırlık yarışı) is an ultramarathon in which ultrarunners participate to train for their target race. They may choose a training race that presents parallel features to their target race based on various criteria, such as technical difficulty of the course, terrain type, elevation, and weather conditions. The objective is to experience a race to improve their physical and mental fitness level in preparation for the target race. If Cappadocia Ultra Trail CUT 119K to be held in October is the target race, then Uludağ Ultra Trail 66K race in July is a potential training race for ultrarunners. Ultrarunners may also prefer short distance trail courses within an ultramarathon organisation for a specific training purpose, e.g., participating in Alanya Ultra 28K race to train at high altitudes and steep hills. Training races are also chosen to increase the 'training volume' (koşu hacmi) of a runner in preparation for the target race (training volume is used to refer to weekly mileage).

Ultrarunners have an experiential relationship with their bodies and look for alternative ways to deal with health problems. They handle their bodies as a vehicle to help them achieve their goals. When it comes to deciding on racing after a significant injury, they may not accept advice from non-runners, including health professionals. They may ignore or underestimate their health problems. Their passion for racing outweighs giving a break to deal with health issues:

> Tamam, koşmaktan keyif alıyoruz, yarışlara katılmayı, bizim için çok zor olanı başardığımız o anları, bitiş çizgilerini seviyoruz ama insan L4-L5 omurları arasındaki diske lazerle müdahale edilmesinin üzerinden daha 40-50 gün geçmemişken nasıl bir motivasyonla 7 ay sonra koşulacak olan 246 kilometrelik bir yarışa katılma hakkı kazanmak için çekilişe katılır? Şimdi dönüp düşündüğümde kendim bile inanamıyorum. (Derman, 2019)
>
> *Okay, we enjoy running. We love participating in races. We love those moments when we achieve what was very difficult for us. We love the finish lines. But what was my motivation for participating in the lottery for a 246-kilometre race that will be run in 7 months' time merely after 40-50 days from the operation I had on the disc between the L4-L5 vertebrae? When I think about it now, I can't even believe it myself.* (Derman, 2019)

The decision-making process for first-timers follows a relatively different path. Runners new to ultramarathon distances tend to pick a race that is recommended by an experienced ultramarathoner whom they know, a race close to where they live, or a popular ultramarathon event (e.g., İznik Ultra or Cappadocia Ultra Trail). A location that holds significance for them may also have an impact on the decision-making process (e.g., Lycian way or Kaçkar mountains). Sometimes they may be asked to choose a specific race by a friend who will accompany them in that race. Surprisingly, the distance chosen for the first ultramarathon has a very large span, ranging from 45K to 160K. Some first-timers prefer to grow their ultrarunning experience by starting with the lowest end of ultramarathon distances, such as 45K or 50K, and raising the bar over time, while some runners choose to enter the ultrarunning world with demanding distances such as 90K or 150K.

Aside from the factors mentioned above, there are other factors that are influential in the decision-making process of ultrarunners. Broadly, these factors fall under four categories:

1. Offerings of an ultramarathon organisation: The credibility of a race organizer plays a critical factor in choosing a race. Ultrarunners take health-related risks during an ultramarathon such as hypothermia (dangerously low body temperature), hyponatremia (low level of sodium concentration in the blood causing brain dysfunction, seizures, coma) or serious injuries due to falling. Therefore, they require an organizer on whom they can rely in the event of an emergency on the trail or at an aid station, i.e., sufficient number of professional rescue and medical teams are on duty during the entire race with the necessary equipment. They expect the organiser to mark the racecourse with high-visibility reflective tapes and signs to avoid getting lost on the trails. In some races, locals occasionally remove the markings from the trees in some spots while the race is in progress. This causes runners to lose their way and sometimes leads to frustration and agitation. This leads runners to lose their way, and sometimes eventually to frustration and agitation. They heavily depend on the markings not only to find their way but also to feel safe, as shared by an ultramarathoner in his book: "It was as if there was a special bond between us and the markings. We were happy to see them. We were afraid when we couldn't see them" (Korkmazyürek, 2018, p. 73). Runners also depend upon a variety of food and drinks provided at the aid stations to implement their nutrition and hydration strategy, thus keeping up with the physical demands of the race. When an organiser does not provide the type of food and beverages that they announced on their website, if the variety and quality do not match the demands of the racecourse, or if the food and beverages run out of stock, such incidences may negatively impact both the performance and motivation of ultrarunners: "İstasyona geliyorsunuz bakıyorsunuz istasyona çizi bisküvi koymuş, yanına da su koymuş... Kendiniz yanınızda bir şey getiremediyseniz eyvah. Bazen gidiyorsunuz 'Ağbi su kalmadı" diyor. Nasıl kalmaz kardeşim yani ben 50 km gelmişim, su yok" *[You arrive at the station, and you see that they put Çizi (salty crackers) on the table and water next to it... If you haven't carried your food, you are done! Sometimes they say "Bro, there is no water left". How can it not be for god's sake! I have come 50 km and there is no water?!]* (Participant 7, male, 48, 29/4/2021)

   The general consensus among the ultrarunners is that if the race organizer is also an ultrarunner, then their needs will be well anticipated and met at all stages of the organisation. As this person has first-hand experience on the trails and overcome

similar challenges, the ultrarunners have expressed greater confidence in signing up for races that ultrarunners organised. After all, a poor race organization may jeopardize not only their health and well-being but also their race performance and experiences: "Ultratrail'lerin yeni canlandığı o dönemde çok böyle amatörce, iki üç kişinin yapmaya çalıştığı ultramaratonlar oldu. Bundan dolayı çok fazla insan rezil oldu. İşte gittiler kimse yok, işaret yok, kaybolanlar. Çok kötü şeyler olmuştu" *[At that time when ultra-trail organisations were on the rise, there were ultramarathons that two or three people tried to organise very amateurishly. So many people felt wretched because of this. They did not find someone to talk to from the race organisation crew, no markings on the racecourse. The runners got lost. Very bad things had happene*d*]* (Participant 11, male, 42, 30/5/2021)

Ultrarunners may expect a race organizer to register the race with international organisations such as International Trail Running Association (ITRA) to be able to compare their performance vis-à-vis other ultrarunners, e.g., ITRA performance index is a tool ranking ultrarunners based on their race performance globally and it is calculated (International Trail Running Association FAQ Performance Index, 2022).

2. Logistics and costs: Ultramarathons require long hours of running. A single-stage ultramarathon organised in Turkey can take anywhere from six to thirty-four hours for an ultrarunner to complete, depending on the distance, terrain, and elevation. Given such long hours to be spent on the racecourse as well as the travel time to and from the race, participating in an ultramarathon may demand one to three days of time for an ultrarunner. In 2022, ultramarathon registration fees in Turkey ranged from 305 TL (Sapanca Ultra 60K early registration) to 1.050 TL (Cappadocia Ultra CUT 119K late registration). When the cost of travel, accommodation and meals are considered, the total cost of an ultramarathon performance may increase significantly. Therefore, while keeping an eye on the ultramarathon goals, ultrarunners also take into account the investment required for races, both in terms of time and money, when developing the race calendar. The proximity of the racecourse to the airport or the city in which the ultramarathoner lives as well as the availability of budget-friendly accommodation options (e.g., overnight camping at Uludağ or by Lake İznik) is an influential factor in the decision-making process of some ultrarunners, as they strive to keep such investments as small as possible.

3. Trail experience: One of the key motivations of ultrarunners is pushing limits and spending time in a setting outside of their comfort zone. Therefore, they look for racecourses with challenging features to meet their personal needs. The elevation profile of the racecourse, the presence of a mountain or steep hills, altitude, diversity of terrain types (e.g., scree, rocky, muddy, sand), risks involved (e.g., running at the edge of cliffs, slippery surfaces, roots, wild animals), and the climate, as well as expected weather conditions during the race month, are taken into account in making race choices. Ultrarunners use the term 'technical trail' (teknik parkur) to describe the difficulty of a trail. 'Technical trail' is difficult to traverse terrain that has obstacles and challenges with loose surfaces, rocky paths, rooted paths, steep climbs and descents, bodies of water, and boulders (What is technical trail running?, 2018). It may involve climbing with the upper body or crossing a passage by holding to a rope. Seasoned ultrarunners tend to show a preference for the availability of technical trails on a racecourse to enhance their experience at ultramarathons.

   In addition to challenges provided by nature, ultrarunners may seek time-bound challenges too. They may prefer a race offering challenging cut-off time goals at checkpoints. In such races, the time given to a runner from one checkpoint to another one is relatively short, requiring a good fitness level to arrive at the next checkpoint before its official closure time (e.g., Spartathlon is a 254-kilometre race with a 36-hour time limit with cut-offs every three to five kilometre). A few ultrarunners also mentioned the availability of a race distance meeting their minimum distance requirement (e.g., having a 100K + course) to choose a race for a fulfilling experience at an ultramarathon, specifically, when intercity travel is required.
4. Social experience: While reaching ultramarathon goals through challenging race distances and terrains, ultrarunners may also think of the socialisation and enjoyment aspect of a race. After training for months, they may prefer the race in a town nearby touristic attractions and sightseeing opportunities to make the most out of their travel time. A racecourse where they can pass by historical places or pleasant landscapes and enjoy the beauty of nature is a sought-after feature among ultrarunners. Good memories of past races in the same organisation, the overall atmosphere of the race and opportunities for socialising with other ultrarunners (e.g., pasta party before the race, the setting of the race expo) may also

have an influence on the choice of a race for some ultrarunners. In a few interviews, ultrarunners have also mentioned that they choose a race only to support their ultrarunner friends by running alongside them.

Having considered all these factors, the number of ultramarathon races attended by an ultrarunner in a calendar year presents a wide range. Among the ultrarunners I interviewed, the lowest figure was one race and the highest was eight per year in the period of 2019-2021, with an average of four ultramarathons per runner.

Once ultrarunners decide on a race, the performance process starts. Regardless of whether they are first-timer, inexperienced, or seasoned runners, the distance, altitude, elevation, and terrain profile of the race they choose have a significant impact on the intensity and duration of the performance process phases.

5.2.2. The 2019 İznik Ultra Marathon Example

Among the three ultramarathon organizations where I conducted fieldwork, İznik Ultra stands out as the best candidate to introduce the flow of an ultramarathon performance with its diverse construct. At ultramarathons, the race set-up (e.g., start-finish times, checkpoint locations, race distances, cut-off times) may present variability from year to year within the same organisation, depending on external factors (e.g., extreme weather conditions). I will use the 2019 race set-up of İznik Ultra Marathon to introduce the essential steps of running an ultramarathon. Where necessary, I will incorporate peculiarities from the other ultramarathons I observed.

İznik Ultra is one of Turkey's oldest and most popular ultramarathon organisations. It was established in 2012, one year after the first-ever single-stage ultramarathon was held in Turkey. The race is positioned as the 'trail and ultrarunning festival of Turkey' on its webpage. The racecourse circles around Lake İznik counterclockwise. It is a semi-autonomy concept race, i.e., the contestants are expected to carry the obligatory equipment and supplies, and they have access to a limited number of aid stations with defined supplies on the course (Iznik Ultra, 2019). The race organiser Caner Odabaşoğlu is an ultrarunner with experience at distances ranging from 170K for single-stage ultramarathons to 240K for multi-stage ultramarathons in Turkey and abroad. In 2019, İznik Ultra was among the top three ultramarathon distance race organisations with the highest number of contestants in the country.

The 8th İznik Ultra Marathon was held on April 19–21, 2019. The majority of ultramarathon organisations in Turkey, particularly the well-established ones, share every little detail about the race and the events by the time they announce the race dates on their website. Some start the countdown on the home screen of the website (e.g., 2 months, 25 days, 1 hour, 42 minutes). The racecourses, checkpoints and time limits, registration fees and procedures, detailed event programme, race rules and commencement of the registration process were announced on October 26, 2018, on the race website (www.iznikultra.com) and on social media accounts. The elevation profile, course map, start time and finish time, cut-off times for each checkpoint and aid station planner information were shared for each racecourse. Under the race umbrella, there were three ultramarathon distance courses (160K, 90K, 55K), two trail courses (35K and 20K) and one city race (5K) as well as a 'kids run' for 4-12 age group. Participation fees for each race differed by payment date. Four payment due dates were offered with rising pricing (until 13.11.2018 / 1.1.2019 / 21.3.2019 / 19.4.2019). Each race had a quota for the number of contestants. The ultramarathon distance races required a valid medical report to be eligible for racing.

In explaining the performance process, only the three ultramarathon distance races under the İznik Ultra Marathon umbrella (İznik Ultra 160K, Orhangazi Ultra 90K, Narlıca Mountain Marathon 55K) will be referenced since the focal point of this thesis is ultra marathons. No further information will be provided on the other shorter distance races and their runners; they will be mentioned only when insights are to be shared about their relation to ultramarathon racers.

As explained earlier, there are three main stages of every performance, namely proto-performance, public performance and aftermath (Schechner, 2020, p. 39). In Iznik example, these stages fell under the following dates:

- Proto-performance: 26 October 2018-11 April 2019
- Public Performance: 12-21 April 2019
- Aftermath: 22 April – 30 June 2019

5.2.2.1. Phase I: Proto-performance.

The first stage of an ultramarathon performance starts with the preparations for a selected race. All performances are prepared, whether they take place in a movie set or a theatre, in meeting rooms of a corporation or a parliament, in a ballroom or a

basketball court, or on tracks or trails for ultramarathon events. Proto-performance is a stage where performers discover the action of the performance through training, workshops and rehearsal (Schechner, 1985).

The process of honing any performance skill involves three dimensions: analytic, technical and interpretive (Beeman, 2002, p. 89). Performer first assess the task ahead and plan for what it takes for a successful presentation. At technical dimension, performer develop the motor skills required to carry out the performative activity. At interpretive dimension, performer is expected to devise a way to make performative activity distinctively their own, "an embodiment of their own skill" (Beeman, 2002, p. 89).

When an ultrarunner signs up for an ultramarathon, they also sign up for the unknown. Running an ultramarathon is a highly demanding physical activity with numerous variables impacting its performance. During a race, while ultrarunners deal with exercise induced muscle pain and injury related pain, they also deal with a plethora of stressor such as overcoming gastrointestinal tract problems, hallucination, negative self-talk, and adverse weather and conditions (McCormick et al., 2018). Therefore, an ultramarathoner needs to be physically and psychologically prepared for a race in order to complete it.

Ultrarunners follow a training and rehearsal plan with rigour and discipline. This stage consists of continuous acts of simulation, and they are the non-negotiables of a race to be performed successfully. The activities in this stage bring the body to the fitness level required for the race. They become aware of both physiological and psychological setbacks in advance, so they develop efficient coping mechanisms. These activities assist them in developing an autopilot mode of a tried and tested set of actions that are safe to use on the course when ultrarunners experience cognitive performance issues.

A performance involves the presentation of rehearsed or pre-established sequences of actions. Schechner (1985) asserts that there is no free or easy performance behaviour, and they are either known or practised behaviour which he refers to as 'twice-behaved behaviour' and/or 'restored behaviour' (p. 118). According to him, individuals never perform something for the first time. In other words, all behaviours are reconstructions or reconfigurations of already behaved actions. All ultrarunners, experienced or inexperienced, practice their performance behaviour prior to a race.

Running an ultramarathon, whether it is a first-time experience on a racecourse or not, involves both known and practised behaviour. During their months of preparation, ultrarunners repeat the motion of running over and over again on terrains that they are familiar with or new to them. They work the muscles in different parts of their bodies with different training techniques to be able to make them fit for race day performance. They consume food, beverages, and supplements while running to identify which combination works best to keep their energy levels up and what their digestion system can handle during a long run. They rehearse with their running wear and gear at training to test if their bodies feel comfortable with them (such as running shoes, socks, or backpack) or sometimes to learn how to use them (such as a headlamp or running poles). They expose themselves to all kinds of weather, such as snowy, rainy, humid, dry, hot, or cold weather, to be able to learn to feel comfortable in uncomfortable settings, and hence to perform well on race day regardless of the weather. They train their minds to not give up when things get tough on the racecourse. They develop tools and practice techniques of self-motivation to use when they hit a low point psychologically or experience pain in their body. All these efforts point out the fact that, although ultrarunners may not be aware they are performing a strip of restored behaviour, an ultramarathon performance is eventually constructed from the countless variations of the pieces of restored (or twice-behaved) behaviour. Their ultramarathon performance is the reconstruction or reconfiguration of already behaved actions during training runs or past races.

The ultrarunners who considered performing at the 2019 İznik Ultra Marathon reviewed the courses after their announcement on the İznik Ultra webpage and made their decisions on the course they will perform, namely 160K, 90K or 55K. In the previous years, the longest ultramarathon distance within the organisation was 140K. The 160K course was introduced for the first time in İznik Ultra in 2019 to meet the '100-mile (100M) race' expectations of ultrarunners. 100-mile races are one of the thresholds that ultrarunners aim to pass to continue challenging their limits. Therefore, this race was particularly attractive for the seasoned ultrarunners as it gave some of them a chance to become the finisher of a 100M ultramarathon for the first time.

The length of proto-performance stage of an ultramarathon performance depends on the race characteristics (distance and terrain), the runner's profile (injury predisposition, time to be allocated to training), endurance background of the runner and runner's race specific goals (e.g., targeting podium or personal best time)

(Livestrong.com, n.d.). A typical preparation time for an ultramarathon race can be considered between 12 and 16 weeks for a regular runner. The participants of İznik Ultramarathon entered the pro-performance stage between the second half of December 2018 and mid-January 2019. A runner with a recent history of injury or not training regularly may have needed more time at this stage and started training earlier, e.g., mid-November-early December 2018).

A variety of practices were employed at this stage to get prepared for the race both physically and mentally, each targeting a specific purpose for a good performance. These practices fall under the three proto-performance activity categories (training, workshop and rehearsal) as suggested by Schechner (2020, p.39).

Training:

Training provides underlying skills that are necessary prior to workshop and rehearsals (Schechner, 2020, p. 40). It prepares performers to develop and excel in a style of performing and makes a performer ready for any challenges that may arise during rehearsals or public performances. In sports, it is a common practice to continue training until the day of performance so that an athlete stays in shape.

During the entire pro-performance stage, ultrarunners run on roads, trails, and sometimes treadmills, alone or with their running partners to train their bodies in different ways. The underlying principles of training runs are to apply successive stress to the body over time to produce a stimulus that will trigger an adaptation mechanism, hence allowing 'subsequent training or performance to be done at a higher absolute intensity or for a longer period of time' (Zaryski & Smith, 2005). Ultrarunning training takes place on roads, trails or gyms. However, it is worth noting that when it comes to training for an ultramarathon, running is only the tip of the iceberg. In an interview with Mahmut Yavuz, elite ultramarathoner, he said that: "Ultramaraton deli işi, ama ultramaratonu koşan kişinin akıllı olması lazım" [*Ultramarathon is a lunatic's job but the person who runs it needs to be smart*] (Yavuz, 2021). The training program should cover developing race-specific strategies and testing them with rigour. Good planning and strategic thinking help an ultrarunner cross the finish line in good shape. The physiological, cognitive, and psychological demands of running an ultramarathon necessitate a diverse training regimen to condition both the body and the mind properly. Along with outdoor running activities on roads and trails, ultrarunners spend time

indoors, at their desk, to meticulously examine the terrain features and course profile. If runners do not take into consideration the distance between the checkpoints and the difficulty of running between these points due to elevation profile and terrain type, they cannot plan their nutrition and hydration efficiently. Spending time on the racecourse profile for mental preparation, identifying race nutrition and fluid replacement strategies, and securing the periods that will allow the body to recover after the running blocks are other important dimensions of training. These activities require careful planning in conjunction with all other life commitments such as family, friends, and work: "Evli, çocuklu olduğumuz için şafakta koşuyorduk. Sabah kahvaltıya eve yetişelim. Bal kabağına dönmeden! (Külkedisi masalına atıfla)" [*We are married and have kids. We were running at dawn so that we could be back home for breakfast in the morning. Before we transform into a pumpkin! (With reference to the folk tale Cinderella)*] (Participant 8, male, 41, 17/5/2021)

In preparation for the İznik Ultra Marathon, the fundamental first step for a runner was to prepare an initial, well-structured personal training plan for the distance the runner signed up for. Some ultrarunners followed a training program that worked for them in the past, while others needed to build a training plan from scratch that fit their race goals. They considered a variety of sources to fill the knowledge gap in building the plan. One of these sources was training plans found on the internet or in books written by experienced ultrarunners (e.g., Ultra Kitap by Aykut Çelikbaş). Another source was the ultrarunning community. They may have sought advice from their experienced ultrarunner friends. Reaching out to other ultrarunners through posting a request on a running forum (e.g., www.kosuforum.com) or contacting them directly through their social media accounts is also among the ways to seek advice from the experienced members of the ultrarunning community. Runners who participated in trail running group activities (e.g., how to trail run activities organised by Salomon Turkey running team or Columbia Montrail Turkey Running Team) may have used such platforms to learn from experienced ultrarunning coaches about how to train for an ultramarathon. Ultrarunners have the practice of sharing their race experiences through 'race report' (yarış raporu) on their personal websites or social media accounts as well as in online forums in written, audio (e.g., Spotify podcast) or video (e.g. Youtube) formats. The race reports focus on a specific race (e.g., 2018 İznik Orhangazi Ultra 90K) and contain information on both proto-performance and public performance

stages. Ultrarunners read these reports to make informed decisions before signing up for races, and then again later to understand the course and conditions in order to develop a suitable training and racing plan. A race report usually encompasses the following: the description of the racecourse; how a runner trained for the race; the gear used; nutrition strategy; specific experiences (challenges, health issues, and positive experiences) and the evaluation of the race organisation. Depending on their race goals, ultrarunners may prefer working with a sports coach and use the program their coach designed for them.

Intensity, duration, and frequency of training are three fundamental variables in creating physiologic stress on the body (Zaryski & Smith, 2005). Trainings are designed to cover these factors in the right balance; hence, the adaptation process is triggered, and they prepare the body for the challenge ahead and reduce the risk of injury. Endurance training (easy runs, recovery runs, long runs), tempo training (tempo runs), and speed training (interval or fartlek workouts) are a variety of techniques that are commonly used in ultramarathon training plans (Çelikbaş, 2017). Giving a sufficient amount of recovery time to the body is as important as running workouts. Its absence may lead to overtraining, causing prolonged fatigue, performance incompetence, and inability to train at expected levels (Zaryski & Smith, 2005).

The training plans that the ultrarunners form at the beginning of the process were not fixed; they were subject to additions and alterations in line with the progress of their fitness level along the path to the performance date. Using excel software (a Microsoft Office spreadsheet program) to keep records of their training data is a practice some ultrarunners follow. They enter the data collected from their GPS watches, such as when, where, and how long they trained, the altitude, heart rate, etc., and use the training data to track their efforts as well as a feedback mechanism for their nutrition, sleep, and other exercise routines as a return on investment for their running performance. If a runner has a time goal for the race, such as arriving at the finish line in 25 hours or less, they may make detailed time plans for their arrival and departure times from each checkpoint.

As the race day approaches, ultrarunners increase the intensity of their training gradually, reaching their peak point no later than 3 weeks prior to the actual performance day. In the second half of March 2019, İznik Ultra participants reached the daily maximum training distance (e.g., 50K) as well as the weekly total distance

(e.g., 100K). By the end of March or early April (2-3 weeks prior the race) they entered the tapering (kademeli azaltma) period. Tapering is reducing the training volume in the days and weeks ahead of the race (Çelikbaş, 2017, p. 117). The objective is to reduce the physiological and psychological stress of daily training and get ready for a good public performance (Mujika & Padilla, 2003). During tapering, the ultrarunners start to lighten their weekly running kilometres and the amount of intensity of their training. During the race week, they went down to a couple of jogging activities for about 5-7 kilometres at a slow tempo.

Workshop:

Schechner (2020), points out that although training and workshops overlap in function, they differentiate in the way they are experienced (p.46). A workshop connects learning and mastering basic skills with figuring out new behaviour or practices for a successful public performance. In training, performers practise a specific way or style of performing, whereas in workshops they can be more experiential. They may explore new styles, try unusual ideas, or push their limits.

Ultrarunning is an ongoing learning activity. It is a never-ending trial and error process. What is good for one ultrarunner might not work for another. It is almost a research and development activity of a lifetime on the body and mind to push the limits further. Every race has its own demands on both body and mind of an ultrarunner regardless of their experience level. Ultrarunners need to try new ways to tackle these challenges. They must devise and apply strategies for dealing with challenging situations, especially when their physical and cognitive abilities are put to the test.

Running an ultramarathon requires swift yet critical decision-making on the racecourse, which eventually may prevent a runner from injury or missing the cut-off times. At the proto-performance stage, ultrarunners voluntarily put themselves in multiple pressing situations by exposing themselves to diverse weather, terrain, and altitude experiences. This gives them a sense of being in control on the day of the actual race when they have to embrace an unexpected adverse situation. For ultrarunners who had experience at sub-100K ultramarathons, İznik Ultra 160K course was a whole new experience that require a new set of skills, such as running overnight. Ultrarunners who haven’t experienced running an ultramarathon with a specific gear (e.g., running poles), on a specific type of terrain (e.g., sand), or at a high altitude need to explore themselves

in such conditions to be able to develop a range of responses through workshops. Thus, they have a range of options to choose from as per the demands of the race on the actual performance day. Such workshops are usually integrated into their training.

In addition to the physical training, ultrarunners train their minds too for a successful performance. They need to learn how to handle their body when they are in pain, having cramps or are injured. They need to prepare their mind to handle adverse situations or to deal with feeling alone, bored of running or scared when running in a dark forest at 3.00 am, hearing wild animals. Ultrarunners develop various mental training tools and approaches to use at times they feel emotionally exhausted, have self-doubt about their competency, or have thoughts about leaving the race. While training they observe the negative self-talk, arguments and justifications they produce in their minds for leaving the race and they develop and experiment with strategies to overcome them. Some of these tools as stated by the informants are as follows:

- Voluntarily exposing themselves to challenging outdoor conditions during training to strengthen self-command
- Running the challenging parts of the race in their minds and visualising overcoming them with ease.
- Practising yoga as a routine practice to centre the mind and to boost mood, mental clarity, and calmness
- Developing their own motivational tool kit to carry in their backpack during the race. In this tool kit, they may have a favourite snack, a motivational music list on their phone, a set of positive self-talk statements to use at times of despair, voice messages from family and friends kept on the phone and a set of mindfulness or breathing techniques to use.

Ultramarathons cannot be finished just by running, they are also ‘eating competitions’ (Malcolm, 2019). While most of the emphasis is on training the body and mind, the nutrition and hydration training, and determining the best fuelling strategy for the race are equally important in completing an ultramarathon. At workshops, ultrarunners experiment with their hydration and eating regime for the ‘gut training’. Gastrointestinal issues are very common among ultrarunners yet sustaining prolonged and vigorous muscular effort heavily depends on adequate hydration and ingestion of carbohydrates (Costa et al., 2017). After long hours spent on the course and a high level of exhaustion, they may find themselves not being able to eat or drink at the aid stations

or even if they do, they may vomit it. Therefore, exploring how and what to eat and drink is a critical workshop activity for an ultrarunner to be able to reach the finish line on race day.

Rehearsal:

Rehearsal is where all the restored behaviour pieces from training and workshops come together and are integrated to make a coherent whole (Schechner, 1985, p. 99). Schechner (2005) refers to early rehearsal as ‘a hunt, full of actions with high information potential’ (p.174). Ultrarunners do 'long runs' as part of their training before their public performance. Back-to-back long runs just before the tapering period are endurance-building workouts. These runs could be in a different race or in a location where at least some of the course parameters (terrain, altitude, or elevation) are similar to the race they've been preparing for. Long runs are not only for training their bodies to be strong enough to move on a racecourse for very long hours (e.g., 30 hours on the İznik Ultra 160K course). During these runs, they also rehearse many elements of their physical training (e.g., running downhill, river-crossings), race gear (e.g., running shoes, headlamp, race vest) and race strategies (e.g., fluid replacement, food consumption, dealing with gastrointestinal tract issues, dealing with negative thoughts) and see whether these elements work in harmony towards reaching their goal. Long runs are a rich source of feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of their physical development, mental strategies, race nutrition and hydration plan and the gear set to be used. A race vest may cause unwanted chafing, and the sports shoes chosen for the race may hurt their feet when running downhills. Eating a new variety of energy gel may cause nausea. With the feedback taken during rehearsal runs, they can make necessary changes to the plans before the race.

As explained previously, ultrarunners attend some races only for training purposes, and they call such races ‘training race’ (antrenman yarışı). These races are treated as a rehearsal of the actual race. Prior to İznik Ultra, some of the ultrarunners performed in other ultramarathons or trail races for rehearsal purposes. Manavgat Ultra, Çekmeköy Ultra and Geyik Koşuları were among the races they participated in January and February in preparation for İznik Ultra. Although there was no ultramarathon distance course under the umbrella of Geyik Koşuları organisation, with its muddy and slippery terrain, the 28K course provided them with a good rehearsal opportunity for

İznik Ultra Marathon. Alanya Ultra and Ephesus Ultra, held in March, were the other races some of my research participants chose for the long run of their training plan as well as the rehearsal of İznik Ultra.

Another technique used by ultrarunners at rehearsal is visualizing the racecourse. Using the route map and elevation profile, they mentally run the course, beginning at the start line, passing through checkpoints, and finally arriving at the finish line, thereby psychologically preparing for the race. This type of mental preparation aids ultrarunners in reducing the negative psychological effects of running through difficult parts of the course on race day.

Some ultrarunners who have a GPS watch upload the racecourse info provided on the race website on their watches. Although the runners pay attention to the markings on the racecourse, sometimes they miss them and lose their way on the trails. If the runner gets off-track during the race, the notification function of the watch will alert them.

Sharing photos of training or rehearsal sessions on social media with hashtags of the race name or distance is a common practice among ultrarunners. They tend to post photos of themselves in relatively challenging conditions (e.g., running on snow or running at 5.30 a.m. in the dark under heavy rain) to emphasize the difficulty of the proto-performance stage and the sacrifices they make. Images of nature's wonders, such as witnessing sunrise, or awakening of nature in spring, as well as rare moments of urban life, such as running on a boulevard early in the morning with no cars passing by also appear in these posts, showcasing the instant gratifications of ultrarunning.

At the proto-performance stage, final piece of planning activity ultrarunners do is to plan for their travel to the race location as well as accommodation. On race websites, suggestions for accommodation and information on how to reach race locations are provided. At some hotels, group bookings give ultrarunners a price advantage; therefore, they prefer to make their bookings as a group in advance. Runners may also prefer staying in tents at designated areas arranged by the race organiser or a camping area in the race location.

The annual race calendar of ultrarunners sits at the centre of their lives. The proto-performance stage of a race sets the rhythm of their life, and almost dictates their way of living and socialising. Training and rehearsing for races may force them to gradually transform their social circles. Long training hours on weekdays and weekends

require them to make choices to balance their running and social lives. They eventually prefer sparing time for friends who are keen to share their passion and help them grow in ultrarunning:

> "Bu süreçte kendiniz gibi insanlarla vakit geçiriyorsunuz ağırlıkta. Hani sizi anlamayan ya da sizinle ortak paydalarda buluşamayan insanlarla çok fazla vakit geçirseniz de ne anlatacaksınız? Anlamıyor ki karşınızdaki insan sizi! Çünkü sizin hedefiniz var...Onunla vakit geçirdiğiniz zaman boşa geçiyor vaktiniz."
>
> *During this process, you spend time with people like yourself. You know, even if you spend a lot of time with people who don't understand what you are doing or can't meet you on common grounds, what are you going to share with them? They will not understand you! You have a goal…The time you spend with them is a time wasted*. (Participant 17, female, 39, 4/9/2021)

Running partners become the most frequently seen friends as they train together. They share both the anguish and excitement of ultramarathon racing and take care of one another's health and wellbeing for a 'sustainable running life':

> "Arıyor öğleden sonra beni, "Dinlenebildin mi, bak dikkat et bugün şunları ye, bunları iç, biraz mineral al" gibi uyarıyor. Ya da işte akşam mesela benim yorgun olduğumu bildiği için bir tencere yemek yapıp getiriyor ya da "hadi bir kahve içelim" diyor. Bir kahve içiyoruz, "İkimiz de yorgunuz, tamam evlere gidelim, daha fazla kalmayalım" diyor."
>
> *He calls me in the afternoon and says, "Look, have you had a rest?" Today pay attention to eating these, drinking that and taking your mineral supplements". Or, for example, in the evening, he knows that I am tired, so he cooks and brings a meal in a pot to me. Or he suggests, "Let's have a cup of coffee." We enjoy our café and then he says, "Alright, we're both tired. Let's go home. Let's not stay longer. (Participant 19, male, 34, 9/9/2021)*

They highly appreciate the importance of race preparation in a runner's life and, therefore, they refrain from criticising when a runner friend invests in a new pair of high-tech trail shoes or chooses training at night over watching a soccer game of their favourite team. They follow a similar routine: waking up very early in the morning

(5.00–5.30 am) to train on roads or trails before breakfast time with family, rarely going out at night to socialise and leaving such occasions earlier than their non-runner friends to be able to sleep long enough or limiting their alcohol intake to perform well at training the next morning. As they spend less and less time with non-runner friends, inevitably, some ultrarunners reposition such friends to the peripherals of their immediate social circle over time: "Başka yerlerden de arkadaşlarım var ama böyle daha çok görüşmek istediğim arkadaşlarım koşudan arkadaşlarım oluyor… Artık koşma diyen arkadaşlarım oluyor bazen. Onlarla pek görüşmemeyi tercih ediyorum sosyal anlamda" [*I have friends from other social circles too, but the friends I want to spend more time with are my running buddies…Sometimes I have friends who tell me not to run anymore. I prefer not to hang with them much*] (Participant 20, female, 42, 17/9/2021)

Jacques Ellul (1964) argues that the Roman notion of using the 'technique' of physical exercise to improve the efficiency of legionnaires still holds sway today (p. 383). He claims that it deeply penetrates the individual's life and influences their approach to sports:

> Sport carries on without deviation the mechanical tradition of furnishing relief and distraction to the worker after he has finished his work properly so that he is at no time independent of one technique or another. In sports, the citizen of the technical society finds the same spirit, criteria, morality, actions, and objectives— in short, all the technical laws and customs— which he encounters in office or factory (Ellul, 1964, p. 384).

Ellul (1964) adds that the individuals become technicians using measurement tools and the mechanisation of their actions becomes more prominent in their broader life. The measurements they track and record are the essential elements of industrial life, a familiar process they repeat in their work-life to pursue efficiency through following a framework. Among all the ultrarunners I interviewed, following a strict and demanding training program was prominent, sometimes extending to the perception of seeing it as more of a chore, not an activity they do for having fun in their spare time. The runners, particularly the ones who signed up for distances covering 100K and more, shared the fact that the intensity of their training did not leave much space for spontaneity and playfulness in their lives. The constant tracking of their performance values may turn into either a source of pride and satisfaction or a stressor. The smartphone applications

(e.g., Strava, Garmin Connect) make their training performance values visible to other runners with the data provided by their GPS watch. Due to the psychological strain it places on them, some ultrarunners prefer to disable other runners' access to their workout data or to prevent others from commenting on their statistics.

The main themes of the proto-performance stage for an ultramarathon emerge as setting thorough planning, employing various techniques while executing the plans with rigour, checking the results against the training goals continuously and taking corrective actions. The discourse ultrarunners use about their training, workshop and rehearsal activities contains many technical details: They tend to express themselves with facts and figures, such as daily or weekly distance, elevation gain, maximum heart rate at training, VO_2 Max (maximal oxygen uptake), daily calorie intake and the dose of various supplements needed to maintain their health etc. They frequently refer to the word ‘strategy’ in the context of running, resting, nutrition and choosing gear for the race. The way they handle the ultramarathon preparation process is almost identical to handling a technical project in a work situation: They first set the annual goals and create a race calendar accordingly. They kick off a ‘project’ by preparing a timetable and taking into account the key variables impacting the success, such as terrain type and distance. They constantly track their performance with the data they collected through their GPS watches and heart rate monitors during runs. The data help them to assess the progress versus their training targets. If they are not satisfied with the progress, they may take the necessary corrective actions, e.g., pushing themselves harder, making changes on the plans. The results reported on training applications may give them an instant sense of accomplishment. All these activities aim to ensure a successful end result, i.e., steady and strong performance on race day. Following months of preparation, ultrarunners finally transition into the public performance stage.

5.2.2.2. Phase II: Public Performance.

Before a public performance, many activities take place behind the scenes. These activities prime the performer for the public performance. As the race day approaches, not only the runners but also the race organiser team rev up their preparations and transition into their performance stage. In this research project, the runners are at the centre of explaining the ultramarathon performance process. However, before delving into the specific behaviour of ultrarunners at the public

performance stage, it will be helpful to first establish a broader context on the other actors engaged in the overall process.

Around one to two months prior to a race, the race organiser may start live broadcasts with experienced ultramarathoners about the approaching race through their social media accounts, such as Instagram. The race interviews cover a variety of topics, such as a review of the racecourse profile, recommendations for how to run efficiently on the technical parts of the course without causing an injury, suggestions on what to wear and carry in the back bag to be able to handle unexpected weather conditions, discussions about how to approach nutrition and hydration during the race, and memories from past races. Social media posts are actively used to create momentum around the race. These posts could be about the countdown for the race (e.g., 3 months to meet again, 18 days to go, only 5 days left-are you ready?), reminders of actions that contestants need to take (e.g., uploading medical reports on the race website, paying attention to bringing mandatory equipment for the race), updates on race logistics (e.g., change of a checkpoint status), or sharing contestants' social media posts about the race ahead (e.g. last training for İznik Ultra).

The racecourse is like a stage of a theatre play. It needs to be set up carefully with every single little detail for a satisfying performance. Around a week prior to race day, the event organiser pulls together a team to place markers on the course to ensure that ultramarathoners follow the same racecourse and do not get lost on trails. Brightly coloured plastic ribbons (on trees, bushes, lampposts etc), reflective tapes, signboards, flags, directional arrows, or chalk markings on walls are used for marking along the racecourse. In İznik Ultra, the racecourse markings were done by experienced ultrarunners who volunteered for the task. Some of them also participated in one of the İznik Ultra races later in the week. These markers were temporarily placed on the racecourses. Given the high numbers of markers used at ultramarathons (e.g., approx. 5.000 markers were placed every 10 to 50 meters on the racecourses of İznik Ultra), the race organisers pay particular attention to removing them from the course once the races are finished.

The organisation teams also ‘dress’ the race town. The organisation team hang banners and posters around the town to announce the upcoming event and to create a sense of ‘race village’ for ultrarunners. During race week, the town or the area where the race will start gradually transforms into a massive foyer for ultrarunners, and

spectators, and backstage for the race crew. The local businesses (e.g., hotels, guest houses, bakery shops, restaurants, cafes, grocery stores, pharmacies, and local art shops) are prepared to meet the increasing demand for their goods and services by the visitors. Local law enforcement agencies (police and gendarmes) finalise their action plans to serve the ultramarathoners on race day for a safe experience on trails and roads. Search and rescue non-profit organizations, such as AKUT, GÖNDAK and ANDA, form their volunteer teams to be on duty during the race in case of an emergency, i.e., they search for runners lost on the trail or who need to be safely removed from the course for medical attention. The race medical team is formed, and the ambulances that will follow the ultrarunners are organised. The vendors and the sponsors set up their kiosks in the designated race expo area. The race presenter, DJ and the race photographers travel to the race location. The race crew set up the race headquarters, registration office, and the start/finish line. They make ready the aid station equipment, stationery, food and beverages to carry to the relevant locations on the race day. Volunteer recruitment continues throughout the race week. Ultramarathons heavily depend on volunteers to work behind the scenes (e.g., marking the racecourse, preparing the race kits) or perform on the stage (e.g., working at the registration office or aid stations). Due to the dynamic nature of race day circumstances, an extra pair of hands is always welcome at aid stations and the start/finish line. The volunteers come from all walks of life, such as university students, runners, race organisers, family members of ultrarunners and villagers. At the 2019 İznik Ultra, 90 volunteers were on duty and in total, a team of around 300 people worked for the organisation.

At ultramarathons, in parallel to runners, the race crews (full-time employees of the race organiser and volunteers) also perform. Their performance aims to make the contestants' experience as smooth and positive as possible at all points of contact. As a preparation for their performance, they receive a briefing from the race director and leaders not only on what they will do but also on how to do it, i.e., how they are expected to interact with the runners.

At the 2019 İznik Ultra, I attended the race crew briefing meeting held on April 19th at 4.00pm where the race director gave a detailed briefing to the volunteers, who came from other cities or local to İznik, on the following points: how the three days will flow; their responsibilities; the critical points they need to pay attention to in their dealings with the runners; and how they can overcome the potential difficulties awaiting

them in the next couple of days. The race director Caner Odabaşoğlu tipped off the volunteers about how to best communicate with runners, the tough moments they might experience and how to handle such moments. The volunteers were informed in advance of the aggressive attitude that some runners may demonstrate especially when they feel extremely exhausted or in pain. As maintaining a positive attitude with ultrarunners is of critical importance in order to keep their morale as high as possible, they were asked to ignore such an attitude and not to take it personally and to do their best to keep a positive attitude with a smile on their face. The race medical director Dr Tülin Tezcanlı also briefed the team on how to cooperate with the medical team if they encounter a health-related emergency at the checkpoints. As an additional note, at the Cappadocia Ultra when I was working at the race registration office, I observed the team leaders reminding the volunteers continuously how essential their positive attitude toward the runners was for their race performance. In essence, the race crew's performance has one goal: to set the stage for ultrarunners to perform well by providing a favourable experience.

Two WhatsApp groups were formed to coordinate the communication among the team leaders and the crew: one group (İznik Ultra Parkur 2019) for tracking the runners on the racecourse and the other one (İznik Ultra 2019) for the volunteers working at different touchpoints of the organisation, such as aid stations and the start/finish line. I was a member of both groups. This granted me access to the 'backstage' activities of the race, allowing me to make additional observations.

Throughout the event, all volunteers and race organisation team members wore the same crew t-shirt and carried a name tag with emergency phone numbers printed on the back.

Ultrarunners gradually step into the second and most yearning phase of the performance process, public performance, one week prior to the race. I chose April 12, 2019, as the date marking the end of proto-performance and the commencement of public performance. However, it is worth noting that this is not a strict date and may present variations from one ultrarunner to another. Variability in the overlap periods between the two phases was evident in all the ultramarathons I studied.

Warm-up:

The warm-up helps performers transition into performing (Schechner, 2020, p. 51). The actions taken for warming up for any performance vary from one to another:

reviewing charts in a presentation deck before a business meeting, washing hands thoroughly before surgery, or doing jaw loosening exercises before a singing performance are just a few examples to warm-up for a performance. Ultrarunners' warm-up is a relatively long activity, it takes days before they show up at the start line.

Ultrarunners start warming up while packing up for the race. Race outfits and gear are similar to the costumes in theatrical production; they are essential to a successful performance. The race week is a time for making final calls on planning the race outfit and gear after checking the latest weather forecasts. Taking into consideration the expected weather on race day and previous experiences in similar races, ultrarunners make choices. Clothing items for race time as well as social time activities, race gears, race food, first aid items and personal care items, and mandatory race equipment as per race organisers' request are packed. For post-race recovery, flip-flops, slides or sandals are must-have items to keep in the bag. Due to blistering and swelling, ultrarunners find it painful to wear regular shoes after an ultramarathon. Therefore, when packing, they consider not only their needs for racing but also for post-race recovery and care.

For the longest distance course of the race, the organisation may give ultrarunners the option of accessing their 'drop bags' that will be transported to a designated aid station. At ultramarathons, runners are on their feet for very long hours and exposed to varying weather and terrain conditions, sometimes at extreme levels. Therefore, they may need to access more items to use on top of what they carry in their backpack during the entire trace. When planning the items to be put in drop bag, the runners take into account the temperature, elevation gain per segment, and time of day for each aid station. An extra pair of trail running shoes, personal care products (e.g., sunscreen, eye drops for contact lens care, toothpaste/brush) first aid items, (e.g., pain killers), foot care items (socks, blister prevention creams), clothing (e.g., long-sleeve t-shirt, gloves), extra batteries and energy bars or gels are among the items that can go into a runner's drop bag. These items are also considered when packing on top of what they will wear and carry in their backpacks at the start line.

Ultrarunners have a tradition of posting a photo of their race outfit and the content of their backpack, usually laid on the floor, on their social media accounts, either before they start travelling for the race or the night before the race with their race bib. From the social media accounts of the ultrarunners I have been following for the

past three years, my observations suggest that especially the seasoned ultrarunners, do this mostly for the races that have a particular significance for them, not for every race they compete in. This could be a race outside of Turkey (e.g., UTMB), a distance they have not experienced before (e.g., İznik 160K), a demanding race with many technical trails (e.g., Alanya Ultra), a race that is difficult to qualify for (e.g., Spartathlon), or a comeback race after a long break. By doing, this they announce that they are about to perform in a race. They vent out the stress of the upcoming performance by receiving supportive messages from their social circle. At this stage, running teams may also use social media to announce their participation in the event by posting photographs or videos from their workouts.

Travelling to the race location leads to slowly building up excitement for the challenge ahead of them and gets ultrarunners into the mood of racing. Like packing for the race, travelling is also a form of activity that takes place in the pre-liminal stage of the performance. The runners leaving their homes for the race get separated from their usual life setting and enter a liminal stage between not performing and performing. They begin to emerge from their training and rehearsal cocoon and meet up with fellow ultrarunners on their way to the race location. They share recollections of their past ultramarathon races and exchange information about their race calendars.

For the 2019 İznik Ultra fieldwork, I asked my key informant, who had signed up for the 160K race, if we could travel together in my car. He accepted my offer and asked if one of his ultrarunner friends could join us too. We arrived at İznik before noon on Friday, April 18th. During the trip, the two runners chatted about both amusing and challenging moments they had in the previous year of İznik Ultra as well as other races. They exchanged race memories of their mutual ultrarunner friends, a few details on how they trained for the race, the potential challenges they were expecting to face and potential ways to cope with them.

For the 2019 Cappadocia Ultra fieldwork, I travelled to the race location solo. This provided me with the opportunity to observe ultrarunners at the İstanbul airport and on the transfer shuttle to Ürgüp. At the airport, it was easy to spot the ultrarunners as many of them were wearing t-shirts containing logos or insignia demonstrating participation in past ultramarathon events. While travelling, wearing a race t-shirt or a finisher vest given at past ultramarathon events is quite common among ultrarunners. They reported that wearing such apparels while travelling or during social activities at

the race town help them to get into the mood of racing; a reminder of what they achieved in the past, a reminder of their strength and potential for the upcoming performance: “Kendime güvenebileceğimi hatırlatıyor bana…Bir nevi aslında motto gibi oluyor. Burayı koştum zaten. Burayı da koşacak gücüm var” [*It reminds me that I can trust myself…It is kind of a motto. I already ran there. I have the strength to run here too*] (Participant 18, female, 48, 9/9/2021)

Another function of wearing race t-shirts and vests in the ultrarunning world is to facilitate ultrarunners to meet and develop a conversation with other runners easily. On my way to the Cappadocia Ultra, I observed the ultrarunners initiating chats with one another by asking about the race, that its name is printed on the t-shirt or simply asking if the other person was travelling for the Cappadocia Ultra too. Such conversations usually continued with a question about the distance the runner had signed up for in the Cappadocia Ultra, and then progressed to an exchange of information about their ultramarathon 'resume' (e.g., previous experience in the Cappadocia Ultra or other races), as well as discussions about the racecourses' challenges and rewards (e.g., running on sand-like terrain, apple trees along the trail). Local must-eat restaurants or cafes were also a big topic of conversation. These exchanges among the ultrarunners are the elements of the warm-up process, which help them mentally prepare for their performance.

An ultramarathon race has both fixed and temporary venues and settings. These are: race organisation team headquarters, race registration office/info centre, race technical briefing area/venue, race expo, stage, start/finish area, drop bag delivery area, resting area, pasta party/opening buffet venue, finisher meal venue, toilets, changing rooms, medical unit, aid stations/checkpoints and race shuttle bus departure points. Among the three organisations I observed, these venues were in different locations, relatively close to each other at İznik Ultra and Cappadocia Ultra, whereas Uludağ Ultra had a compact setting, all outdoor and indoor venues were located at Uludağ central cable car station (teleferik).

Once the ultrarunners arrive at the race location, they visit the race registration office to pick up their race kit. This is an important stage in their warm-up process. Having the race bib (competition number) means the public performance is only hours away. Race registration desks are located indoors or outdoors, depending on the availability of the area. In İznik Ultra and Uludağ Ultra, the tents were set up outdoors

and the runners were queued up by the order of arrival. At Cappadocia Ultra, the registration office was set up in a congress centre and ultrarunners were given the option of registering by appointment or by showing up.

A typical registration process follows three steps. These steps are usually handled at different desks in the registration area. In the first step, ultrarunners are asked to present a valid medical certificate indicating clearance for a long-distance run or a valid licence issued by relevant sports federations and sign a waiver form exempting the organisers from any liability for damage to runners or their properties.

The second step is passing the mandatory equipment check. The ultrarunners carry their race equipment to the registration area to claim them one by one to the race crew (see Figure 4). Every race requires its contestants to carry a specific set of equipment in their backpacks (see Figure 5).

Figure 4.
Volunteers Checking Mandatory Equipment, İ.Ö., 6/8/2021*

*İ.Ö. stands for author's initials (İpek Özdem) across the thesis

Figure 5.

Mandatory Equipment Infographic, İ.Ö., 6/8/2021

This equipment varies depending on the weather and terrain conditions as well as distance. The longer distances tend to demand more items to be carried throughout the race than the shorter courses. Ultrarunners who fail to present any of the mandatory items in their backpack are not eligible for racing. Therefore, they cannot get their race bib until they present the missing items to the race crew. In İznik Ultra, the mandatory equipment was a fully charged mobile phone, identity card, cup (min. 15cl.), water bottle (min. 1.2 lt.), a headlamp with spare batteries, emergency blanket (aluminium), whistle, medical elastic band, waterproof outer shell, long-sleeved shirt, reflective running gear (vest or belt), hat or bandana, food (last for 6 hours) and backpack. At Cappadocia Ultra, when I was working at the registration office with the race crew, I came across ultrarunners who failed to present all items at the mandatory equipment check desk. Some of them accepted the fact that they needed to fetch the missing items, whereas some attempted to bargain with me. Until they presented all the items for control, they were not directed to the race bib delivery desks.

The third and final step is handing the race bib and the race pack, also called race kit, (yarış kiti) to contestants who passed the equipment control (see Figure 6).

Figure 6.

Race Bib and Race Kit Delivery, İ.Ö., 6/8/2021

The race bib contains a built-in timing chip for electronic identification. When runners move across a special mat at the starting and finishing lines as well as the checkpoints, the chip registers runners' time. This enables the race organisers to track the runners along the racecourse. The family members and friends of ultrarunners may also monitor the progress of the runner on the live results page of the race website. The race bib colour codes and number ranges are separate for each racecourse for the race crew to spot easily from a distance. The 2019 İznik Ultra 160K colour code was navy blue, Orhangazi Ultra Marathon 90K was green and Narlıca Mountain Marathon 55K was maroon. Bib numbers were assigned to courses in ranges: 160K starting from 1, 90K from 300 and 55K from 500.

In the race kit, ultrarunners may find presents from the race organiser and the sponsors, such as race name and year printed t-shirt and bandana, energy bars, sports drinks and supplement sachets or instant coffee sachets. Discount coupons may also be included for local food stores or after race recovery treats, such as spa or physiotherapy centres. At the interviews, the race t-shirts were frequently mentioned as significant mementos. Therefore, when a race organisation gives a race t-shirt that is not suitable (e.g., a cotton t-shirt) for wearing at training runs or future races, this may lead to dissatisfaction among ultramarathoners: "En azından verdikleri yarış tişörtleri

daha teknik ve teri emebilen olsa… insan koşarken onu giymek istiyor. İsterdim ki hiç bir şey vermesinler ama tişörtü çok iyi yapsınlar" [*I wish the race t-shirts provided were more technical and absorbed sweat... I want to wear it on my runs. I wish they hadn't given us anything except a high-quality t-shirt*] (Participant 21, female, 37, 19/9/2021). In the absence of a race t-shirt suitable for running, they miss the opportunity to use it as a motivational tool and a means of communicating their past experiences. After all, the race t-shirts are the symbols of their ultrarunner identity and achievements.

While registration continues, a race briefing called technical meeting (teknik toplantı) is held to inform the runners about the overall demographic information of the contestants (e.g., total number of runners, their nationalities etc), what to expect on the racecourse (e.g., technical segments of the course, potentially high-risk spots, recommendation on hydration and food strategies and warnings on the expected race day weather), drop bag logistics, shuttle bus times to start line if there are races starting at different locations, and the time ultrarunners expected to line up behind the start line for a sharp start. The race director encouraged the runners for shopping from the local stores as a gesture of gratitude for hosting them in their town. If there are contestants from other countries, which were the case in both İznik Ultra and Cappadocia, the briefing is given in two languages, Turkish and English. In İznik Ultra, 160 K race briefing to runners took place in an outdoor area next to the registration desks on April 19th at 1.00 p.m., and 90K and 55K at 5.00 p.m., while the runners were standing around the race director. In the 2019 Cappadocia Ultra, this meeting took place in a congress hall where the registration office was also co-located. In Cappadocia, the elite ultrarunners from Turkey and other countries were invited to a panel on the stage to reply to questions from the runners (see Figure 7). These meetings moved to online platforms (i.e., Instagram live) after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Figure 7.

Elite Ultrarunners Panel at Cappadocia Ultra, İ.Ö., 18/10/2019

Between receiving the bib number and lining up behind the start line, there are ample opportunities to mingle with other ultrarunners whom they know or have never met before. Ultrarunners typically come together at the race registration office or run into each other at the technical meeting, race expo (yarış fuarı), race pasta party (makarna partisi) or opening buffet or their favourite local restaurants or cafes. As ultrarunners come from different cities, such venues provide them with an opportunity to catch up with the runners they met in previous races. The ultrarunners exchange information about their training programme for the race, update one another on the ultramarathon experiences they had early in the year, other races they plan for the rest of the year and news on the injuries they had. They also make fun of one another for the incidents that occurred while they were running together in previous races.

Goffman (1956) examined the extent to which our daily social interactions are influenced by pre-established patterns or routines. According to him, when an individual enters a social occasion, the others frequently seek information about them; therefore, an individual finds themselves in a context of expressing themselves to others, whether intentionally or unintentionally, and in return the others are impressed by them in some way (Goffman, 1956, p. 2). He adds that individuals often tend to treat others based on the image they project now about their past and future (Goffman,

1956, p. 161) Therefore, others look for cues about the individual's competence and what to expect of them. Various sources of information are taken into account, including 'sign-vehicles' (Goffman, 1956, p. 1). In ultrarunning culture, there are certain patterns of cultural behaviour that runners present prior to a race, specifically when they socialise at the marathon fair or at the race registration area. The outfits ultrarunners chose to wear present themselves to the community and may provide cues about their ultramarathon running experience. In such social occasions, it is highly likely to see ultrarunners wearing the t-shirt, bandana or finisher vest of the ultramarathons they attended outside of Turkey (e.g., UTMB, Lavaredo Ultra Trail) or an ultramarathon they participated in recently in Turkey (e.g., wearing Uludağ Premium Ultra 2021 t-shirt at İznik Ultra 2021).

> "Orada artık bir şekilde sosyalleşiyoruz. daha önce ne yaptığını gösteren bir referans sistemi gibi oluyor aslında…burayı koşmuş, işte bunu yapmış gibisinden. Ya da işte dediğim gibi orası podyum, yani güzel de giyinmeye çalışıyor insanlar bence orada"
>
> *We socialise there somehow. It acts like a reference system showing what people have accomplished before, e.g., he participated in that race, or that's what he did. Or, as I said, it's like a red-carpet walk; people try to dress well for the occasion* (Participant 18, female, 48, 9/9/2021).

As discussed earlier at the 'travelling to the race', wearing such outfits functions as a means of communication among ultrarunners. It is a visual cue for highlighting their ultrarunning experience as if reading a line on their 'ultrarunning resumé'. It is a reference, an official certificate of a runner's qualification. Some race t-shirts or vests such as PTL (Petite Trotte à Léon) race of UTMB, TOR330 (Tor des Géants) or Spartathlon have almost an impact of 'red-carpet' walking at race expo or race registration area. Wearing such outfits has a particular function in occasions where the ultrarunners spend a long time together. It gives a hint to an inexperienced ultrarunner (either in ultrarunning or in a specific race) about who should be approached and asked about their experiences. It facilitates getting recommendations from experienced ultrarunners, which is a highly valued method of developing oneself in ultrarunning, in addition to reading the race reports. After all, a face-to-face discussion with an experienced ultrarunner is an ideal opportunity for runners who want to address specific

questions they may have about a race or running a particular distance. A runner may also choose to wear the old t-shirt of the race they are about to perform (e.g., wearing İznik Ultra 2017 t-shirt at the 2021 race expo or pasta party). It shows off both the experience and seniority of a runner in a particular race. As an ultrarunning etiquette, it is not favourable to wear the t-shirt of a race in which the runner did not participate. It is perceived as deceiving other runners.

With the ever-growing interest in social media, runners prefer to share their pictures taken at different moments of the event on their social media accounts. Next to the race expo area, the race organiser sets up a panel with the umbrella name of the race printed on it (e.g., İznik Ultra) for ultrarunners to use as a background while taking pictures of themselves solo or with their teammates. They may take these pictures before the race or after the race with their race outfits and the finisher medals. In the 2019 İznik Ultra, A3 size plates were prepared with the colour code of the racecourse, and the distance and elevation gain information printed on them (e.g., blue plate with 160K 4470m+ writing). These plates were left next to the panel for ultrarunners to hold them while taking a picture in front of the panel (Figure 8).

Figure 8.
Pre-race Photo Shooting, İ.Ö., 20/4/2019

Visiting the race expo and purchasing sportswear or gear are common pre-race activities among ultrarunners. A race expo is a temporary outdoor marketplace where sports-related goods and services are promoted and sold, both by race sponsors or

partner companies (e.g., Polar, Salomon, PT Academy) or other small sportswear businesses (Figure 9). The race expo also includes kiosks from local vendors selling local produce (e.g., Nicaea Olive Oil of İznik).

Figure 9.
Sportswear Kiosk at İznik Ultra Race Expo, İ.Ö., 19/4/2019

Depending on the race start time, the runners have pre-race meals, a critical step of the warm-up. If the race staring in the evening (like 160K race of İznik), then they have a late afternoon meal at a local restaurant or eat at the pasta party. For a race starting around 7 a.m. (like in Cappadocia Ultra), they have a pre-race breakfast at around 5 a.m. In such breakfasts, the ultrarunners consume food rich in carbohydrates and sugar, such as bread, simit (a bagel-like local food), pastries, molasses, tahini or honey. At the race breakfast or the late afternoon meal, the runners have discussions on the potential impact of the weather on their experience on the racecourse. The last decisions are made on what to carry in the backpack in addition to the mandatory equipment (e.g., carrying a pair of gloves) or what to add to the drop bags. They may highlight the importance of getting prepared for the expected erratic weather (e.g., heavy fog, sudden drop in temperature) and even develop a strategy for how to support one another on the course in case the weather conditions develop unexpectedly.

Before the race, some ultrarunners prefer quiet time rather than socialising with the ultrarunner community. They prefer to prepare themselves mentally and psychologically for the challenge ahead with no interaction with the outer world. They

may meditate or sleep. They avoid talking to other runners at the marathon expo or pasta party to prevent themselves from a potential negative impact on their mood while racing.

The first race of the 2019 İznik Ultra was the 160K course, starting at 7.00 pm on April 19th at İznik city centre. As the race start time approached, the runners left the race expo and registration office area, some before the pasta party and some after. I was staying in the same hotel with four of the 160K runners (of which 3 of them were my informants) and accompanied them to the hotel around 2.30 pm to continue my observations. Their plans were to have a nap or just lay down on the bed. On their way, some of them bought snacks and water (approximately 4 litres per person) to consume before and after the race in the room. They were sharing rooms. At 6.30 pm they left the hotel with their race outfits, race backpacks and drop bags, and walked to the race starting point. They arrived at the race start line at 6.4o pm and handed their drop bags to the race crew to use the bags at Sölöz checkpoint (at 88.8K of the race) to refresh themselves after a long night's run.

At the start of an ultramarathon, in every race I observed, there were common elements, namely a DJ playing upbeat pop music, a race presenter addressing both the runners and spectators during their speech, photographers capturing the moments of racers and their interactions with other runners as well as their family and friends, a drone operator filming the crowd, race director doing last checks for a smooth start, contestants who will race in other competitions of the organisation to send the ultrarunners off at the start, spectators waiting at both sides of the race start aisle, technician waiting to start the race timer, and race crew to cheer the ultrarunners. In some races, there was a representative of local authorities gave a short speech addressing the contestants.

The runners were gathering around the race start area, all in their race outfits, carrying backpacks. The start was set up on Kılıçaslan street, the shopping district of İznik. The road was closed for the event. They placed their run bibs on their outfit. In ultramarathons, race organisers expect runners to make sure that their race bibs remain permanently and completely visible during the whole race. I observed a variety of bib number placement styles at the start line. The runners pinned race bibs on different parts of their running wear or bags, namely the middle or lower-middle of the t-shirt (front), right or left lower side of the t-shirt (front or back), right or left side of their shorts at

the lower thigh area or belly, the strap of the belly bag or backpack (middle or side), in the middle of the backpack.

20 minutes to the race start time, while the upbeat pop music was playing loud and the race presenter was occasionally sharing information on the race, the runners were taking selfies, or photos with their friends or families using the start line as the background. There were no runners lined up yet; the start line was more of a stage for photo and video shootings. Some runners were stretching and warming up their muscles with jumping and short jogs. In every ultramarathon organisation I observed, the same person was in charge of presenting the race.

The last 10 minutes before the race began, the presenter asked the runners to take their positions behind the start line slowly. He also asked the spectators to line up along the two sides of runners' aisle and get prepared to cheer the runners for the start. He had short interactions with the runners. These were the last minutes for taking selfies or team photos or warming up the muscles. The runners who had companions hugged or kissed them, and made their way to the area behind the start line. The runners were separated from the spectators by the barriers in the waiting area; the spectators did not have access there. They were standing behind the race timing mat on the ground and the arch with a digital clock on it. Some preferred to stand in silence or continued to chat with the other runners. Some texted on the phone or uploaded the photos on their social media accounts.

About 5 minutes to start, the race crew placed a black ribbon across the start line around the belly level of the runners, with the English word 'start' printed on it (see Figure 10). The race crew asked the runners standing at the front line to go one step back away from the timing mat. The race presenter wished the runners well for the race and added his words, "I hope to see you come back to İznik in good health and happiness". While the drone was shooting them, he asked the runners to wave their hands to the race photographers to capture their start moments. Some spectators started to whistle for cheering them up. The race presenter reminded the spectators to clear the racecourse for runners.

Figure 10.

Ultrarunners Waiting for İznik Ultra 160K Start, İ.Ö., 19/4/2019

Performances may include a variety of auditory elements, and these may contribute to the warm up experience of the ultrarunners. Ultrarunners waiting at the start line are at the centre of an ultramarathon soundscape. The sonic environment surrounding the sentients in an ultramarathon can be referred to as the 'soundscape' (Rodaway, 1994, p. 86). The runners are exposed to an auditory experience with the DJ's music, chatters among spectators, talks among race crew and race presenter's speech. The voice of race presenter is one of the "sound agents" in this soundscape. The presenter Tansel Kader is a well-known figure among ultrarunners (see Figure 11). He was the race presenter at all ultramarathon organisations I observed (2018, 2019 and 2021 İznik Ultra, 2019 Cappadocia Ultra-Trail and 2021 Uludağ Premium Ultra). At the 2021 Uludağ Ultra, I repeatedly heard ultrarunners telling him how much they missed hearing his voice at an ultramarathon event after a year break due to Covid-19 pandemic. For many ultrarunners, he seems to be an integral part of their ultramarathon experience. His voice is one of the auditory components of ultramarathon soundscape, preparing ultrarunners for their journey ahead.

Figure 11.
Race Presenter at Uludağ Ultra, İ.Ö., 3/7/2021

Sensuous experience of sounds may play a role in getting the performers into the mood of performance. Some runners I interviewed highlighted the lack of a musical tradition in ultramarathon races held in Turkey. No ultramarathon organisation has signature music for their races; only random, upbeat pop songs are played at high volume to prime the runners for the performance. The runners referred to UTMB as an excellent example that gives them goosebumps with the music, they play at the race start. At the UTMB, the music played is 'Conquest of Paradise' by Vangelis and at the PTL it is the main theme of the movie 'The Last Mohicans'. They stated that hearing an epic tune just at the start of an ultramarathon gets them in the mood, lifts them up and makes such moments unforgettable.

About one minute to start, the runners were doing last adjustments on the strands of their backpacks or checking the different parts of the backpacks by squeezing them, setting their GPS watch to push the start button, and holding their spot. Some were smiling and some were looking calm and some of them tense. Some were standing still, and some were fidgeting. Some were doing fist bumping with another runner or giving high-fives. The presenter changed his spot to clear the way for the runners and reminded the spectators not to stand on the racecourse.

The warm-up for an ultramarathon performance involves various activities and a lengthy process as explained above. From packing for the race to hearing the countdown at the start gradually prepare the ultramarathoner to transition from readiness to performance. Schechner defines every performance as a liminal time, and the warm-up is a leap from the ordinary side of life to the performance (Schechner, 2020, p. 51). Thresholds such as doorposts or arches create a frame for entering a new state (Douglas, 1984, p. 115). The start line of an ultramarathon is where ultrarunners embark on a new journey into the unknown. The start line is a threshold that separates ultrarunners from their families, friends, daily chores, and usual urban settings. The metal arch built by the race organiser not only marks the physical location of where the race starts but also symbolises the beginning of their new status (Figure 12). Using Van Gennep and Turner's frameworks I will elaborate more on their transformational journey in *ultramarathon as a liminoid experience* section.

Figure 12.

The 2019 İznik Ultra Start/Finish Arch, İ.Ö., 19/4/2019

After months of long and arduous preparation for the performance, they line up at the start to let other know that they can do something up to a standard. Previous experience of a distance or a racecourse does not guarantee an ultrarunner crossing the finish line again. Both personal and external circumstances are unique to each race. Therefore, ultrarunners overcome new challenges in every race. At the start line, from

the outside, some may appear nervous: “Heyecandan ölüyorsun. Herkes orada, kıyafetler savaşa gider gibi!” [*You are about to die of excitement. Everyone is there. Our outfits are as if we are going to war!*] (Participant 15, female, 60, 24/7/2021). Or some may seem calm: *“*Ama biliyorum ki içerde patlamaya hazır şey var, bir enerji var; ama ben orada çok sakinimdir, calm diyoruz ya*”* [*I know there is something inside about to explode; an energy. But I am very calm there*] (Participant 13, male, 59, 26/6/2021). However, starting a race gives ultrarunners the thrill of a first-timer, no matter how experienced they are.

Actual doing:

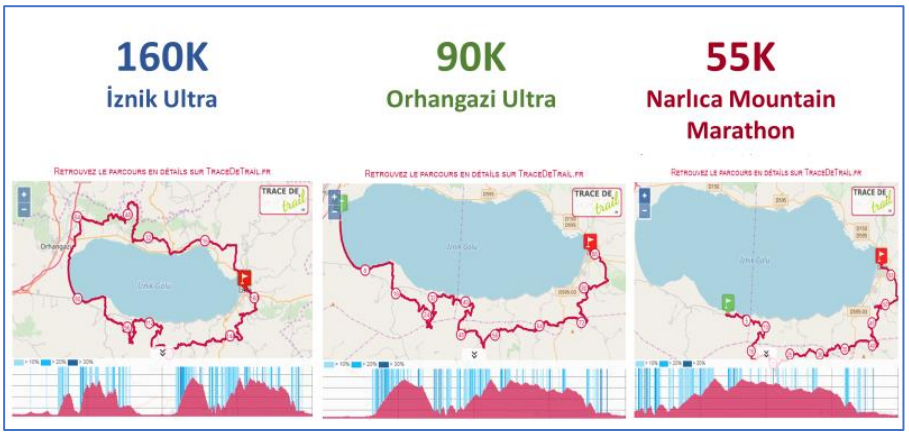
Wherever a performance is held, it is always marked with a beginning and an end. What marks the start of a performance? In a wedding ceremony, the performance starts with a sudden pause in the music and the entrance of the bride and groom into the ballroom with a special piece of music. In a theatre play, it starts with dimming the lights in seating areas, bringing the stage lights up, and opening the act curtain.

The 2019 İznik Ultra 160K ultramarathon performance started with a series of visual, auditory and touching acts: Race presenter’s question “Are we ready?” and then counting back from 10 with the runners and the spectators while waving his hand up and down. In the meantime, some runners were briefly touching their bellies, faces, or backpacks, or looking to their GPS watches. The sounds of clapping, whistling, cheering, bells or horns, finally hearing the command ‘Go!’, and the tearing of the ‘start’ ribbon marked the beginning of the performance. While crossing the timing mat on the ground, the ultrarunners pressed the start button on their GPS watches to track their performance and to stay on the course with the map they uploaded on the watches (see Figure 13).

Figure 13.
İznik Ultra 50K Runners Crossing the Start Line, İ.Ö., 20/4/2019

The 2019 İznik Ultra races were performed around Lake İznik and they were started in stages at different locations (see Figure 14). Around 20% of the route was paved roads, and the rest were paths and single tracks. All three races were in accordance with semi-autonomy rule. The runners were supposed to be self-sufficient in the itinerary between two aid stations. They carried their equipment and supplies and got support at the limited number of aid stations.

Figure 14.
The 2019 İznik Ultra Marathon Racecourse and Elevation Maps



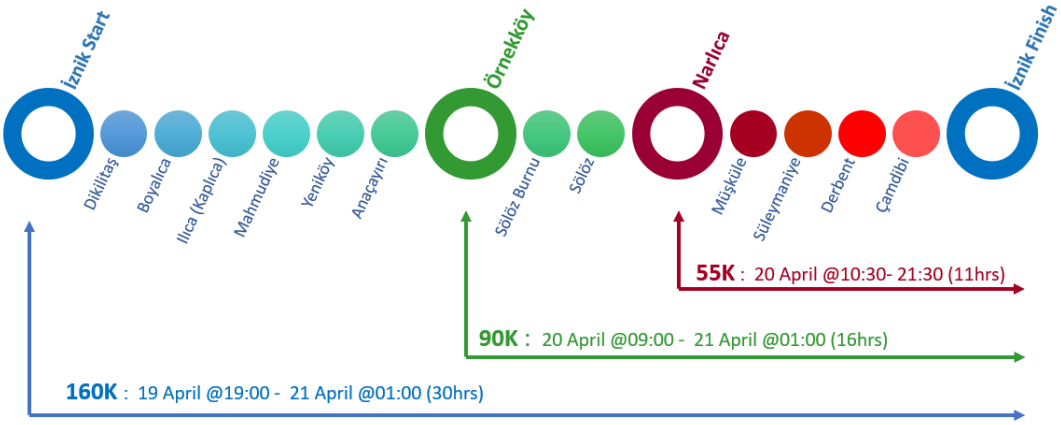
The 160K İznik Ultra race started at İznik city centre with 83 runners (10 women and 73 men) at 7.00 pm on Friday, April 19th. It was a single loop ultramarathon; it finished where it started. The time limit of the race was 30 hours, and 14 CPs were located along the course, between the start/finish lines (see Figure 15).

The 90K Orhangazi Ultra started at Örnekköy, the west end of the lake, with 71 runners (4 women and 67 men) at 9.00 am on April 20th. It was a point-to-point type of ultramarathon; the finish of the race was at İznik city centre. Time limit for this race was 16 hours and there were 7 CPs until the finish line (see Figure 15). The complimentary shuttle services drove the runners from İznik city centre to Örnekköy race start area.

The 55K Narlıca Mountain Marathon started at Narlıca, the middle-south of the lake, with 192 runners (35 women and 157 men) at 10.30 am on April 20th. It was a point-to-point type of ultramarathon like the 90K race, finishing at İznik city centre. Time limit for this race was 11 hours and there were 4 CPs until the finish line (see Figure 15). The complimentary shuttle services drove the runners from İznik city centre to Narlıca race start area.

Figure 15.

The 2019 İznik Ultra Marathon Race Timings and Checkpoints



Once the 160K race started, my fieldwork moved from the start line to the aid stations and eventually to the finish line. The majority of observations took place at the aid stations and the finish line, with a small portion on the trails. I did not run with the ultrarunners on the trails. However, I made observations when interviewing the race photographers as they were taking pictures of the runners on the course. The insights into running an ultramarathon provided in this section are based on my interviews at the aid stations with ultrarunners both daytime and at night as well as off-race in-depth interviews, the in-race shootings of the runners that they shared with me or posted on

Instagram stories, race-related exchanges on running forums, race reports, YouTube videos of ultrarunners, and the race reports and books written by them.

The time window for observing the İznik 2019 ultramarathon races was very narrow, so I had to prepare a thorough plan addressing where, when, and how long to conduct observations at the starts, aid stations, and the finish. The majority of CPs were also aid stations. Only Anaçayırı and Sölöz Burcu were set up as CPs; no aid station facilities were present there. Since the runners were not supposed to spend time at CP only locations, I did not consider adding them to my fieldwork route. While creating the field plans, I reviewed past years' CP passing and race completion times of both competitive and recreational ultrarunners and took into account the time to be spent commuting between the observation locations. Since the 160K race was to be run for the first time and I had no past reference for this race, I talked to my key informant to get his input on the plan.

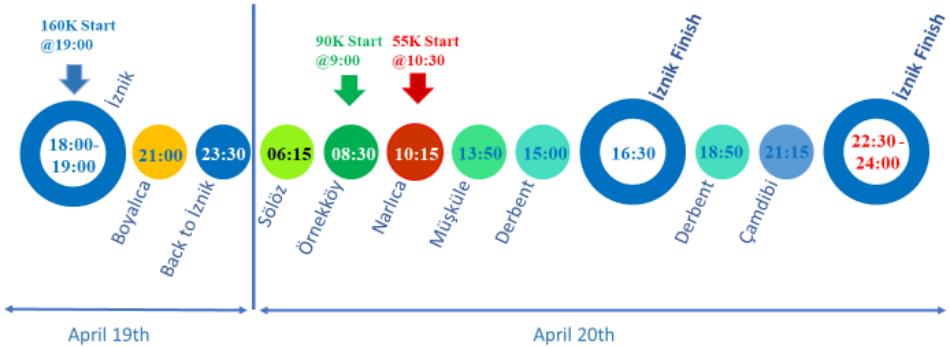
Observing an ultramarathon event requires a continual shift in observation locations as the runners move along the racecourse. On race day, I was starting my observations at the start line, and as the runners move from checkpoint to checkpoint, I was changing my location too. During my in-race participant observation, I was able to observe not only the racers but also their support crew. I was witnessing high and low moments of the ultrarunners at the aid stations and observing their crew helping them to refill their flasks, giving food, helping them to take out objects form the deep end of their back packs, and motivating them for the rest of the race. An aid station volunteer typically works at a few aid stations therefore runners have no chance to see the same volunteer over and over again along the racecourse. As I was travelling from one CP to another, I naturally found myself in the position of a "support crew" for some runners.

The warm-up stage observations were relatively straight forward as they were mostly in walking distances in one large area, however observing the race from beginning to the end was demanding in terms of using time efficiently while dealing with the unforeseen dynamics of the fieldwork as multiple events were running in parallel, e.g., while 160K and 90K raced were in progress, 55K race was starting at Narlıca, requiring back and forth commuting on the course, or while the first group of runners of 55K race were crossing the finish line, 160K and 80K runners were still on the course. In 2019, I conducted observations at the start of the three races (160K, 90K and 55K), at the finish line in İznik city centre and at eight aid stations at different times of the day with multiple visits to them to observe the progress of the performances from

beginning to the end (see Figure 16). The aim of the plan was to observe the interactions of the ultramarathoners at the aid stations at different stages of their race performance, namely from the early hours while they feel strong to the last hours when they feel exhausted. The maximum performance time was 30 hours (160K race), from 7.00 pm on April 19th to 1.00 am on April 21st. I was in the field for 24 hours during the performances. I gave a break between midnight and early morning to be able to conduct the daytime observations efficiently. In 2021 İznik Ultra, during participant observations, I covered after midnight hours, and visited two the aid stations that I skipped in the 2019 races (see Appendix B for the 2021 İznik Ultra and Cappadocia 2019 In-race observation time-lines).

Figure 16.

The 2019 İznik Ultra In-race Field Observation Timeline



The flow of an ultramarathon event is straightforward. The runners are supposed to proceed from one checkpoint to the next on a marked course at a predetermined time. Along the course, ultrarunners pass through settlements, agricultural lands, plains, valleys, hills, forests, woods, lakefronts, and streams. They run, jog (a slower and less intense form of running) or walk. They check into CPs to claim their progress on the course. They eat, drink, rest, change and get medical help at the aid stations. The fastest female and male runners on each course win the race. The first three places receive the winner's medals. In most of the races, no monetary prizes are given to the first three runners by the race organisation; they only receive gifts from the sponsors (e.g., gift vouchers for sportswear, sports-watch or sport supplements, olives as much as the weight of winning runner).

All ultramarathoners who cross the finish line receive a medal, and in some organisations, a finisher vest or jacket too (e.g., Cappadocia Ultra).

No performance can be staged without rules. These rules instruct all parties involved in a performance and cannot be counted as the performance itself (Schechner, 2020, p. 59). Ultramarathoners are bound to follow a set of rules; otherwise, they are subject to penalties and disqualification. Their behaviour is no longer regulated by everyday life rules. They act in accordance with the frame of the race they compete in. There are universal racing rules in ultramarathons. In the case of violation of these rules, the contestants are subject to time penalties or disqualification as defined by the organisations. These are shortening of the course, cheating (e.g., using a vehicle), absence of mandatory equipment on random checks on the course, threatening or disturbing other runners or organisation crew during the race, not helping other runners in danger, disrespecting the environment and the natural areas (e.g., littering on the course), being assisted by a non-authorised person, and absence of bib number and timing chip.

In my research, three types of ultramarathon running attitudes emerged, impacting the runners' movements and interactions on the racecourse. These were 'podium-seeking', 'performance-seeking' and 'experience-orientation'. For podium-seeking and performance-seeking ultrarunners, running ultramarathons becomes a means of accomplishment and achieving a desired level of performance. On the other hand, experience-oriented ultrarunners aim to optimise their experience of ultramarathon running, i.e., honouring their months of training by finishing the race on time while also making the most out of the entire experience through their interactions.

'Podium-seekers' tend to prefer running solo to be able to focus on the course markings and technical terrains. Losing way on trails or getting injured by tripping over can happen at any moment when the runners are distracted by internal or external factors. They prefer not to chat with other runners along the course unless it is necessary. If they see a runner in an emergency, they stop and help the other runner. As soon as the emergency is under control, they swiftly continue their way.

> "Biz biraz daha kürsüye doğru yanaştığımız için çok zaman kaybetme şansımız yok.…Bazı insanlar için ultramaraton koşmak, eğlenmek, Kakara kikiri yapmak…. Ben durmuyorum mesela, sadece tuvalet ihtiyacı için dururum, ihtiyacımı gideririm. CP'lerden sularımı, takviyelerimi alırım. En fazla 1 dk içinde çıkarım CP'den. En fazla o da!"

> *We don't have a chance to lose much time as we approach the podium a little bit more... For some people, running an ultramarathon, is about having fun, laughing, chatting. I do not stop; I only stop for toilet needs. I take care of my needs. I get my water and supplements from CPs. I'm out of CP in a maximum of 1 minute.* (Participant 17, female, 39, 4/9/2021)

Spending time in nature, having the joy of passing by beautiful natural places or places of historical significance, and chatting with fellow runners on the racecourse is not what their primary focus is while running ultramarathons. This does not mean that they ignore such benefits and rewards of running ultramarathons. Such benefits help them to stay motivated on the course. However, the podium goals and the numeric goals they set for themselves (e.g., finishing a race under 10 hours) are their priorities for satisfactory race performance, and hence these goals dictate their experience. They have limited interaction with other runners and volunteers at the aid stations too. They rush into aid stations, fill their water bottles, grab food to eat while on the go, ask for their position in the race rankings, and leave the aid station in a significantly shorter time than the other contestants. Their aid station experience seems like a Formula 1 race car at a pit stop. They may have a crew at the aid station waiting for them to arrive. Their crew makes the food, beverages, and supplements ready for the runner in advance. Some runners shared with me that they witnessed such runners leaving the race (i.e., choosing to be DNF) after they figured out that they would not be able to have a place on the podium, even if they did not have health problems.

The runners, driven with ‘Performance seeking’ attitude, aim to finish the race either with a specific time they set in their mind or as fast as possible. Unlike podium-seeking runners, these runners tend to interact with other runners more. If they happen to catch other runners on the course, they may continue running together with them and chatting as long as they don’t slow them down. When they spot a runner having a hard time continuing in the race, they suggest practical strategies that may help them carry on. They share their food, supplements, or encouraging words to lift them up. If they spot a runner having a health problem, like any other ultrarunner, they put aside their race performance goals and help the runner. In brief, their goals are not as aggressive as the podiums-seekers; so they spare relatively more time at the aid stations, interact more with other runners, volunteers, and locals, and when they encounter beautiful scenery that is worth sparing a couple of moments, they take time to enjoy it.

‘Experience-oriented’ runners aim to reach the finish line on time and injury-free with as many memories as they can collect along the racecourse through their interactions with other runners, volunteers, race crew, locals, and nature, without being stressed about doing their best time. They prioritise their sensory experience. They take breaks to enjoy the scenery, indulge themselves with fruits from the trees, and shoot many videos and pictures. Some of these runners tend to stay solo on the course to spend more time with themselves in nature and savour the moment. They have occasional chats with other runners on the course. Some of the experience-oriented runners enjoy meeting many runners and chatting with them on the course. They keep an eye on the time to be ahead of the cut-off times while spending considerable time at the aid stations. They get good rest, don't rush in to eat and drink, and exchange their significant moments so far in the race with the runners and volunteers.

Depending on the race dynamics, a performance-seeker runner may modify their position to that of a podium-seeker after hearing that they are in the lead pack and may vie for the top three positions. A performance seeking runner may readjust their race performance to that of an experience-oriented runner after having a gastrointestinal tract problem that slows them down significantly. After realising that they are moving much faster than they expected, an experienced-oriented runner may become a performance-seeking runner and strive for a personal best (PB) in that race. Depending on race dynamics, these attitudes are fluid throughout the race; the boundaries between these typologies are permeable. They are not concrete labels defining an ultrarunner but more of a race-specific choices that can be attributed to ultrarunners.

In road races such as marathons, the runners tend to feel the pressure of always running during the race. They push themselves to run faster. Pausing or walking is not the desired state in these races; some even find it degrading. In the contrast, in ultramarathons, running slowly, walking, or even giving breaks at any point on the racecourse are common practises that ultrarunners have peace with. Ultrarunners have a basic motto for every race: keep moving until you can’t, don’t give up. Running, jogging, or hiking are all forms of moving forward. What matters most is to reach the finish line. What happens between the start and finish line is there for an ultrarunner to embrace and deal with. After all, they had prepared their bodies and minds for whatever the course might throw at them with months of training and rehearsing.

One common ultrarunning strategy that ultrarunners use is to divide the racecourse into manageable chunks, e.g., aiming to reach the next aid station within a

time limit they decided prior to the race and focusing on this micro-goal. There is one motto they keep reminding themselves: Place one foot in front of the other and keep doing it until next CP. This serves them by alleviating their concerns and preventing them from viewing the end goal as a monumental task to complete. In order to use their energy efficiently, other strategies they employ are to walk the uphill slopes, especially steep ones and take short breaks on the course when they feel the need.

Running an ultramarathon is being open and adaptable to ever-changing conditions. This is one of the underlying reasons for ultrarunners doing long and arduous training in diverse settings and using a range of techniques. In contrast to road marathons, where many conditions influencing race performance are either stable (e.g., running on asphalt in daylight) or predictable (e.g., weather), ultramarathon runners favour the variety on the racecourse. They expect the unexpected and find a way to keep moving on trails. Unlike road marathons where many conditions impacting race performance are either stable (e.g., running on asphalt at day light), or predictable (e.g., weather), in ultramarathons the runners expect the unexpected and find a way to continue running.

> "Ultra koşmak sürprizlerle dolu. Hava koşulları değişiyor, zemin değişiyor, yokuş toprak değişiyor. Bazen taşta koşuyorsun, bazen toprakta. Sulardan geçiyorsun bazı yarışlarda vs. Çok uzun olursa gündüz başlıyorsun ya da sabahın karanlığında başlanıyor, gece devam edebiliyorsun. Ultra sadece koşmak değil. Ben bunu sevdim aslında ultralarda... Ultra kafası dediğim bütün sürprizlere hazırlıklı olmak."
>
> *Ultrarunning is full of surprises. Weather conditions change, and the type of terrain, soil, and slopes vary. Sometimes you run on rocks, sometimes on soil. You cross the water in some races, etc. If it is a very long race, then you can start in the daytime or before sunrise, and you can continue at night. Ultra isn't just about running. This is what I particularly like about ultras. Being prepared for all the surprises is the ultra-mindset*. (Participant 20, female, 42, 17/9/2021)

While they welcome the unexpected conditions that unfold on the trails, they put effort into controlling what they can. All the runners I interviewed had a strong agreement on one point: "Never consume food or drink that you are not used to and never use a new gear or sportswear during the race. Stick to what was tested at training and rehearsals". Despite knowing this rule, they occasionally disregard it when a vendor at the race expo sells them sportswear (e.g., compression socks), gear (e.g., running

poles), or supplements (e.g., energy gel) with the promise of improved race performance or a shorter recovery period. It could cost them finishing a race much slower than they intended or, worse, abandoning the race. Despite all the measures they take for a smooth race, things can go wrong unexpectedly. The backpack zipper can suddenly break due to excessive load, and contents begin to fall off as they run. While running through a dark forest, the headlamp may break, the GPS watch may stop working, or one of the running poles may fall off a cliff. In such instances, the runners either fix the problem with creative solutions or get help from another ultrarunner, e.g., when the headlamp is broken, they move slowly and as soon as a contestant catches them on the course, they move with the help of the headlight of the other runners.

Perseverance is a key feature of running ultramarathons. The racecourse is a place of extremes, where ultrarunners go on a roller-coaster ride with many sharp ups and downs. Their mood alters depending on their physical and mental state. The mood swings gain momentum as the distances pile up. They have many moments of love and hate relationship with running ultramarathon, loneliness and togetherness, feeling powerful and weak, easy going and aggressive, euphoria and suffering, feeling whole and estranged, in-control and out of control, and tranquillity and chaos.

In every race, there are two sets of start and finish lines. The first one is the official start and finish lines. It is same for every contestant as set by race organiser. The runners are expected to cross the start and finish lines within the total race time and pass all the checkpoints before the cut-off times to complete an ultramarathon performance. On the other hand, there are ‘personal start / finish lines’ too at the different spots of the racecourse as defined by ultrarunners individually. These spots are where they feel the ‘real race’ starts for them or their performance is on the edge of coming to an end. This is where they deeply feel the challenge that they are in, and therefore where the ‘joy’ or satisfaction of ultrarunning starts for some. It is the beginning of reaping the benefits of their arduous training and sacrifices. This could be a particular segment on the racecourse demanding considerable physical effort, e.g., a specific type of terrain, or a tough weather condition (e.g., snow, hail or torrential rain). Or the ‘real race’ may start for them when they feel extremely exhausted, and in pain due to injuries, cramps or gastrointestinal problems. It could be a moment that they start questioning the meaning of their effort, especially when they lost motivation for the race, or when they get bored in the middle of the night, running alone for hours: “Bir alt parkurdan ayrıldığım nokta işte benim kopma anım o an oluyor. Gidebilirdim

oradan işte ne güzel, yarışı burada bitirebilirken sen daha şimdi yeni başlıyorsun" [*For me, the breaking point is when my racecourse diverges from a shorter distance course that we were sharing up until that point. I tell myself: you could have been on your way to the finish line now. The others are done, and you are starting the race right now*] (Participant 11, male, 42, 30/5/2021)

Running an ultramarathon is not only about overcoming physiological and environmental challenges. Crossing finish line requires both physical and psychological capabilities (Noakes, 2006). Inner challenges are sometimes tougher than those they face in the external world. At times when they are exhausted, in pain, experiencing fatigue which is making it difficult to cope with terrain or weather-related difficulties, or simply feeling bored of running for hours, the runners experience a range of unpleasant emotions over the course of a race, and they start negative self-talk. They say things like: "Hep aynı eşekliği niye yapıyorum? Neden 100K üstüne yazıldım!" [*Why do I always do the same stupid thing? What was I thinking when I signed up for a race longer than 100K*] or "Ben ne yaptım! Buralara niye geldim!?" [*What have I done! Why did I come here!?*] (Source: runners' chats at aid stations at İznik Ultra). Sometimes they start talking to geographical formations to channel the negative talk towards another subject, rather than themselves, e.g., complaining the steepness of slope on the hill. One of the almost inevitable moments in an ultramarathon is when ultrarunners question the purpose of running an ultramarathon, or specifically, the distance they chose to run. This happens multiple times during a race as they encounter difficulties and health problems. They ask themselves repeatedly why they endure the pain and struggle that awaits them on the rest of the racecourse. These are the moments of truth at the racecourse. They repeatedly question themselves whether to leave or not to leave the race, as expressed by a 160k runner at İznik Ultra Dikilitaş CP in 2021: "there is no point in running in dust; this bloody dust it is all over my face. Why would I bother to run!"

If ultrarunners have experienced a racecourse more than once, although some segments are found challenging by all runners, every runner has specific areas that make them face their own 'demons'. These places are where they feel fragile and reach a breaking point. The majority of the ultrarunners I talked to stated that completing an ultramarathon requires more mental power than physical strength. At times they are physically challenged and having second thoughts about whether to stay or leave the race, their mental training pays dividends. Positive self-talk, repeating motivational

phrases, imagining a friend or coach talking to them, thinking about the loved ones waiting for them at CPs or at the finish line, visualising the moment of finishing the race, thinking of the time they will spend in the next CP, using breathing techniques, listening to music, singing, and screaming are common practises on trails to manage stress and overcome the men setbacks. In addition to these, some ultrarunners choose to swear on trails to manage their stress and deal with the pain. The research shows that using swear words repetitively produces a hypoalgesic (pain lessening) effect for many people and can be an effective way of increasing tolerance for the physical pain (Stephens et al., 2009). Eating fruits from the trees, washing hair, face, or neck at the fountains, and cooling down and refreshing body by sitting in irrigation canals are pick-me-up moments during a low point in a long race.

Apart from the individual coping mechanisms, perhaps their most impactful hack in such moments is to get motivational support from fellow runners on the course or at the aid stations. Companionship is in the DNA of ultramarathons and solidarity is a non-negotiable value of ultrarunners. They provide physical and mental support to one another on the racecourse. After all, they run in isolated places in nature and need each other to 'survive' in that setting. They do not refer to other runners in the race as opponents, but rather as companions. Regardless of being complete strangers to one another or being friends, accompanying a struggling fellow runner with motivational words, and having a friendly conversation diverting their focus from their thoughts is a widely used approach to lift a runner's mood. A usual approach is to say to the struggling runner, "Hadi abi gidelim yavaş yavaş, ben de zaten yavaş yavaş yürüyorum, hadi gel birlikte yürüyelim" [*Come on bro, let's move on slowly, I'm walking slowly anyway, let's walk together*]. If the runner is struggling due to fatigue or pain, they offer their spare supplements such as energy gels, electrolyte tablets, salt tablets, or pain killers. If necessary, they don't hesitate to share their own food and water supplies with the other runners.

Humour is another adaptive coping strategy that ultrarunners employ to regulate their positive mood and emotions. I observed runners making fun of one another at the aid stations. They make fun of themselves and laugh to lessen the impact of challenges and setbacks, relieve stress from their body and mind. Compared to the time they checked in to the station, after sharing a laugh the instant change in their mood was visible. One of the witty expressions came from a 60-year-old male runner at an aid station who was a podium-seeker runner. As soon as he approached the table, he asked

the volunteer to fill his bottles by saying “Hadi hadi, memeleri doldur” [*Come on, fill the breasts*]. The volunteers and the runners at the station broke into laughter with this unexpected description.

The time sun starts to rise is a turning point for ultramarathoners: “Güneş sanki bir umut yaaa..Sabah gün doğmaya başladığında şarj edilmiş gibi oluyorsun. Şarkılar söylemeye, koşmaya başlıyorsun” [*The sun gives you a sense of hope. When the sun starts to rise in the morning, you feel like you are recharged. You start to sing songs and run] (Participant 6, male, 46, 26/3/2021).* Sunrise acts as a mood booster for ultrarunners; it has a “curtain up” effect on them. It gives them hope and stamina almost like a new beginning for the rest of the race. Like sunrise, changing race wear at a drop bag CP also help ultrarunners feels refreshed both physically and mentally.

During a race, ultrarunners experience many stressors. A stressor is an event or situation leading an individual to perceive their resources are under pressure or exceeded (Holt et al., 2014). Injuries, cramping, blisters, chafing, gastrointestinal tract problems such as bloating, belching, stomach pain, the urge to vomit, vomiting, and nausea are among the common medical issues runners experience due to the extreme physical demands of these events place on participants: “Şeker düştüğü zaman da mide bulantısı başlıyor. Tabii kusabiliyoruz. Benim çok sık başıma gelen bir şey bu. Vücut gerçekten diplere vuruyor kustuğunuzda. O noktada tekrardan ayağa kalkıp ilerleyebilmek çok önemli bir şey” [*Nausea begins when blood sugar level drops. We may vomit then. This is something that happens to me very often. The body really hits the bottom when you vomit. At that point, being able to stand up again and move forward is very important*] (Participant 3, male, 45, 15/03/2020)

According to a study at two large 161-K ultramarathons, nausea and/or vomiting came out the most common reasons for not finishing the race (23%) (Hoffman, et al., 2014). Ultrarunners have hard time with eating and drinking while running on the trails and at aid stations as the kilometres pile up and their energy levels plummet. At the aid stations, I witnessed to this struggle numerous times. Stomach issues were one of the hot topics among ultrarunners to talk about at the stations. Having a food giving them a sense of refreshment such as lemon or oranges were playing critical role for them to feel better, and to continue eating at the station. During a 161K race, an average ultrarunner utilises 500-800 kcal/h while is able to ingest around 200-300 kcal/h, causing a calorie deficit, and such gastrointestinal problems can further compromise intake of the calorie runners need (Hoffman, et al., 2014). Multiple times, I observed

runners wanted to consume food, but they were unable to eat large enough to top up their body. Even they managed to eat, they later informed me that they vomited it 200-300 metres after they left the aid station.

In addition to dealing with gastrointestinal tract issues, fixing foot problems, particularly friction blisters (17%-40% of injuries in single stage ultramarathons), is also critical to completing the performance, i.e., making it to the finish line (Hoffman, et al., 2014). Some runners apply paper tapes to the friction points of their feet to prevent blister, however as they move further on the course, blisters start to appear. Seeing more and more runners' treating their blisters either by themselves or with the help of a race medical team member becomes a regular scene at an aid station. In İznik 2021, one of the 150K runners had to get treated the blisters on his feet at every station I observed, starting from Örnekköy CP, the halfway of the race. The doctor used an injector from time to time to discharge the liquid in the blister so that he could continue running (see Figure 17). He was visibly in agony, but he did not quit the race and crossed the finish line on time.

Figure 17.

Race Doctor Treating Blisters at a CP, İ.Ö., 9/8/2021

An ultramarathon is a sport event where runners not only temporarily face medical problems but also risk their health, and sometimes even their lives. According to a study investigating incidence of deaths in running competitions in the mountains from 2008 to 2019 (including ultramarathons, mountain running and fell running), 51 fatal events were recorded in Western Europe during training, races and after races (Roi, 2021). Ultramarathons contain the risk of life-threatening issues such as major traumas from falls, hypothermia, and animal attacks (Hoffman, et al., 2014). Ultrarunners may expose to natural events such as fires, severe storms, floods or lightening. Though they sign a waiver form to be able to take their bib number at the registration, in case of an emergency situation, they entrust their health and well-being to the race organiser and the crew. In 2021, 21 ultrarunners lost their lives at a 100K race in the Gansu region of China due to hypothermia as they were unexpectedly hit by hail, heavy rain, and gales (BBC, 2021).

The inherent challenges of the unique environments at ultramarathons sometimes lead to medical issues that ultrarunners may have never experienced before at their training or rehearsals. Runners who live at lower altitudes may suffer from headache, nausea, dizziness, fatigue, or tachycardia at rest when they attend races above 2,500 metres. During field observation at Uludağ Ultra Trail, I felt dizzy, probably due to high altitude that I'm not used to. At Cappadocia Ultra-Trail I was significantly impacted by the dry climate and had to stop observing the race after 3 pm to deal with a severe headache. When I discussed this with the informants after the race, they informed me that they prefer to arrive at such races earlier than usual to allow their bodies to adjust to the environment. Despite the measures they take, they still may end up dealing with health problems that they have never had before. Even in such cases, they continue in the name of honouring their commitment to the performance.

When ultrarunners create a high stress on their body at proto-performance stage with high training loads and inadequate recovery, they may suffer from the effects of the overtraining at their race performance. In the 2021 İznik Ultra, at one of the early checkpoints of the race, a highly experienced ultrarunner was suffering from fatigue and nausea. He attributed his low performance at such an early stage of the race to his overtraining and participation into many races since the beginning of the year, not giving time to his body to recover. He eventually decided to leave the race at that CP.

Ultrarunners may experience hallucinations and agitation as a result of pushing their bodies for an extended period of time. The runners talk about their hallucination

experiences at aid stations or after a race when socialising with the other runners. At the aid stations, I sometimes witnessed ultrarunners acting aggressively, impatiently, and even shouting at volunteers or complaining about the race organisation. When the race is over, they usually feel remorse for mistreating volunteers or making false accusations against the race organiser.

A performance goes well beyond what happens onstage. It is operated in the context of a social, cultural, technical, and economic network (Schechner, 2020, p. 54). The İznik Ultra race crew were on duty day and night to ensure safe and uninterrupted performance for the ultrarunners. They set up the aid stations hours before the runners arrive and waited until the last ultrarunner left. They ensured the transportation of the runners who decided to leave the race in the middle of the night or day to the city centre. The locals were ready to offer beverages and food to the runners passing by their villages, some prepared homemade food for the runners to indulge in at the aid station. The race photographers identified the specific spots on the racecourse to wait for the ultrarunners to capture their performance. In choosing the shooting spots, they took into consideration where they could best reflect the different states and emotions of the runners while using the nature or historical places as the background to increase the impact of their performance (see Figure 18).

Figure 18.
Race Photographer at İznik Ultra, İ.Ö., 20/4/2019

Before the race begins, ultrarunners are aware of the exact locations of the checkpoints (CPs), which CPs function as an aid station, what food and drink are served at each aid station as announced at the race website. As they move along the course and reach CPs, they perform repetitive actions: eating, drinking, resting, taking supplements, refilling the bottles with water and cola, taking food with themselves to consume later on the trail, and fixing minor injuries like blisters or wounds.

Aid stations are temporary settlements in a race, where ultrarunners are usually offered a place to sit, access food, drinks and medical care, and get rest in a supportive, friendly atmosphere. They operate within the time frame set by the race organiser. The aid station is set up by the station volunteers and the race crew before the expected arrival time of the first runner. The refreshments on the tables are continuously topped up by the volunteers as long as the station is in operation. When the cut-off time of the station arrives, the volunteers wait for the last runners on the course to arrive at the station and end the race for them, i.e., these runners are marked as DNF on the race tracking lists and they are taken out of the racecourse. After all the racers are counted as checked in, the station volunteers pack everything up and close the station.

Aid stations can be situated outdoors or indoors, depending on the season, the time of the day that they function, and the facilities available at the location. They could be located in a remote place in between two settlements or in a village or town. The aid station can be set up at a designated area by the road, a village square, a section of a village coffee house (köy kahvesi) or restaurant, or a location in front of a local administration building (see Figure 19).

Figure 19.
Narlıca (outdoor) and Derbent (indoor) Aid Stations, İ.Ö., 20/4/2019

If it is not set up inside a building, most of the time tents are built to protect the runners, volunteers, and the food items from direct contact with the sun or any precipitation

An ultramarathon is an organisation based on trust. It is vital for runners to know in advance what services will be provided to them at the aid stations, thus they can make plans and rehearse accordingly. Information on which refreshments will be available at each aid station helps ultrarunners plan the food and supplements they need to carry in their bags to maintain their energy level along the course. While semi-autonomy is a critical aspect of ultramarathons, if an organizer falls short in providing the committed food and beverage support at aid stations, it may have consequences for both the runners' health and their ability to finish the race.

The layout of an aid stations is simple. A timing mat is laid on the ground at the entry to record check-in time to CP, tables are lined up to fill their tops with food and drinks, and chairs or benches are placed to provide a resting area for runners. The tables and chairs are placed in different variations, depending on the size of the physical setting. The optimum use of a station’s physical area is taken into account during the set up. The entrance and exit route of the aid station may have marked at some stations to lead the runners to the right direction. At the entrance of the aid station, a volunteer guides the runners to the timing mat, note down the runner’s bib number and time of entry on a paper form for manual tracking of the racers in addition to digital tracking of timing mats. In some races, instead of using timing mats, a volunteer records the runner's check-in time to CP by holding a small chip-reader gadget close to the runner's race bib.

At every station, the organisation places an information post board, ranging from A3 size to 2 metres tall, to let the runners know of the CP name they checked in, the distance they run so far, the name and distance of the next CP, cut-off time and the course elevation profile (see Figure 20 and Figure 21). These boards act as the visual snapshots of the racecourse. They help runners to organise their behaviour at the aid station accordingly, e.g., how long they can stay there, how much they need to eat or take with themselves to be able to sustain their energy until the next CP. As mentioned at the proto-performance stage, ultrarunners develop race specific strategies. The information post boards assist them in checking their performance against the plans and make changes on the race strategy if necessary.

Figure 20.

Entrance of İbrahimpaşa CP at Cappadocia Ultra, İ.Ö., 19/10/2019

Figure 21.

Sölöz CP information Post Boards at İznik Ultra, İ.Ö., 20/4/2019

Performing at ultramarathons necessitates plenty of eating along the racecourse in addition to running. It requires an optimal nutritional intake. Consuming carbohydrates at race enhances performance of an ultrarunner (Costa et al, 2019). Therefore, ultrarunners expect the refreshments to be served at the aid stations rich in carbohydrates and sugar. The common types of ultramarathon refreshments in an aid

station are savoury food items (e.g., crisps, crackers, bread, cheese, soup), sweet food items (e.g., cake, biscuits, fruits, halvah), and soft drinks (e.g., water, mineral water, cola, tea, coffee). The way refreshments presented on the tables may vary depending on the type of refreshments served in a particular aid station. If hot food and/or beverages are available in an aid station, they are usually served to the runners by the volunteers (e.g., soup or tea). In the 2019 İznik Ultra Marathon, crisps, crackers, cheese, salted peanuts, bread, biscuits, cake, dark chocolate, olives, lemon, orange and banana were served to ultrarunners at the aid stations. Depending on the type of aid station (i.e., mini or full-service), the number of food and beverages items varied (See Figure 22). In a few stations such as Sölöz and Derbent, lentil soup and bulgur pilaf were also available.

Figure 22.

Sölöz CP Refreshments, İ.Ö., 20/4/2019

Depending on the season and the availability of locally grown food, a variety of other fruits are also served to runners at ultramarathons (e.g., grapes at Cappadocia Ultra-Trail). It is also possible to see boiled potato, halvah, protein/energy bars at ultramarathon stations.

With respect to beverages, water and cola are the essential items on an aid station tables (Figure 23 and Figure 24). Sparkling mineral water is the most demanded beverage after water and cola, however depending on the race organiser's choice, in some races it is a staple item on the tables at most aid stations while in other races it is

available at only a few stations. Sports drinks, carbonated soft drinks, and lemonade are the other drinks that may have served at the aid stations.

Figure 23.

Water Dispensers at Derbent Indoor CP, İ.Ö., 20/4/2019

Figure 24.

Volunteer Serving Soft Drinks at Cappadocia Ultra, İ.Ö., 19/10/2019

The presence or absence of a certain type of food or beverage in an aid station sometimes may have an impact on runners' moods. The ultrarunners who arrive at a CP in the early morning look for a cup of tea and/or soup. Sparkling mineral water

becomes the most sought-after drink in the afternoon stage of an ultramarathon in hot weather. The absence of these refreshment items at CPs at the most relevant times may cause frustration, even when the race organiser did not announce providing them. There can also be instances in which ultrarunners discover "surprise snacks" at CPs despite the fact that it was not announced by the event organisation before the race. Such surprises usually provided by either local people or by the volunteers. In the İznik Ultra 2018, at Narlıca CP, a Turkish desert 'Aşure' (Noah's pudding) was brought by the volunteers, not a regular treat to be found a CP.

In the İznik Ultra 2019, last CP before the finish line was Çamdibi village. In addition to the regular food items, at Çamdibi CP there was an additional speciality food on the table: stuffed vine leaves prepared by the village women, a highly favoured special food item in Turkish cuisine. This gave me the opportunity to observe the reactions of the runners to a special treat provided at an aid station. As runners approached the table, I observed a spark of joy on their exhausted faces. Some cheered and shared words of gratitude. Consuming such food provided them with a sense of reward at a time when exhaustion had accumulated from the long distances they had covered, as well as motivation for the final few kilometres until the finish line.

The reaction of runners to refreshments provided at a CP may also vary due to cultural differences as the meaning attributed to a type of food or beverage are not the same in every culture. In the 2019 Cappadocia Ultra-Trail, during my observations at Çavuşin aid station, I frequently noticed the negative reactions of Turkish runners to the tea prepared with teabags while non-Turkish runners did not seem to bother with this detail. Many Turkish ultrarunners asked for if there was 'demleme çay' [brewed tea], meaning that the tea prepared with traditional method, i.e., loose leaf tea brewed for 15-20 minutes. On the other hand, both Turkish and non-Turkish runners seemed dissatisfied when they noticed that the soup was not home-made, i.e., packet soup. The demand for a specific type of food and beverages may vary with the time of the day, season, the distance of an aid station from the start, and the challenges ultrarunners have to overcome in between the two aid stations.

Ultramarathons claim to be environment-friendly events. Therefore, in İznik Ultra and other organisations, all ultrarunners were expected to carry their own reusable cups throughout the race to use at aid stations to drink beverages. They were not given disposable plastic cups or plastic water bottles for individual usage. Organisations avoid supplying beverages to runners in small size plastic bottles (e.g., 250 ml or 500 ml) to

avoid excessive plastic waste. The only exception to this was Uludağ Ultra Trail. The name sponsor of the race, Uludağ Premium, is a natural mineral, spring water and soft drinks producer. They provided water in 400 ml and lemonade in 250 ml plastic bottles to the runners and the race crews. They placed recycling bins at race start/finish area to collect used bottles for recycling. Hot food (soup, bulgur pilaf) and hot beverages were also served in paper cups at ultramarathons. In contrast to consistent expectations from the runners with respect to acting environmentally friendly, the organisations had different interpretations of being environmentally conscious at the races. At the 2019 İznik Ultra 19 lt returnable plastic carboy bottles were used to serve water to avoid excessive use of plastic, whereas Cappadocia Ultra and Uludağ Ultra relied on using 1-1.5 lt pet bottles. These pet bottles were used by runners not only to fill their bottles but also to refresh their heads. On the other hand, in Cappadocia Ultra only paper cups, plates, and aluminium trays were used to serve refreshments, while in İznik Ultra and Uludağ Ultra plastic plates were used.

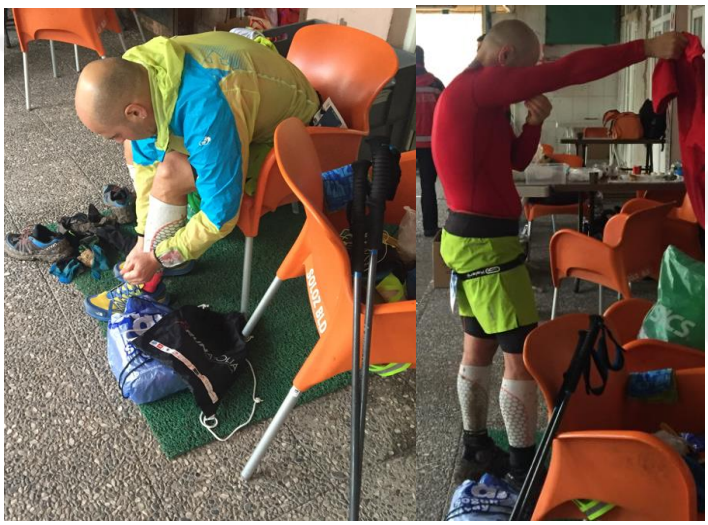
Every social activity creates a cognitive frame, and such frame differentiates a state from the ordinary outside world (Beeman, 2014, p.35). Transition to and away from these states are signalled by clear linguistic triggers. In the 2019 İznik Ultra, the ultrarunners approaching to an aid station were signalled by a volunteer standing at the entrance of the station, saying out loud ‘coming in!’ (gelen var!). The other volunteers, crew and sometimes the villagers sitting at the coffee house (köy kahvesi) or the kids hanging around the aid station say: ‘bravo!’, ‘that’s it!’ (işte bu!), ‘well done! (helal olsun!) or welcome (hoşgeldin), and applause the runners (Figure 25).

Figure 25.
Village Children Cheering a Runner Arriving at CP, İ.Ö., 9/8/2021

Aid stations are analogous to pit stops in a car race. It is where ultrarunners stop moving, take care of themselves with the help of volunteers, and refill their backpacks with the necessary food and beverage items before leaving the station to continue the race. This is where ultrarunners get seated to rest, feel warm, give care to their bodies, e.g., hydration, nourishment, supplements, rest, first aid to blisters and wounds, and reclaim their physical fitness. If it is a drop bag station, then it is a place for runners to refresh themselves from top to bottom, by changing their t-shirts, shorts, socks, shoes, etc., and doing personal care (see Figure 26).

Figure 26.

An Ultrarunner Changing Outfits from His Drop-Bag, İ.Ö., 20/4/2019



An aid station is more than just a physical location that ultrarunners meet their physiological needs. It is where runners recharge themselves both physically and mentally. It is a place making them feel comfortable and relaxed (see Figure 27). It is a place for chatting with fellow runners to vent off the stress, hearing encouraging and motivating words from volunteers and fellow runners, boosting mood, finding a companion for the rest of the race, reconnecting with family and friends, doing an interim evaluation for the race performance, and reviewing the strategy for the rest of the course.

Figure 27.

160K and 90K Ultrarunners at Narlıca CP, İ.Ö., 20/4/2019

Aid stations are ideal venues for ultrarunners to gain racing motivation back. Ultrarunners on the verge of abandoning a race may change their mind after spending time at the aid station. Eating and drinking to refuel their bodies and chatting with volunteers and fellow runners may give them the motivation they lost in between the two aid stations.

Ultrarunners need to watch out for the time they spend in the aid stations. If they are not cautious and fail to find a balance between their resting and moving times, the time they spend at the aid stations accumulates, and eventually, they may face the risk of cut-off towards the end of the race. Ultramarathoners are a very supportive community. When a runner notices the cut-off risk for another runner (e.g., by taking into account that runner's overall performance on the course or the challenges ahead of them in the rest of the race), they tend to urge these runners to leave the station as soon as possible by saying “Hadi ağbi çık artık sen” [*Bro, you’d better leave now*]. Before leaving an aid station the runners make sure that they have everything they came in with. If they leave their running poles at the station, they had to return to fetch them.

At the aid stations, the volunteers perform a few actions. The first action is to immediately fill the bottles of the runners with only water or a mixture of water and cola, as per the runner’s preference. While the runner is seated, the volunteer who greeted them at the entrance of the aid station and filled their bottles either places the bottles in the runner's backpack or assists the runner in doing so. Some runners can be

in a hurry; therefore, the volunteers need to be fast in serving them. If there are hot beverages or cooked food at the station, the volunteers serve them, and from time to time, they check if the runners need more. When a runner's time is up and they are leaving the station, the volunteers ask the runners if they have filled their bottles with water and if they have taken any food. Due to fatigue, the runners may experience difficulties in planning their hydration and nutrition. Therefore, the volunteers make sure that they have everything they need before they leave the station.

During my observations, I noticed that while some runners were throwing their litter on the ground or leaving it on the tables, the others were paying attention to placing their litter into the bins provided at the aid stations, leaving their seating area clean (see Figure 28). The volunteers clean up the station by removing the litter that some runners left on the tables or on the ground. They top up the food items on the plates.

Figure 28.

Littering at the 2019 Cappadocia Ultra Göreme CP, İ.Ö., 19/10/2019

Although ultramarathon contests are positioned as environmentally conscious events and ultrarunners as nature-loving people, the level of emphasis placed on environmental footprint varies from organisation to organisation and from ultrarunner to ultrarunner. In the three ultramarathon organisations I observed (İznik, Cappadocia and Uludağ), the ecological impact of the events varied from race to race, even year to

year within the same organization. In order to reduce the plastic waste of the organisation, in all races the runners were asked to carry their own beverage cup. On the other hand, the use of paper cups and plastic cutlery for hot meals and hot beverages was prominent across all events (see Figures 24, 27 and 28). At İznik Ultra, at some CPs water dispensers were used instead of disposable water bottles as an eco-friendly solution for reducing the use of plastic bottles (see Figure 23). A few experienced ultrarunner informed me that at some ultramarathons outside Turkey such as UTMB, the amount of plastic and paper waste is reduced by not distributing any disposable dishes and cutlery at the aid stations. They invite runners and volunteers to bring their own utensils if they wish to eat hot meals at the aid stations.

Another task that volunteers handle at an aid station is paying attention to the health condition of arriving ultrarunners. If a runner does not seem well, the volunteers ask the medical team to check on their condition. Medical team members may force the withdrawal of a contestant in discussion with the race director and the athlete themselves. After months of preparation, ending a performance at halfway (being DNF), may cause a runner to feel vulnerable or embarrassed. The volunteers are expected to approach these runners carefully, no matter whether they left the race by their choice or were forced by the race team.

The possibility of DNF and the agony of having to live with it later is a shadow lurking behind an ultrarunner: “Yarıştan bir gün sonra bu durumun verdiği vicdan azabını, zorluğu tarif edemem sana, Bütün emeklerin boşa gitmiş” *[I cannot describe to you the remorse and difficulty of this situation the day after the race. All your hard work has been in vain]* (Participant 1, male, 55, 8/8/2021). The significant effort they put forth in training is to leave this shadow as far behind as possible during the race: “Cut-off’ a kalan insanlar topluyorlar. CP’nin kapanması ile beraber seni de alırlar oradan. Hani masayı, sandalyeyi aldıkları gibi. “Bu da burada kalmasın”, toplar götürürler. Hoş bir durum değil ama her zaman ihtimal de var” [*They pick up the runners who failed to reach the CP before the cut-off time. They pick you up from there as soon as the CP is closed. Just like tables and chairs. “Let’s not leave this behind”. They carry away them too. It's not a pleasant situation, but there is always a possibility*] (Participant 10, male, 42, 27/5/2021)

Leaving a race for personal choice is a difficult decision for ultrarunners. During in-depth interviews, while talking about their DNF stories, ultrarunners chose metaphors like "a fly on a white sheet" or "unfinished business" to emphasise their

discomfort. Making the decision to withdraw from a race is analogous to removing a coma patient's life support. Ultrarunners find it hard to be sure whether they have reached their limits or not. Once they let the race team know of their withdrawal decision, they cannot return to the race. They are concerned about what if later they would feel better and want to continue. Ultramarathoners usually do not accept exhaustion as a legitimate reason for quitting a race. Since completing an ultramarathon is the main goal of many runners, they tend to push their limits until they end up missing the cut-off time of a CP, which automatically disqualifies them from the race. Whatever the motivation behind a DNF decision, a runner on the verge of leaving the race goes through emotional turmoil. Ultrarunners sometimes want others to make a decision on their behalf. Since the race organisers are aware of this psychology, they brief the volunteers about not rushing to report a runner as DNF unless there is a medical condition. In such instances, they ask the runner to have a good rest at the station and revisit their decision before the cut-off time. Seeing a runner leave the race can be an emotionally charged experience for other runners and volunteers:

> Eşi dedi artık bırakman gerekiyor falan. Zor bela ikna ettik. Kadın bana sarıldı, nasıl hüngür hüngür ağlıyor. “Bırakmamam lazım, bırakmak istemiyorum ama bir taraftan çok sakatım”. Bir şey de diyemiyorsun, evet bırakması lazım, senin de onu ona söylemen gerekiyor. Ama o da senden ışık bekliyor, “sen yaparsın, bırakma” demeni bekliyor; onu da diyemiyorsun.
>
> *Her husband said to her “you have to quit the race now”. We convinced her with difficulty. The woman hugged me; she was sobbing: "I shouldn't quit, I don't want to quit, but I'm injured,". You can't say anything either; yes, she has to leave, you have to tell her that. But she is waiting for a signal from to carry on, waiting for you to say "you can do it, don't let go", on the one hand, you can't say that either.* (Participant 10, male, 42, 27/5/2021)

Runners decided to leave a race or had to leave the race due to cut-off, either aim to come back to that race next year for payback or totally ignore that race in the future.

Aid station volunteers play a critical role in ultrarunners’ total race experience. They create a positive environment, sometimes even a festive atmosphere as they welcome and sent off runners by cheering. Their small acts of kindness can immediately lift an exhausted ultrarunner’s mood. Their care and attention encourage runners in pulling themselves together and continuing the race with increased motivation. At

ultramarathons, volunteers witness many times the struggles of ultrarunners. Volunteers benefit from helping ultrarunners in a variety of ways, such as supporting their community as a non-racing ultrarunner or receiving emotional gratification by displaying charitable behaviour while working in difficult conditions for long hours. Ultrarunners acknowledge the hard work and sacrifices made by the volunteers and feel grateful to them. The appreciative and positive attitudes of ultrarunners towards volunteers (waving hands, thanking them for their assistance) are not only a way for them to express their gratitude, but also a mental strategy they use to return to the race with positive feelings. The ultrarunners tend to favour aid stations. The hospitality of locals, the variety of food, the attitude of volunteers, or the distinctive geographical or historical features of the station may distinguish a specific station from the rest; they later tend to share these details in their race reports or social media posts.

At the aid stations, ultrarunners' attitudes may range from introvert to extravert, and from self-serving to caring about fellow runners. Some runners choose to relax without mingling with other contestants, while some prefer to converse with them about their experiences on the course. Being in pain for extended periods of time may cause episodes of aggressive behaviour at the aid stations. In the 2019 İznik Ultra Marathon, particularly at Derbent CP, there happened a few tense moments. Increased irritability and aggressive behaviour were more visible among the ones lost their way on the course or have cut-off risk.

Runner fatigue develops in tandem with mileage accumulation. Fatigue may cause cognitive perception issues in runners, and this may impact the way they interact with other runners and the volunteers at the aid stations. During night-time observations at Derbent CP (125 km from the start of the 160K race), the exhaustion in runners' faces was visible. Some of them were unable to express themselves when they entered the station. I witnessed multiple times that the runners were not able to answer the basic questions of volunteers about what they preferred to eat or drink. Some of them were just looking at the volunteers with no response. It was possible to see a runner putting their litter on another runner's plate. Some were asking a volunteer to bring them a cup of soup despite the fact that the volunteer already did it. This is where the role of a volunteer extends beyond handing a cup of soup or tea to a runner and becomes more about handling a runner that is in a vulnerable state with care. In a race, this could be the breaking point for runners; they may not find the strength to carry on. These are the moments where the ultrarunners support one another. At such moments, the runners in

relatively better condition at the aid station give motivation to the ones having second thoughts about finishing the race. They sometimes offer to run together or share a strategy for the rest of the race. This is why highly experienced ultrarunner volunteers choose to work at night at these last CPs to carefully handle extremely exhausted contestants.

Ultrarunners appear as outstanding volunteers at aid stations. They have first-hand experience on running ultramarathons, therefore they can easily anticipate ultrarunners' needs and expectations. They know how to help URs when they are in physical and mental struggles. They do not provide one size fits all solutions. They treat each runner differently depending on their needs. Highly experienced ultrarunners working as volunteer at the aid stations is an important resource for the runners. While serving food and beverages to the runners, in the meantime they observe the runners' overall physical condition. They provide suggestions on how to best refuel to gain their energy back. They inform runners about the critical sections of the course and provide advice on how to run there efficiently and injury-free. They also do quick checks on runners' cognitive performance with the questions they ask. If they spot a problem, they advise the runners have more rest at the station. In the 2019 İznik Ultra, Bakiye Duran, the first ultramarathoner of Turkey was the volunteer in Sölöz CP (see Figure 29) and Aykut Çelikbaş at Narlıca CP.

Figure 29.

Sölöz CP, Volunteer Bakiye Duran, İ.Ö., 20/4/2019

I observed them asking one runner to stay longer in the aid station, another to consume a specific type of food, and yet another to leave the station immediately to avoid hypothermia. They approach the needs of runners on a case-by-case basis based on their personal experience accumulated throughout the years. Such volunteers can facilitate a significant turnaround in an ultrarunner's race performance. Sometimes, a runner leaving the race due to rough weather conditions impacts other runners' morale too, and begin to doubt themselves. In moments ultramarathoners have self-doubt about finishing the race, the guidance or feedback coming from an experienced ultrarunner help them to see the light at the end of the tunnel, as in the following example of the 2019 Cappadocia Ultra 119K race report written in English by an ultrarunner:

> When I arrived at Göreme, I was in such a big panic that I am sure the volunteers in the CP hated me. Luckily, I saw Aykut Celikbas there. He calmed me down and told me that the first part of the race was over, and the second part had just started. He convinced me that I was not late, and I could still make it to the next CP on time (Ulusoy, 2019).

Performers may face a set of universal difficulties that hinder the effective delivery of their performance, such as losing concentration, under-preparation, over-preparation and miscalculation of the context. (Beeman, 2002, p. 99). The 2019 İznik Ultra contestants witnessed extreme changes in the weather (from sunny mild spring weather to snowing cold winter weather) and muddy trails which were demanding extra effort to be able to move on it. The runners who were not adequately trained for adverse conditions hit by the extreme weather, and they decided to leave the race. Some of these runners continued running, however they were moving very slowly on the course, leaving them with the risk of hypothermia. Some did not arrive at Müşküle, Süleymaniye or Derbent CPs before the cut-off times. Their performances were terminated. While resting at the aid stations, the ultrarunners were chatting about the difficulties that were slowing them down or making the experience more painful. Some runners also mentioned that they were engaged way too much in chatting on the course to the point that they lost concentration, missed the markings on the trail and got lost. This costed them both time and extra effort as they ran back to where they went off the racecourse. At the 2019 İznik Ultra, only one out four 160K runners were able to finish the race (The finisher rate was much higher in 2018 140k race, which was 3

out of 5 / 66%). The finisher rate was higher in other courses: 72% at both 90K and 55K races.

In every performance, participants are subject to a series of expectations and obligations. They expect specific acts, events or interventions to happen and want to be assured that some others won't (Schechner, 2020, p. 60). Like in all sports, there is room for cheating in ultramarathons too. Common ways of cheating in ultramarathons are taking a shortcut on the racecourse, not carrying the mandatory kit, leaving batons at an aid station, getting food supplies from the crew in between the stations, and taking a section of the racecourse with the crew car. Among these, taking shortcuts came out as the most mentioned type of cheating during my fieldwork. Ultrarunners such behaviour in the racecourse. Some report these runners to the race authorities for them to get time penalty.

Towards the finish line, the mood of ultrarunners may vary; some feel relieved, while some feel agitated. A race photographer shared with me a memory of his regarding the ultrarunners' psychology in the last kilometres of the race as such:

> Çamdibi köyünde bana kaç kilometre kaldığını sordu. "3.5 kilometren kaldı" dedim. Yüzü bir anda dağıldı ve bana bağırmaya başladı: "Ama bana 3 kilometren kaldı demiştiler, sen de 3.5 kilometre diyorsun!" Ya inanabiliyor musunuz? O kontrol noktasına kadar adam 150 kilometreden fazla koşmuş ve sırf bitiş çizgisine 500 metre daha fazla mesafesi kaldığını söyledim diye bana kızdı. Onun için 500 metre ne ki? Yarışın sonuna doğru depoları boşaldıkça çok asabi oluyorlar
>
> *At Çamdibi village he asked me how many kilometres left. I told him "you have only 3.5 kilometres to go". I saw his face changed instantly and started yelling me "But they said it was only 3 km left from here, yet you are telling me I have 3.5 kms to go!". Can you believe what he said? He ran more than 150 kms until that CP and got upset with me only because I told him the distance to finish line is 500 metres longer! What is 500 metres for him anyway? They lose their nerves towards end of the race as their tanks went empty.*

In the ultramarathon world, the tortoise beats the hare. It is a race where being young does not give an automatic advantage over the older age groups on the way to the podium. It is highly likely to see a 60-year-old runner arrive at the finish line hours earlier than a 30-year-old runner or a female runner become the first finisher of a race,

leaving male contestants behind (e.g., in the 2022 İznik Ultra 90K race, a female runner, Eve Moore, finished the race 25 minutes before a male runner reached the finish line).

There are two different scenes at the finish line, depending on the time of the day. At the 2019 İznik Ultra, at daytime, a brass band was making music at the finish line, many spectators were present, applauding and cheering on runners. As the ultramarathoners were approaching the finish line, the spectators, especially the kids, were demanding high fives from the runners. The runners were waving hands to the crowd, holding hands with a fellow runner as they were getting closer to the finish, jumping while crossing the line, or holding country flags or sports club flags (see Figure 30).

Figure 30.

Daytime Finishers and Spectators, İ.Ö., 21/4/2018

At the 2019 İznik Ultra, as soon as a runner crossed the finish line, one of the race crew presented them a finisher medal. Their photo with the medal was taken by the race photographer. İznik Ultra race organiser, Caner Odabaşoğlu, aims to support the local businesses; therefore, he supplied the medals locally from the craftsmen of İznik ceramics. The local artists designed, and hand painted each ceramic medal. The largest medals in size were given to 160K racers; 90K and 55K medals were relatively smaller.

The runners had mixed emotions as they approached the finish line. They transitioned from the unknown to the known, proving what they were capable of to

themselves and the world. Some of them were blissful, some seemed relaxed, and some were jumping with joy. In the mini-interviews I conducted after the finish or during the awards ceremony, some runners shared with me how they felt both proud and happy, while in the meantime, they experienced a sudden rush of feeling empty, almost sad as the goal that made them jump out of bed every day was over.

Once they crossed the finish line, I heard some of the ultrarunners claiming, "I will never register for the long course of this race again." Their friends replied to them: "Yeah, last time you said the same! I know, you'll do it again, like you promised the same in the previous race". It seems like they have regret when they feel roughed up due to fatigue and pain, and once it is over, they spring back.

There is another scenery at the finish line if a runner makes their way to the finish at late night. The finish line lacks the daytime excitement of the audience as the majority of the spectators are gone; mostly the families and friends of the runners on the course or some of the ultramarathoners who finished the race earlier wait at night for the remaining runners on the course. Many runners of the 160K and 90K of the 2019 İznik Ultra reached the finish line around midnight while the rain was pouring. There were few spectators cheering them on; the crew was shaking cowbells to create some noise to celebrate the finisher, weak applause from the small number of spectators; the soundscape of the finish was almost muted compared the that of daytime. Despite the long hours of struggle in tough weather and terrain conditions, late-night finishers had the experience of a deserted finish, i.e., not many spectators cheering them towards the finish line, except for their family members and friends (see Figure 31). A runner complained about the fact that they spent more time on the racecourse and went through hardship for a longer period, but their struggle was not recognised as much as the early finishers.

Figure 31.

Late night 160K and 90K Finishers, İ.Ö., 20/4/2019

Satisfaction from a race is impacted by a multitude of factors, such as a racecourse passing by natural beauties and historical places, challenging terrains, altitude and cut-off times, and tough weather conditions. Easy wins do not satisfy ultrarunners; they look for going through tough conditions that eventually amplify the taste of victory and make a race more memorable and newsworthy for them. The variety of food and beverage supplies at aid stations, and uplifting interactions with local people and volunteers also contribute their satisfaction from a race. Seasoned ultrarunners internalize the fundamental principle of ultrarunning: self-sufficiency. They act upon this principle at ultramarathon races and do not complain of aid station services or the markings at the racecourse. On the other hand, inexperienced runners tend to expect race organizers to make their suffering more bearable and rewardable through the services they provide.

Cool down:

Finishing an ultramarathon, regardless of ranking, makes them feel successful. In road races such as marathons, what makes a contestant a "successful runner" is the finish time and/or ranking, whereas in the ultramarathon community, being a finisher is the definition of success. When compared to road marathons, where finish time is the sole performance and recognition criterion, ultramarathon runners have a greater chance of feeling satisfied with their performance and hard work. The meaning of crossing finish line changes over time as an ultrarunner gains experience. Seasoned

ultrarunners tend to be pleased and satisfied with seeing how their months of preparation pay off, whereas a first-timer feels euphoria upon crossing the finish line after all the sacrifices they have made and the agony and suffering they went through. At the finish line, spectators see the runners crossing the 'threshold' once more, but this time in laughter, screams, shouting, crying, sobbing, kneeling down on the floor, and jumping up with joy.

Schechner refers cool down as the sister of warm up. This is the transitional phase of a performance from the state of show to 'show-is-over' state (Schechner, 2020, p. 55). During cool down, performers unwind, change their performance outfits, and slowly get back to their regular life. At the 2019 İznik Ultra, the crew presented finisher medals to runners who crossed the finish line. The race photographers photographed them as they crossed the finish line. The race photographers also caught their emotional moments. The runners were provided with a meal by the race organiser (finisher's buffet) to catch their breath, and get their energy back with a proper meal after long hours, and finally leave the race area to get some rest. Some of them preferred to do stretching exercises to relax their muscles (Figure 32).

Figure 32.

Cooldown Stretching After the Race, İ.Ö., 21/4/2018

In other races I observed, there were sports physiotherapists helping ultrarunners relax their stiff muscles with massage. At the finish line, the race medical crew was also on hand to provide medical assistance to the ultramarathoners.

After finishing their race, ultramarathoners tend to come back to the finish to cheer on their fellow ultrarunners approaching the finish line. Despite the soreness and fatigue that they feel in their bodies, some wait there, standing, until the cut-off time of the race. By doing this, they not only share the moments of victory of their fellow runners, but at the same time, seeing other runners arrive at the finish line presents them with an opportunity to relive the euphoria of the finish moment over and over again. Some runners do not prefer to spend time with fellow runners immediately after finishing the race. They spend time alone to process the experience. On the next day of the race, they are ready to mingle with the community, exchange their race stories, and celebrate the success together.

Race finish lines or award ceremonies are used to stage ritualistic key moments in their lives. The proposals are made either as soon as the runner finishes the race or during the award ceremony (see Figure 33).

Figure 33.

Marriage Proposal at the Award Ceremony, İ.Ö., 21/4/2019

The award ceremony is one of the key activities of cool down. The end of the ceremony marks the closure of the performance, like the ‘curtain down’ of a stage performance. A typical sight after the race is runners in flip-flops, slides, or sandals,

regardless of the season, and wearing race t-shirts (or finisher vests if given by the race organisation). They tend to limp or walk slowly. When they are climbing to the podium, the ultrarunners waiting on the podium help them, as they have pain and sore muscles in their legs. While the winners take their spots on the podium, they show their sports clubs or sponsors' flags. They receive their medals and prizes from the sponsors while other contestants cheer them for their success (see Figure 34). With the conclusion of the ceremony, ultramarathoners leave their transitional state

Figure 34.
Award Ceremony at İznik Ultra 2021, İ.Ö., 8/8/2021

The cool down process for the organisation starts before the ultrarunners leave town. A task force removes markings from the racecourse. This action is called "sweeping the racecourses" (parkuru süpürmek). They may also clean the litter (e.g., gel sachets) that some runners left behind despite the strict rules against it. İznik Ultra organisation calls this task force "last sweepers" (son süpürücüler) in relation to the idea of a final pressing operator (son ütücü) in the garment production process. The race start/finish arch, race tents, and platforms are dismantled. The vendors and service providers of the race expo usually wait until the late evening of the award ceremony day to pack their goods and leave the race town.

5.2.2.3. Phase III: Aftermath.

After math is the period of evaluation, critique, and memory reinforcing activities after a performance. At this stage ultramarathoners do a self-evaluation, review the race with other ultrarunners, take lessons from their mistakes, further develop their winning race strategies, post their race photos on social media, and write race reports. This stage has no hard closure date. It can last from one day to years for an ultrarunner, depending on the impact of a race in their life. During this stage, they come together with fellow ultrarunners to exchange highlights of the race, show each other shootings from the race while having breakfast or dinner together or while travelling back home. As the memory of a performance fades away quickly, they post their race highlights on Instagram or YouTube vlogs.

Ultrarunners process their experiences and make these memories last by writing race reports. They usually publish these reports on a personal or team website or a running forum. Some ultrarunners keep these notes to themselves as a personal memoir and do not publish them on any platform. In race reports, they share the story of their experience of the race, including the development of their thoughts and feelings as well as their physical condition as they progress through the kilometres, their overall impressions of their performance, and the lessons they learned from the race. The ultrarunners also add photographs to their race reports, either ones they took or ones race photographers, as well as their friends, took, to add visual context to their story. Sometimes they also provide a summary of their training and the reason for choosing the race.

Typically, one week after the race, the race organiser uploads the race photos to the race website, taken by the multiple race photographers at the different segments of the racecourse, for the ultrarunners to download. Some of them charge for this service, and some of them do it free of charge. The runners share these photos on their social media accounts with a few comments on how they felt or went through the race day. These posts fade away around a month later; runners stop sharing the photos of the race as they start to gear up for the next race and share its training photos.

Schechner (1985) considers two types of performances: Performances transporting the performer and performances transforming the performer. (p. 130). He

argues that each performance is a transportation, which takes the performer to a liminal space, a performative world, and when the performance over, the performer goes back to ordinary life, ending about the point where they started. However, a series of transformations may lead the performer to a transformation eventually.

In ultramarathons, not only the runners, but also the race crew and the volunteers perform. As explained earlier in this section, sometimes experienced ultrarunners work together with other volunteers at the aid stations to help the organisation team. These experienced volunteers closely interact with the contestants and transfer their experience to the runners who need guidance or motivation. They sometimes can be the source of inspiration for runners to continue the race who are on the verge of quitting the race. As a result, these skilled volunteers facilitate the transformation of the contestants. These volunteers may not change at the end of their performance. Once the race is over, they return to their usual life unchanged, in other words 'transported'. If a change happens, it is mostly subtle. It occurs when they gain more respect from the ultrarunners they helped.

At the end of a race, like these volunteers, some ultrarunners may cross the finish line as transported too. They may have signed up to a race not too far away from their comfort zone, or their race goal was to spend good time with the ultrarunning community without pushing their limits to an extreme point. They may have performed with the attitude of an 'experience-oriented runner'. Because of the way ultramarathons are designed, all runners face varying degrees of difficulty and deprivation on the course. Depending on the runners' trail experience, they may not be as affected by setbacks and deprivations as other runners. They may choose to run together with another ultrarunner on the course and share good camaraderie while experiencing the racecourse together. At the end of the race, their performance may not lead a significant change in their physical or spiritual world. They may not be the same person they were before the race, but the scope of their self-discovery may remain limited. In such incidences, running an ultramarathon may serve them more of a calibration tool. In their daily lives, they are professionals, and may hold a position of power. Being in nature reminds them how vulnerable they are as human beings, and this helps them to develop a sense of modesty: "Kendinizi çok küçük hissediyorsunuz; dünyaları ben yarattım modunda çıkıyorsunuz" [*You feel insignificant. You come to your senses, and you stop boasting]* (Participant 11, male, 42, 30/5/2021)

Coming back to Schechner's argument on the types of performances, he holds the view that both transportation and transformation performances coexist in the same event. Transformation performances are integral to initiation rites, which are designed to transform people from one status or social identity to another. (Schechner, 1985, p. 127). Unlike transportation performances, the transformation performances change the performer permanently. Schechner (1985) attributes significance to the markings, additions, and subtractions that happens during the initiation rites on the transformed body. He suggests that these are loaded with power and bind a person to their community or associate them with a social identity (p. 131).

While some ultrarunners are slightly or not changed after an ultramarathon race, i.e., 'transported, there is a portion of runners who cross the finish line transformed; they meet with a new version of themselves. They become someone who left an old physical and/or a psychological barrier behind, and ready to use this new reference point in their daily life. Such transformation may happen when they try a significantly longer distance (e.g., 160K race), an environmental extreme (e.g., running in a desert) or a new format (multi-staged ultra) that they haven't tried before. They feel extremely pushed beyond their limits in many ways. They experience a whole new set of physical and cognitive problems. In traditional societies, many initiation rites engage pain and markings on the body. An ultramarathoner go through a similar experience. They lose their toenails on the racecourse, tape back the loosened skin under their feet, cough blood, or deal with severe vomiting: "Kan tükürüyoruz. Öksürmeye başlıyorsun, balgamdan sonra kan tükürmeye başlıyorsun. Ama biz devam ediyoruz" [*We spit blood. You start coughing, after phlegm you start spitting blood. But we continue*] (Participant-33, Male, 45,15/03/2020). While they spend hours on the course alone at day and might, they deal with the voices in their heads. When they emerge from this experience, they are not the same person they left at the start line.

5.2.3. Summary: Cycle of Ultrarunning Performance

Participating in an ultramarathon race requires developing requisite skills over a prolonged training period. The ultrarunners are completely immersed in their performance during an ultramarathon, with the support of volunteers waiting to help them day and night at the checkpoints. Following the race, they attain a sense of achievement and an immediate urge to pamper themselves.

Ultramarathon events serve as a physical space for the reunion of ultramarathon community members where they reinforce their ties, exchange their experiences, celebrate the surpassing of existing limits, support one another in their journey, and witness outstanding stories of willpower.

Every performance includes some form of ritualised behaviour, and ultramarathon running is no exception. Ultrarunners have their own rituals, which can be considered key elements of the ultramarathon culture. Traveling together and sharing a room, visiting a marathon fair to meet with other runners, counting back at the start line, cheering ultrarunners arriving at or leaving the checkpoint, running the last couple of metres to the finish line no matter how tired they are, posing with the race medal for the race photographer, and wearing the race t-shirt/fleece jacket after the race and hanging around with it are a few examples of these rituals.

Ultramarathon running is a continuous cycle in ultrarunners' lives. The cycle initiates with the race decision, and continues with preparing physically and mentally for the race, and progresses further with performing at the race. For an ultramarathoner, a race does not finish right after crossing the finish line or when for some reason they had to left the race; it takes time to process the total experience, make decisions and take some actions to reach closure. Aftermath in Schechner's performance process framework is a critical enabler of closure. After doing a post-race evaluation right after the race with fellow ultrarunners as well as spending time on their own in the coming days or even weeks rewinding the race in their minds to identify what went right and what went wrong, they draw lessons from this performance. They share these either on a social media post or in a race report they upload on a website, or they simply exchange them at a training session with other runners. These actions finally carry them into a quasi-closure state. Many times, they cannot reach a full closure because the "duration of aftermath is indefinite" (Schechner, 2020, p. 56). For a full closure, an ultrarunner may need to perform in that race one more time if they were unable to cross the finish line. In fact, even a race was performed successfully, the ultrarunners may revisit the learning of this race in the light of a new input they had from another race they participated in, hence they re-open the case in their minds and draw further conclusions. Bringing this post-evaluation process to a complete end may not be possible for some performances. Whether there is a partial or complete closure, once the soaring muscles

find relief and begin to recover from the race's fatigue, the ultramarathoners initiate the new cycle for the next race, for the next goal.

Having defined the flow and dynamics of an ultramarathon event, in the chapter that follows, I present what motivates ultramarathoners to run ultra distances despite the unequivocally arduous nature of their sport, how ultrarunning affects their lives, and how they create and foster their community.

5.3. Ultramarathon Running: A Journey Within and Outside

Although ultramarathoners appear to be on a physical journey, passing through mountains, valleys, forests, or deserts, a closer look at the ultrarunning phenomenon reveals that, in parallel, they are also on an internal journey, traversing their beliefs, experiences, relationships, and the meaning of their lives. In the previous section, the performance process of ultramarathon running was explained using the 2019 İznik Ultra as an example. This part of the thesis further discusses the findings on the phenomenon of ultramarathon running within the context of liminality and liminoid. It aims to address the experiences and sensations generated by ultramarathon running, the motives of ultrarunners, the claimed benefits associated with ultramarathon running, as well as its impact on their lives on multiple fronts. I will also present the dynamics behind the emergence of ultramarathoner communitas and the vocabulary they use as a key component of ultrarunning culture.

5.3.1. Ultramarathon as a Liminoid Experience

> *"Moving is knowing. The walker knows as he goes along. Proceeding on his way, his life unfolds: he grows older and wiser."* (Ingold, 2015, p. 47)

In every race, ultrarunners set out on two journeys: one within and one outside. Although their physical journeys take place on the same path, their inner journeys take them down different paths. The participants stressed multiple times that what makes ultramarathons a significant experience in their lives is mostly the journey, not the destination. After months of preparation, they embark on a new journey into the unknown at the start line, no matter how familiar they are with the distance or the terrain. For ultrarunners, each ultramarathon has its own unique story, which unfolds

gradually as they pass through the check points. As they run, they face challenges and dramas, experience joy and camaraderie along the path, and finally make their way to the finish line-if they can. The person who started the race is no longer the same person. As an ultrarunner expressed it in her book: “Ve bitiş noktasına geldiğimde gözyaşlarımı tutamadım. Başarmıştım…Bedenimde yorgunluk vardı ama ruhumda yeni bir başlangıcın enerjisi ve heyecanı filizlenmişti. Yaşam bağımı burada bulmuştum. Ben burada yeniden doğmuştum” [*And when I got to the finish line, I couldn't hold back my tears. I had made it… My body was tired, but the energy and excitement of a new beginning sprouted in my soul. I found my bond with life here. I was born again here*] (Baltacı, 2020, p. 141).

According to Turner, liminal phenomena present their participants with situations outside their normal lives, breaking from the routines and repetitions of life, and stepping into a new status; the legitimacy of institutionalised statuses, roles, norms, and values of ordinary life is suspended (Turner and Turner, 1978). In liminality, there is no certainty concerning how it will evolve and result. Pre-existing notions of existence start to dissolve and transform. In this transitional phase, individuals leave old identities behind and, at the end of the liminal experience, become something new. Turner used "liminoid" to describe ritual-like symbolic actions that took place during leisure activities. He classified rituals, mainly in premodern and agricultural societies, as liminal phenomena and performance genres such as theatrical plays and music concerts in industrialised societies as liminoid phenomena.

Turner (1982) characterises sport as a liminoid, a liminal-like, phenomenon like art performances. His distinction between the liminal and the liminoid is based on the sacred. While social obligations are the source of motivation for attending liminal activities, liminoid activities require a sense of voluntarism for participation. He identifies liminoid (liminal-like) phenomena as spectacular and frequently commodified performances, appealing to individuals or small set of individuals. Being a sporting activity, ultramarathons meet many of the criteria that Turner identified as liminoid, with some exceptions indicated later in this section.

Liminoid and liminal processes share important characteristics, including “escape from the classifications of everyday life, symbolic reversals, destruction-at a deep level- of social distinctions.” (Turner, 1979, p. 491) When the liminality properties were examined, in the context of ultramarathons, the most prominent observed

characteristics included communitas, transition, homogeneity, equality, absence of status and rank, uniform clothing, minimization of gender differences, disregard for personal appearance, humility, simplicity, unselfishness, and acceptance of pain and suffering. In an ultramarathon, the arch and the race timing mat at the start line function as the limen (threshold), separating the ultrarunners from the liminoid (liminal-like) state that they are about to step into, where they leave their names, status, roles, routines, and responsibilities behind. During liminal phase, the ritual subjects are given new names to indicate their 'no longer/not yet' status (Deflem, 1991, p. 13). In ultramarathons, the number on the bib replaces the ultrarunner's name throughout the race; their names, titles, or status lose its significance. The runners attach the race bib to their outfit and always keep it visible during the race, as required by the race organizer. As they move along the racecourse, the organisation crew refers to ultrarunners with their numbers instead of their names; their check-in time to the CPs or their race status is recorded by their bib numbers, e.g., "Number 335 needs to see the doctor", "Number 10 decided to quit the race. Mark him as DNF!". One of the characteristics of liminoid phase is wearing uniform clothing and disregarding personal appearance. All ultramarathoners are expected to adhere to the rules set by the event organizer, including the outfit they can wear and the gadgets they can carry; therefore, they all look similar in terms of what they wear and carry with them. Mud stains on their legs or body odour are perceived as normal. Unlike road races, at ultramarathons, the elite athletes are not given a head start. They line up at the start side by side with the recreational athletes, and the ultrarunners start the race all together. A gender-neutral space also emerges during the ultramarathon liminoid phase. All ultrarunners are exposed to the same external conditions. Both female and male participants that I interviewed indicated that on the racecourse gender differences melt away and they respect one another equally for the effort they put forward. They stressed paying great attention to helping one another on the course, regardless of gender. As soon as the race starts, ultramarathoners set on a journey to acquire the necessary experience before re-entering society. Experienced ultramarathoners working in aid stations and the race organisers who are also ultrarunners, act as "ceremony masters". They guide the runners throughout their liminoid journey so that ultrarunners can complete their performance and reintegrate with their families, friends and other spectators at the finish line.

Turner associated two types of freedom with leisure-time. Both “freedom from” and “freedom to” coexist in running ultramarathons (Turner, 1982, p. 37). When running an ultramarathon, ultrarunners emancipate themselves from adhering to regular sleeping and wake times, performing daily family chores, refraining from consuming highly processed food or sugary drinks (e.g., crisps, cakes, carbonated soft drinks), changing outfits for every social occasion, and being preoccupied with personal hygiene and grooming. This gives them "freedom from" family, social, and work obligations—a breathing space away from daily dominant structures and cycles. Ultrarunners also experience “freedom to” test the limits of their body and mental power, experiment with dealing with pain and suffering, take risks in nature, and connect with people from all walks of life and ages.

Ultramarathoners are exposed to both emotional and physical difficulties in liminal-like space. While undergoing ultramarathon experience, they face multiple adversities sourced from terrain and weather conditions as well as physiological problems. They encounter circumstances that give rise to conflicting emotions and feelings. In this liminal-like space, hope and new possibilities go hand in hand with discomfort and despair. Ultramarathoners accept the conditions and instead of complaining about them, they focus on finding solutions to be able to make their way to the finish. Turner argues that in liminality the social order may appear to be turned upside down and familiar is defamiliarized (Turner, 1982, p. 27). Running ultramarathons alters the normal, as one participant put it: “Normal hayatta çamurdan, sudan, taştan, yokuştan kaçarsın. Orada, patikada, bunları dert etmiyorsun. Bir rahatlık içindesin” [*In everyday life, you would avoid mud, water, stones, and slopes. You don't mind them on the trails; you're at ease*] (Participant 1, male, 55, 8/8/2021). At ultramarathons, the runners do things they would not prefer doing at regular times, e.g., constantly moving for 30 hours without sleep, running in the woods alone at midnight, running immediately after eating, or urinating and defecating in the outdoors.

Liminoid events contain the potential for the development of an intense egalitarianism, social bonding, and comradeship among the participants, which is called communitas (Turner, 1982). Given the arduous conditions ultrarunners are subject to at both training runs and races, ultramarathons host the ideal conditions for communitas to emerge. The development and features of communitas experienced in ultramarathon

running are discussed in great detail in a separate subsection (i.e., No runner left behind: Ultrarunning communitas).

By deciding on their race calendar for the year, the ultramarathoners choose the number of liminoid experiences and the location of these experiences that "stamp their personalities" (Thomassen, 2014, p.4). In contrast to liminal phenomena, where the entire community participates in a ritual not by choice but by obligation, in liminoid phenomena, like ultramarathon events, attendance is voluntary and driven by individual agendas, occurring in a fragmented, intermittent time frame (Turner, 1982, p. 54). Ultrarunners are free to choose the races they want to participate in and withdraw their participation at any moment.

While liminoid genres emphasise individual reflexivity and subjective flow, liminal genres place a lot of emphasis on plural reflexivity and mass (shared) flow (Turner, 1979, p. 494). Ultramarathoning entails long hours of solitary running on trails, and ultramarathoners find plenty of time for introspection in this liminoid space. They reflect on their past experiences, choices, and the way they approach life. In the liminoid space of an ultramarathon, very long distances are crossed in the company of others, yet it is a very long journey on your own as one participant put it: "Ultra maratoncuları dervişlere benzetiyorum. Aslında dervişin yolculuğu gibi, dervişin çile çekmesi gibi o parkurda gidiş, orayı bitirmeye çalışmak" [*I liken ultramarathoners to dervishes. In fact, like the journey of dervish, the suffering of dervish, moving on the racecourse, trying to finish it*] (Participant 8, male, 41, 17/5/2021). During my discussions with the ultrarunners, I heard them making references to pilgrimage to articulate their experiences of ultramarathon running. Pilgrimage, from Turnerian perspective, has liminal features as its participants become equal when they separate themselves from everyday structures and social identities, resulting in a homogeneity of status and a strong sense of communitas (Turner, 1978). Ultramarathon running becomes a secular form of pilgrimage for some ultrarunners. Like some pilgrimage practices involve movement (e.g., knee-walking at the sanctuary of Fatima in Portugal or running back and forth for seven times between the hills of Safa and Marwa hills during Hajj), ultramarathon running may lead to a transformational journey performed on the move. It involves a territorial passage where ultrarunners experience a connection with a higher power, unity and a sense of catharsis while moving along a racecourse day and night, sometimes alone and sometimes in the company of other

contestants, with limited support from the external world. The sense of connection with a higher power and the feeling of unity are discussed in more detail in a subsection called ‘connected and free’ that follows.

When Turner’s distinction between liminal and liminoid genres of performance is considered, some aspects of ultramarathon running appear to be skewed more towards the liminal than the liminoid. Turner argues that transition, which is one of the key features of liminality, does not exist in liminoid experiences. In contrast to liminal experiences, he suggests liminoid as optional, a playful as-if experience that gives space to breaking from normality, without being involved in the resolution of a personal crisis or change of status (Thomassen, 2015, p.47). In fact, this feature slightly pushes ultramarathon away from being a truly liminoid phenomenon and gravitates it towards liminal genres. Depending on the ultrarunner’s race choice and the race goals, an ultramarathoner may either feel transformed or transported as they emerge from liminoid space and reintegrate into society (please see section “Phase III: Aftermath” for a detailed discussion on transformed vis-à-vis transported concepts). The ultrarunners who successfully complete their first ultramarathon, or a difficult ultramarathon establish new limits for their present selves. The hardship they went through on the racecourse may transform their perception of themselves. This may not happen every time, as in the case of liminal phenomena; however, it could be asserted that ultramarathons may witness transition (or in Schechner’s terms transformation) of some ultrarunners.

The cyclical nature of ultramarathons also poses a difficulty for Turner’s liminal/liminoid distinction. Turner (1982) suggests that liminal phenomena tend to be concerned with calendrical rhythms, whereas liminoid phenomena are continuously generated and are not cyclical (p. 54). Every ultramarathon event has a specific time slot in a year (e.g., İznik Ultra in April or Cappadocia Ultra in October), and unless there is an extraordinary development (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic, wildfires), the ultramarathon organisations host ultrarunners every year around the same time. During the interviews and social media observations, I observed that the ultramarathon community longs for the race weeks and makes significant arrangements in their private lives to be able to participate in these events. In addition to the races that ultrarunners decide to contest in a given year, some ultrarunners also choose to attend the same ultramarathon organisation year after year, almost as if it were a ritual of their

ultrarunning practise (the participants frequently mentioned the Iznik Ultra and Cappadocia Ultra for this purpose). Rowe (1998) argues that given the wide spectrum of modern sports, some sporting events may serve the transformative needs of individuals or eufunctional needs of communities, which was attributed only to liminal genres by Turner (p. 54). She points out that modern sport presents a clear case to critique the liminal/liminoid distinction and encourage further analysis (Rowe, 1998, pp. 57-58).

In this section, it has been discussed that ultramarathons present a liminoid experience to recreational ultrarunners. Although Turner considers sporting events as liminoid genres, ultramarathon running has several characteristics that are unique to liminal phenomena. As a result, it is possible to conclude that ultramarathon running is a liminoid phenomenon with a rich liminal experience. The section that follows moves on to review the arrangements and sacrifices recreational ultrarunners make in their lives to be able to participate in ultramarathons.

5.3.2. Leading Life à la 'Ultra': The Choices Made

> *One of the most significant facts about us may finally be that we all begin with the natural equipment to live a thousand kinds of life but end in the end having lived only one* (Geertz, 2010, p. 50).

One can observe the characteristics of serious leisure in the way the recreational ultrarunners do their sport, including perseverance, leisure career, significant personal effort, durable benefits, a unique ethos, and identification with pursuit (Stebbins, 2014, pp. 8-9). They approach their sport with dedication, rigor, and discipline; they set certain challenges to be able to continue experiencing the same level of fulfilment. Ultramarathon running provide them many benefits, such as self-actualisation, feelings of accomplishment, renewal of self, and sense of belonging. Ultrarunning becomes a lifestyle choice for them; many aspects of their lives revolve around race preparation and racing. They dedicate significant effort into their training as well as acquiring specific skills, and knowledge to able to perform at ultramarathons. Therefore, race participation decisions play a significant role on how they organise their lives and relationships.

When ultrarunners make decisions about which ultramarathon events to participate in, their choices in other areas of their lives are inevitably influenced. They make arrangements in all other parts of their lives to be able to cater the needs of intensive training and race participation plans. These arrangements may vary in a wide spectrum, from opting out of a particular food from their diet to minimising the time they spend socialising with friends or family outside home or selling personal car to finance the participation expenses of a race abroad. Such changes eventually may lead to some permanent changes in their lives. As one participant expressed: "Ultra bütün hayatımı değiştirdi. Yani baştan sona, beslenmeden tutun da yaşama şekline kadar her türlü şeyimi değiştirdi. Oradan öğrendiğim pozitif şeyleri hayatıma yansıttım. Yanlış yaptığım şeyleri hayatımdan sildim ve attım. Yani buna evliliğimde dahil olmak üzere" [*Ultra changed my whole life. I mean, it changed everything from top to bottom, from my diet to the way I live. I incorporated the good things I learned there into my life. I threw away the things I had done wrong in my life. I mean, that includes my marriage*] (Participant 7, male, 48, 1/5/2021).

Participants interviewed for this study appeared to lead three lives: one with their family, one at work, and one with ultrarunning. They put an effort to strike a balance as they alternate between these three positions: "Aaaa koşu benim gizli sevgilim, metresim…Herkesin bir aşkı vardır ya, gizli gizli buluşur. Ben de kimse uykusundan uyanmasın, uykusundan fedakarlık yapmasın, aile düzenini bozmasın diye sabahın köründe koşuyorum" [*Uhhm, running is my secret lover, my mistress... Everyone has a lover, right? They meet in secret. I run in the early morning so that no one wakes up from their sleep, sacrifices their sleep, hence the order of our family life is not disrupted]* (Participant 18, female, 48, 9/9/2021)

Ultrarunners work hard to balance their family obligations and social lives; they accommodate their running demands around other family activities. Due to long training hours, they are pressed with time; hence optimisation in everything they do becomes critical for a sustainable running, working, social life triangle for them. Ultrarunners tend to inform their family and friends in advance of the potential issues and shortcomings that will impact their daily lives due to their heavy training schedules. To meet the demands of their families, avoid their resentment, and spend time doing what they love, they make sacrifices such as starting training before sunrise to be home before breakfast time, or training late at night after sending their children to bed. The

bill is divided between family and their friends; they do sacrifices too for an ultrarunner to reach their goals:

> "*Bugün evime gelen misafirden tutun da çocuklarıma ayıracağım zamana kadar her şeyi planlamak zorundayım. Mesela ben 160 İznik'e hazırlanırken eşime "3 ay beni affet" dedim. Çünkü onların zamanını çalıyorsunuz…*Beşte uyanıp koşuyorum. On kilometre, on beş kilometre koşuyorum. Eve geliyorum. Duşumu alıyorum. Servise biniyorum. Bunu yapamazsam bu sefer akşam yapıyorum. Akşam yapınca da çocuklarımdan zaman çalmış oluyorum. Bunu da ayarlamak zorundayım!"
>
> *I have to plan everything, from the guest coming to my house to the time I spend with my children. For example, while I was preparing for 160 Iznik, I said to my wife, "Please forgive me for the next three months". Because you are stealing their time… I wake up at 5 a.m. and go for a run. I run ten kilometers, fifteen kilometers, and come back home. I take a shower. I get on the shuttle. If I can't do that, I need to do it in the evening. When I do it in the evening, then I steal time from my children. I have to set these things up!* (Participant 11, male, 42, 30/5/2021)

Ultramarathon training and races become a 'third place' for them where they have an additional social space in their lives outside of the home and work environments, providing them an escape from daily routines, duties and technology. 'Third place' is coined by American urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg which refers to a wide range of public spaces such as pubs or cafes that host voluntary, unofficial, and eagerly anticipated gatherings of people outside of their homes and work (Oldenburg, 1989). Sport activities and events such as distance running events became the next generation form of third places reflecting the changing demands of the society (Shipway, 2012).

On top of the time spent at outdoor training activities on weekdays and weekends for months, and being away from home for races at weekends, maintenance costs of running wear and gear, food supplement costs, medical expenses due to injuries, race entry fees, and travel and accommodation costs also take their share of financial resources:

> "Önce İda Ultra, sonra da Kapadokya Ultra'ya kaydımı yaptırdım. Bu yılı uzunlarla kapatıp, seneye daha akılcı bir plan yapmak kafamda var. Malum

> bütçe, fiziksel ve ruhsal güç kısıtlarını yönetmem gerek. UTMB için taşıtımı satmıştım. Fazla hayatı sıkıştırmanın anlamı da yok" (Balce, 2019).
> *I first registered to Ida Ultra and then to Kapadokya Ultra. I have in my mind to close this year with long ultramarathons and make a more rational plan for next year. I have to manage the constraints of my budget, physical and mental power. I sold my car for UTMB. There's no point in pushing life too hard (Balce, 2019).*

Running ultradistances appear to become an addiction in runners' lives, partly physiological and partly psychological. They tend to have a love-hate relationship with ultramarathons. For ultrarunners, there are always new goals to reach, or thresholds to cross (e.g., new distances, or new geographies). They sign up for a challenging course, or distance, and they resent themselves later for this choice after the race has started. When the ultrarunners arrive at the finish line, their suffering dissolves, and only a sense of joy, pride, and memories worth remembering stay with them in the long run. Even within an ultramarathon race, they cross new thresholds, e.g., running overnight for the first time, crossing a flooding river, or running at extreme temperatures.

Ultramarathoners tend to incorporate ultramarathons into their daily lives by decorating their living spaces (home or workplace) with race mementos or wearing race outfits given by ultramarathon race organizations. During the in-depth interviews, I observed the displays of the race medals both in ultrarunners' workplaces and at their homes (see Figure 35 for the picture of the race trophies cabinet shared by Participant 16). Some ultrarunners tend not to display all their race medals and trophies. This is a decision they made either on purpose or involuntarily. When ultrarunners have many medals accumulated over time, some prefer to avoid a cluttered look in their living spaces or simply cannot spare a large enough space. In such cases, they pick the medals to which they have a strong attachment and that are worth displaying. On the other hand, some ultrarunners mentioned that they gave up displaying their ultramarathon medals after having a clash with their family members, e.g., the spouse did not want these medals to be displayed at home.

Figure 35.

Race Trophies Cabinet

My interactions with ultrarunners revealed that many of them keep their race bibs as mementos. They claimed to store the race bibs in a box or folder. The race bibs usually contain the elevation map of the race and inform and accompany the ultrarunners throughout the entire journey; in a way, they become an emotionally charged object for them. The race bibs represent both the physical and emotional maps of their journey. It helps them recall the race week and what they went through; it evokes the memories of the racecourse:

> "Hani madalya güzel ama göğüs numarana baktığında 'şurada bir eğim vardı, şurada şu CP vardı, ben şurada zorlanmıştım' diyebiliyorsun…Bence madalyaya göre o göğüs numarası daha fazla şey hatırlatıyor aslında"
>
> [*You know, the medal is great, but when you look at your bib number, you can say "there was a slope here, there was that CP, this is where I had a hard time"... I think that bib number reminds me of the race more than the medal*]
>
> (Participant 10, male, 42, 27/5/2021).

While the bib numbers are reminders of their excursions, the race medals are the records of the success of these adventures.

Given the resources recreational ultrarunners invest in running ultramarathons (e.g., time, money), as well as the sacrifices made by themselves and those around them, it is now necessary to present the benefits and rewards they receive in return.

5.3.3. Reasons, Benefits and Rewards

> *Most runners run not because they want to live longer, but because they want to live life to the fullest…Exerting yourself to the fullest within your individual limits: that's the essence of running, and a metaphor for life—and for me, for writing as well. I believe many runners would agree.* (Murakami, 2015, p. 83)

After reading the section on "cycle of ultrarunning: how to perform an ultramarathon", one might wonder what keeps them coming back to these ultra distance races repeatedly despite the moments of suffering from injuries, cramps, nauseation, blisters, sleep deprivation, or fatigue, and even facing the risk of hypothermia. From the research, the significance of ultramarathon running came out so strongly for ultrarunners that they described it as an essential part of their lives. Some even claimed that they do not run ultramarathons primarily to be healthy. Instead, they lead a healthy lifestyle to be able to run ultramarathons. They are so fond of their sport to a level that in an international study, three out of four ultrarunners claimed to continue ultramarathon training and running even they were to learn with absolute certainty that ultramarathon running is bad for their health (Hoffman & Krouse, 2018). So, what makes it so indispensable in their lives? What role may ultramarathon running play in meaning-making?

In this section, the third question of this study is explored, namely, what drives recreational runners to devote significant time and effort to running very long distances? Before dwelling on the motivations behind running ultra distances, it is worth understanding the overall role of running in their lives. The participants expressed a range of benefits that running provides them, including a sense of freedom, relaxation, a lower stress level, a head start on the day, and a boost of vitality and energy in the morning that lasts all day. They claimed that running gives them a greater sense of aliveness. It also holds a space in their lives for contemplation and reflection. They reported that running allows them to think more clearly, even helping to find answers to life or work-related problems. Overall, the participants stated the belief that running helped them maintain discipline in all aspects of their lives, including their eating and circadian rhythm. It not only allows them to eat stress-free but also increases their awareness of their food choices and motivates them to maintain a balanced diet. According to ultrarunners, training for and participating in ultramarathons provides

them a deeper level of running related benefits, or a variety of additional advantages and rewards, which compensate for the gruelling nature of ultra distance running.

While in pre-modern societies, the body is usually marked in ritualised settings with traditional symbols, in modernity, the shaping, decorating, and training of the body are mostly done as a manifestation of an individual's identity (Schilling, 2002, p. 174). Atkinson (2010) points out that in late-modern culturescapes, a number of unconventional, boundary-pushing physical cultural acts that can broadly be referred to as "post-sport athletics" are employed to explore subaltern forms of existential truth, subjectivity, desire, authenticity, and purpose (p. 1250). Post-sports is defined as athletic practises that are process-oriented, cooperative over competitive, anti-commercial, socially inclusionary rather than hierarchical, and value human spiritual, physical and emotional expression through athleticism (Atkinson, 2010, p. 1251). Being a post-sport activity, in ultramarathons, participants commit to self-discovery and development while prioritising companionship over individual victories. Ultramarathons become places where competing against oneself and the external conditions (e.g., weather, terrain) outweighs the experience of competing against others. Most recreational ultramarathoners I interviewed did not mention competition as a motivation for doing this demanding sport. On the contrary, they stated that they run ultras for themselves: “Ultra maraton bence yarıştan ziyade bir macera. Burada kendi sınırlarını deniyorsun ve kendini aşmaya çalışıyorsun. Görünürde başkalarına karşı yarışıyorsun ama esasında kendine karşı yarışıyorsun” [*Ultra marathon is more of an adventure than a race. You are testing your own limits here and trying to surpass yourself. You appear to be competing against others, but in reality, you are competing against yourself*] (Participant 14, male, 47, 22/7/2021).

One of the most frequently stated reasons for running ultramarathons is wondering about one's limits. All the participants expressed a strong desire to explore and push their physical and mental boundaries. They claimed that by pushing the boundaries of endurance, they have been continuously discovering what they are truly capable of, their physiological, mental, and psychological limits, and thus who they are: “Bence sınır diye bir şey yok. Sınır sizsiniz. Siz kafanızın içinde sınırı bitirdiğiniz zaman aşıyorsunuz. Sınır dediğin parça parça üst üste konan lego gibidir” [*I think there is no such thing as a limit. You are the limit. If you figure it out in your head, then you surpass the limit. The limit is like Lego, which can be stacked on top of each other,*

piece by piece] (Participant 13, male, 59, 26/6/2021). In road races, the ways to push one's limits are rather limited since the maximum distance is set at 42.2 kilometres (marathon distance), external conditions can be rather predictable, and the personal fastest finish time is the sole goal. In contrast, ultramarathons can offer a world of possibilities for stepping out of one's comfort zone, aiming for a variety of goals beyond the finish time, and pursuing new challenges in highly variable conditions. Regardless of their race goals, ultrarunning satisfies runners on multiple levels. Long hours spent on the racecourse present opportunities for experiencing a variety of landscapes and weather conditions, as well as interactions with other runners, leading to stimulation of their senses and eventually a sense of satisfaction.

> "Uzun yarışlarda konuşabilme fırsatı bulabiliyorsun. Kısalarda herkes paldır küldür bitirme telaşında oluyor zaten…Ultra koşmayı çok seviyorum. Çünkü sürprizlerle dolu. Hava koşulları değişiyor, zemin değişiyor. Çok uzun olursa gündüz başlıyorsun ya da sabahın karanlığında başlanıyor, gece devam edebiliyorsun. Ultra koşmak sadece koşmak değil. Ben bunu sevdim aslında ultralarda. Sürprizler olmasını her türlü."
>
> *You have the opportunity to chat in long distance races. In short races, everyone is in a hurry to finish speedily anyway… I love ultrarunning. Because it is full of surprises. Weather conditions are changing, the terrain is changing. If it's too long, you start in the daytime or you start at dusk, you can continue at night. Ultrarunning is not just running. I actually like ultras for this. All kinds of surprises.* (Participant 20, female, 42, 17/9/2021)

According to Simon (2002), in late modernity, extreme sports such as mountain climbing have become a place for meaning-making that cannot be met by conventional sources (e.g., labour market, marriage). Extreme sports athletes push the limits of their bodies for the pursuit of truth and meaning in life; they make sacrifices and suffer on this path (Le Breton, 2000) A similar assertion could be made about ultramarathon running. As ultrarunners continue to participate in ultramarathons, this eventually transforms into a serious leisure activity that they find a deeper personal meaning in. One participant expressed the role of ultrarunning in his life as follows:

> "Hani ulaşılacak bir yer var, farklı farklı yollar var. Ben koşarak gidiyorum oraya. Benim hayatımı anlamlı hale getirdiğim, kendimi olgunlaşmış hissedeceğim, hayatıma dönüp baktığımda anlamlı bir hayat yaşadım

> diyeceğim, o varmak istediğim noktaya beni getirecek olan şey ultramaraton koşmak"
>
> *You know, there is a place to reach, and there are different ways to get there. I'm going there through running. Running ultramarathons is what will get me where I want to be: to the place where I make my life meaningful, where I feel mature, and when I look back on my life, I will say that I have lived a meaningful life.* (Participant 8, male, 41, 17/5/2021)

It gives them an opportunity to break away from their routines and create something extraordinary in their lives, something to cherish and share with others, serving as an inspiration to others, and leaving a mark on their life journey: "… aslında kendi kahramanlık hikayesini yaratıyor. Bugün artık savaş yok. Gidip yan köyle düello yapılmıyor ama burada kendini var edebiliyor, bir hikâye yaratabiliyor" [*In fact, they make up their own heroic story. There is no war today. It is not possible to go and duel with the next village, but they demonstrate an existence here; they can create a story*] (Participant 14, male, 47, 22/7/2021).

These results agree with the findings of other studies. Waśkiewicz et al. identified life meaning and affiliation as particularly important factors behind running ultramarathons while shorter distance runners were significantly more motivated with psychological coping, self-esteem, competition, health, and weight concerns. In a quantitative study conducted among ultrarunners in Turkey, exceeding one's limits and adding meaning to life came out the top two motivational factors for running ultramarathons while competing with others as well as gaining respect and recognition were the two lowest scored (Çalışkan, 2018).

Ultrarunners believe that participating in ultramarathons makes them happier and more fulfilled as individuals. The research on what makes people happy has established the fact that, provided one is not struggling to meet their basic needs, experiential expenditures appear to have a greater impact on happiness than material purchases (Dunn et al., 2011). The research also points out that experiences create the opportunity for sharing with others and improving connections with others tends to improve the happiness of individuals too. The majority of the ultramarathoners commented that running ultramarathons was a rewarding experience, from planning to racing. By signing up for an ultramarathon, they commit to an experience with many ups and downs that lasts for months, from training to actual racing. They experiment

with their bodies and develop strategies to overcome the setbacks while spending long hours outdoors, away from their usual surroundings. They asserted that these experiences make them happy despite the pain and suffering they endure. For them, the entire journey is filled with unique moments that make them exhilarated and happy, which they will find difficult to substitute elsewhere: “Yaşamı sıkı sıkı sarıp, ele geçirdiğinizi hissediyorsunuz. Ben yaşıyorum! Diyorsunuz. Ben bunu maratonda hissedemiyorum” [*You feel that you are holding tight to life and taking over. You say, "I'm alive!". I cannot feel it in the marathon*] (Participant 12, male, 46, 2&6/2021). They also emphasised the benefit of meeting with like-minded people, in their words with “ultra-minded” (ultra kafasındaki) people, exchanging stories with them on the course, and supporting one another along the way, which eventually made them feel connected and happier.

Another reward of ultrarunning is experiencing the "flow" state. “Flow” is an optimal experience that occurs when one is fully engaged in a challenging activity “during which the mind and body work harmoniously while honed in on a specific task” (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 2017, p. 16). The majority of the ultrarunners I talked to described “flow” experiences in ultramarathons after passing a distance threshold, though they did not name it “flow” while sharing their race memories with me. In the early kilometres of an ultramarathon, ultrarunners tend to be in a "doing" mindset. They dwell more in the mind, pre-occupied with the thoughts about the racecourse and the weather conditions, comparing their performance to what they had planned, and considering what steps they might need to take at forthcoming checkpoints to handle any problems they may encounter in the upcoming kilometres. They sometimes engage in negative self-talk, undermining their confidence. As the kilometres add up, they occasionally leave this "dwelling in the mind" state and enter the "being present in the moment” mindset where they feel “in the zone”. They demonstrate more presence in the here and now and almost get into a meditative state. They feel a sense of harmony with their surroundings and become more confident about moving forward along the racecourse. Flow is an autotelic experience, which means that the reward and consequent satisfaction come from the experience itself (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 2017). When they are in flow, their minds stop wandering in numerous directions, and their presence is heightened. They are fully absorbed in the act of running with a feeling of energised focus. Their actions and awareness are experienced as one. They become

fully aware of the internal feedback from their bodies and the external feedback coming from the terrain, weather, nature, and the fellow runners (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 2017, pp. 26-27). They feel capable of running very long distances until the finish line. Accomplished American ultramarathoner Scott Jurek also expressed this phenomenon in his book:

> I'm convinced that a lot of people run ultramarathons for the same reason they take mood-altering drugs. I don't mean to minimize the gifts of friendship, achievement, and closeness to nature that I've received in my running career. But the longer and farther I ran, the more I realized that what I was often chasing was a state of mind—a place where worries that seemed monumental melted away, where the beauty and timelessness of the universe, of the present moment, came into sharp focus (Jurek, 2012).

One of the points that all the participants agreed on was the positive impact of running ultramarathons on their overall life satisfaction. The participants reported that the deprivation of basic needs and small pleasures of life during long runs leads to higher satisfaction and delight as soon as they have access to them at checkpoints, at the end of a race, and in their regular lives (such as drinking water from a fountain, enjoying fruit from a tree, having a post-race treat of ice cream or beer, taking a long shower in a hotel, or sleeping in bed). Such difficulties help ultrarunners in appreciating the basic comforts and pleasures of everyday life and, hence, to maintain a positive outlook towards life.

Better mood management and getting psychologically and mentally stronger were other benefits expressed by the ultrarunners. Past research indicates that people who do not engage in physical activity have a higher likelihood of experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety (De Mello, et al., 2013). Almost every ultrarunner I talked to referred to the importance of maintaining a particular attitude, namely prioritising learning and ongoing self-improvement, to be able to run ultramarathons. In fact, without naming it, they were referring to a concept in psychology called "growth mindset" which refers to the ability to persevere through challenges and put up the necessary effort to overcome obstacles (Bernecker & Job, 2019, p. 179). They reported that the challenges of training and racing provide them with numerous opportunities to practise how to better regulate their mood. They asserted that they are

more adept at managing their stress, more patient, peaceful, and open to unforeseen events. As one participant put it: “Maraton koşmak size sabır katıyor, ama ultramaraton Dalai Lama seviyesi” [*Running marathons develops your patience, but ultramarathons bring your patience to the Dalai Lama's level*] (Participant 12, male, 46, 2&6/2021). They expressed the belief that as they complete ultramarathons and exceed their limits, they further develop their stamina and gain more self-confidence, hence being ready for whatever life may throw at them. As one participant said:

> “Ultramaratonda “hadi ayağa kalk, bir şeyler yap, yapabilirsin”i birebir yaşıyorsun. Kendinle de yaşıyorsun, başkalarında da yaşıyorsun. O yarış esnasında oturan, çöken birinde “hadi kalk gideceğiz, gerekirse bak ben koluna giriyorum senin, hadi yapabiliriz”i görüyorsun...İstedikten sonra aslında her şeyi başarabilirsin. Bunu tatbik ettiğin için hayatının farklı alanlarında da uygulanabilecek olduğunu görüyorsun aslında”
>
> *In the ultramarathon, you exercise the "get on your feet and do something, you can do it" mentality. You experience it in yourself and also observe it in others. You say to someone who is sitting or has collapsed during the race, "Let's get up; we will carry on; if necessary, I'll take your arm; let's do it," ...As long as you want it, you can achieve anything. As you practise this, you realise that it can be applied in different areas of your life.* (Participant 10, male, 42, 27/5/2021)

Running ultramarathons teaches ultrarunners how to create a system to achieve a demanding goal, break it down into multiple small, achievable steps, and use continuous feedback to optimise the solutions. The participants claimed to have further developed their cognitive skills, such as foresight, big picture thinking, self-efficacy, clarity in thinking, better planning, and enhanced problem-solving skills. In fact, research suggests that athletes benefit from intense exercise in convergent-thinking, which is defined as the process of generating one possible solution to a specific problem (Colzato et al., 2013).

The ability to create space for self-care was another influential factor in choosing to run ultramarathons. They participate in ultramarathons not only to push their physical and mental limits but also to reconnect with themselves away from the distractions of technology and make sense of their lives while spending quality time alone in nature. As one participant put it:

> "Ultramaratonlarda biraz daha kendimle kalabiliyorum. Kendimi dinleyebiliyorum. Mesela birçok kişi hayatı sorguladım filan der. Çok uzun sürdüğü için her şey oluyor. Hayatı da sorguluyor insan…Trail koşuları farklı doğanın içinde olmak, doğa ile bütünleşmek açısından, koşarken bunu hissetmek. Yani hani bir evren var, bir doğa var. O doğanın içinde bir parçasın ya da değilsin görebiliyorsun ve bütünleşebiliyorsun. Daha önce belki görüp geçtiğin şeyler, ama koşarken bunu daha iyi hissedip, farklı algılayabiliyorsun"
>
> *In ultramarathons, I can spend more time with myself. I can listen to myself. For example, many people say that they have questioned life (while running ultras). Many things happen because it takes so long. You question life too…Trail runs are different in terms of being in nature and being in harmony with nature, you feel this while running. I mean, there is the universe, and there is nature. You can realise whether you are a part of that nature or not and integrate into it. Perhaps the things you've seen and passed by without noticing. Running allows you to feel and perceive them differently*. (Participant 20, female, 42, 17/9/2021).

Schechner identifies seven functions of a performance, including to entertain, to create beauty, to mark or change identity, to make or foster community, to heal, to teach or persuade and to deal with the sacred and the demonic (Schechner, 2020, p. 18). Many performances focus on multiple tasks, and the hierarchy of these functions varies depending on who the performer is and what they want to accomplish. It can be argued that one of the profound functions of ultramarathon performance is marking or changing identity given the significance placed on pushing one's physical and mental limitations. which includes traits such as being eager to leave their comfort zone, pushing limits, having an enduring mindset, and being resilient. An experienced ultrarunner encounters "newer version" of their ultrarunner identity and thus of themselves when they expand the distances they cover or raise the bar of challenging conditions (e.g., by selecting races with more elevation gain or pressing cut-off times).

Another function of ultramarathon running performance is to heal. It recuperates ultrarunners by increasing their regular exposure to nature and fresh air away from screens while being physically active. Long hours spent in nature serve them as eco-therapy; it lowers their stress and improves their mood, contributing to their

psychological well-being, as one participant stressed: “Yaptığım antrenmanların %70’i beni rahatlatan, zihinsel yorgunluğumu alan antrenmanlar” [*70% of my training runs relax me and take away my mental fatigue*] (Participant 22, male, 45, 31/3/2022).

From Schechner’s perspective, making or fostering the community can be included among the functions of ultramarathon performance. Ultramarathon races provide an opportunity for ultrarunners to interact with trail runners who compete at sub-ultra distances. At ultramarathon events, they share their experiences with trail runners and encourage them to participate in ultramarathons, thereby inviting potential future ultrarunners to their community. Ultramarathons also create an ideal atmosphere for ultrarunners to strengthen the bonding among community members.

This section has reviewed the key aspects of what drives individuals to run ultramarathons. It was argued that the predominant motivation behind this arduous sport is to push the envelope, i.e., discover oneself beyond the current boundaries of mind and body while also liberating oneself from the routines of everyday life. It was concluded that the psychological and cognitive rewards of pushing the limits make this sport indispensable for ultrarunners. The marking or changing the identity and healing functions of the ultramarathon performance is presented in detail in this section while the making or fostering community function is briefly introduced. The role that being in nature and community spirit play in their lives will be discussed in greater depth in the subsequent sections.

5.3.4. Connected and Free

> *“Aynı yolda farklı yolculuklar yaşıyoruz” [We are on separate journeys along the same path] (Participant 9, female, 47, 19/5/2021)*

In this subsection, I will continue exploring the reasons for participating in ultramarathons as well as the impact of ultramarathon running on their lives. I aim to discuss the deep connections ultrarunners develop with nature and with themselves as they train for and run ultramarathons on trails. The human connections ultrarunners form and experience with other ultrarunners are discussed in a separate section (i.e., in the “No runners left behind: ultramarathon communitas” section). The present section

also discusses the sense of freedom and breaking routine aspects of ultramarathon running.

Since the beginning of time, humanity have had a close relationship with nature. With the increasing urbanisation and the emergence of modern society, this relationship went beyond the dependence of subsistence and production, and nature became also a source of recreation and enjoyment, impacting human quality of life (Keniger, et al., 2013). The shift toward urban living is anticipated to continue and intensify as the twenty-first century progresses. While the challenges of modern life, and having more sedentary lives with increasing screen time reduce the opportunities for access and engagement with nature (e.g., TV viewing, smart phone and computer use), there is a growing body of evidence on the benefits of human interaction with nature, including physical health (e.g., reduced blood pressure, reduced occurrence of illness), psychological well-being (e.g., increased self-esteem, reduced anger, improved mood), cognitive ability (e.g., improved productivity, attentional restoration), and social cohesion (Keniger, et al., 2013).

Throughout my research, the ultrarunners expressed that being in nature plays a central role in their total experience of ultra distance running. They treat ultrarunning as a medium fulfilling their deep-rooted desire to reconnect with nature and for creating regular opportunities for them to spend long hours in nature away from phone calls, screens, and desk: “Koşarken kamyon sesi, korna sesi duymayacağım. Ultraya doğallığı saf haliyle yaşamak için gidiyorsun, ne kadar bozulmamış ve saf o kadar güzel” [*I will not hear the sound of trucks or horns while running ultramarathons. You go to the ultramarathon to experience nature in its purest form; the more pristine and purer, the more beautiful*] (Participant 1, male, 55, 8/8/2021).

Ultramarathons are mostly performed away from urban settlements, in natural settings such as plains, valleys, forests, and mountains which provide rich opportunities to runners for intense interaction with nature over long periods of time. Unlike road races, running slow, walking, or giving breaks at any point on the racecourse are common practices in ultramarathons. The ultrarunners find nature enticing for pauses on the racecourse. They take breaks not only to catch their breath but also to appreciate the beauty of their surroundings and feel awe, wonder, or amazement.

Nature is regarded by ultrarunners as a calibration tool to maintain their humility and enhance their satisfaction with life. They consider running in nature as an antidote

to the draining effects of urban life, a remedy for healing. As a matter of fact, research shows that repeated contact with nature leads to improved emotional functioning and greater life satisfaction (Capaldi et al., 2015). Running long distances in nature seems to foster humility and positive emotions in ultrarunners through the awe obtained from viewing and experiencing nature. Many participants reported that spending extended periods of time in nature while putting in significant effort to traverse a variety of landscapes, particularly mountains, help them reconnect with their vulnerability, reminding them of how weak and powerless humans actually are. This realisation manifests as a sense of being small while also being connected to something larger: "Doğada, yaradanın ortamında, siz onun bir parçasısınız, yani siz kendinizi ondan soyutlayamazsınız…Acziyetinizi görüyorsunuz ve diyorsunuz ki "ben aciz bir kulum", yani onun için şükrediyorsunuz, o da sizi pozitif bir düşünceye götürüyor" [*In nature, in the environment of the creator, you are a part of it, so you cannot isolate yourself from it... You confront your weaknesses, and you say, "I am just a weak servant." That is, you are grateful to him, and this leads you to positive thinking*] (Participant-13, male, 59, 26/6/2021).

In extreme sports, where the external is unquestionably more potent and the stakes are high, humility is triggered (Brymer & Oades, 2009). Ultrarunners prefer to define their relationship with nature harmonious, decent, respectful, and admiring. They do not frame nature as a phenomenon to tame, conquer, or battle with. In contrary, they choose to approach it with respect and humility. They tend to portray nature as a powerful entity that they must treat with respect in order for them to complete an ultramarathon successfully.

Many ultrarunners I interviewed seemed to have a special connection with mountains in particular. Some reported that they greet and talk to mountains at ultramarathons. They were very fond of mountains and had a tendency to perceive mountains as their spiritual teachers:

> "Dağın kendisi daha fazla bilinmeyen de getiriyor, daha fazla zorluğu da getiriyor, kontrol edilemeyen bir şeyi de getiriyor. bu da esasında senin bu dünyadaki varlığını tekrar konumlandırdığın, hani sen merkezli olmaktan doğa merkezli olmaya taşıyor sanırım. Orada bir enginlik var, bir kadimlik hali var ve sen onun içerisinde bir noktasın onu görüyorsun. Dağlık yerlerde başka bir yaratıcı güce inanman gerekiyor. Ateist de olsan inanıyorsun"

> *The mountain brings with it more unknowns, challenges, and something uncontrollable. I guess this means that you are repositioning your existence in this world, shifting from self-centered to nature-centered. There is a vastness there, an ancient state, and you see a point in it. In the mountains, you need to believe in the power of a creator. Even if you are an atheist, you believe.* (Participant 14, male, 47, 22/7/2021)

Some ultrarunners had such a strong affection for mountains that during my social media search and at the interviews, I came across ultramarathoners who had the tattoos of the mountains they ran at the races. During my conversations with the female ultrarunners, I observed that they have a slightly stronger and deeper emotional bond with mountains than do male runners.

The ultramarathoners strongly emphasised the supreme power of mountains, making them realise how insignificant and powerless they are. They perceive themselves at the mercy of the mountains in order to continue pushing their limits. They believe that no matter how hard they planned and trained for potential adversities that they might face during the race or how well they performed, they would not be able to finish a race unless nature let them traverse: "Dağ izin verdiği sürece, doğa ana bize izin verdiği sürece, biz onun içinde varız. Doğa ana bize izin vermezse oradan çıkamıyoruz…Doğanın gücüne meydan okumaya kalkarsam doğa beni tokatlar ve yarışı bitirtmez" [*We have presence there for as long as the mountains and Mother Nature allow. We can't get out of there if Mother Nature doesn't let us... If I attempt to challenge the power of nature, nature will slap me and not let me finish the race*] (Participant 17, female, 39, 4/9/2021).

In the presence of nature, they leave their "powerful urban persona" behind, and accept their vulnerability and act with humility. Many of them believed that nature would not harm them and would even protect them. This belief is so profound that it can be observed in one participant's statement: "Ultramaraton koşmak doğa ile beraber olmak demek. Yani anne rahmine dönmek gibi bir şey. Çok güvenli geliyor bana" [*Running an ultramarathon means being in nature. It's like returning to the womb. It feels very safe to me*] (Participant 18, female, 48, 9/9/2021). One could assert that they attribute to nature a parent-child like relationship, in which they position themselves as a child who respects the parent and acts with humility and, in return, deserves the parent's protection and support on their developmental journey. They develop a sense

of kinship, a kind of spiritual connection, with animals and plants. This connection can be so strong that some of them have even claimed that predatory animals like wolves, wild boars, jackals, and snakes won't hurt them while they are running.

Ultrarunners consider themselves "visitors" to nature, as such they expect their fellow runners to be respectful of the host's house and show the utmost care to keep it unspoiled, e.g., not dumping their litter and being kind and gentle to plants and animals. Although littering the course cause penalty at ultramarathons, this does not prevent some runners from doing it. A significant cause of annoyance among ultrarunners are the runners who harm the environment by discarding waste that does not belong in the environment, such as used energy gel sachets. During the interviews, some expressed their concern about how some 'road runners' have brought their littering culture to ultramarathons. As one informant reported: "Öndeki adam ultra maraton koşuyor ama anlamamış. Jeli tüketiyor, tükettiği şeyi yere atıyor. Yani bu doğasına, felsefesine aykırı ultranın.. Doğaya saygılı olacaksınız, Zaten onun için oradasınız. O zaman yol maratonu koş! Niçin buradasın?" [*The man in front of me was running an ultra-marathon, yet he had not grasp it. He consumed the gel and threw it on the ground. You know, this is contrary to the nature and philosophy of the ultra. You should be respectful to nature. You are already there for it. Run a road marathon then! Why are you here?*] (Participant 7, male, 48, 29/4/2021). Some ultramarathoners approach the problem with an activist mentality. While racing, they collect the litter left on the racecourse by other runners and put them in a bin at the checkpoints. They also share posts on their social media accounts to bring attention to the problem. Apart from the environmentalist concerns, their annoyance may be explained by a desire to keep their 'third place' unspoiled, where they live outside of the home and work environments. They want to protect 'their host' from the way modern society treats it as a commodity to be consumed. They expect every ultrarunner to put effort into preserving the integrity of their 'sanctuary'.

With the heightened sense of presence, ultramarathons become a place for eco-therapy for runners. After the commotion of the start line, e.g., high volume electronic music, cheering of the spectators and the sound of horns, such "sounding agents" leave their place to the sounds of nature as ultramarathoners set on their journey on trails (Rodaway, 1994). The soundscape of an ultramarathon moves as ultrarunners run through the racecourse: The distant sound of a thunder, a stream or wind in the trees,

or howling of dogs and screaming of foxes, and the songs of birds become the prominent sounding agents. In the absence of the city noises, they can vividly hear their breathing and stomping of their sports shoes on the ground. Being away from noises of the city and the long stretches of uninterrupted time spent in nature initiate an inner dialogue in which they reflect on issues such as life, relationships, work, and family. They find serenity in the movement and a sense of stillness in motion.

Past research indicates that eudaimonic well-being, which goes beyond just feeling good and involves having a meaningful purpose in life and fulfilling one's best potential, is higher in people who feel connected to nature (Pritchard et al., 2020). These people tend to have higher levels of self-reported personal growth. During the interviews, the ultrarunners frequently mentioned running in nature providing them a fresh perspective and a sense of meaning. As one participant expressed: "İnsanın anlam arayışında ve rutinlik dediğimiz şey aslında bizde ölümü çağrıştırır…Ve biz bu kaygı ile ne yapacağımızı bilemeyiz.. O varoluşsal anlamsızlık, anlamlandırma gibi şeylere ultra maraton çok daha iyi gelebiliyor. Aslında bir şekilde iyileştirebiliyor da diyebilirim" [*Man's search for meaning and what we call routine actually evokes death in us… And we do not know what to do with this anxiety.An ultra-marathon can be much better for things like that existential meaninglessness and search for meaning. In fact, I can say that it can heal it in a way*] (Participant 9, female, 47, 19/5/2021). A common view amongst the participants was that while running ultramarathons, solitude helps make sense of their own thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Running for long periods of time allows them to check in with themselves, ask questions that they do not have time to think about in their busy lives, and make sense of their life experiences. Ultrarunning provides an antidote to the agenda diverting factors in runners' lives, it creates a natural space for thinking and contemplation.

Running ultra distances provides a sense of freedom to ultrarunners. In research conducted among extreme sport participants, Brymer and Schweitzer (2013) identified six types of freedom, including "freedom from constraints, freedom as movement, freedom as letting go of the need for control, freedom as the release of fear, freedom as being at one, and finally freedom as choice and responsibility". They suggested that extreme sport athletes choose to experience self in relation to nature, assume the risks and responsibility of their decisions, and reveal "the capacity of humans to experience a sense of liberation" (Brymer & Schweitzer, 2013, p. 871). Running ultramarathons is

another example of exerting oneself in the face of potentially dangerous natural conditions in order to encounter these manifestations of freedom.

Ultrarunning offers ultrarunners a chance to escape from the routines, obligations, and daily pursuits of life as well freedom from constraints: “9.00-17.00 ofiste çalışan beyaz yakalı için bir tür özgürleşme yeri ya da ailesinden, eşinden kaçma yeri. Bu kadın için de eşinden uzaklaşma, kendini özgürce ifade etme yeri olabilir” [*It's a place for white-collar workers who are in the office from 9 a.m. to 17 p.m. to feel liberated, or a place to get away from their family and spouse. It can also be a place for a woman to get away from her husband and express herself freely*] (Participant 14, male, 47, 22/7/2021).

While running ultramarathons, their daily concerns become limited to how far they need to travel until the next checkpoint, what they need to eat, and how to deal with pain or injuries. It creates a temporary breathing space away from the daily chores and responsibilities:

> “Zaten iş hayatında sıkışmışlık var. Özel hayatta, aile hayatında...Dolayısıyla böyle bir kaçış noktamız yok. Benim için koşmak, hakikaten klasik gibi belki ama, kaçmak gibi oluyor. Kendime ayırdığım, kendim gibi olduğum tek an. Çünkü o sırada sevdiğim bir şeyi yapıyorum ve kimseye bunu açıklamak zorunda değilim.”
>
> *At work, there is a sense of being stuck. In our private lives, in our family lives... So, we have no escape point. It may sound like a cliché, but for me, running is like 'running away'. It's the only time I spare for myself, the only time I feel like myself. Because while running I'm doing something I love and I don't have to explain it to anyone* (Participant 8, male, 41, 17/5/2021).

Running in general gives a sense of freedom, no matter if it is for a road race or an ultramarathon. It could conceivably be hypothesised that ultramarathons offer this sense of freedom more intensely than road and track races, with their lengthier training and racing times taking place in natural settings. Although they undertake a significant deal of effort to ensure that they are physically, mentally and psychologically ready for the race, the ultramarathoners accept the fact that they cannot control nature hence have a rather limited control of the activity. They let go of control and focused only on what they could do under the given circumstances. This brings them to a balanced mental

state, i.e., they become open to accepting what is, letting go of control, and at the same time doing their best to be in control of only what is controllable. Multiple times the informants reported carrying the lessons learned from these experiences into their everyday lives, which allegedly helps them respond to pressing situations at work or with family in a calmer manner.

When they participate in ultramarathons, they choose to confront their fears and continue on the racecourse despite them (e.g., fear of running at night, running by a cliff, fear of wild animals, fear of getting lost). It could conceivably be hypothesised that managing and overcoming their fears gives them a sense of freedom.

Ultramarathon running is a reflexive physical culture practise. Running ultras creates a personal window for runners to spend time with themselves without interruption. It enables an inner journey, a process of self-exploration, as one informant reported: "Ultramarathon bizim kendimiz ile olan bir yolculuğumuz…O bize hem iyi hem kötü yanlarımızı gösteriyor. Aslında ayna gibi bir şey…Kendini anlama, bulma yolculuğu" [*Ultramarathon represents our journey with ourselves...It reveals both our good and bad qualities... Actually, it's like a mirror... A journey of self-understanding, of finding oneself*] (Participant 9, female, 47, 19/5/2021). While running long distances, new ideas are also discovered, new ventures are thought out, plans are refined, and work and life matters are reviewed and resolved.

The majority of the participants highlighted that the joy of ultrarunning reveals itself when an ultrarunner chooses to be present in the moment, accepts and cooperates with what is, and does not make comparisons between what is happening and what they were expecting to happen. In this regard, ultramarathoning appears to be a physically active form of practising mindfulness.

Ultramarathon provides runners with a solitary retreat in nature, a breathing space away from urban settings where they can experience a brief respite from the identities, thoughts, and behaviours that shape their daily lives. Spending time with themselves out in nature, living under scarcity and challenging physical conditions, and facing their demons and vulnerability provide ample opportunities for revisiting their beliefs and attitudes toward life. It becomes a place where runners leave their titles, comfort zones, and material abundance behind. They experience freedom in multiple dimensions.

5.3.5. No Runner Left Behind: Ultrarunning Communitas

In this section, I will continue answering the research question "How do ultrarunners create a sense of community" by sharing insights on the ways in which communitas emerges in ultramarathon running and dynamics within ultramarathon communitas. I will also briefly cover the challenges faced by female ultrarunners.

Ultramarathon running is an endurance sport that involves running and walking on trails under changing altitude, terrain, and meteorological conditions. Completing an ultramarathon is an arduous task. Once the runners leave the start line, the time they spend on the racecourse may take anywhere from six hours to multiple days or even a week. They find themselves in a liminoid space, a transitionary, floating, powerless state. They run in remote locations, crossing fields, hills, and woods many times without any contact with others. During this time, as explained in previous sections, ultrarunners experience difficult physiological and emotional moments. They endure pain, cramps, fatigue, sleep deprivation, and gastrointestinal track problems as well sudden mood changes and negative self-talk. They deal with unexpected risky situations along the course, such as dog attacks, bone fractures, ankle sprains, or hyponatremia.

While many sports highlight competition and can be divisive of the social fabric, ultramarathons promote solidarity and companionship. According to Turner, when people experience liminality in a setting, communitas emerge. He points out that liminal phenomena offer a blend of lowliness and sacredness, and of homogeneity and comradeship (Turner, 2004, p.80). Communitas is formed through spontaneous connections that occur between other liminars in the liminal stage. During the interviews, most of the participants stated that while running on trails, on top of having physical pain, agony, and discomfort, they may also find themselves dealing with feelings of weakness, vulnerability, and insignificance. When they sign up for an ultramarathon, they voluntarily choose to submit to the rules as well as the difficult circumstances of a race. Throughout an ultramarathon, ultrarunners coincide on the racecourse and run together for a while. When they notice a runner having a health problem or lacking motivation to continue the race, they offer help to support the runner. This help could be in the form of sharing their food supplies and supplements or accompanying the other runner until they gain their motivation back. They become the interdependent sufferers of the ultramarathon performance process, which eventually leads to the formation of communitas.

The ultrarunners are stripped of their social distinctions such as names, classes, and ranks in society and reduced to a number on their race bibs. The challenging conditions experienced in ultra distance running form suitable settings for communitas to emerge, as such conditions facilitate bonding and a feeling of camaraderie. As one participant put it: "Ya o kadar zor şartlarda zaman geçiriyorsun. O arkadaşlık çok farklı bir dostluk oluyor. Çünkü normaldeki arkadaşlık gibi değil. Orada resmen hayat mücadelesi veriyoruz" [*You spend time in such difficult circumstances. That friendship turns into a very different type of friendship. Because it's not like a regular friendship. We are officially fighting for life there]* (Participant 15, female, 60, 24/7/2021). In the face of extreme physical exhaustion and the potential dangers of being in nature, rivalry and everyday social orders fade, giving way to empathy and support for one another. On his personal blog, elite ultrarunner Aykut Çelikbaş sheds a light on the essence of ultrarunner communitas and explains how ultrarunners value camaraderie over personal victories (Çelikbaş, Ultra maratonun ruhu, 2014):

> "…uzun saatler boyunca tek gördüğünüz, konuştuğunuz, bazen hiç konuşmadan ne düşündüğünüzü bildiğiniz biriyle birlikte gidiyorsanız ve bütün zorluklara göğüs gerip birbirinize yardımcı olduysanız, işte o zaman derecenin, zamanın, kişisel hırsların ve egoların önemi kalmıyor. O anı o kişiyle birlikte paylaşmanın hazzı her şeyin üstünde yer alıyor… Umarım işin içine başka şeylerin girmesi ile ultra maratonun ruhu bozulmaz ve yozlaşmaz."
>
> *When you travel with someone that for long hours you see, converse with and even know what they think without talking, and you overcome all the difficulties together and help each other, then rank, time, personal ambitions, and egos don't matter. The pleasure of sharing that moment with that person is above everything else… I hope that the spirit of the ultramarathon does not spoil and degenerate with the introduction of other things.*

Camaraderie amongst ultrarunners was strongly visible at the CPs and finish line. It showed up in the encouraging words ultrarunners shared with one another, in offering company to fellow runners until the next station, running together at night with the ones not feeling comfortable with the dark, and in waiting at the finish line to celebrate the arriving runners. One participant expressed the importance of such norms in ultramarathon culture as follows: "Bitirenlere hemen ihtimam gösterirsin. Yarışını bitirip hemen oteline gidiyorsan ayıp edersin. Senden sonrakilere son 100-150 metrede

alkışlamalısın,. Otelin yakınsa git, üstünü değiştir ve finiş takının orada yerini al. Senden sonra gelenlere destek ol!" [*You immediately pay attention to those who finish. It would be a shame if you finished your race and went straight to your hotel. You should applaud those after you in the last 100-150 meters of their race. If your hotel is close, go change your outfits and take your place at the finish arch. Support those who come after you!]* (Participant 6, male, 46, 26/3/2021).

Communitas is a human bond, where individuals feel social equality, union and solidarity. It grows "a sentiment of humankindness" between them (Deflem, 1991, p. 15). The majority of the participants repeatedly expressed how supportive the ultramarathoners are and how they help grow one another: "Ultra camiasındaki insanlar güzel insanlar. Kadını da erkeği de her aşamada birbirine yardım eden insanlar" [*The ultra-community is made up of nice people. Men and women who support one another at all stages*] (Participant 6, male, 46, 26/3/2021). Being competitive is not the driving force within ultramarathoner communitas. As stated in the 'public performance' section, ultramarathoners view other runners as companions rather than competitors who must be outperformed at all costs. Unlike in many competitive individual or team sports (e.g., short distance running races, tennis, football, basketball), regardless of whether they are complete strangers or friends, ultrarunners expressed the importance of praising one another and supporting fellow runners with motivational words throughout the race. During my observations at the CPs, I witnessed ultramarathoners multiple times motivating fellow runners who were about to abandon the race, with encouraging words such as "Bro, you came so far great. You are doing alright" or "You have enough time until the next CP. Now calm down, take your time and have a good rest. You're going to make it". The participants also commented about supporting runners who had technical problems (e.g., headlamp not functioning) or were worried about the upcoming section of the racecourse. In such cases, they reported accompanying these runners to a point that they felt they could run on their own: "Yolda hep birbirimize destek oluyoruz. Bir keresinde Aylin Savacı Armador Likya'da önümde gidiyor. Olağanüstü bir koşucu…biliyorsunuz hep birinci geliyor. Hep bana batonuyla yol gösterdi. Kilometrelerce beni bırakmadı, yolu gösterdi" [*We always support each other on the racecourse. Once, Aylin Savacı Armador was ahead of me in Lycia. An extraordinary runner… you know, she always wins first place. She guided me with her*

baton. She didn't leave me alone for miles, she showed me the way] (Participant 15, female, 60, 24/7/2021)

Ultrarunners prioritise helping one another at any moment of the race, not only because they are bound by the rules of the organisation but because they are eager to do it. Many participants said that they share their supplements with runners experiencing physiological problem on the trails. If necessary, they claimed not to hesitate offering even their food and water supplies with the other runners:

> "Tuz hapları ve elektrolitler bizim için çok değerlidir. Çok bilirim birbirimizle paylaştığımızı. Tanımıyoruz, ismini bilmiyoruz, cismini bilmiyoruz ama biz orada ultra yol arkadaşıyız. Ultra kafasındayız. Biz hepimiz orada biriz. Hepimiz o gün o parkurdan sağlıklı bir şekilde finish i geçmek için oradayız."
> *Salt pills and electrolytes are invaluable to us. I know of many times we shared these with each other. We don't know the person, we don't know their name, but we are ultra trail companions there. We're in the ultra-mind. We are all one there. We are all there to pass the finish in a healthy way that day*. (Participant 17, female, 39, 4/9/2021)

While preparing for a race for months or running an ultramarathon, ultramarathoners have ample opportunities for interacting with other runners. It is very common among ultrarunners to initiate a chat with other runners while running or walking on the course, no matter if they know each other before or not. Despite the fact that they are meeting for the first time, they may go into great depth in their discussions, which eventually serve the development of a sense of community among them:

> "Yarıştığın koşu arkadaşınız, yarış arkadaşınız o anda, o gece sizinle birlikte bir yolculuk yapar. Hani bütün gece birlikte koşarsınız, o kişi geçmişine, çocukluğuna ait her şeyi size aktarır. Siz de ona aktarmışsınızdır. Artık aranızda bir bağ oluşmuştur. Kimi unutulur, ama bazıları unutulmaz."
> *Your running partner in that race have a journey with you at that moment, that night. You know, that person shares everything from his past and childhood with you when you run all night together. You share with them too. A bond has now formed between two of you. Some are forgotten, but some are not.* (Participant 9, female, 47, 19/5/2021)

Multiple factors facilitate the development of a community spirit among ultrarunners beyond the companion and the support they offer one another during races. Months of ultramarathon training require early morning or night runs in nature for long hours. They train together to minimise the risks and unforeseen problems, such as getting injured in the middle of the woods or being attacked by stray dogs. Unlike road races, an ultramarathon is a multi-day event. Beyond the time they spend on the racecourse, ultrarunners have ample opportunities to interact with one another at the marathon fairs, pre-race pasta parties, medal ceremonies, camping in the same area or staying at the same hotel, sharing rooms, and dining together in local restaurants: "Biz grupça katıldığımız için yeni bir arkadaşımız olursa yarış çantası nasıl hazırlanır ritüelimiz var, ona yarıştan önceki akşam gösteririz" [*Since we participate as a team, if we have a new member, we have a ritual of 'how to prepare a racing bag', we show him the night before the race*] (Participant 7, male, 48, 29/4/2021).

During the field study, I had the opportunity to observe the interactions between the members of two running teams over a three-year span. Although some of them knew one another from the workplace, they reported that their friendship grew over time as they spent long time on trails during training and racing as well as travelling together for the races.

Beyond the times they run training for or at ultramarathons, their communitas continue to exist in the form of an inclusive and tight-knit community. Their bonding transcends the city borders: "Öyle arkadaşım var, öncesinde planlıyoruz: "Bak ben senle koşacam, bak ona göre ayarla ha!" Başka illerdeyiz ya da başka yerlerdeyiz ama planlarımız aynı: Beraber koşmak. Beraber tamamlamak" *[I have such a friend, we plan in advance: "Look, I will run with you, arrange your plans accordingly!" We live in separate cities, but our plans are common: To run together. To finish together]* (Participant 11, male, 42, 30/5/2021).

Ultramarathon communitas emerging from semi-liminality can be recognised as a deeply connected community. The supportive attitude of ultrarunners transcends the time and space of the races they meet. Their solidarity presents itself at different dimensions, from trading (i.e., choosing an ultramarathon in shopping) to transferring experience on ultramarathon running (e.g., how to train for a specific race): "Ben seviyorum camiamı. Manisa'da bir tane koşucu arkadaşım var, zeytinyağımı hep ondan alıyorum… Ya da bir yarış koşacağım. Açıyorum, diyorum ki "Ben Cortina yı

koşmadım. Parkur nasıl bana biraz bilgi verir misin?" A dan Z ye anlatıyor" *[I love my community. I have a runner friend in Manisa, I always purchase my olive oil from him…Or if I'll run a race. I pick up the phone, I say "I haven't run Cortina yet. Can you give me some information about the racecourse?" He tells me about every detail from A to Z]* (Participant 18, female, 48, 9/9/2021). The narrative descriptions of race routes, race strategies, and race preparation approaches provided in the race reports support communitas members in making decisions about when, where, and how to run ultramarathons. They show solidarity in the advancement of their ultramarathon running careers.

Ultrarunners tend to make close friends from their communitas because of their intense training schedules together. The adherence among the members of the community comes from the interactions they had during training and races. An injury may represent the inability to demonstrate the skills required to maintain membership in the ultrarunning community. If an ultrarunner got injured and stays away from the trails long time, they might fall apart with the community or get fewer invites from their runner friends for social occasions. An ultrarunner I interviewed shared with me an example of this. She stated that when she had an injury and was away from the trails for months, she did not receive the emotional support that she expected from her community. She claimed that no one ever paid her a visit at home. She resentfully added that when she was performing well at ultramarathons, they were by her side, cheering her on, but when she needed them the most, she claimed they vanished. She believed that as long as one could continue running on trails, the community would stand for them. A possible explanation for this might be that ultrarunners find it hard to balance their time between family, work, and running life duties. Long hours of training leave relatively little space in their lives to fulfil all the duties of their social lives; in this specific case, perhaps instead of visiting an injured runner friend at home, they might have preferred to respond by calling. Another reason, as stated by this participant, could be that one deserves the group's attention as long as they continue to be active on the trails and in touch with the community.

Although there is a significant emphasis on the outstanding camaraderie between the ultramarathoners, the "ultimate triumph is singular and personal", similar to the experience of other extreme sports participants, such as mountain climbers (Simon, 2002, p. 191). In the interviews, ultramarathoners described the people in their

community as supportive, caring, and considerate, a feature that they think is uncommon among road runners. When the physical conditions and the risks involved in trail and road races are compared, it could be argued that ultramarathoners help one another out on the racecourse as they need one another to accomplish their goals, not because they are more altruistic than runners competing in road events. Many ultrarunners with whom I spoke were against the introduction of high value race prizes, believing that money would spoil trail etiquette, and negatively impact their camaraderie.

In communitas, individuals have tied one another in an egalitarian way, they are treated as equals to one another. An ultramarathon is a place where many stereotypes fade away. Ultrarunners value respect and support for one another, regardless of profession, socioeconomic class, gender, or age. The runners' social status in the community is not influenced by such factors but by their race experiences, performance, and general attitude. A common view stood out amongst the participants was that they do not pay much attention one another's social status, professional titles, achievements, gender or age. On the racecourse the socio-cultural roles and status expectations are abandoned:

> "Koşu tıpkı çay gibi! Yaş, cinsiyet, kökenin, sosyal sınıfın, dilin, dinin ortadan kalkıyor. İnsanı yücelten variety'dir. Normal yaşamında, kendi sosyal çevrende ultrada karşılaştığın, birlikte koştuğun profillerle bir araya gelme ihtimalin yok gibi bir şey. Çeşitlilik getiriyor insanın hayatına ultra koşmak. Birlik duygusu veriyor. Etiketsizlik sağlıyor."
>
> *Running is like tea! Your age, gender, origin, social class, language, religion disappear. It is diversity that elevates people. In your normal life, it's highly unlikely to meet with people that you run into at ultras in your social circle. Ultrarunning brings diversity to one's life. It gives a sense of unity. It makes you label-free.* (Participant 2, female, 42, 29/2/2020)

Dissolution of structural relationships may sometimes give communitas a positive opportunity. Ultramarathon races are gender-neutral spaces in which both males and females face the same challenges and support one another in making their way to the finish line. They feel empowered in cases where they help fellow male runners who have been experiencing difficulties and health problems. The female

ultrarunners I interviewed strongly expressed that they experience full equality with men on the racecourse and get their respect.

It can be asserted that ultramarathon races are breathing spaces for women where they feel more liberated from the traditional gender roles exist in Turkish society. This observation manifested itself in one of the participants expressions:

> "Parkurlarda onlarla omuz omuza gidecek kadınları görünce parkurlarda bizi çok destekliyorlar. Ben onlara da diyorum: "Bana saygı duyduğunuzdan 10 kat daha fazla saygı duyuyorum. Çünkü siz Türkiye gibi bir coğrafyada kadına saygı duyuyorsunuz" diyorum... Bizi parkurda bir işçi gibi görmüyorsunuz, bir kadın gibi değil. Bizi omuz omuza gittiğiniz yol arkadaşınız olarak görüyorsunuz" ki bu çok güzel bir şey!"
>
> *They are very supportive of us when they see the women who will run alongside them on the racecourse. And I say to them: "I respect you 10 times more than you respect me. Because you respect women in a country like Turkey… "You don't see us as workers, not like a woman. You see us as your companions with whom you go shoulder to shoulder" and this is great!* (Participant 17, female, 39, 4/9/2021)

Although the ultramarathoner communitas discourse promotes gender equality, life outside of the ultramarathon events puts men in a more advantageous position in many ways. A study conducted among long distance runners reveals that men assert to have a right to leisure by virtue of being men, i.e., they claim to have more physical, mental, and sporting needs to be fulfilled (Barrell et al., 1989, p. 262). Compared to men, women do not enjoy the same chances for leisure activities; the leisure hours that women can devote to themselves are limited due to social expectations on women. The homemaker role of women in Turkish families and the safety concerns of women about being alone on trails before sunrise or after sunset, even on city roads, may have an impact on the slow development of a female ultrarunner base in Turkey. One female runner shared with me how she sees the impact of traditional gender roles on the emergence of female ultrarunners:

> "Benim şöyle bir şansım var, erken anne oldum. Kadınlar niye bu kadar uzun koşmuyor? Aslında çocukları olunca onları sabah kaldırıyorlar, giydiriyorlar,

> okula yolluyorlar. Akşam da çocukları hazırlıyorlar. Yemekleri var, ödevleri var. Kendi kızıma bakıyorum onun spor yapacak vakti yok mesela."
> *I had a chance to become an early mother. Why don't women run long distances? When they have children, they wake them up in the morning, dress them and send them to school. In the evening, they prepare the children. They have meals, they have homework. I look at my own daughter. She doesn't have time to do sports.* (Participant 15, female, 60, 24/7/2021)

Female participation rate in ultrarunning is considerably lower than that of males globally. The female runner share in total ultramarathon population was 23% in 2018 (Ronto, 2021), though it suggests a slight improvement in the past decade (i.e., 17% in 2008). From the analysis I made with the participation data provided in ultramarathon race in 2021, I reached a lower figure for Turkey than the global average which is 15%. Slightly more than half of the ultrarunner females I randomly recruited was single (5 out 9) whereas the male ultrarunners were mostly married with kids (8 out of 13). A similar trend, i.e., the difference in proportion of males and females with dependents, is evident in the previous quantitative studies too across long distance footrace events (Valentin, et al., 2021). With regard to gender, another important fact to consider is the percentage of one-time only ultramarathoners. While 50% of female ultramarathoners in DUV Turkey database finished an ultramarathon only once, the same statistic is only 3% for males, indicating the female ultrarunners drop out rate is significantly higher that of males.

One female participant expressed her concern about how female runners tend to withhold themselves from running long distances due to financial concerns while male runners do not seem to have it:

> "Kadın da erkek de koşmak istiyorsa masraflar vs. olduğu için kadın biraz daha az kilometre koşuyor, erkek biraz daha uzun km koşuyor. Çünkü niye çantalar pahalı. Trail koşusu antrenmanı yapmak için hem patika ayakkabısı olacak, hem de yol ayakkabısı."
> *When both men and women want to run, the woman chooses to run shorter distances while the man goes for longer distances. Why? Because trail running backpacks are expensive. One needs both trail shoes and road shoes for trail running training. (Participant 20, female, 42, 17/9/2021)*

During my discussions with female ultrarunners, I observed a sense of guilt in the discourse of married female ultrarunners about being away from their children while racing or concerns about not spending enough time supporting children's academic growth. Travelling back home to reunion with her children can be prioritized over attending a medal ceremony held next day of the race where the runner is ranked in top three position. When I reviewed the male participants' verbatims, married male ultrarunners' emphasis was more on finding a balance between running and time spent with family instead of addressing the guilt they feel inside towards their children like their female counterparts.

The first timers, i.e., runners who participated in an ultramaraton for the first time, immediately form a spontaneous communitas on the racecourse as they experience several challenges. While running ultra distances, they start to grasp the spirit of ultramarathon camaraderie, and they are positively surprised with the depth of personal interactions and support they receive from other runners. They experience "a feeling of endless power" in it and they feel that "it is important to relate directly to another person as he presents himself in the here-and-now, to understand him sympathetic way, free from culturally encumbrances of his role, status, reputation, class, sex, or other structural niche." (Turner, 1982, p. 48) As they continue running ultramarathons, they become a member of the normative ultramarathon communitas.

The normative communitas is the most prominent communitas type encountered in the ultrarunning phenomenon. The experienced ultrarunners form a normative communitas, uniting them across the boundaries of physical fitness, gender, social class, age, and profession. It arises from the foundation of "love of endurance and pushing the limits", adhering ultrarunners to their communitas. They foster and maintain their relationships within their communitas on an almost permanent basis through investing time and effort in certain activities, including training, travelling, and racing together, as well as exchanging their experiences on online forums. They honour and role model the ultramarathon values and behaviours in races to maintain their communitas.

The ideological communitas appeared to be formed and maintained by some ultramarathon runners who are highly devoted to their sports. They aspire for leading an 'ultra life', a life in sync with the core principles of ultra distance running, applying

these principles to the different aspects of their daily lives beyond ultramarathons, such as being respectful to nature and community, being resourceful, calm, fair, self-sufficient and humble, not complaining about the circumstances, and having a solution oriented, positive mindset.

After discussing how ultrarunners develop camaraderie at ultramarathon races, as well as how they form a community with the features of communitas in the face of challenges, and create a culture within this communitas, I now move on to another aspect of their culture, which is the specific words and expressions they use that reflect their ultrarunner identity.

5.3.6. Pain, Neoliberalism and Ultramarathons

Thus far, the thesis has argued that ultramarathoners choose to run ultra distances in order to push themselves beyond their limits, run without a ceiling or knowing when they will reach the top, and have an extra social space in their lives outside of home and workplace environments where they can reconnect with themselves and nature. It has been pointed out that ultrarunning plays a central role in how ultrarunners organise their lives around it. The support and camaraderie they provide one another and the strong ties among the members of ultramarathon communitas have also been discussed. In this subsection, I present the role of pain and suffering in the context of ultramarathon phenomenon, as well as the connection between ultramarathon running and the neoliberal system. I suggest that running ultramarathons is a performance to reaffirm and practise some parts of neoliberal ideas and beliefs through fostering self-efficacy, more demanding levels of endurance, and endless possibilities for personal transformation.

The competition and struggle in ultramarathons are predominantly with oneself, not with other people. Becoming an ultrarunner is founded on the capacity to negotiate discomfort and overcome suffering. At the very core of ultramarathon running, pushing the body to preconceived limits and exploring these limits through voluntary suffering and hardship lies, as one participant vividly expressed: “Bunu yaparken kimse sana para vermeyecek, üstüne sen para veriyorsun, bu kadar rezilliği çekiyorsun. Neden bunları yapıyorsun? Kimsenin seni çok takdir ettiği filan yok. Buradaki mücadele senin kendinle, kimseden de bunu beklemiyorsun, zaten güzel tarafı o” *[While doing this, no*

one will offer you money, instead you spend money for doing this and suffer such disgrace. Why are you doing these? No one appreciates you much. The struggle here is with yourself, you don't expect this from anyone, that's the good part] (Participant 8, male, 41, 17/5/2021).

Pain is one of the fundamental human experiences that shapes us and determines who we are (Morris, 1991) . The acceptance of suffering in sports is unique compared to other spheres of social life. In sports, it is an "accepted by-product", almost sought after by athletes, and can serve as a tool for self-discovery and enhancement of self (Roessler, 2005). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that, in the world of sports, "no pain, no gain" is a motto widely used. In extreme sports, the suffering and pain endured by athletes are the indicators of their sincerity and commitment (Le Breton, 2010). Pushing through the pain and even injuries and tolerating fatigue and discomfort are integral components of ultramarathon culture: "Çamur oluyor, ayakkabı çok acıtıyor, ama bağcıklar çamurdan keçe gibi olmuş, açamıyorum bağcığı…ayaklarımın acısıyla yarışı bitirmek zorunda kalıyorum" [*The shoes hurt a lot when there's mud; the mud stiffens the laces to the point where I can't untie them. I have to finish the race even though my feet hurt*] (Participant 15, female, 60, 24/7/2021).

In ultramarathon running, pain appears as an indicator of reaching one's limits and the point where self enhancement begins (Roessler, 2005, p. 98). Le Breton (2010) argues that in extreme sports pain is used as a tool for knowledge, a way to explore one's own limits (p. 207). He points out that athletes relate to pain as a raw material for the work they do with the body, thus enduring pain in sport represents a symbolic meaning for taking back the control of life (Le Breton, 2010, p. 195). At this point, one could ask why recreational ultramarathoners, whose demographics are heavily skewed towards white-collar professionals with full-time jobs, choose to engage in a physically and mentally demanding pastime activity that requires significant time and other resources to confront their limits. It is hoped that this will become clearer when the ultramarathon phenomenon is discussed in the context of a leisure activity reinforcing the individuals' ties with the neoliberal system.

As previously stated, the ultrarunners set their goals for the coming year and train towards them with self-discipline and self-motivation, almost like managing a project. They devise a training, nutrition, and recovery plan and develop a race strategy. While forming the training plan, they take into consideration the physical conditions

such as elevation gain, terrain, climate, and distance of the race. On top of these, ultrarunners also invest time and energy into finding efficient ways to keep themselves motivated throughout the training and the actual race to resist the temptation of making a DNF call (i.e., withdraw from the race). They make choices on how to split their time between work, family, socializing and ultrarunning. They make significant sacrifices during months of training to be able to prepare for the potential challenges of the upcoming races. Although they appreciate the emotional support they get from ultramarathoner communitas and the volunteers at the CPs, they mostly rely on their internal motivation to be able to finish a race.

Neoliberalism constructs individuals as entrepreneurial actors in every aspect of their lives, and it views them as logical, calculated beings who have the responsibility to provide for their own needs and fulfil their own ambitions. (Brown, 2005, p. 42). In a neoliberal economy, individuals are expected to be flexible and responsive to everchanging, volatile market dynamics and employ creative and efficient strategies to adapt to new environments. As the neoliberalization process is dependent on how well its ideas and beliefs are adopted in popular culture, various forms of socialising processes, including sports, are utilised to infuse neoliberal ideology into individuals' lives.

Neoliberal strategies promote the idea that individuals are autonomous, active subjects who can improve their own well-being; as a result, everyone is encouraged to work on themselves (Larner, 2000). In ultramarathon culture, an ultrarunner is expected to be self-motivated, flexible, and self-sufficient, continuously challenging their limits, having a "growth mindset", and providing solutions to setbacks and unexpected developments without complaining. These qualities of ultramarathoners were repeatedly emphasised by all participants in the interviews. They stressed that it is the runner's responsibility to overcome the adversities of an ultramarathon, not to expect much from the organisation, and to find ways to cope with the unforeseen developments on the course, pain and fatigue. Regardless of the conditions, an ultramarathoner need to be prepared for anything that can happen in a race and improve their physical and mental strength to avoid DNF. Their ultimate goal is to endure all internal and external challenges and complete a race before the cut-off time. Thus, in ultramarathon running, neo-liberal notion of self-empowerment is reproduced through this accomplishment (Hanold, 2010).

Given the strong task orientation for running among these ultramarathoners, it is possible to hypothesise that their goal orientation may extend beyond running, encompassing their career and other personal activities as well. Their focus on optimization and productivity may rule other areas of life. As they gain "enough value from ultramarathon running in terms of their overall function that they would be willing to take some health risks in order to retain such functional benefits" (Hoffman & Krouse, 2018). In ultramarathon running, there is always more to learn, more to work, and more to explore. Ultrarunners Longitudinal Tracking (ULTRA) Study results revealed that 74.1% of the participants would continue ultramarathon training and running even if they were to learn with absolute certainty that ultramarathon running is bad for their health (Hoffman & Krouse, 2018). The ultrarunners I interviewed specifically mentioned liking the "being on a journey" aspect of ultramarathon running, in other words, running without knowing the top point is a critical motivation for continuously raising the bar of endurance.

Simon (2002) points out the increasing interest in mountain climbing among corporate executives and wealthy financiers as a cult sport, valorising summitting (p. 181). He refers to "fetishization of the summit" among these climbers (Simon, 2002, p. 190). In the context of ultramarathon, pushing the envelope of endurance is highly glorified; therefore, it is possible to assert that there is the "fetishization of the endurance" among ultrarunners. The ultrarunners tend to push their endurance by embracing pain and fatigue at new levels. This fetish manifests itself in the various dimensions of an ultramarathon race, i.e., distance, terrain, weather, elevation gain, cut-off times, duration, and autonomy, increasing the uncertainties and hence the risks involved in an ultramarathon. In some races this fetish is stretched by entailing multiple dimensions, such as challenging cut-off times over very long distances (e.g., passing 75 race control points through 246 kilometres at a demanding pace of Spartathlon), challenging distances in challenging altitudes in multiple days (e.g., 330 km and over 24.000 m elevation gain of TOR330 -Tor Des Géants), or difficult terrains, extreme weather conditions, and very long distances requiring multiple days to finish with minimal support (e.g., Marathon de Sables in Sahara Desert, PTL-UTMB in the Alps). On the one hand, they prefer running ultramarathons to reconnect with themselves in the presence of nature, away from pressing business targets, daily responsibilities, duties, and other distracting factors; on the other hand, they prefer to participate in more

challenging races that require months of highly disciplined training, putting them back into a work-like project management model,

Although the ultramarathoners are a tightly-knit community, running an ultramarathon is fundamentally a highly individual physical cultural practise that strengthens the neoliberal practices in ultrarunners' lives. Ultramarathon running serves them as a “physical and mental training ground for their work and participation in neoliberal economy” (Eren, 2017). Living in a world where risks and uncertainties have been expanding, individuals look for ways to exercise courage and composure through getting involved in voluntary risk-taking activities in relatively regulated environments (Lyng, 2014). One could argue that ultramarathon running helps ultrarunners practise the continuous vigilance, resilience, persistence, adaptivity, and self-efficacy that is demanded by the VUCA (i.e., volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) world through exposing them to adverse conditions, injuries, fatigue, and pain on the racecourse. It could be hypothesised that the more they are aware of and in touch with their own competencies, and stretch their limits further and further, the more they may feel resourceful and in control of what life brings them.

In fact, over the last few decades, the discipline of psychology has been at the service of individuals by introducing new concepts such as positive psychology and emotional agility to help them cope with the VUCA world. It could be asserted that by providing them with the necessary self-help tools and putting emphasis on their agency, the discipline appears to be aiding the individuals' adaptation to the neoliberal system. An example to this, psychologist Susan David's book on "emotional agility" can be considered. In her book, she proposes a new mindset and a set of practical tools to tolerate and deal with the high levels of stress and VUCA world successfully:

> “Emotionally agile people are dynamic. They demonstrate flexibility in dealing with our fast-changing, complex world. They are able to tolerate high levels of stress and to endure setbacks, while remaining engaged, open and receptive. They understand that life isn’t always easy but they continue to act according to their most cherished values and pursue their biggest long-term goals” (David, 2016)

Taking into consideration what is expected from an ultramarathoner and their willingness to taking risks for the benefits they get from ultrarunner, it could conceivably be hypothesised that by continuously signing up and performing in

ultramarathons, recreational ultrarunners reinforce their neoliberal citizenship, meaning that they tend to lead a life like an ‘enterprise’ (Scharff, 2015).

Before moving on to the conclusions chapter, one more aspect of ultramarathon culture remains to be shared. In the next subsection, I'll list the terms and expressions used by ultramarathon runners to conclude the findings of this research.

5.3.7. The Language of Ultramarathon World

Individuals belong to one or more speech communities who share same expectations about a language, and use vocabulary and conventions that may not be understood by others unfamiliar with it (González, 2019). According to Shipway et al. (2012) distance running community members would exhibit their membership through a language specific to their world, especially where the social identity is not readily apparent. During my fieldwork, I recorded a set of words and expressions commonly used by the ultrarunners in addition to the acronyms used in ultramarathon running (e.g., DNF, CP). From my personal experience with running community, I spotted many words and expressions that runners use in common, no matter if they are road runners or ultramarathoners. However, there were specific words or expressions that may signal the orientation of the runner towards ultrarunning.

When I talked to the ultrarunners, watched their broadcasts on Instagram and their YouTube videos, listened to their podcasts, and read their books, race reports, posts on social media or on-line forums, I identified key words and a few speech patterns they used frequently in the context of ultramarathon phenomenon. This section does not aim to suggest a detailed discourse analysis but to provide an inventory of the words that belong to the ultramarathon culture. Future researchers may also benefit from this list as it enables them to acquire the language the 'locals' use.

Before moving to the word lists, it is worth to highlight a few pattens I identified from my discussion with ultrarunners. These patterns are as follows:

1- Ultramarathoners tend to use words and expressions from the world of cars such as gear, engine, accelerator, gas tank, fuel oil, flat tires to describe their ultrarunning experience: "fazla basmak" [stepping on the accelerator much], "vites değiştirmek"[changing gears], "vitesi düşürmek/arttırmak"[gear up/down], "yarışta patlamak" [go 'flat'[like tire) at a race] , "ayakların patlaması" [foot go 'flat'], "yokuşta patlamak" [go 'flat' at uphill], "duran koşucuyu çekmek"[towing a standing runner], "motorun gitmemesi" [engine not functioning at full capacity], "benzinin bitmesi" [running out of gas], "depoyu doldurmak" [filling the gas tank], "doğru yakıtı bulmak" [finding the right fuel]
2- When they refer to their race training activities, they tend to choose words from the world of school: "dersini çalışmak" [studying lesson], "yarışa çalışmak" [studying the race], "beslenmeyi çözmek" [solving the nutrition]

3- There are certain expressions that give ultramarathoners cues about the other person's running background, i.e., whether a road runner or trail runner. Ultramarathoners hesitate to use the expression 'my competitors' [rakiplerim] to refer other runners. They simply use the word 'runner'[koşucu] or 'yol arkadaşı' [companion]. They do not name ultramarathon events as 'race' [yarışma], but 'running' [koşu]. There are a set of questions signalling ultrarunners if the other person is a road runner or one of them. The ultrarunners hesitate to ask questions such as: What was your rank? [Kaçıncı oldun?], What was your pace? [Kaç pace'le koştun?], What was your time? [Kaç dakikada koştun?] If the contestant is running on a downhill single track and shouting other runners 'clear the way' or 'out of my way!' [Çekilin geliyorum!], this is a clear signal of a 'road runner' for an ultrarunner.
4- Codeswitching by mixing English and Turkish words is prevalent among ultrarunners, such as back-to-back antrenman, start alanı, start almak, cut-off'a kalmak, finish'i görmek, trail adabı.

In the following pages, the words and the expressions are presented in tables grouped in accordance with specific themes:

Table 4.

Ultramarathon World Descriptive Words

ULTRAWORLD	Ultra felsefesi	Ultra kafası
	Ultra Yaşam	Ultra/Ultracı ruhu
	Ultra kardeşliği	Ultra yol arkadaşı
	Ultra aşkı	Ultra dayanışması
	Patika camiası	Trail adabı

ULTRAMARATHON	Ultramaraton mesafesi	Maratonüstü mesafe
	Ultra mesafeler	50K/100K/100 mil yarışı
	Tek etaplı ultra	Çok etaplı ultra

Table 5.

Runner Descriptive Words

RUNNER TYPES	Ultracı	Ultramaratoncu
	Endurınsçı	Patika koşucusu
	Patikacı	Asfaltçı
	Yol koşucusu	Sosyal koşucu
	Uzuncular	Uzun mesafeci
	Kürsü odaklı koşucu	160cılar / 55ciler
	Tavşanlar	Peysır (Pacer)
	Ön grup	Arka grup
	Çalışmış koşucu	Destek koşucusu
	Finisher	Destekçi

Table 6.

Training Descriptive Words

TRAINING TYPES	Doğru antrenman	Yarışa özel antrenman
	Mental antrenman	Zihinsel antrenman
	Core antrenmanı	Kuvvet antrenmanı
	Interval antrenmanı	Hız antrenmanı
	Tempo antrenmanı	Antrenman blokları
	İrtifa antrenmanı	Arazi antrenmanı
	Sert antrenman	Antrenmanın şiddeti
	Eğim antrenmanı	Antrenman hacmi
	Yokuş çalışmak	Uzun iniş için çalışmak
	Uzun çıkış çalışmak	Uzun zamanlı antrenman
	Uzun antrenman	Back-to-back antrenman

Table 7.

Training Periods Descriptive Words

TRAINING PERIODS	Uzun yapmak	Haftanın uzunu
	Hafta sonu uzunu	Tek uzun yapmak
	Pazar uzunu	Yüklemek
	Yükleme yapmak	Yükleme dönemi
	Off vermek	Dinlenme günü
	Taper yapmak	Taper dönemi

Table 8.

Planning Descriptive Words

PLANNING	Parkura göre hazırlanmak	Parkur deneyimi
	Parkuru bilmek	Psikolojik hazırlık
	Zihinsel hazırlık	Yarışa Mental hazırlık
	Yarış stratejisi	Beslenme Stratejisi
	Beslenmeyi Çözmek	Doğru yakıtı bulmak
	Dersine çalışmak	Yarışı çalışmak
	Yarışı kafada koşmak	CP geçişlerini planlamak
	Rotayı çalışmak	Parkuru çalışmak
	Eğim grafiğini çalışmak	Yükselti grafiğini çalışmak

Table 9.

Mental Power Descriptive Words

MENTAL POWER	Mental/Zihinsel güç	Mental direnç
	Mental/Zihinsel dayanıklılık	Mental/Zihinsel bariyer
	Mental oyun	Mentali toparlamak
	Mentali kuvvetli olmak	Mentali kuvvetli tutmak
	Mentali bozulmak	Mental olarak pes etmek
	Mental olarak düşmek	Mentali aşağı çekmek
	Mental olarak zorlanmak	Mental olarak zorlu mücadele vermek
	Mental savaş içinde olmak	Zihinsel kırılmak
	Motivasyonun dibe vurması	Mentali yüksek tutmak
	Canlanmak	Yükselmek

Table 10.

Race Types Descriptive Words

RACE TYPES	Hedef Yarış	Antrenman Yarışı
	Deneme yarışı	Uzun antrenman yarışı
	Eğlence yarışı	Yükselti kazanımlı yarış
	ITRA'sı yüksek yarış	Kürsü gelecek yarış
	Sert Yarış	Keskin yarış
	Kırıcı yarış	

Table 11.

Start Line Descriptive Words

START LINE	Ön sıra (başlama çizgisinde)	Start almak
	Yarışa agresif başlamak	Yarışa temkinli başlamak
	Yarışa arkadan çıkmak	Çıkış dalgasına kapılmamak
	Yavaş tempoyla çıkış yapmak	Kendi yarışını koşmak

Table 12.

Racecourse Descriptive Words-1

RACECOURSE - 1	Sert çıkış/tırmanış	Sert eğim
	Tatlı çıkış	Tatlı tırmanış
	Yükseklik kazanımı olan bölüm	Teknik çıkış
	Güzel teknik iniş	Sert iniş
	Zor iniş	Testereye girmek
	Asfalt iniş	Zor parkur
	Zor geçiş	Zorlayıcı bölüm
	Basit parkur	Ağlatan parkur
	Acıması olmayan /acımasız parkur	Sert parkur
	Kırıcı kısım	Kırıcı parkur
	(Aşırı) teknik parkur	Teknik arazi
	Teknik tırmanış	Teknik geçiş
	Teknik zemin	Teknik bölüm
	Çarşak zemin	Yorucu zemin
	Ağırlaşan zemin (çamur-balçık gibi)	

Table 13.

Racecourse Descriptive Words-2

RACECOURSE - 2	Su geçişi	Kum geçişi
	Asfalt geçişi	Single-track geçiş
	Sahil etabı	Koşu etabı
	Tırmanış etabı	Orman geçişi
	Parkurun en sert noktası	Zorluk derecesi yüksek parkur
	Parkurun düşük nabızlı bölümü	Parkurun yüksek nabızlı bölümü

Table 14.

Passing a Check Point Descriptive Words

PASSING A CP	Zaman sınırı/bariyeri/limiti	Zaman sınırına takılmak
	Cut off'a kalmak / Yarış dışı kalmak	Cut-off riski
	Cut-off'a girmeden CP'den geçmek	Geçiş zamanı
	Check point'den geçmek / geçiş yapmak	Kontrol noktasından çıkmak / ayrılmak
	Destek noktasında oyalanmak	Soğumadan kalkmak
	CP'ye gelmek	Çipi okutmak
	İstasyona güçlü gelmek	CP'den çıkmak
	Önünde .....(kişi) Var	Önünde kimse yok
	Besin/Gıda takviyesi yapmak	Beslenme yapmak
	Sulukları doldurmak	Su takviyesi yapmak
	Depoyu doldurmak	İzotonik takviyesi yapmak
	CP'den boş geçmek	

Table 15.

Check Point Descriptive Words

CHECK POINT	CP	Check point
	Kontrol noktası	İstasyon
	Beslenme noktası	Su destek noktası
	İkmal istasyonu	Drop-bag noktası
	Zengin istasyon / CP	CP'de çalışmak
	CP'yi açmak	CP'yi toplamak
	CP'yi kapatmak	CP'den koşucu toplamak
	CP'ye /İstasyona Desteğe gitmek	

Table 16.

Race Challenges Descriptive Words

CHALLENGES	Yarışta/Parkurda kırılma noktası yaşamak	Yarışta/Parkurda kopma anı
	Vücudun gitmemesi	Vücudun götürmemesi
	Yarışta düşmek	Bedenen düşmek
	……'dan tokat yemek	……'nın tokatlaması
	Vücudun kendini kapatması	Motorun gitmemesi
	Benzinin bitmesi	Yarışta patlamak
	Yokuşta patlamak	Ayakların patlaması
	Nabzı patlatmak	Fiziksel kırılma
	Beynin kitlenmesi	Midenin kitlenmesi
	Hipotermiye girmek/uğramak	Hipotermi tehlikesi atlatmak
	Bitsin moduna gelmek	Rüzgârı / tipiyi / soğuğu yemek

Table 17.

Racing Descriptive Words

RACING	Asıl yarışın başladığı yer	Eşiği geçmek
	Kafayı kitleyip koşmak	Koşabilir moda geçmek
	Kontrollü ilerlemek/geçmek	Hafif koşmak
	Kontrollü inmek	Kontrollü gitmek
	Güzel tempo	Tatlı tempo
	Koş-yürü yapmak / Yürü-koş yapmak	Koşuda kıvamı yakalamak/bozmamak
	Yarışta açılmak	Kendi hız limitini görmek
	Tempoyu yükseltmek	İyi bir tempo yakalamak
	Fazla basmak	Vites değiştirmek/düşürmek
	Pata pata koşmak	Duran koşucuyu çekmek
	Pıtı pıtı/ fıtı fıtı koşmak	Tavşanlık yapmak

	Yolda diğer koşucuları teker teker toplamak (onlara yetişip geçmek anlamında)	Parkurdaki tavşanları yakalamak/onlara takılmak
	Pace-daş (Pace arkadaşı)	Parkurda kapışmak

Table 18.

Finish Descriptive Words

FINISH LINE	Finişe odaklanmak	Finişin kokusunu almak
	Parkuru tamamlamak	Hedefe sağlam varmak
	Güçlü/Kuvvetli bitirmek	Finish'e güçlü girmek
	Bitişe gelmek	Bitişi sağlıklı görmek
	Finisher olmak	Finish'e burgu yaparak girmek
	Finish'i görmek	Kürsü yapmak
	Süreyi geliştirmek	Süreyi iyileştirmek
	Hedef sürede yarışı tamamlamak	Sub ...(saat olarak) yapmak
	PB yapmak	DNF olmak

Table 19.

After Race Activities Descriptive Words

AFTER RACE ACTIVITIES	Parkuru süpürmek	Yarışın Strava kaydı
	Yarış sonrası jog atmak	Recovery /Toparlanma koşusu
	Yarış raporu	Yarış hikayesi

6. CONCLUSION

This chapter will begin by providing a summary of the findings, as well as the limitations of the study, followed by recommendations for further research.

6.1. Summary of Findings

From an anthropological standpoint, this study explored the experience of becoming an ultramarathoner and the emerging ultramarathon culture in Turkey. It investigated how meaning and identity are constructed through ultramarathon running as a leisure activity. Drawing particularly on the work of Turner and Schechner, it aimed to provide a deeper understanding on ultramarathon running culture, community codes, and rituals of preparation and performance in ultramarathons.

The cycle of ultramarathon running was illuminated through subjecting it to the three-phase performance process framework of Schechner. Schechner's framework provided a wide perspective to describe an ultramarathon performance beyond the series of actions happening in between the start and finish lines; it enabled revealing insights about the preparation and after performance processes, which are as critical as the racing stage in ultrarunning culture. Through Turner's concepts of liminal, liminoid, and communitas, I explored how ultramarathoners embody and shape the values and norms of the ultramarathoner community and its culture.

Sport is a phenomenon that reveals a great deal about human experience and the fabric of a particular culture. Ultramarathon is a demanding sport dominated by recreational athletes, where ordinary people do extraordinary things, surpass their limits. The ultrarunner profile is skewed toward well-educated, white-collar, male runners. What qualifies an individual as an ultrarunner is a subject of debate among ultrarunners. Despite the lack of consensus, ultrarunners agree that finishing an ultramarathon race is not sufficient to qualify as an ultrarunner. In addition to running ultra distances, being an ultrarunner requires possession of an ethos and culture that are shared by the community members.

Recreational ultrarunners have a variety of motivations and reasons for participating in ultramarathons. Ultramarathon running gives access to a particular experience of self. They choose ultrarunning for personal challenge—to push themselves beyond anything they've endured before and thus to explore themselves. Other motivations and rewards for participating in this sport include breaking away

from routines, creating something extraordinary and meaningful in their lives, reconnecting with nature and with one's spiritual self, as well as increasing overall life satisfaction, becoming psychologically and mentally stronger, and experiencing solidarity and companionship.

Ultramarathoners approach their sport like a career, they invest their time, energy, and resources in ultra distance running. Exploring limits is a lifelong quest with full of surprises worth pursuing for ultrarunners. They devote far more time to training runs than they do to competing in events. Preparing for an ultramarathon requires developing a structured, efficient, long-term training plan in accordance with the racecourse's requirements and executing this plan in a systematic and rigorous manner. Ultrarunners tend to normalise extremes and set their next challenge based on increased level of difficulty or longer distances.

Participation in ultramarathon running becomes so pervasive in their lives that it has a significant impact on their lifestyle choices, almost ruling their lives on multiple fronts. It moulds their social circles and forces them to be efficient and pragmatic in their personal, professional, and social lives. Preparing for and running ultramarathons helps ultrarunners practise mastering their minds. The skills they gain from ultramarathon running help them on other fronts of their professional and personal lives, e.g., in approaching the adversities of daily life with a calmer, more patient, and more positive attitude.

Ultramarathon has a less competitive ethos compared to road races such as marathons and half-marathons. In the realm of ultramarathons, success is defined as having the capacity to enjoy the difficulties of covering long distances and ultimately finishing a race. While absolute pace (minutes per kilometre) governs running goals in road races, in ultrarunning pace is a relative concept impacted by highly varied terrain, weather conditions as well as elevation gains/losses, and is not the definitive measure of success. In ultrarunning, enjoyment and camaraderie are privileged over speed and personal records.

The process of enculturation take place in multiple physical and virtual spaces. What happens in between travelling to a race location and traveling back home from an ultramarathon race provide ample opportunities to the members of the community to acquire and embody the norms, values and practices of ultra distance running culture.

The exchanges at training sessions and online platforms as well as the race reports also feed this enculturation process.

Ultramarathon is a place where many extremities and diverse states of being are juxtaposed: order and chaos, physical and mental, monotony and variability, ordinary and remarkable, exhaustion and liveliness, spontaneous and disciplined, adamant and submissive, resistant and flexible, strong and vulnerable, connected and free, solitude and companionship, self-centred and altruist, pleasure and pain, suffering and joy.

The ultrarunners experience multiple physical and emotional highs and lows on the racecourse. Being mindful, responding to what is experienced in the present moment, and instead of strict adherence to plans, being flexible in implementing pre-determined racing strategy and training practices are the critical enablers of completing a race. At some moments they find it hard to justify the efforts in the name of finishing a race. In such moments they start bargaining with themselves about leaving the race. The ones who can master their negative self-talk, continue the journey and the ones fail to find a strong reason to continue eventually found themselves dealing with the agony of DNF (Did Not Finish). While racing exhausts them physically and emotionally and tears them apart, crossing the finish line fills them with euphoria and pride, making them feel whole again.

In ultramarathon liminoid space, voluntary suffering and hardship lie at the core of this sport. Managing suffering and withstanding, even enjoying, pain is highly valorised by the ultrarunning community. It is a marker of their collective identity. Ultramarathoners, like ascetics, subject themselves to pain and suffering in the process of ultramarathon running and as a result, they practise self-mastery and defy their limits. Endurance is a learning process for ultrarunners, and it is almost fetishized. The bar of endurance is continuously raised by signing up for longer or harder races. Overcoming self-doubt and having an enduring mindset to defend the runner from their own frailties in the face of injuries, fatigue, pain, and other external stressors (e.g., weather conditions, geography) is a key competency to develop in order to progress in “ultramarathon running career”.

Ultramarathon running offers ultrarunners the chance to experience survival in nature in a relatively safe setting. Findings confirmed that running in a natural environment provides a rich sensory experience and helps them reconnect with their former ways of being. Nature serves them as a stage on which ultrarunners can push

their limits and experiment with themselves to take control over their bodies through training their minds. In the presence of nature, they continually oscillate between omnipotence and weakness or insignificance. For them, nature is there to admire and respect rather than conquer.

Ultramarathons give ultrarunners a short-term escape from traditional power structures. It gives them a sense of freedom from the structures and obligations of professional and social life, and societal constraints and norms, such as health, beauty, success, failure, competition as well freedom to take risks, explore personal limitations, and establish trust-based authentic, tribal connections. Ultrarunning provides them an additional social space, a “third place”, in their lives outside of the home and work environments. A world that values being in harmony with nature rather than dominating it, a world that facilitates inner journeys and self-discovery rather than causing distractions, and a world that prioritises trust, companionship, and being supportive of one another over competing and winning at any cost. Their limits become transitional as they continue to experience new liminoid spaces at ultramarathons.

From the outside, an ultramarathon appears to be an athletic contest, but in parallel it also encompasses a spiritual journey. Ultrarunners find peace in solitude, better connect with their thoughts and emotions, and feel realigned. In a world where digital media consumption and digital socialisation tools have been slowly but steadily taking over the offline time people spend with themselves without distraction, ultramarathon running has the potential to provide people with a space where they can spend quality time with themselves and nature to contemplate. Ultramarathoners believe that nature cures them both physically and spiritually. Ultrarunners’ sense of connectedness with nature makes ultrarunning a platform where they train their souls, reshaping their spiritual "physique". Running for long periods of time helps them get into a mindful state, where they focus on what is and take an observer seat, where they notice and confront their ego-driven thoughts and actions as well as their self-beliefs. This mental state leads to increased knowledge of oneself and impacts the trajectory of one's life journey.

Preparing for and running ultramarathons facilitates ultrarunners’ self-exploration process. Being exposed to adverse conditions in nature and subject to outside forces for long hours may trigger a transformational experience in an ultrarunner through connecting with oneself at a level that has not surfaced before. By

leaving their comfort zone and urban lifestyle voluntarily, even though temporarily, they experiment and meet with new versions of themselves.

Running ultramarathons is almost a fast-forward representation of one's life cycle, from birth to death, with its victories and defeats, exuberance and gloom, abundance and deprivation, and losing the track and finding the way back. It is a journey filled with ups and downs, pleasure and pain, hope and despair, falling and rising, perseverance and giving up, victories and failures, joy and boredom.

Although ultramarathoners move along the same racecourse and are exposed to same external conditions, no runner has a matching experience with another runner on the race day. Every finish leads to a new start, a new beginning in ultramarathoners' lives. The targets they set for themselves feeds the vicious cycle of ultrarunning. To achieve a target, they push their bodies and minds to its limits. As soon as it is achieved and celebrated with fellow runners, the target becomes their 'new normal' and a new cycle begins.

Ultramarathon running is a community-oriented physical culture practice. It is an egalitarian sport by its nature and its liminoid space creates a fertile ground for a normative communitas to emerge. The gravitational force of their communitas is their love of endurance, pushing the limits, and discovering what they are capable of. In ultramarathon events, runners experience authentic human connections on the trails while going through physical setbacks and facing risks. The challenging experiences as well as the slower pace of ultras induced by the length and terrain conditions facilitate the development of social interactions. Runners meet on the trails; conversations go deep fast: life purpose, dreams, anxieties, fears are exchanged. Ultrarunners situate their sport as an inclusive, supportive running space based on the social support they provide one another. They invest in time to foster and maintain their relationships within their communitas. They are eager to share their knowledge and experiences with anyone who wishes to transition into ultrarunning. They encourage one another to learn lessons about self and being and let go off mental boundaries by embracing as many adversities as possible in different racecourses.

Ultramarathon runners learn to cope with and adapt to adversity and stress. Being outside their comfort zone becomes their new comfort zone. Running ultramarathons helps them develop and reinforce a perspective of life as well as a source of inspiration that they can draw in their daily lives. Engaging athletics in ultrarunning

form becomes a physical and mental training ground for participation in neoliberal economy. The neoliberal structure holds its citizens accountable for taking responsibility for their progress and making their way through despite all the adversities that life will throw at them. The ultrarunners reaffirm and practise some parts of neoliberal ideas and beliefs by raising the bar of endurance, self-government, practising being self-sufficient, solution-oriented and flexible in the face of ever-changing conditions, and overcoming resistance both externally and internally.

6.2. Limitations of the Research

As with the majority of studies, the design of the present study is subject to potential limitations. Ultramarathoners over the age of 40 and the male runners make up a larger portion of the sample, which is in line with the proportion of age and gender groups in ultrarunner population. Therefore, the representation of younger ultramarathoners and female ultramarathoners are limited in the present research. Future studies may consider a more balanced recruitment to better represent these groups.

My initial plan was to conduct all in-depth interviews face-to-face, and most of them in the homes of ultramarathoners to be able to observe how running was penetrated into their living spaces, and, where possible, interact with their household members. I wasn't expecting every runner to agree to in-home interviews; however, I was hoping to increase the potential by establishing rapport at the races I observed. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, I conducted only a few interviews face-to-face in public areas, the majority took place in the form of on-line interviews. This might have some impact on the degree of depth and genuineness of the data I collected.

Being a runner, I sometimes struggled to maintain an outsider perspective in observing ultrarunners. It has to be acknowledged that my personal experience and identification with running might have influenced the research process to a certain extent.

In terms of research method, future researchers might consider adding more sites to their observations, such as observing weekly training sessions of trail running groups organised by sportswear brands (e.g., How to trail run by Salomon or Columbia Montrail running team), and observing relatively smaller ultramarathon organisations in addition to major ones. The two ultramarathon events I observed (İznik and Cappadocia) were among the most attended ultramarathon organisations in Turkey.

Doing observations in small-scale ultramarathons might reveal more insights about the ultramarathon community.

6.3. Recommendations for Future Research

One of the questions raised by this study is what factors impact the participation of female recreational athletes in endurance sports events and what choices and sacrifices they make to take part in these events. According to DUV statistics, half of the female ultramarathon runners raced only once in ultramarathon organisations in Turkey, they did not continue performing in ultra distances. Although the ultrarunners expressed the gender-neutral environment of ultramarathons, women runners live in the wider context of Turkey. They are constrained by societal norms and expectations incumbent in their roles as single women, working women, non-working women, conservative women, wives and mothers. Future studies may target the impact of gender on participation in and experience of endurance sports.

The ultramarathoners believe that their exposure to unpredictable and ever-changing conditions of ultrarunning benefits them in their professional lives. They claim to have further developed their problem-solving and listening skills, solution-oriented and positive mindset, and patience in their interactions in the work environment by running ultramarathons. In the future, it would be interesting to explore the impact of ultrarunning on runners' professional lives.

Running an ultramarathon activates the senses. Ultrarunners go through a rich variety of sensory experiences at various points of ultramarathon events. Future research could examine how these sensory impressions affect the athletes' lived experiences in ultramarathons and other endurance sports.

In this research, my focal point was recreational ultramarathoners. I researched the race organisers and volunteers in the context of their impact on ultrarunners' race experiences. I did not conduct in-depth interviews with the local community members who were exposed to ultramarathon events within the scope of this present research. During in-depth interviews, the ultramarathoners mentioned numerous times their desire about making a positive impact on the attitude of local communities towards sports activities and being a role model for the local kids going future. Researching sport events phenomenon from the perspective of locals and its impact on the local community life, economy and culture is another area I would propose for future

research. It is hoped that, in the future, subject matter could also be researched from the angle of commercialisation of the endurance sports and its impact on the future of endurance sports culture.

6.4. Contribution

The research succeeded in providing satisfactory insights into the cultural construct of ultramarathoner identity, the dynamics of ultramarathon races, and the cultural norms, values, and characteristics of the ultramarathon community. It has contributed to our understanding of how individuals thrive and add meaning to their lives through endurance sport activities. The findings brought an understanding on the way ultrarunners foster and maintain their community and culture. I am confident that my research will serve as a strong basis to future social science studies on not only ultramarathons and ultramarathon runners but also other endurance sports activities and communities.

The findings from this study make several contributions to the current literature. Ultrarunning has witnessed a dramatic increase in popularity over recent years, yet anthropological research about the recreational ultramarathon athletes is still in its infancy. In Turkey, the ultramarathon experience and ultrarunning culture were mostly shared by ultramarathoners, with the exception of a few studies focussed mainly on the race organisations and ultrarunner motivations. The current research is the first scholar work employing phenomenological perspective in exploring the ultramarathon community and culture in Turkey, and the impact of running ultra distances on ultramarathoners' lives. The research offers a groundwork for future studies on other endurance sports. It provides the first extensive compilation of ultramarathoner discourse for the future researchers.

The present research is also the first comprehensive application of Schechner's tripartite structure of the performance process to endurance sports, specifically the ultramarathon phenomenon, providing a comprehensive picture of ultramarathon running from conception to completion.

6.5. Conclusion

Given the growing popularity of ultramarathons, the present study sought to close the gap in the literature by examining the ultramarathoners' experiences from a phenomenological standpoint and shedding light on meaning and impact of ultrarunning on their lives and the emerging ultramarathon culture in Turkey. This chapter concluded the study by highlighting the key findings in relation to the research aims and questions.

The research indicated that ultramaraton running has a cyclical nature in ultrarunners' lives; as they reach their goals, a new cycle of performance begins with mew goals. Ultramarathon running is a journey within and outside. For the sake of finding out their limits and seeking meaning in life, ultrarunners voluntarily and repeatedly embrace the gruelling conditions of ultramarathon running. Ultrarunners commit themselves to becoming limitless in facing difficulties to be able to find their limits, which move farther as they reach them. They make peace with pain and discomfort to create outstanding stories of willpower and self-government with their bodies. In the absence of an absolute limen (threshold) to cross, the ultrarunners aim to thrive for "becoming an ultramarathoner" instead of "being an ultramarathoner". The title "ultramarathoner" is structurally transitional and fluid, a multifaceted construct representing a way of life, almost an ideal form of existence that is hard to reach. Ultrarunning reflects an integral part of their identity and is a signature of their life view, shaping their lifestyle and social spheres. The ultramarathons they complete cause varying degrees of transformation in their identity construct. For ultrarunners, it is not a sport activity they do for health but a serious leisure activity, giving them a good cause to lead a healthy lifestyle; it is almost a career they pursue.

The research has also shown that ultramarathon is a liminoid space that creates tribal bonds among its members, making them feel unified with one another and with nature. It serves them as a space for contemplation and as a calibration tool for life: reminding them of their vulnerability and promoting a sense of modesty. It becomes a platform where they train their souls, reshaping their spiritual "physiques".

Ultramarathon is analogous to the way we human beings live our lives. We set out on a long journey called life. We identify goals with the hope of having a life that matters and is fulfilling, and we play our part in preparations to the best of our knowledge. The journey is full of unknowns, yet we move on and accumulate

experiences. Some sections of the course make us think that we are not going to make it, and leads us to feeling vulnerable, whereas some sections make us appreciate the wonders of this journey and make us feel transcendent. The journey constantly transforms us. When it comes to an end, we are no longer the same person at the start point after all the adventures and the camaraderie we experienced along the way.

Practising to cope with and adapt to adversity and continuously pushing the envelope by exposing oneself outside one's comfort zone becomes a norm in ultrarunners' lives. The question could be asked then, what could be the implications of being eager in embracing ever-increasing levels of endurance and fostering self-efficacy? What if developing a sense of pleasure in exhaustion, suffering, and pain, welcoming every adversity without resistance and viewing it as an opportunity for personal growth, and accepting full responsibility for the circumstances one is given may lead individuals to being more obedient to the challenges presented them by the authorities or structures? What if perceiving these as a prerequisite of an exhilarating, liberating and life-changing experience condition the sense of success and hence impact the level of satisfaction one could get? Given the high proportion of white-collar professionals in the ultramarathon population, the question is whether these individuals train to explore themselves and create a breathing space away from the power structures or train to become more tolerable, receptive and productive for the demands of the neoliberal structures? These are the new questions that remain not fully answered yet, and they hold the potential of starting a new cycle of research.

As a final word, this topic is of interest and deeply personal to me as somebody who has immensely benefited from running on multiple fronts of my life, from keeping my body active to improving my mindfulness and resilience, as well as accessing my creativity. Therefore, one of the motivations for choosing this research project and writing this thesis was to encourage its academic readers to be more physically active in nature, no matter what the external conditions are. I hope reading this thesis triggers sustainable actions.

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Appendix A – In-depth Interview Guide

- Would you tell me about yourself?
- When and how did you start running?
- What does running mean to you? What is its significance in your life journey?
- How did you hear about ultramarathon races?
- Are there different types of ultramarathons? How?
- How did you start running ultramarathons?
- Which ultramarathon distances and races have you run so far?
- How do you choose an ultramarathon race?
- Would you describe yourself as an ultramarathoner? When did you first start calling yourself an ultramarathoner?
- In your opinion, who is called an ultramarathoner? What it takes to be an ultramarathoner?
- How do you evaluate ultrarunners in relation to other runners? Any similarities or differences?
- What does participate in an ultramarathon event mean to you?
- What impact do you think running ultramarathons had on you? In which sense?
- How about the impact of your ultramarathon running on people in your close circle? (Probe: Spouse/partner, parent, child, friends etc.)
- Taking into account all the experiences you have from preparing for to running ultramarathons, what does stand out? What are the indispensable elements of it?
- What does mental preparation mean to you? What do you do for it?
- Imagine that you are at the starting line of an ultramarathon. What is going on there? How do you feel, what do you do?
- Are there any moments, experiences, or emotions that you cannot forget from the races you participated in? Can you describe them?
- When and how do ultramarathoners interact with one another in races? What sort of interactions take place on the racecourse?
- How about of your experiences and interactions with nature in ultramarathons?
- Sometimes ultramarathoners quit a race or feel like on the verge of quitting. Have you experienced such moments? When? What happened? How did your feel?

- Towards the finish line and the time you crossed the line, what do you experience? How do you feel?
- Do you keep objects from the races you participated in? Which ones? Where do you keep them? What is their significance for you?
- If you had never run ultramarathons, what would you be missing in your life?
- Is there anything else you want to share with me?

Appendix B – Analysis Codes

- [HOW] - RUNNING ULTRA - FIRST STEPS:
  How started to running/ultra, how/where heard of ultra, first ultramarathon
- [ULTRAS] - ULTRAMARATHON DEFINITIONS & COMPARISONS:
  Definition of ultramarathoner, types of ultramarathon(er)s, popularity and attraction towards ultras, ultramarathon vs marathon
- [WHY] – MEANING & MOTIVES
  Meaning of running, ultrarunning motivations/benefits/gains, addiction
- [TRGT] – ULTRAMARATHON TARGETS
- [CHCS] – CHOICES MADE
  Race decision process, race selection criteria, race calendar, life choices made for race preparation
- [LIMIT] – MEANING OF LIMITS
- [WRKLF] - IMPACT OF RUNNING ON WORK LIFE
- [MNTL] - MENTAL POWER & PREPARATION
- [PSYC] - PSYCHOLOGY OF ULTRAMARATHON RUNNING
- [NMBRS] - RUNNERS' AFFINITY TO NUMBERS/MEASUREMENTS
- [REACT] - REACTIONS TOWARDS ULTRARUNNERS
  Support / Discouragement from family and social circles
- [TRN] - PLANNING, TRAINING, EQUIPPING FOR RACE
  Race strategy, researching/ learning for race, training/rehearsing for race, what to wear/which gear to take for race, how to fuel up at race, recovery for race
- [PRERC] - PRE-RACE EXPERIENCES
  transportation to race, accommodation for race, registration, interactions at marathon fair, pre-race socialisation, pre-race social media sharing
- [LINE] - EXPERIENCES AT THE START/FINISH LINE
  start line waiting experience, finish line crossing experience
- [INRACE] - IN RACE/CHECK POINT EXPERIENCES
  Check point impressions, quality of refreshments, efforts of ultramarathoner' race crew and volunteers, race weather, race terrain, race quitting, sensations
- [INTER] - INTERACTIONS DURING RACE
  Interactions with nature/fellow ultra runners/volunteers/race crew/locals/self

- [HEALTH] - PAIN & HEALTH MATTERS
  Experience of pain, injuries, digestive distress, scars & blisters, other (hallucination etc)
- [POSTRC] - POST-RACE EXPERIENCES
  Race medals, race t-shirts & vests, prizes, medal ceremony, post-race meal & care, post-race socialisation, post-race social media usage, race report writing, signing up a new race
- [COMTT] – ULTRAMARATHON COMMUNITY / SUPPORT
  Camaraderie among ultrarunners, mentoring junior ultrarunners, support to fellow runners, support at emergency, race organizer support
- [CODES] - SOCIAL NORMS IN ULTRARUNNING COMMUNITY
  start-finish line codes, in race codes (health, food, chat, etc), other norms and codes (pre-race/after race etc)
- [ORG] – RACE ORGANIZERS
- [TEAMS] – RUNNING TEAMS
- [MMTO] - MEMENTOS COLLECTED & STORED FROM RACES
- [COVID] – Ultrarunners & COVID19

Appendix C – Fieldwork Execution Plans

Figure 36.

İznik Ultra Marathon 2021 - Arrival Time to CPs for Observations

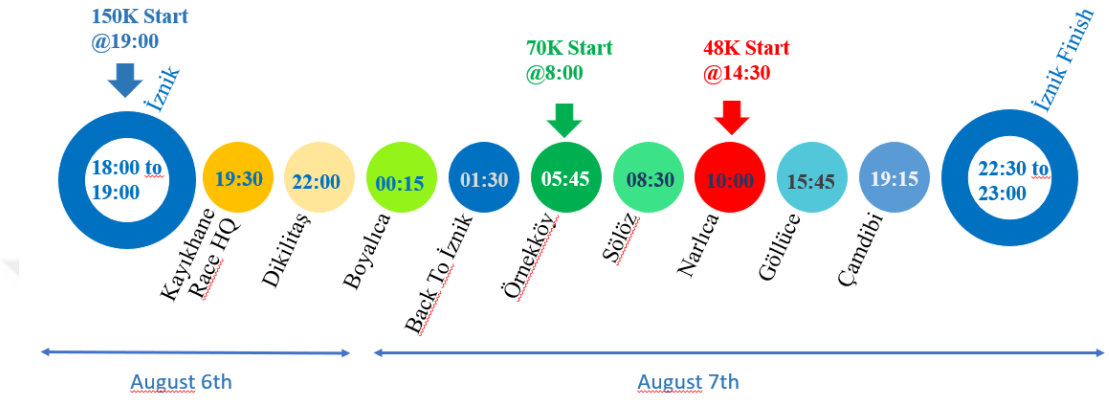
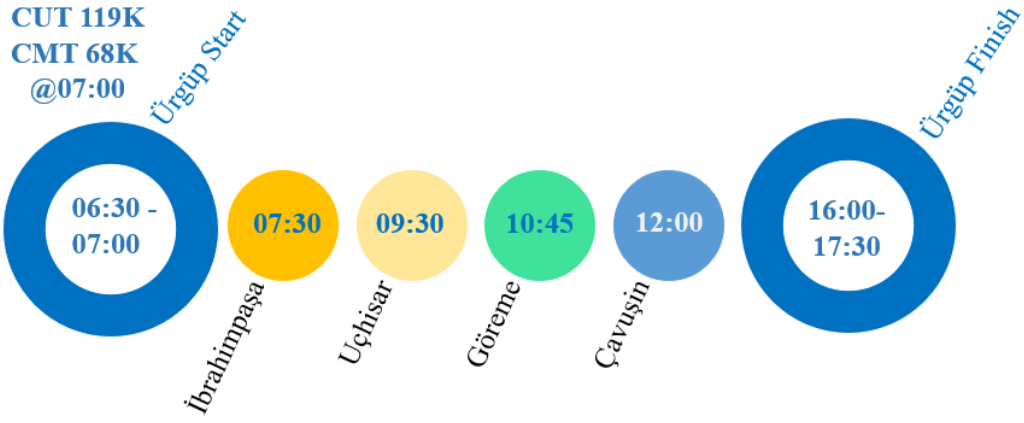


Figure 37.

Salomon Cappadocia 2019 - Arrival Time to CPs for Observations



Appendix D- 2022 Ultramarathon Calendar

2022 TÜRKİYE ULTRA MARATHON CALENDAR

	RACE DATE	RACE REGION	RACE NAME	Total number of races	Number of Ultra Distance races	100K + Races
SPRING	12-Mar	AEGEAN	Nif Trail (10K, 20K, 30K, 55K)	4	1	
	18-20 Mar	AEGEAN	Climbolic Efes Ultra (5K, 12K, 23K, 42K, 61K, 120K)	6	2	1
	2-Apr	MEDITERRANEAN	Merrell Alanya Ultra (17K, 28K, 48K, 76K)	4	2	
	9-10 Apr	MEDITERRANEAN	Garmin Latmos Ultra Ekstreme (10K, 17K, 45K)	3	1	
	16-Apr	MARMARA	Farm Olea Backyard Ultra	1	1	
	23-Apr	MARMARA	İstanbul Ultra Trail (15K, 30K, 60K, 100K)	4	2	1
	14-15 May	MARMARA	Şahinyurdu Ultra (9K, 19K, 35K, 80K)	4	1	
	20-22 May	MARMARA	İznik Ultra Maratonu (5K, 13K, 25K, 35K, 55K, 90K, 160K)	6	3	1
	14-15 May	MEDITERRANEAN	Tahtalı Run to Sky 12K, 27K, 65K, 113K)	4	2	1
	28-May	MARMARA	Gebze Ultra Trail (7K, 17K, 27K, 41K, 55K)	5	1	
SUMMER	4-Jun	MARMARA	Dağ Yenice Ultra (6K, 13K, 32K, 59K)	4	1	
	11-Jun	MEDITERRANEAN	Yesemek Ultra Trail (5K, 10K,22K,45K,65K)	5	2	
	11-12 Jun	MARMARA	Sapanca Ultra Maratonu (6K, 13K, 21K, 40K, 60K)	5	1	
	2-3 Jul	CENTRAL ANATOLIA	Erciyes Ultra Sky (4.5K, 12K, 25K, 45K, 64K)	4	2	
	22-24 Jul	MARMARA	Uludağ Premium Ultra Trail BURSA (6K, 16K, 30K, 66K,100K)	5	2	1
	29-31 Jul	EASTERN ANATOLIA	Artos Sky Trail (15K, 30K, 48K)	3	1	
	19-21 Aug	CENTRAL ANATOLIA	Runfire Salt Lake (10K, 20K, 40K, 80K, 100M)	5	2	1
AUTUMN	10-11 Sept	MARMARA	Kyzikos Ultra (5K, 22K, 45K, 60K, 104K)	5	3	1
	10-Sep	BLACK SEA	Kaçkar Ultra (5K, 15K, 50K)	3	1	
	17-18 Sept	AEGEAN	Frig Ultra (2K, 6K, 11K, 22K, 44K, 66K)	6	2	
	23-25 Sept	MEDITERRANEAN	Kilikya Ultra Maratonu (7K, 15K, 33K, 54K)	4	1	
	23-25 Sept	AEGEAN	Likya Yolu Ultra Maratonu (20K, 37K, 57K, 100K)	4	2	1
	1 Oct	MEDITERRANEAN	Elbistan Ultramaratonu K.Maraş (5K, 100K)	2	1	1
	15-16 Oct	CENTRAL ANATOLIA	Salomon Cappadocia Ultra (38K, 63K, 119K)	3	2	1
	12-Nov	AEGEAN	Tantalos Ultra Trail -Karagöl Milli Parkı (8K, 15K, 24K, 50K)	4	1	
	19-Nov	AEGEAN	BodRUN BODRUM (6K, 10K, 23K, 60K)	4	1	
	26-Nov	MEDITERRANEAN	Fethiye Ultra (10K, 25K, 50K)	3	1	
WINTER	3-4 Dec	MARMARA	Ida Ultra (15K, 36K, 66K, 114K)	4	2	1
	17 Dec	MARMARA	Longest Night Run (8K, 20K, 45K)	3	1	
	24-25 Dec	MEDITERRANEAN	Antalya Ultra (5K, 12K, 31K, 57K, 85K)	5	2	
			Total :	**122**	**47**	**11**

Appendix E- Race Information for Selected Ultramarathons in 2022

RACE NAME	RACECOURSES	DISTANCE (Km)	ELEVATION (mt)	TIME LIMIT (HRS)	ITRA POINTS	EARLY PAYMENT (TL)	LATE PAYMENT (TL)
CLIMBOLIC EFES ULTRA	Ephesus Ultra Trail 120K	120	4,740	24	5	649	750
	Ephesus Medium Trail 61K	61	2,610	10	3	419	500
MERRELL ALANYA ULTRA TRAIL	Alanya Ultra Trail AUT76K	76	3,700	15	4	450	510
	Taurus Mountain Marathon TMM48K	48	2,690	10.30	3	390	450
LATMOS ULTRA TRAIL	Latmos Ultra 45K	45	2,150	10	-	420	420
İSTANBUL ULTRA	IU-100K	100	2,546	20	4	380	420
	IU-60K	60	1,459	12	3	340	380
TAHTALI RUN TO SKY	Tahtalı Ultra Sky TUS113K	113	5,450	26	5	750	900
	Berg Sky Race BSR65K	65	4,300	17	3	550	660
İZNİK ULTRA	İznik Ultra 160K	160	4,930	33	6	725	900
	Orhangazi Ultra 90K	90	2,790	17	4	550	700
	Narlıca Mountain Marathon 55K	55	1,920	11	3	450	600
SPX DAĞYENİCE ULTRA	Toprak Parkuru 59K	59	2,100	10	3	350	490
SAPANCA ULTRA	Sapanca Ultra 60K	60	2,170	10	3	305	395
ULUDAĞ PREMIUM ULTRA	UPUT100K	100	5,100	25	4	550	700
	UPA 66K	66	3,600	17	3	450	600
ERCİYES SKY TRAIL	ULTRA SKY TRAIL 64K	64	3,000	15	-	400	500
	45K	45	3,917	12	-	300	400
GARMIN RUNFIRE SALTLAKE	RSFL 100MIL	160	1	34	5	680	720
	RSFL 80K	80	1	14	3	640	660
KYZIKOS ULTRA	KYZIKOS ULTRA 104K	104	3,100	24	4	350	550
	KIRAZLI MANASTIRI ULTRA 60K	60	2,300	12	3	350	550
LYCIAN WAY ULTRA	LYUM 100K	100	4,158	25	4	650	690
	LYUM 57K	57	2,840	16	3	570	610
SALOMON CAPPADOCIA ULTRA TRAIL	CUT 119K	119	3,730	24	5	950	1050
	CMT 63K	63	2,030	12.30	3	800	900
IDA ULTRA	IDU114K	114	4,270	24	5	450	540
	IHU66K	66	2,670	14	3	375	450