

A man with a beard, wearing a grey hoodie and dark pants, sits on a log on a hillside. He is looking out over a valley with rolling hills and a small town in the distance. The sky is overcast. The text 'FLIGHT FROM SYRIA' is in large black letters, and 'REFUGEE STORIES' is in large white letters, both overlaid on the image.

FLIGHT FROM SYRIA REFUGEE STORIES

FLIGHT FROM SYRIA:

REFUGEE STORIES



Featuring the work of:

Hugh Eakin

Lauren Gelfond Feldinger

Stephen Franklin

Joanna Kakissis

Alia Malek

Holly Pickett

Alisa Roth

Alice Su

Selin Thomas

Edited by Kem Knapp Sawyer

Design by Evey Wilson

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Introduction

The Syrian civil war, now in its fifth year, has claimed the lives of more than 300,000, and almost half are civilians. Historical antiquities and well-preserved temples are destroyed, ancient ruins looted, an archaeologist—the keeper of a World Heritage UNESCO site—beheaded.

In a country that numbers over 23 million, 15 million are directly affected by the war—hungry, ill, and sometimes homeless. More than 4 million have fled the country.

Many have crossed borders on foot, in the back of trucks, and on trains. Others never make it. They are detained or die—from suffocation or lack of food and water.

Some have turned to the sea—crowding into small boats, leaving their possessions behind, and trusting their lives to strangers. The body of a 3-year old boy is found washed ashore in Turkey, and his father tells us his wife and 5-year old son also drowned.

Flight from Syria: Refugee Stories looks at the people behind the sobering statistics, showing the human toll of a war that has divided families, left children orphaned, and pitted neighbor against neighbor. It features the writing and photography of nine Pulitzer Center grantees—all journalists who have reported on the Syrian refugee crisis. Their travels took them from Syria to Sweden, and from over-populated camps to cramped apartments in city suburbs.

Originally published by Al Jazeera, BBC News Magazine, Guernica, In These Times, Marketplace, NPR, The Atlantic, and The New York Review of Books between 2012 and 2015, these stories tell of an abandoned homeland, an indifferent world, and an uncertain future. They trace the history of one of the biggest displacements of modern times—providing a testament to the suffering and courage of those who fled.

Each of the journalists lends a unique perspective. Hugh Eakin and Alisa Roth underscore the bleak prospects for the Syrian diaspora in a world that does little to make refugees feel welcome.

Alia Malek writes of Syrian Armenians whose ancestors survived the 1915 genocide. Alice Su tells us of Palestinians forced to flee Syria and barred from neighboring countries.

Selin Thomas reports on the many refugee children who have little or no access to schools or medical care. Their parents can no longer find work and home is a camp or temporary shelter.

Joanna Kakissis and Holly Pickett take us to Greece, Germany, Sweden, and Russia to meet a few of the 200,000 Syrians who have found refuge in Europe. Along the way they encounter bandits, smugglers, extortionists, and politicians who claim “refugees cost too much.”

But we also see glimmers of hope. Stephen Franklin profiles doctors and lawyers forced to leave behind successful practices, now donating their services to refugees who thought they had no future.

And Lauren Gelfond Feldinger introduces us to a Syrian group of volunteers who work with refugee children in Jordan. They teach conflict resolution and team building—boys and girls on the playing field are given keepsake cards that read, “Your education is your weapon.”

Here are stories of hardships, pain, dreams, and expectations. They leave us with a resounding question: What can we do?

Kem Knapp Sawyer

CHAPTER ONE: THE DISPLACED

The numbers keep going up. "As of the summer of 2015, nearly half the entire population of Syria is displaced," Hugh Eakin and Alisa Roth report. Almost two million Syrians now live in Turkey, more than a million in Lebanon, and a half million in Jordan. How have their lives changed after leaving family and home behind? What future do they face in a world that shows so much indifference?

Alisa Roth writes about everyday life in Gaziantep, Turkey, a city that has become a new home for Syrians. One where cafes serve espresso with cardamom, store signs are posted in Arabic, and falafel comes with a hole in the center. Yet much is different. Refugees in Gaziantep have left their well-equipped kitchens behind—they now use a mini-fridge and a two-burner hotplate. Children no longer have their own bedroom but instead sleep on the living-room couch. Families have traded amenities for temporary physical security: "no bombs, no snipers and no random arrests."

For years, as more and more refugees continued to flee, many of the world's political leaders turned a blind eye. "We have not seen a refugee outflow escalate at such a frightening rate since the Rwandan genocide almost 20 years ago," Antonio Guterres, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, told the UN Security Council in 2013.

"Among the many effects of the Syrian war, the collapse of one of the Arab world's most diverse societies may be the most consequential," Eakin and Roth write. Syria was once home to Alawites, Christians, Druze, Kurds, Turkmen, Armenians, Assyrians and Sunni Muslims who made up a 74 percent majority. But now "the incessant battles" have led to "a new sectarian consciousness."

And everything is changing. An official from a Hezbollah town on Lebanon's Syrian border explains, "We have Syrians living alongside our own families here, and the sons of both are meanwhile killing each other in Syria."

**Hugh Eakin
Alisa Roth**

Most of the refugees are found not in large camps, but in towns and rural areas—the director of the Norwegian Refugee Council’s Lebanon office calls their living conditions “a hidden crisis.” Well-trained doctors cannot find work and others struggle to make ends meet having fled the violence with only flip flops and the clothes on their backs.

Those who face the most severe crisis are the children. Diseases like tuberculosis and measles, once rare, are now recurring. Most children do not attend school—instead they sell tissues and soap on the streets.

In a world where “civilians have almost no safe place to go” the international community ponders military strategy and food distribution. Eakin and Roth remind us of the uncertainty that lies ahead.

■ ■ ■



A Damascus widower and his young daughter hung this mirror in their apartment in an abandoned building across from the UN office in Beirut. They joked that they don't need a refrigerator in the winter because the apartment is so cold they can leave the food out. Image by Alisa Roth. Lebanon, 2013.



Total population of Syria in 2014:
23.30 million

Number of people killed as of January 2015:
220,000

Number of internally displaced people as of June 2015:
7.6 million

Through a Chain Link Fence

Hugh Eakin and Alisa Roth
August 10, 2015

On June 14, 2015, a terrified throng of men and women, many clutching babies and young children by the backs of their shirts, stampeded their way through a narrow opening in a chain-link and barbed-wire fence separating Tal Abyad, a city controlled by the Islamic State, and the Turkish border town of Akcakale. They were fleeing vicious fighting between ISIS militants and Kurdish forces, which were trying to regain Tal Abyad, even as the Turkish military, on the other side of the fence, was trying to keep the border closed. Within hours, several thousand Syrians—a majority of them women and children—squeezed through the gap until ISIS fighters stopped the exodus at gunpoint.

Yet one more horror in a war that has delivered them almost daily, the event nevertheless stood out for what it showed about the sheer complexity of the human catastrophe now unfolding in Syria. Back in the summer of 2013, when we undertook a [comprehensive investigation](#) for *The New York Review* of the Syrian refugee crisis, it seemed to us that it couldn't get much worse. There were nearly three million officially

registered refugees, and nearly one-third of Syria's entire population of 22.5 million—a staggering number—had been uprooted from their homes. Visiting border areas in Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, and Northern Iraq, we found Syrians struggling to survive, in makeshift encampments, abandoned buildings, dirt-floor houses, and squalid apartments. Almost half of them were children, and many were unable to go to school.

Still, there seemed to be many ways to address the crisis. However daunting such measures might be in practice, food could be distributed, camps erected, medical checkups provided, schools built. For humanitarian aid workers, the overriding concern was raising sufficient international funds—the UN target at the time was a record 5.2 billion dollars—and ensuring that there was sufficient infrastructure to cope with the vast numbers of people flowing into neighboring countries.

Even as we reported the story, however, there were signs that the conflict itself was turning in an ominous new direction. Turkey, we noted, had become a major conduit for fighters into Syria, while Jordan and Iraq, fearful of destabilization, were intermittently closing their borders. In Lebanon's [Bekaa Valley](#), we visited towns whose sons were fighting for the Syrian regime but that were filled with refugees who supported the opposition.

Then, in the second half of 2013, came the alarming and widely unanticipated spread of ISIS across much of eastern Syria. By the following spring, ISIS had decisively brought the conflict to western Iraq as well, creating a humanitarian crisis that now spanned most of the Levant. The conquest of Mosul alone, in June 2014, displaced some 500,000 people virtually overnight; in Tikrit, further south, almost the

entire population of some 200,000 would be chased out of the city during nine months under ISIS rule. Even for an especially brutal conflict, upheavals on this scale were almost unimaginable two years ago.

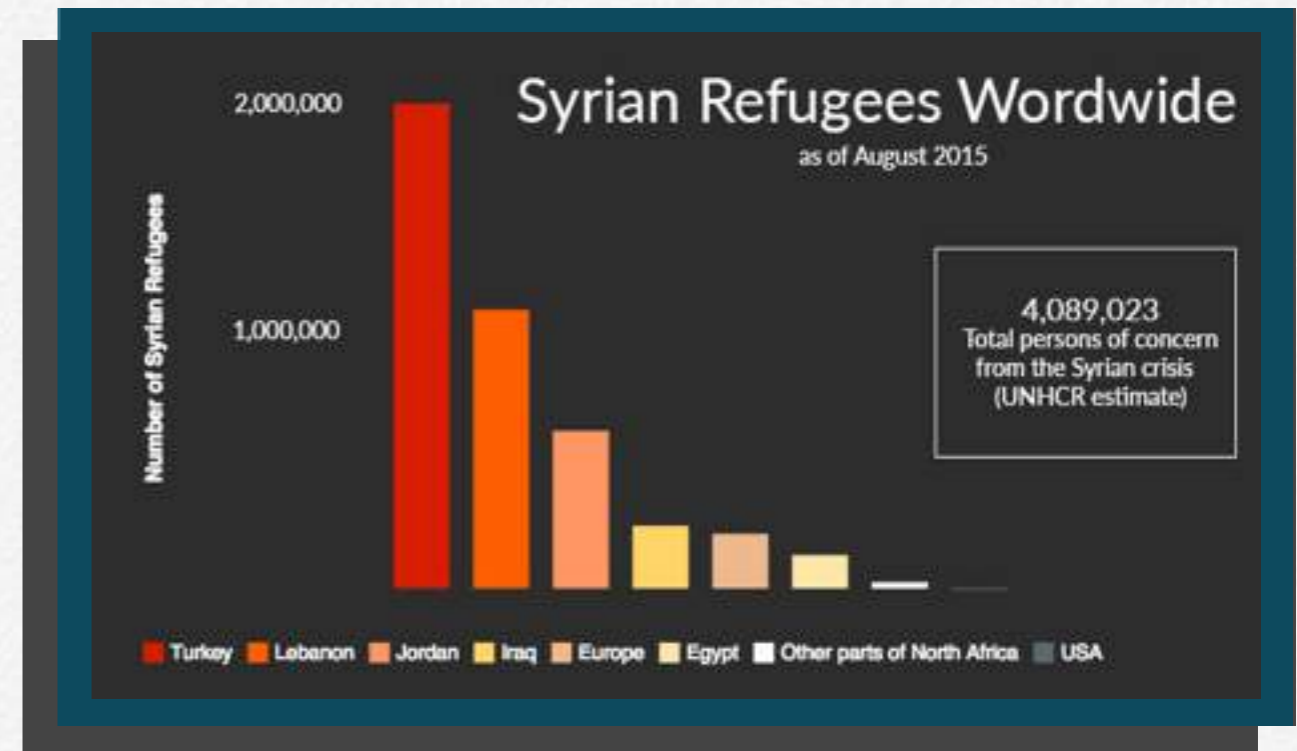
Still worse off, however, were the millions of people, in both Syria and Iraq, who were now prevented from fleeing and largely cut off from international aid. In August 2014, Jan Egeland, a former UN diplomat and the director of the Norwegian Refugee Council, told us it was time for international organizations to get over their qualms and deliver food and medicine to Syrians trapped in areas held by the Islamic State. Few listened. As of June 2015, by the UN's own account, it had managed to reach only 5 percent of the nearly five million people it estimated were in need in "hard to reach areas" of Syria; of these some 2.7 million were in ISIS-controlled territory, "where humanitarian access continued to decline."

So ineffective has the international response become that in March 2015, a group of twenty-one leading NGOs formally accused the UN Security Council of "failing to implement" its own resolutions on Syria, abetting what they called the "worst year" of the Syrian crisis to date. Meanwhile, the numbers keep going up: there were 700,000 new Syrian refugees in the first four months of 2015 alone—a rate that exceeds that of any other period in the war—pushing the total number of Syrians registered with the UN to more than four million. As of the summer of 2015, nearly half the entire population of Syria is displaced; and in Syria and Iraq together, there are now some 14 million people in need of humanitarian assistance.

Meanwhile, much of the burden for helping those who have fled has fallen on Syria's beleaguered neighbors, which have scarce resources to deal with them. There are now nearly two million Syrians in Turkey, more

than a million in Lebanon (where they are now one of every five people), more than a half million in Jordan, and more than one hundred thousand in Egypt. With their situation increasingly precarious in these countries, many Syrians have died trying to get to Europe. Those remaining in the Middle East have increasingly been forced to put their children to work on the street to get what money they can to survive.

Among the more poignant stories we encountered in Lebanon in 2013 was that of Wafa Hamakurdi, a woman from Aleppo whose family had taken refuge in Shatila, the extremely poor, decades-old Palestinian refugee camp in south Beirut. They had gone to Shatila not because they are Palestinian—they are not—but because it was the only place they could afford. Two years hence, she says, her husband is still unable to work because he fears being caught by the Lebanese authorities. Recently, after her two daughters, fourteen and seventeen, were harassed, they



moved to another poor neighborhood in south Beirut. Her three older sons, fifteen, twenty-two, and twenty-three, have dropped out of school and university to support the family; her youngest son, who is ten, has been unable to find a place in school, because there were too many Syrian students. If things got really bad in Lebanon, she said back in 2013, she would go back to Syria, because “if you die in your country, somebody will bury you.” Now, she says, that may no longer be true: most of their extended family has left Syria, too.

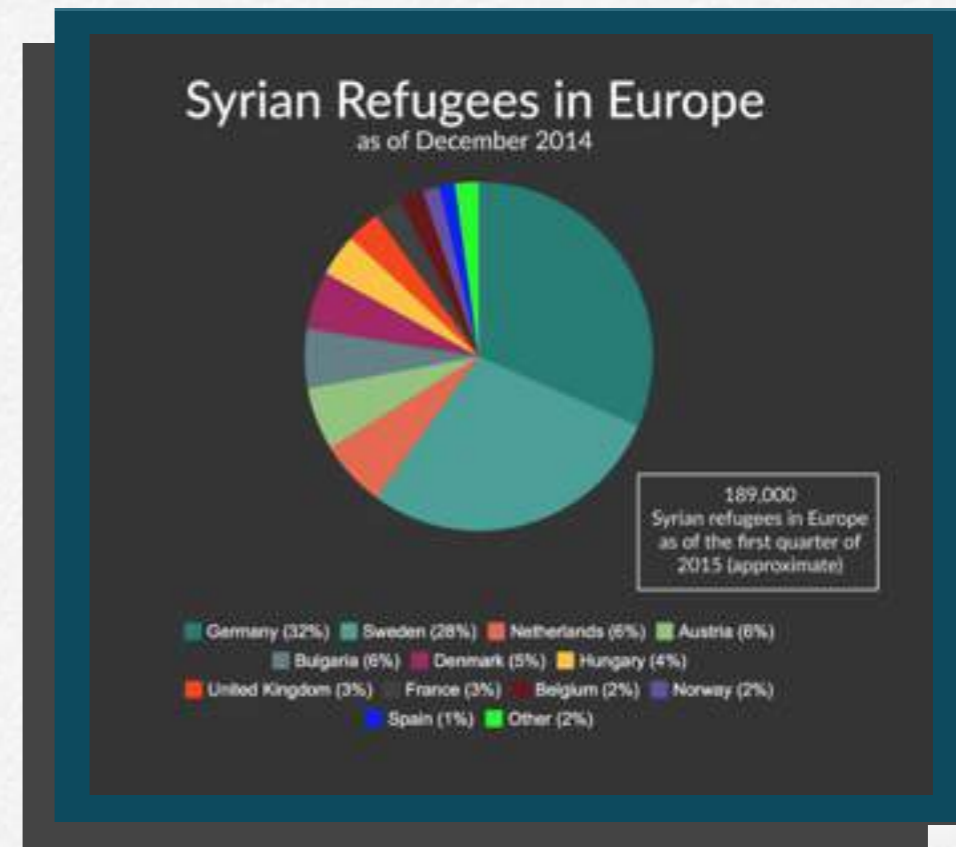


he is completely cut off from his family. His mother and sister and her two young children remain in Turkey, while his daughter and ex-wife are still in Syria, where he has not heard from them since the first year of the conflict. His brother-in-law was killed by a bomb in Syria.

The greatest threat facing Syria’s refugees today is indifference. On June 15, a day after legions of terrified Syrians fled from Tal Abyad to the Turkish border, Kurdish forces successfully retook the town from ISIS. This was an important strategic victory in the US-led campaign against the Islamic State. But despite pledges by Kurdish leaders to allow some 20,000 refugees—many of them Sunni Arabs and Turkmen—to return, few have been able to do so.

With Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey unable or unwilling to absorb more Syrians, pressure has grown on wealthy Western countries to do more. In the spring and summer of 2015, a huge wave of Syrians began setting out in rubber dinghies from the Turkish coast to the Greek islands, where they hoped to transit onward to northern Europe and apply for asylum; more than 50,000 arrived in Greece in the month of July alone. In August, fearing an uncontrolled humanitarian crisis in Europe itself, Germany announced it was prepared to take in a record 800,000 asylum seekers this year. However, many other countries have been reluctant to follow suit, and have instead been defending their borders.

Among those who managed—often through dangerous negotiations with smugglers—to reach Europe was Ahmet Nassan, the physician we met in Gaziantep, Turkey in 2013. We tracked him down in Dortmund, Germany, where he is looking for work. “It’s a very long story,” he said. But



With the war now in its fifth year and Western governments preoccupied by fears of jihadists striking on their own soil, it is hard for humanitarian organizations even to make the case for Syrians in need. In early July 2015—during the holy month of Ramadan—the World Food Program and the UN Refugee Agency announced they were reducing food vouchers to Syrians in Lebanon by one third. And in early August, facing severe budget shortfalls, the World Food Program [cut](#) food assistance by half to some 200,000 refugees in Jordan. A few weeks earlier, at a hearing on Syrian refugees in the U.S. Congress, legislators

from both parties raised concerns that terrorists would use the refugee system to gain access to the United States. The U.S. has resettled fewer than one thousand Syrian refugees so far—more made it through that hole in the fence at the Syrian-Turkish border during a few hours in June. ♦

(From The New York Review of Books blog, NYRblog (blogs.nybooks.com). Copyright ©2015 by Hugh Eakin.)

SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

December 2010

The Jasmine Revolution begins in Tunisia, giving way to the Arab Spring

March 2011

Protests erupt in Syria after the security forces of President Bashar al-Assad arrest 15 students for 'anti-government graffiti'

May 2011

U.S. imposes sanctions on Syria's leaders

November 2011

The Arab League votes to suspend Syria

July 2012

The Battle of Aleppo pits the Free Syrian Army, the Islamic Front, the People's Defense Units and Sunni militants against the Syrian government, and Hezbollah and Shi'ite militants

March 2013

Assad regime is accused of launching chemical weapons attacks

October 2012

Number of refugees reaches 300,000

September 2012

The Syrian Islamic Liberation Front (SILF) is formed by 20 rebel groups

June 2013

U.S. votes to aid the Syrian rebels

December 2013

Death toll reaches 125,835

November 2014

ISIS and al-Qaeda agree to join forces to fight against the Syrian government


January 2015

Death toll reaches 220,000

July 2015

Number of refugees surpasses 4,000,000

Around 200,000 Syrians live in 23 refugee camps in Turkey, such as this one in the border city of Kilis. Some are housed in containers; others in tents. At least another 300,000 are so-called urban refugees, living in cities and villages throughout the country. Image by Hugh Eakin. Turkey, 2013.



The greatest threat facing Syria's refugees today is indifference.

Turkey: My time in Little Aleppo

Alisa Roth
August 10, 2015

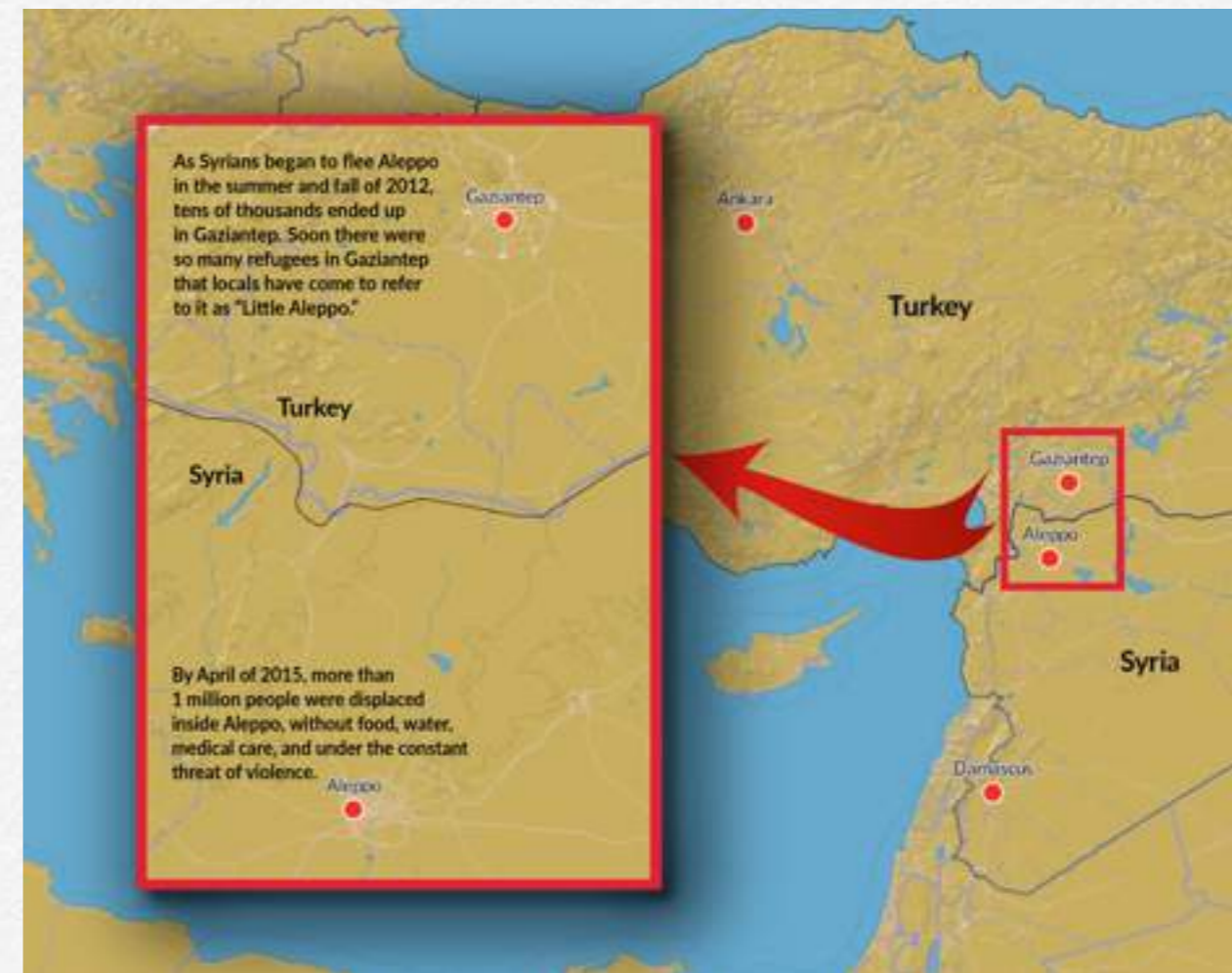
About half a million Syrians have fled their country's violent conflict and settled in Turkey. Many are grateful to be taken in but also fearful of being kicked out.

I knew so many Syrian refugees had come to Gaziantep, a city in southern Turkey, that locals had started referring to it, only half-jokingly, as “Little Aleppo.” And I had seen the evidence: not only did I meet a lot of Syrians, but I saw Arabic signs on stores and heard Arabic spoken in the streets; I drank Syrian coffee—espresso with cardamom—in a cafe transplanted from Aleppo, Syria’s commercial capital barely two hours away by car before the war. I ate Syrian-style falafels—flat disks with holes in the center—in a restaurant that was an informal resource center for refugees.

But strangely, it was license plates that most made me feel like the nickname was appropriate. On one block, in a neighborhood near the university where many Syrians have moved, I counted that eight out of nine parked cars had Syrian plates. The block after that, and the next one after that, were similar. Suddenly I could picture thousands of them,

overflowing with people and suitcases like a photo one refugee showed me of his own car, as they drove across the border to safety in Turkey.

Gaziantep, Turkey, and Aleppo, Syria, have been close for a long time. They are geographically near; during the Ottoman Empire, they were even part of the same province. Before the war started in Syria, it only took about two hours to drive from one to the other, closer than either city is to its respective capital. Especially after Syria and Turkey stopped requiring visas in 2009, Aleppans often came to Gaziantep on weekends to shop; some even used Gaziantep’s airport as their own. Even after the



war started, but before it came to Aleppo, there was a lot of trade between the two cities, both regional business centers.

The two are culturally close, too. Cross-border marriages are common, and many families have relatives in both countries. Gaziantep's cuisine is much closer to Aleppo's than it is to the rest of Turkey's.

It's mostly that spirit of neighborliness that I sensed there. Refugees told me about Turkish friends and relatives who helped them with everything from starting businesses to finding apartments. And as Settar Çanlıoğlu, a Gaziantep city official, said, helping the Syrians in Gaziantep isn't so much generosity as a humanitarian duty. He showed me a binder, filled with the resumes of roughly 60 Turkish-educated Syrian doctors, for whom he was trying to find jobs.



The bulletin board on the restaurant's back wall lets Syrians advertise for jobs, housing and other services. The photograph above it is of the owner's son, who died in the conflict. The owner says he sees him reflected in the young refugees he feeds. Image by Alisa Roth. Turkey, 2013.

It's fortunate, since it's likely the Syrians will be around for awhile. I asked a university student-turned-housepainter how long he was planning to stay. His answer? "Forever."

But I also wonder how long Turkey—both officially and personally—will continue to feel so hospitable. Suphi Atan, the foreign ministry official responsible for the 20-odd refugee camps Turkey has built for Syrians, said that the best scenario at this point is to start helping the Syrians in Syria. Turkey's border is officially open for all Syrians, but NGOs and refugees say that's not true. And even Turkey acknowledges there are tens of thousands of Syrians in camps on the Syrian side of the border. And as Çanlıoğlu, the Gaziantep official, told me, the best outcome of this crisis is that the war ends so the Syrians can go home.

It's Syrian coffee that Husain Hamdawi and his wife, Jumara Hajirabi, can't live without. They fled Syria with their two children four months ago, leaving their apartment and most of their possessions behind. But when friends or family visit from Syria, they ask for ground coffee.

They moved to Gaziantep, to that neighborhood near the university where I saw so many Syrian license plates.

Although they have reconnected with many old friends from Syria, the lives of Hamdawi and Hajirabi are completely different from before.

"In my kitchen in Aleppo," Hajirabi said, "there was a table and chairs and a TV. That kitchen was like a small house."

The kitchen in their current apartment—which had been built as student housing—is really more like a kitchen corner. It has a cabinet and a sink.



The border crossing near Kilis. Officially, Turkey's borders are open to all Syrians. But both NGOs and refugees accuse Turkey of limiting entry. And even the Turkish government acknowledges there are tens of thousands of people living in camps on the Syrian side of the border. Image by Hugh Eakin. Turkey, 2013.

The refrigerator is the size of a hotel mini-bar and the stove is a two burner hotplate squeezed onto a bit of counter.

Hamdawi and his wife share the apartment's one bedroom. The children sleep on twin beds in one corner of the living room. They both fell asleep on the couch while we were talking late one evening. I asked if I should go so they could sleep, but their mother said they'd gotten used to sleeping with the lights on, and grown-ups talking—even though they had their own rooms in Syria.

But unlike his big shop in Syria, where he had people working for him, he and his partner do all the work themselves.

In Syria, their apartment was air-conditioned; here a fan whirs endlessly in front of the open window. The big, 3-D TV they had—Hamdawi loves new technology—has been replaced by a small old-fashioned one.

Still, they feel safe in Turkey, where there are no bombs, no snipers and no random arrests. Their daughter, Lama, is in second grade at a special school for Syrian refugees. Her favorite subject is English—she pulled out her English notebook and read the exercises to me.

Their son, Assad, who just turned two—he was born a few weeks before the uprising began—is a typical toddler, jumping on the couch endlessly, stopping only to admire himself in a video on his father's cell phone.

Hamdawi's professional life has been down-sized too. In Syria, he owned two businesses: a sleek computer and TV store, and a pharmaceutical distribution company. A few weeks ago, he and a Syrian friend opened a tiny shop in downtown Gaziantep, where they sell computers and cell phones to a mostly Syrian clientele.

But unlike his big shop in Syria, where he had people working for him, he and his partner do all the work themselves:



Image by Alisa Roth. Turkey, 2013.

“It's like when we first started our businesses in Syria,” he said, “when we had small shops and had to fix customers' cell phones and laptops ourselves. We haven't had to do that for years.”

Hamdawi says he and his wife are operating on a five year plan; he's already talking about expanding his new business.

But he's also terrified Turkey could change its mind, and ask them to leave. He and his wife would like to go home, eventually, but they know it will be years before that can happen, if it ever does.

“Even if the Syrian regime goes soon,” he said, “the Syrian crisis won't.” ◆

(Originally published by Marketplace.)

The Catastrophe

Hugh Eakin and Alisa Roth
October 10, 2013

In early June 2011, some three months into the uprising against the regime of Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad, Syrian government forces began preparing for a large-scale assault on Jisr al-Shughour, a rebellious border town sixty-five miles southwest of Aleppo. The events that led to this operation are a matter of some dispute. Residents of the town said that Assad's security forces shot and killed an unarmed man during a protest after Friday prayers. At his funeral the next day, thousands of mourners marched to a post office where security forces were gathered.

According to eyewitnesses, government snipers on top of the building began shooting at the crowd, while more troops arrived to back them up. But numerous accounts also describe soldiers defecting and joining with the mourners, a number of whom had brought guns, to attack the regime forces; Syrian state media later claimed that 120 soldiers had been massacred by "armed gangs."

What is certain is that an exceptionally violent confrontation took place. As the regime sent reinforcements to retake control, most of the town's

44,000 inhabitants and many from the surrounding area fled. "They were burning houses and fields and killing animals. They started shooting. And killed two families," a woman who called herself Lajia told us when, reporting for a public radio story, we met her in a tiny Turkish village two weeks later. With her six children, then aged six to seventeen, she had escaped from her farm near Jisr al-Shughour across the border to Turkey, where she was staying with relatives. "Villages were increasingly empty from around forty kilometers away," a United Nations official reported after a fact-finding mission later that month. "Jisr al-Shughour itself was almost deserted." Like Lajia and her family, much of the population had crossed into Turkey's Hatay province—the first refugees in a conflict that has since produced more than two million of them.

In more than one way, what happened in Jisr al-Shughour is unusually revealing about the course of Syria's civil war: it was the first well-documented case of protesters arming themselves and fighting back against Syrian troops. It was also one of the first occasions that large numbers of Syrians were forced to flee to a neighboring country. At the time, the Turkish government had not yet endorsed the Syrian opposition; it had spent the previous decade building economic and political ties with the Assad regime and still hoped for a negotiated solution to the uprising. But Turkey is a Sunni country whose current leadership has Islamist sympathies. Jisr al-Shughour was a Sunni town with a history of Islamist activism and violent repression by Syria's ruling Baath regime, which is dominated by the Alawite sect. The refugees who left for Turkey soon became the first links in a crucial supply chain for the rebel cause. In July 2011, a few weeks after we met Lajia and other Syrians in the border region of Hatay province, a group of military

defectors among them announced the founding of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), dedicated to the armed overthrow of Assad.

Since the summer of 2011, what happened in Jisr al-Shughour has been repeated in villages and towns all over Syria, with far-reaching consequences on almost every side of its 1,400-mile-long perimeter. The country had a population of 22.5 million when the war began; about 10 percent have now left. With nearly a half-million Syrians now in Turkey, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is actively supporting the Syrian opposition and has turned his country into a primary conduit of arms to rebel groups. Along with the FSA, which is favored by the U.S. and its allies, these include other militias, some of them associated with aggressive Islamism. Notably, the Turkish government has not impeded the activity of the al-Nusra Front, an al-Qaeda-linked rebel group that has been designated a terrorist organization by the United States and the UN Security Council.

In Jordan, a far smaller and more fragile country, the arrival of an even greater number of Syrians has raised fears that refugees could bring instability or encourage jihadism among Jordanians themselves. In recent months, the Jordanian government has clamped down on its refugee population while quietly allowing the United States to build up a military presence to protect its border with Syria. In northern Iraq, a rapidly growing population of some 200,000 Syrian Kurds is drawing Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government into a violent new war between Kurds and Islamists in northeastern Syria. Iraq's Kurdish leaders

are meanwhile locked in conflict with Syria's main Kurdish party over the future of Syrian Kurdistan.

And then there is Lebanon. A tiny, fractious country of about four million people when the Syrian uprising began, the Lebanese Republic has large populations of Sunnis, Shias, and Christians, and especially intricate ties to Syria, which surrounds all of its northern and most of its long eastern borders. According to the government, it has now received well over a million Syrians, most of them within the last twelve months; soon, nearly one in four people in Lebanon will be Syrian. A large majority of the refugees are Sunni Muslims and many Lebanese Sunnis strongly support the Syrian opposition. Yet Hezbollah, the powerful Shia group that controls significant parts of Lebanon,

has been fighting in Syria on the side of the Assad regime.

Since early June 2013, when Hezbollah fighters vanquished rebel forces in the Syrian border town of al-Qusayr, there have been a series of bombings and kidnappings targeting Shia areas of Lebanon, including in Beirut itself. "What is happening now is a growing mass fear about the situation," Makram Malaeb, an official with Lebanon's Ministry of Social Affairs who coordinates refugee policy, told us in Beirut in late July. "We



Fuaz Ruhayyad, a butcher from Homs, came to Mafraq, Jordan, with his family after his brother and other relatives were killed. Image by Alisa Roth. Jordan, 2013.

have to reassure the population that this will not mean the end of Lebanon as we know it.”

About all this, the U.S. and its allies have been largely silent. By contrast, the U.S. response to the alleged chemical weapons attacks near Damascus on August 21 has been swift and dramatic. Even as UN inspectors were visiting a site of the attacks for the first time, the Obama administration began planning a retaliatory strike against the Syrian regime, which was presumed responsible. On September 10, a day after the Russian government gave support to a call to put Syria’s chemical weapons program under international supervision, President Obama said he would allow the UN Security Council a chance to pursue the idea before asking Congress to approve strikes; but he declared it was his “judgment as commander in chief” that the U.S. should if necessary intervene militarily.

Syria had actually been a haven for people escaping persecution elsewhere

In a statement following the attacks, however, the International Crisis Group observed that if the U.S., with or without its allies, goes ahead with such strikes, “it will have taken such action for reasons largely divorced from the interests of the Syrian people. The administration has cited the need to punish, deter and prevent use of chemical weapons—a defensible goal, though Syrians have suffered from far deadlier mass atrocities during the course of the conflict without this prompting much collective action in their defence.”

In fact, well before the August [2013] attacks, the daily violence of the war had produced a humanitarian crisis of almost unprecedented scale. One reason many nations have been slow to recognize this—despite the steady accumulation of more than 100,000 fatalities—is that the conflict came relatively late to Syria’s largest cities. A full year into the uprising, which began in March 2011, the United Nations’ refugee agency (UNHCR) had only registered some 30,000 refugees from Syria overall; as late as December 2012, some political leaders in Lebanon, whose borders with Syria are largely uncontrolled and which has for years had large seasonal migrations of Syrian laborers, denied that a refugee problem existed at all.

As fighting reached parts of Aleppo and Damascus in the summer and fall of 2012, however, all predictions were upended. By last September, the number of those fleeing abroad had grown tenfold, to more than 300,000, a figure that doubled again over the following three months. In March of this year, it reached one million. At the beginning of September, more than two million Syrians had left the country, while the average pace had reached five thousand people a day. The UN projects there will be 3.5 million refugees by the end of the year.

After months under siege by both rebels and government forces, some neighborhoods of Aleppo have been abandoned; tens of thousands of Aleppines can now be found in Gaziantep, a city in southern Turkey that locals have begun referring to as “Little Aleppo.” Egypt, a country that had hardly any Syrian refugees a year ago, now has more than 100,000; many are middle-class professionals who view Cairo, for all its upheaval, as preferable to expensive Beirut.

This tent is part of a squatter community in Amman, Jordan. The family who lives in it 'borrows' electricity from a factory next door. Image by Alisa Roth. Jordan, 2013.



“We have not seen a refugee outflow escalate at such a frightening rate since the Rwandan genocide almost 20 years ago”

This is to say nothing of the more than four million Syrians who, according to the UN and other aid groups, have been uprooted by the conflict but remain inside Syria; overall, nearly one third of the country's population have been forced to abandon their homes. Many of those within Syria have taken refuge in schools and mosques in large cities. Tens of thousands of others now occupy makeshift encampments near the border and still hope to leave the country. By April of 2013, there were more than a million displaced people in the single northern governorate of Aleppo, many of them subsisting without adequate food, clean water, or medical care, and at continued risk of violence. This summer, in northeastern Syria, Islamist rebel militias have reportedly threatened Kurdish villages with beheadings, kidnappings, and other atrocities, driving tens of thousands toward the border with Iraqi Kurdistan. When a single border crossing opened in August, more than 46,000 Syrians flooded across in ten days, forcing the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq to set a three-thousand-per-day limit.

"We have not seen a refugee outflow escalate at such a frightening rate since the Rwandan genocide almost twenty years ago," António Guterres, the United Nations high commissioner for refugees, told the UN Security Council in July. Analysts with the Assistance Coordination Unit (ACU)—the humanitarian arm of the Syrian National Coalition, the opposition's main governing body—say that still larger waves of refugees cannot be ruled out. "We are preparing for three contingencies involving the major population centers," explained Samer Araabi, who runs the ACU's office in southern Turkey. "A massive movement out of Aleppo—significantly larger than we've seen until now; a large-scale migration out of Damascus, if the war came directly to the central parts of the capital; and a movement out of Deir ez-Zor"—a large city in eastern Syria where there has been fierce

fighting in recent weeks. "We're talking hundreds of thousands of people, perhaps all at once."



Among the many effects of the Syrian war, the collapse of one of the Arab world's most diverse societies may be the most consequential. The Syrian Arab Republic was long known for its authoritarian government and brutal security apparatus; but it had also been an unusually mixed country for decades. As has been widely reported, Sunni Muslims make up a clear majority (some 74 percent) and Alawites, the sect of the Assad family and many of its supporters, a minority (12 percent). Yet before the war, there were nearly as many Christians as Alawites, as well as the world's largest population of Druze (700,000) and smaller populations of Ismailis, Sufis, Yezidis, and Shias, among other sects. Though predominantly Arab, Syria also had some 2.5 million Kurds, as many as a million Turkmen, and tens of thousands of Armenians, Assyrians, and other groups.

Owing to its relative stability, Syria had actually been a haven for people escaping persecution elsewhere, from Armenians fleeing the genocide in 1915 and Palestinians chased out of Palestine in 1948—there were some 500,000 Palestinians in Syria in 2011—to both Christian and Muslim Iraqis escaping the recent war in Iraq. In 2006, the Syrian government took in more than 120,000 Lebanese whose homes had been damaged or destroyed in Israel's war with Hezbollah. When the uprising against the Assad regime began, Syria also had sizable numbers of Somali, Sudanese, and Afghan refugees.

And yet this complicated ethnic and sectarian mosaic made Syria particularly susceptible to large population movements once the uprising turned violent. To a degree, these movements followed basic geography. Punishing attacks by regime forces in the southern governorate of Daraa, where the protests began, drove many of its inhabitants to Jordan, which abuts it in the south. Fighting between rebels and government troops in the northern governorate of Idlib, and—beginning in the summer of 2012—around Aleppo, drove many north into Turkey. And the incessant battles over Homs, in the western part of the country, forced many to seek refuge in nearby Lebanon. (Others remained trapped in the old city of Homs, where they make up one of the most desperate displaced populations in Syria today.)

But at the same time these upheavals led to a new sectarian consciousness. In Turkey and Jordan, a very large majority of the arriving Syrians were Sunnis from areas of Syria contested by the Assad regime, and they were going to Sunni countries that increasingly supported the opposition. (Though Turkey's Arab Alevi minority has links to Syria's Alawites, a cause of tension in some Turkish border villages.) Moreover, while not party to the conflict, Syrian Christians have been attacked by Islamist rebels—most recently in the assault on Maaloula, an Aramaic-speaking village north of Damascus, in early September. Many have fled to Christian areas of Lebanon, like Zahlé, a large town in the Beqaa valley where we encountered them; and thousands of Armenian Christians have gone to Armenia. Jordan, meanwhile, fearful of upsetting its precarious demographic balance, has largely denied entry to Syrian Palestinians; more than 90,000 of them have instead taken refuge in Palestinian communities in Lebanon.

In northern Iraq, we met many Syrian Kurds who, though they had been living in mixed cities in western Syria, had nonetheless moved all the way to Syria's Kurdish-dominated northeast, before crossing the eastern border. "In the beginning, we were all together," recalled Ahmed, a Kurd and engineering student at the University of Damascus who joined with fellow Arab students in the initial protests. Arrested by the authorities for anti-regime statements he posted on Facebook, he fled to Erbil, in Iraq, where he now watches with dismay the violent war playing out between Kurds and Islamists, who also oppose Assad, in Syria's Kurdish region.

In some areas, particularly in Lebanon, the Syrian influx is so large that sectarian divisions become blurred. We met non-Palestinian Syrians who had made their way to Shatila, the historic Palestinian refugee camp in South Beirut, despite its reputation for overcrowding and lawlessness. "Lebanon is like Europe, with the [rent] prices," said Wafa Hamakurdi, a housewife from Aleppo with a family of six. "Shatila was the cheapest thing." Still more remarkable, many Sunnis have taken refuge in Shia towns controlled by Hezbollah. One local official in Hermel, a Hezbollah town on Lebanon's Syrian border, said, "We have Syrians living alongside our own families here, and the sons of both are meanwhile killing each other in Syria."*

The refugee situation has created daunting problems for Hezbollah. The militant Shia organization is terrified that a Sunni-led opposition might defeat its ally, the Assad regime, thus cutting off a vital source of support. Such a loss could also embolden hard-line Lebanese Sunni groups to take on Hezbollah inside Lebanon itself. On the other hand, the more Hezbollah fighters help the Syrian army, the more Sunni refugees will come to Lebanon, perhaps decisively tipping the country's sectarian balance against the Shias.

And yet in Hermel, as in many other border towns in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, cross-border ties run deep. One Lebanese farmer, who carried an image of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah on his keychain, had taken in an extended family of eighteen because their own farm in Syria had been destroyed. A critical question facing the entire region is what happens when people like him—many quite poor—can no longer support the newcomers, and public opinion turns against the Syrians.



The children in Ruhayyad's family only go to school occasionally, even though they all went to school in Syria. Syrians are allowed to attend Jordanian schools, but two-thirds don't, according to the UN. Even so, many Jordanian schools have had to add second shifts to accommodate all the new students. Image by Alisa Roth. Jordan, 2013.

One of the misconceptions about the Syrian refugee crisis is that it mainly involves people in large camps, above all in Jordan and Turkey. Much has been made in the international press, for example, of Zaatari, the sprawling camp in Jordan operated by UNHCR under Jordanian government supervision, which now houses 120,000 Syrians. Indeed, the social problems that have emerged at Zaatari show the limitations of large refugee facilities and officials say the camp will soon close to new arrivals. But according to UN figures, a full three quarters of the Syrian refugee population throughout the region are surviving on their own in towns and rural areas.

Turkey, which has spent hundreds of millions of dollars setting up twenty-two camps, has more urban refugees than camp dwellers. "Around 300,000 [Syrians] are living outside of the camps, by their own means, and they are extremely in need," said Suphi Atan, a Turkish Foreign Ministry official. "They create a burden especially on the infrastructure." In Jordan, refugees in Amman, Irbid, and other cities outnumber camp residents by more than three to one; in Lebanon, owing to political resistance to the idea, there are no camps at all.

This has made it particularly difficult for international aid organizations to respond. "You look around and you wonder, where are the refugees?" said Niamh Murnaghan, director of the Norwegian Refugee Council's Lebanon office in Beirut. "It's a hidden crisis, that's the most difficult thing." In Gaziantep, Turkey, we met Ahmet Nassan, an internist from Aleppo who, lacking Turkish certification, cannot practice medicine; he now supports himself working as a translator at a private hospital. In the same city, sixty more Syrian doctors, who are Turkish-trained, can't find work. In Beirut we discovered a Syrian man and his young daughter living in an

abandoned building across the street from the UN refugee agency's Lebanon office. His wife was killed by regime shelling in his Damascus neighborhood, and he had escaped in his flip flops, with the clothes he was wearing.

Meanwhile the hidden population continues to grow. Khaled Ghanen, who runs an Islamic charity in al-Mafraq, Jordan, recalled that at the beginning of Ramadan in August 2011, his charity had helped sixteen families. By the end of that month, there were forty. By the end of the year, there were five hundred families; a year later, he estimates 15,000 families. Now he is seeing fifty new families a day. Until the middle of last year, the charity was able to offer rent money and employment help. "But now, there is no housing and no jobs to find," he said. "The whole kingdom [of Jordan] is filled with Syrians. Our city is not receiving them, though. She is throwing them away."

For those who end up in a camp, conditions vary widely. At Kilis, on Turkey's southern border near Aleppo, we found some 13,000 Syrians living in container houses with satellite dishes and air conditioning, with access to a newly built school, health clinic, and mosque; but Turkish officials told us that camps like Kilis are now full. By contrast, in northern Iraq, a poorly planned camp called Domiz has been allowed to grow into a teeming shantytown for some 70,000 Syrians. It is difficult to imagine how its primitive canvas tents will survive the harsh winter. At Jordan's Zaatari camp, residents are forbidden from leaving without a special

permit (for which there is now a thriving black market trade)—part of an effort by the Jordanian government to control the spread of jihadism. Yet in Turkey's Hatay province, a special facility for Syrian military defectors has been used as a command center for the FSA, and rebel fighters commute back and forth from the camps to the front lines.

But housing—whether in tents or containers or abandoned buildings—may not be the most pressing issue facing Syrian exiles. One of the defining facts of the Syrian crisis is the startling number of children who have become refugees—a number that reached one million in August. Before the conflict began, oil revenues were sufficient for the

Assad regime to provide free education and health care to most Syrians. Between 1995 and 2011, the population expanded by nearly nine million people, or 65 percent, leading to a society in which more than four out of every ten people are under the age of fifteen. Many Syrian refugee families we met had six or more children; some women had given birth after fleeing the country. "The population growth rate is tremendous," said Malaeb, the Lebanese official. Even if Lebanon stopped taking in Syrians now, he said, "there are going to be two million Syrians in three years."



Photojournalists snapped pictures as Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu visited students at a special school for Syrian refugees in Gaziantep. Demand for the program during the academic year was so high that organizers arranged a special summer session. Image by Alisa Roth. Turkey, 2013.

Already, the number of school-age Syrian children in Lebanon is scheduled to surpass the entire population of school-age Lebanese children by the end of the year. In Gaziantep, Turkey, there are so many Syrian families that a Syrian school has been started, with a Syrian curriculum, staffed entirely by volunteers. But according to UNICEF, as the new school year begins, nearly two thirds of Syrian children in Jordan remain out of school. Early marriage is common for refugee girls; in Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq, we saw young Syrian children selling things like tissues and soap on the streets.

Everywhere, there is fear of spreading disease. There has been an alarming rise in the incidence of leishmaniasis, a parasitic disease common in the Aleppo region that had largely been controlled: since the conflict began, doctors in Syria and Turkey have diagnosed 100,000 cases of it. In Lebanon, diseases that had been nearly eradicated, like tuberculosis and measles, have now reemerged in refugee populations; the country's overwhelmed hospitals are increasingly unable to meet the

demand. And while Syrian doctors find themselves unemployed in Turkey and elsewhere, Syria itself has suffered an acute shortage, with the number of doctors still working in the country having dwindled from 30,000 to 5,000, according to one recent estimate.



Over the last few months, as the Syrian refugee population has surpassed even the extraordinary numbers produced by the Iraq war seven years ago, the world has finally begun to notice. In early June, the United Nations launched a \$5.2 billion aid appeal for Syria and neighboring countries affected by the war—until now its largest such appeal ever. (By September 2, some \$1.5 billion had been raised.) In July [2013], U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry visited Jordan's Zaatari camp, where Syrians staying there accused him of “nonaction.” Kerry responded that the U.S. was considering further steps, and on August 7, President Barack Obama



This tent is part of a squatter community in Amman, Jordan. The family who lives in it ‘borrows’ electricity from a factory next door. Image by Alisa Roth. Jordan, 2013.

announced that the U.S. was offering another \$195 million in humanitarian aid to help Syrians.

Even if the UN's daunting fund-raising goals can be met—and even if the vital contributions by NGOs, wealthy donors in the region, and individual Syrians themselves can be increased further—many of those in need will be out of reach. Since this spring, the Jordanian government has significantly limited the flow of Syrians into its territory while allowing the U.S. to step up military aid. Jordan's overriding concern “is very clearly the refugee issue,” General Martin E. Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told *The New York Times* in August. Meanwhile, many refugees described being prevented from crossing from Syria into Turkey and Jordan, with some resorting to bribes and others forced to seek shelter elsewhere. The autonomous Kurdish region of northern Iraq closed its border to Syria from late May to mid-August, while Baghdad has deployed troops to guard Iraq's long borders with Syria in Anbar and Nineveh provinces. (The Shia-led Iraqi government has accused Sunni “terrorist” groups of infiltrating the country and smuggling in weapons from Syria.) And Lebanese officials say they too are considering measures to slow down the number of Syrians crossing at the one border that has remained completely open throughout the conflict.

As a result, precisely when Syrians have become most vulnerable they may have no way of getting out or getting help. Despite the heroic efforts of its staff, the Syrian Red Crescent, which nominally operates under the authority of Damascus, is often unable to reach rebel-held areas or major conflict zones. Already in March of this year, the UN declared that “civilians have almost no safe place to go” in Syria. In the summer of 2012, thousands of displaced Syrians took shelter in Yarmouk, a Palestinian

refugee camp south of Damascus; but in December of that year, Yarmouk itself was bombed by Syrian planes, compelling most of them to flee a second time. For much of the war, Syria's northeast has been relatively calm, becoming a destination for tens of thousands of displaced families from other parts of the country; but since vicious fighting erupted there this summer, 250,000 people have again been forced to move.

One of the unambiguous lessons of this refugee crisis is that, at every stage, violent confrontations between rebels and the army, or between rebels and pro-regime militias, or even among different rebel groups, have made it worse. Addressing the problem will require not just huge amounts of humanitarian aid but also a concerted international effort to limit the conflict's spread.



Even among populations with close ethnic bonds there can be little support for refugees. In the expensive Kurdish region of Iraq, Syrian Kurds have been officially welcomed as “brothers,” but some 70,000 live in primitive tents at Domiz camp, exposed to extreme desert temperatures. Image by Hugh Eakin. Iraq, 2013.

Action, however, may bring its own costs. The international sanctions now in force against Syria, for example, have hurt those already suffering from the conflict by helping devalue the Syrian currency and further disrupting aid delivery. According to a study earlier this year by the Danish Institute for International Studies, Syria's poor are now "faced with inflation, higher food and fuel prices, import restrictions, and higher unemployment.... Import restrictions and trade disruptions have forced many local vendors who provided supplies to aid agencies to close down."

"It's a hidden crisis, that's the most difficult thing."

More promising may be efforts to adapt military strategy to civilian need. In a recent report, Anthony Cordesman, the American military analyst, called for a "broad international effort to support Syrian refugees inside areas in Syria where moderate rebel factions and NGOs can operate." He suggested this could be done through a "civil-military" plan that would give as much emphasis to programs like the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which is currently helping organize food distribution in parts of Syria, as it does to military support for the rebels.

A larger irony of course is that, while closing their borders to Syrian civilians trying to escape, Syria's neighbors are becoming more and more drawn into the conflict themselves. In contrast to refugees, fighters for both sides now travel freely in and out of Lebanon, Turkey, and—in spite of official restrictions—Jordan and Iraq. In northern Iraq, the Kurdistan Regional Government has been building a "Syrian Peshmerga," a militia of

several thousand Iraqi-trained Syrian Kurds, to be deployed in the Kurdish region of Syria.

As the violence continues, the international community—and Syrians themselves—have been increasingly divided about the Obama administration's proposed strikes on Damascus. A number of refugees asked us why the U.S. wasn't doing more; many clamored for a no-fly zone. Others argued it was too late now for the U.S. to enter a conflict that had long since been taken over by violent militias, many financed by foreign powers such as Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. On September 9, Navi Pillay, the United Nations high commissioner for human rights, said that "the appalling situation cries out for international action, yet a military response or the continued supply of arms risk igniting a regional conflagration, possibly resulting in many more deaths and even more widespread suffering."

Largely ignored in this debate, however, has been the crucial question of whether—and when—the millions of Syrians who have already fled will be able to return to their homes. The prospect of a negotiated cease-fire, followed by the establishment of a transitional government or administration, has been suggested by some international officials, and if successful, might allow for the safe return of Syrians to at least some parts of the country. But many we talked to expressed doubts that the Syria they knew could ever be rebuilt. ◆

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CHAPTER TWO: FROM ARMENIA to SYRIA and BACK AGAIN

Civil rights lawyer and journalist Alia Malek introduces us to the Armenian diaspora as she follows the life of Anto, an innkeeper and gifted performer forced to abandon his home in Aleppo, Syria. In 2011, “Anto was marked, a Syrian-Armenian Christian in a Syria of looming sectarianism.”

Alia Malek

Anto risks being kidnapped (or worse) and so he leaves, taking with him “sentimental items”—the portraits of his father and grandfather. He flees to Yerevan, the capital of modern day Armenia, which welcomes Syrian Armenians.

Anto’s great grandfather, a puppeteer named Akbar, his wife and six children had fled Anatolia in 1915, in the wake of the Ottoman genocide. As many as 1.5 million Armenians were massacred, but Akbar and his family survived. They settled in Aleppo, Syria, where Akbar worked as a portrait photographer and started a small restaurant. “Song, theater, and storytelling remained in their homes and souls, and there, in the safety of Aleppo, Akbar’s family and his descendants would flourish.”

Now, almost one hundred years later, Yerevan becomes a refuge for Anto. “Some things felt familiar,” Malek tell us, “the architecture of the churches, the contours of the faces, and mostly, the songs.” Anto opens a new restaurant. Soon he will watch on a flat screen TV as the souks of Aleppo burn. He is a transient who wonders, “if permanence is always illusory.”

...



Ankara

Turkey

Armenia

Yerevan

Mount Ararat

Aleppo

Mosul

Cyprus

Syria

Lebanon

Beirut

Damascus

Iraq

Alia Malek **October 15, 2013**

Two years ago, in September, Anto's neighbors warned him: It was time for him to go. He would no longer be safe in these hills above the city of Idlib in northwestern Syria. He knew better than to doubt them.

A descendant of Armenians from Ottoman Turkey, he had inherited a dormant vigilance that now came to life. Anto's father used to tell him, repeating what had been passed down through four generations: "Like we came from Turkey, we may also one day leave from Syria."

With his neighbors' warnings in his ears, Anto scrambled to secure some cash. He started to quietly sell off whatever he could from Abu Artin, a restaurant and inn that his family had operated every spring and summer

since 1938. His grandfather had built Abu Artin, named for Anto's great-grandfather, high in these hills as an escape for Syrians living in the swelter of those months in the cities and towns below. The land offered fresh air, their kitchen delectable food, and the men—Anto and his father and grandfather before him—impromptu musical performances that had made them famous with customers.

Anto sold the restaurant's cutlery and dishware, and the inn's AC and heating units, in another village, and at a fraction of their value. Sentimental items—the portraits of his grandfather and father—he took to his house in Aleppo, where he lived in the off-season. He made sure not to tell anyone in the hills when he was coming or going.

Even though he tried downsizing as slowly and as inconspicuously as possible, soon people began to notice, to circle, and to ask. Syrians were accustomed to the peering eyes of the government's many informers, and generally understood the difference between what information could get someone in trouble and what just accumulated. But now, in the chaos that had been building in a speedy crescendo since spring, no one knew what detail would be damning, and to which fate.

January and February had brought an end to the dictatorships in Tunisia and Egypt. By March 2011, it was clear that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who had inherited power from his father, bringing Assad family rule to a total of 41 years, did not intend to follow suit. At the end of the month, his forces had killed 103 unarmed protesting civilians and had disappeared many more; the exact number, no one would ever quite know.

So in April 2011, when Anto would have usually opened Abu Artin, he kept it shuttered instead. No one was driving the 70 kilometers from Aleppo, Syria's largest city and home to much of the family's clientele over the last 73 years. Syrians still untouched by the violence, in cities like Aleppo, were staying closer to home, hoping that by ignoring the war in other parts of the country, it might just go away.

With summer, fruit had ripened, uneaten on the trees in the surrounding garden. Both restaurant and inn remained idle and empty.

But by September, six months into the uprising and crackdown, no one could avoid a certain vulgar calculus: Anto was marked, a Syrian-Armenian Christian in a Syria of looming sectarianism.

Aleppo was home to tens of thousands of other Syrian Armenians, but in these hills, Anto was alone. "You're like an Arab in Tel Aviv," a man from Idlib told him.

Idlib and the surrounding area were becoming strongholds for opposition fighters, both secularists and jihadists. In the growing chaos, religion and ethnicity had become a congenital liability: the wrong belief or background, at the wrong moment, could be fatal. Guilt had become collective; one individual could be traded for another of the same sect or community in escalating cycles of brutality and vengeance.

To the more conservative people in the hills, Anto was already an affront, with the alcohol serving, singing, and gender-mixing in his restaurant. For the more ignorant, his being neither Muslim nor Arab—despite his being Syrian—made him fair game as a scapegoat for a regime that claimed to be supported by minorities. It also made him an easy target for kidnapers

hoping to net a pretty ransom without the risk of angering a much more numerous or powerful community. For those who, in their fervor, believed a better Syria required that everyone be the same, there would be little room for him. Pragmatic Syrians reasoned that the casualties would be many before anyone would stop to consider or even question the hell that they had just meted upon each other.

"Like we came from Turkey, we may also one day leave from Syria."

Anto had little time to waste, and didn't want to gamble on the hope that people might come back to their senses. On an early morning in October 2011, a month after his neighbors warned him he would not be safe, Anto went up to the hills. One of the locals joked, "Why didn't you tell us you were coming? We were going to kidnap you."

Anto laughed it off but didn't say he had come for the last time. He silently bid goodbye to the trees, the hills, the ground itself. He nodded to the statue of the Madonna and the little masjid he had built so Muslim workers or guests could pray.

He paused at the chair where he used to sit with his *arghileh*, a water pipe, and gazed at the spot where, as a boy and as a man, he watched his father and grandfather sing to the rapt diners. He caressed the walls his great-grandfather had built from the stones turned up in the dirt all those years ago. This was history; it was real and couldn't be erased. Abu Artin was there before Bashar, before Hafez, before all the presidents.

He fed the stray dog they had taken in and went into a small room and cried. He wanted to die; he thought his heart might stop of his own will right there. *Where am I going to go? How am I going to take care of Matilda and the girls?*

He dried his tears and went to Mahmoud who had worked for his family for years, who had held Anto's father's hand in the hospital when he had died. Mahmoud now had a little dikan, a convenience store, close to Abu Artin.

Anto asked Mahmoud to try to spare some food for the dog each day; he then handed him the keys to Abu Artin and told him he was returning to Aleppo.



Members of the Knadjian family at the Abu Artin restaurant and inn, 1959. Image courtesy of the Knadjian family.

Anto kissed Mahmoud and said, "May god protect you. God willing we will see each other again."

"Don't come back, *mualem*," Mahmoud said.

A week later, Mahmoud told Anto over the phone that the door to the inn had been broken. What Anto had left behind—toilets, vanities, mirrors—had all been stolen by some neighbors. Displaced Syrians from Jisr-al-Shagour had also moved into the empty rooms.

Anto cursed the thieves but didn't begrudge the squatters; they needed a place to sleep. They were escaping violence that had claimed their only homes. Where else should they go?

Anto, his wife, and his three young children all had a place to sleep, even if he wasn't sure what would come next, what he would do, how he would provide. But he would figure it out. He had saved enough and sold enough that for the next several months, he—they—could survive, as their ancestors had before them, in the safety of Aleppo.



Before winter gave way to spring in 1915, Abkar's Turkish neighbors warned him: *Something* was coming. Armenian subjects of the Ottoman Empire—like Abkar and his family—would soon be in great danger. Abkar was a puppeteer, and the stories he would weave and animate by night with his marionettes had made Abkar beloved by Armenians and Turks alike. So they gave him a head start.

He packed his puppets, dug up his gold, and stole away quickly, under darkness, on foot with his wife and six children.

On his heels was one of the twentieth century's first genocides.

The Ottoman Empire's extermination of its Armenian population is generally said to have begun on the night of April 24, 1915, when the Ottoman government rounded up and imprisoned over two hundred Armenian notables and leaders, the majority of whom were summarily executed shortly after.

Inhabitants of Armenian villages—men, women, children, and the elderly—were massacred, butchered, burned, or drowned in the Black Sea. Extermination camps were set up. The vast majority were deported to Aleppo, a city in Ottoman-controlled Syria, literally at the end of the line of the railroad. Since its founding in the sixth millennium B.C., Aleppo had been populated by Muslims, Christians, Jews, and a small local Arabicized Armenian community.



Armenians are marched to a nearby prison in Mezireh by armed Turkish soldiers. Kharpert, Armenia, Ottoman Empire, April, 1915. Image from [Creative Commons](#).

From Aleppo, the Ottomans forced the corralled Armenians to march into the Syrian Desert, ostensibly to another deportation center, but the death march was in fact the point. They were not provided cover from the sun, nor food or water. Sometimes they were marched in circles until they collapsed. Most died in the desert, the dust of their bones still discernible today among the grains of sand.

In August of 1915, the *New York Times* cited an account that reported “the roads and the Euphrates are strewn with corpses of exiles, and those who survive are doomed to certain death since they will find neither house, work, nor food in the desert. It is a plan to exterminate the whole Armenian people.”

Though Aleppo in the beginning was a point of transfer, it later became a place of rescue and relief, and even later a site of memory. The city was already home to an Arabicized Armenian population that had been in Syria since at least the eleventh century. In fact, religiously inspired Armenians—Armenia was one of the world's first Christian countries—had been traveling and settling long before among northern Syria's sites of Christian pilgrimage.

By late 1915 and onwards, aid efforts were concentrated in Aleppo and sprawling refugee camps were set up to care for the Armenians. They would later become bustling Armenian neighborhoods, as tents became cement, and the camps evolved from limbo to permanency. What was considered by Armenians “Western Armenia”—delineated from Eastern, modern-day Armenia by the magnificent summit of Ararat—ceased to exist as its people and its traces were cleansed from lands that became modern-day Turkey. Its language, churches, schools, and its people were instead resuscitated, rebuilt, and preserved in Aleppo. Many Armenians

stayed, made Syria their home, and became Syrian, the community numbering an estimated 150,000 at its peak in the 1990s. Others left to Lebanon, Europe, South America, or the United States, the many communities that today make up the Armenian Diaspora. But they all passed first through Syria, and in the collective Armenian imagination, Aleppo in particular and Syria in general is a place of refuge and rebirth.

When Abkar and his family left their land in Urfa, they walked on foot to Antep, then Killis, finally arriving in Aleppo. There, he kept his puppets packed, worked as a portrait photographer, and soon started a small restaurant to serve the growing community of genocide survivors, nostalgic for home. Abkar also wanted to seduce the local Syrian population with the spicier flavors of the Anatolian kitchen.

Most died in the desert, the dust of their bones still discernible today among the grains of sand.

Abkar's son, Artin, who had arrived in Syria as a little boy, would later open a summer restaurant and rest-house in the untouched hills above Idlib. Artin named his getaway with the epithet Syrian Arabs used for his father: *Abu* (father of) Artin. He had chosen to marry a local Armenian woman named Zakeya, who spoke Arabic, not his native Western Armenian. Music was the language they shared; he had fallen in love with her the moment he had heard her strum the melancholy notes of the oud. She was widowed, and Artin married her and raised her three children with her, to which they added two of their own, Bedrous and Antranig,

who died at age eighteen. Bedrous would name his own son, Anto, for that lost brother.

Song, theater, and storytelling remained in their homes and souls, and there, in the safety of Aleppo, Abkar's family and his descendants would flourish.



In 1993, the first time Anto went to Armenia, he arrived with only the clothes on his back and the traditional Armenian costume he wore when he performed. He was 25 years old and traveling with a dance troupe of Syrian Armenians to a music festival across Armenia; somewhere between Aleppo and Yerevan, their belongings had been lost.

Armenia was newly independent, having, like other republics, broken away in nationalist catharsis from the Soviet Union as it had disintegrated. Armenians from across the Diaspora would be performing over the next two weeks, and Anto relished the opportunity to do what he loved best, what was in his family's blood: to sing, to dance, and to play music.

He was curious to visit Armenia, even if it wasn't *really* Armenia, and he wasn't really from this Armenia.

For him and the other Syrians, their homeland lay to the west of towering Ararat, the snow-capped mountain that dominated Yerevan's horizon. Like Ararat itself, their Western Armenia lay across a sealed border in Turkey. This Armenia, what they called Eastern Armenia, was all that remained of the erstwhile kingdom. Genocide and expulsion had erased Western Armenia, leaving it to memory. Its culture, institutions, cuisine, and

language—different than those of Eastern Armenia—had been carried into exile by those who had fled and survived the slaughter, resuscitated and reconstituted in their homes, their kitchens. If the heritage of Western Armenia lived anywhere, it was in Aleppo.

Yet Ararat, so looming in the sky that it seemed easy enough to touch, was also an open wound, a constant reminder of that other side and all that was lost to it.

The summit had cleaved history, dividing the destinies of these two Armenias. There was Western Armenia, once brutalized but now thriving in the Arab World and on the Mediterranean Sea, and there was Eastern Armenia, impoverished and hungry in the rugged Caucasus, in the spheres of Persia and Russia, in both ancient and modern times.

It wasn't only Armenia that had to navigate the USSR's demise; Syria too had benefited from Soviet patronage, which it sought to replace with American friendship. Syria joined the U.S.-led coalition to invade Iraq in 1991 and was rewarded with an occupation, green-lighted by the United States, of Lebanon and with peace negotiations with Israel.

Yet, after nearly 5,000 years in historic Syria, the last 50 years of conflict between the modern-day states of Syria and Israel had made Jews an

uncomfortable inconvenience for both. In 1992, Syria's remaining 4,000 Jews left in quiet exodus.

This excision did not go unnoticed by Anto or other Syrians, who wondered whether a precedent had just been set – that “being Syrian” could be qualified and classified in tiers. But such thoughts were quashed and eyes were averted; this was a “special case” after all. Jewish nationalism and war with Israel – that essential conflict in the Arab world – was what had made being Jewish and Arab a contradiction. There were, they thought, no other such contradictions.

If for Syria it was an era in which the country seemed to be coming out of isolation and into the light, in Armenia it was one of darkness, literally. A war with neighbor Azerbaijan had brought an energy embargo to Armenia. Without enough electricity, the nights in this fledgling state were passed by candlelight. There were also shortages of food, and the Armenian

Diaspora, including the wealthy community in Syria, had to bolster its homeland's economy with remittances. Georgia and Iran, on Armenia's other shared borders, were the country's only lifeline to the rest of the world.

The organizers of the festival had warned the Syrians and the other international Armenians not to stay out after dark. It seemed to Anto as if they were in another century, tied as they were to the presence of the sun in the sky. Fitting then, that they were wandering around Yerevan in costumes from a bygone time and world.

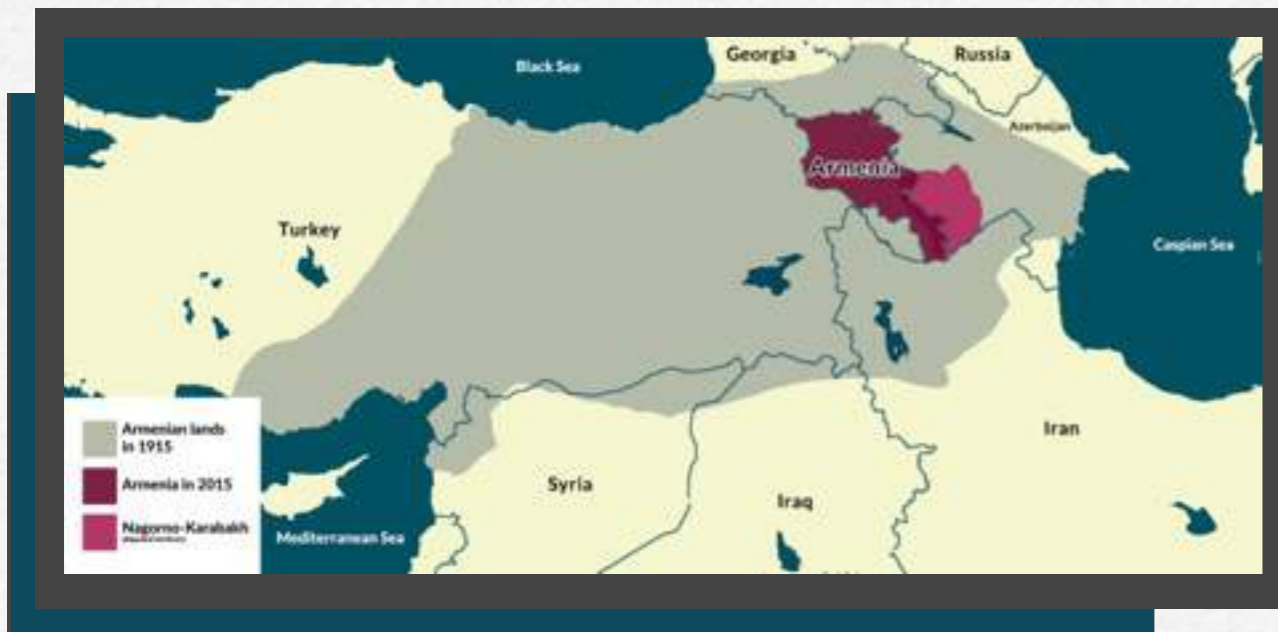


Yerevan, Armenia, with Mount Ararat in the background. Image from [Creative Commons](#).

He pitied this place. Was it any wonder most Syrian Armenians had ignored Armenian nationalist calls to “come back” to Armenia? He fell into easier conversation with the other Diaspora performers who had traveled from as far away as Argentina and who spoke in the same Western Armenian cadence as he. Anto was also hungry, having refused to eat the food, which he found inedible. Even bread was hard to come by.

Yet some things felt familiar—the architecture of the churches, the contours of the faces, and mostly, the songs. Musically, Anto felt like he had been in Armenia for a hundred years.

On their third night in this not-quite homeland, after the troupe had performed in the mountains outside of Yerevan, they were hurtling down dark and curving roads in a bus provided by the festival. It was already past midnight, and the driver seemed eager to drop them at their hotel and continue to his own destination. Finally, he pulled over and told the



Syrians to get out: they had arrived where they would be sleeping. Barely able to see their own hands in front of them in the darkness, they found their way to the door and knocked. The driver had already sped away.

A woman dressed all in white answered, her face lit only by the candle she held.

“We are the group from Syria,” they announced to her.

“Welcome,” she said. “We are waiting for a group from Syria.”

As they followed behind her, barely able to see anything in the blackness, Anto could hear the woman rapping on doors and saying, “The Syrian troupe is here. Get up! There are people who want to sleep.”

He felt hurried movement in response and sensed something was amiss. He whispered to one of the Syrians, “We’re not in the right place.”

The woman showed the eighteen of them to empty rooms with scant furniture and offered them vodka and cognac in dirty glasses. They could hear dogs howling outside. Anto pulled back the curtains to see what could be seen, only to discover there were no windows, only the plaster of the walls.

Left to themselves, the men assured the women that there was nothing to fear. They arranged themselves on the floor or on whatever furniture they found. Anto didn’t plan to sleep; he had heard back home that Armenia was a country of thieves. Yet, despite himself, he drifted off.

He woke only when he was shaken. “Wake up, wake up!”

A member of the troupe had come running in from another room. “The government has been looking for us,” he said. “Thank God they found us.”

Only in the light of day, after they had emerged from the secondary darkness of their windowless room, did they see that their driver had not delivered them to a hotel.

The woman in white was a nurse. They had taken refuge from the darkness in an asylum for the abandoned and insane.



When Anto told his mother in early 2012 that he was leaving Syria and moving to Armenia, she was aghast.

“There, the mafia will kidnap you,” she said. “And you and Matilda will get divorced.”

She was convinced, like many others in the Armenian community and in Aleppo itself, that what was happening in other parts of Syria would not—could not—reach them.

What Anto had lost in Idlib made him believe otherwise. After retreating to Aleppo, living off the revenue he had raised from selling what he could at Abu Artin, he also decided to sell his house in the city. The community gossiped. Why would he do such a desperate thing? He told them he had debts to pay, letting people speculate about which way he had failed as a man and as a provider.

With Aleppo oblivious to what was coming, he got a price for the house that suggested nothing of a country at war. He took his head start and the money and went in February to scout a life in Yerevan.

The city had changed since his first visit in 1993. Diaspora money had poured in, and there were glitzy new hotels, offices, shops, and streets in the city center. Anto had continued to come frequently to Armenia, where he had pursued and exercised his musical ambitions, recording and producing records—singing in Armenian came easier than Arabic. He knew Yerevan well enough, and he wanted to start a restaurant in Armenia. Quickly, he found the space he thought perfect to rent.

He could barely afford the modest place, which had previously been occupied by another restaurant named “New Antep,” after a city in Ottoman Turkey that had been home to Armenians for centuries before the genocide. New Antep had scaled up, and Anto decided that at the old New Antep, he would open New Urfa, named for his great-grandfather’s city, similarly cleansed of its Armenians. He would serve the same food that had traveled with his family and survivors over a century and across borders.

But when he went back to Aleppo, he had second thoughts. This was a land that he loved. This was his city, and maybe it really would all be over as quickly as it had started.

Then he thought of his young children and found his resolve again. By May, he moved them and Matilda to Yerevan. Slowly, customers began to arrive at New Urfa. He knew that in summer, when many Syrian

Armenians and other Western Armenians would come for vacation, insistent on the food of home, business would pick up.

In June, Syrians arriving from Aleppo told him that the troubles would all be resolved—even before their vacations ended. Then, in July, began the battle for Aleppo itself. Fighting engulfed the city and would eventually leave much of it in ruins. Syrians—including Anto’s brother and sister—extended their stays in Armenia, saying they would wait out the rough period in Yerevan. Many still thought it would all be over in weeks.

When September came, their summer clothes and shoes were no longer enough to keep them warm against the chill of evening. In October, with the school year about to begin in Syria and their children stranded in Yerevan, Syrian Armenian families approached the government for help opening a school that would follow the Syrian curriculum. From a single set of Arabic textbooks flown out of Syria, they made photocopies, hoping that when they returned to Syria, the children would not have missed a step.

Armenia fast-tracked visas and citizenships for Syrian Armenians, many of whom had long scoffed at the idea of a passport from Armenia, seeing no need. The government also offered Syrians free medical care and allowed them to pay tuition at the universities at the low local rate. The country waived certain fees and taxes involved in longer-term stays, and soon cars with Syrian license plates could be seen all over Yerevan.

Governmental and private groups helped Syrian Armenians find jobs and transfer their businesses to Armenia. After all, the community in Aleppo was industrious and prosperous, and Armenia needed people, investment,

and a jolt to an economy that depended greatly on remittances. Many saw an answer to Armenia’s problems in Syria’s loss.

He had fallen in love with her the moment he had heard her strum the melancholy notes of the oud.

Some in Armenia also seized on fears of violence in Syria and memories of the Ottoman genocide to push nationalist goals, particularly the return or “repatriation” of all Armenians to the country. They argued that the “it will all work out” mentality had cost them lives in the genocide.

At New Urfa, Anto mounted a large flat screen TV and set the satellite dish to channels from Syria. In September 2012, a year after that first warning to leave Idlib, Anto watched the historic souks of Aleppo burn.

“I cannot cry now,” he said. “I have no time. I have to feed my family. I have to survive in this new country. If my situation gets better and I can relax, I will cry.”

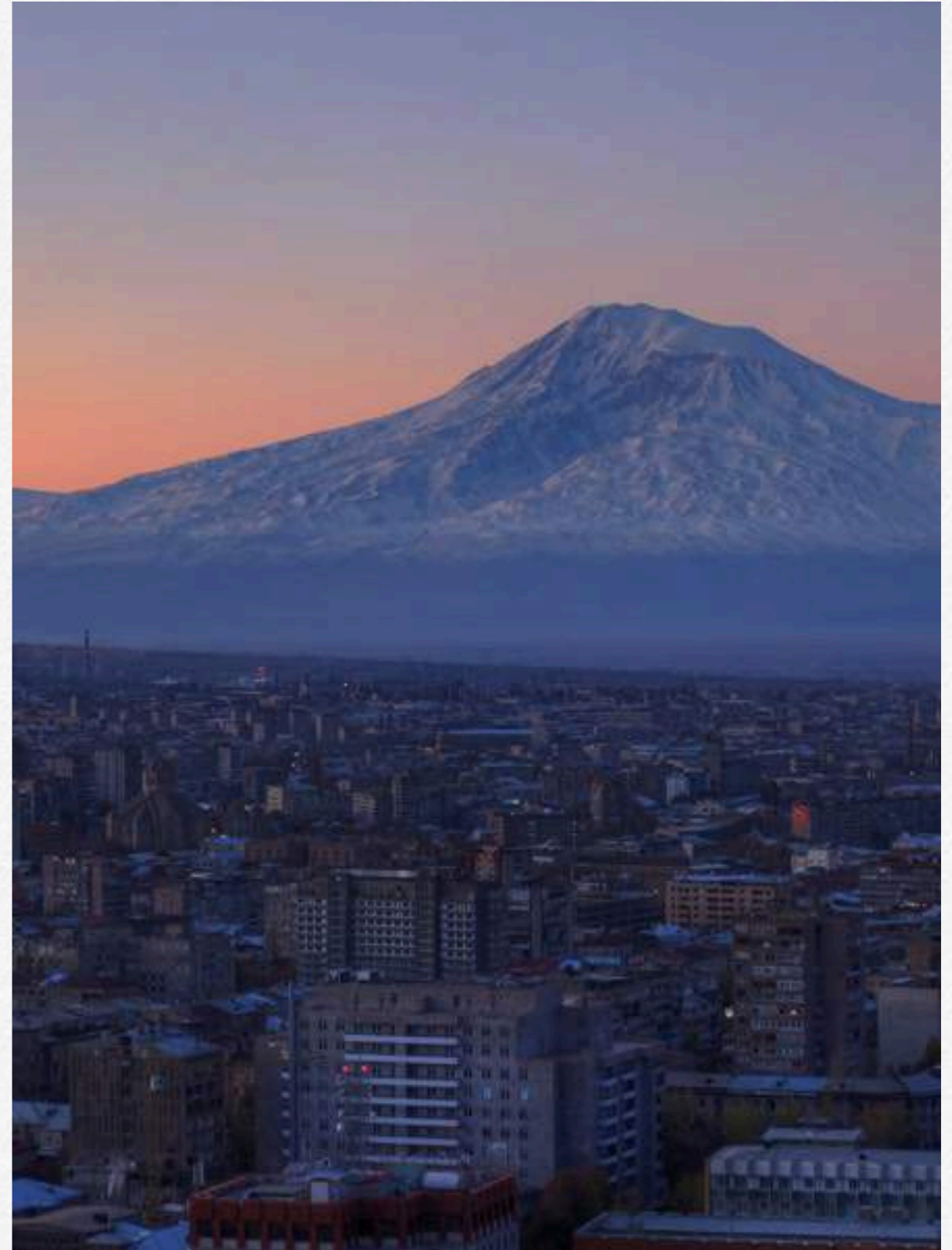
In December, on the eve of Christmas Eve, his mother died alone in her house in Aleppo. She had chosen to remain, even as snipers and violence trapped her, like many Aleppans, inside. She had passed the time in front of the television, ignoring the news and watching the Turkish soap operas she adored, in a language she still knew better than Arabic.

Last month marked Anto’s second year in Yerevan, and the first anniversary of Aleppo’s destruction. But he is no longer sure how to

measure time. Are the events to be marked, to be mourned, in Urfa, or in Idlib, or Aleppo, or Yerevan?

“I miss the past,” he says, but keeps moving forward, every day making more grape leaves and manti and kibbeh and kababs at New Urfa, still unsure, like his patrons, if permanence is always illusory. ◆

(This article was originally published by Guernica in collaboration with the Ochberg Society for Trauma Journalism.)



Yerevan, Armenia, with Mount Ararat. Image from [Creative Commons](#).

CHAPTER THREE: STARTING OVER

Stephen Franklin

Labor writer and former foreign correspondent Stephen Franklin paints portraits of Syrian refugees in Turkey, “uprooted and wounded souls in the Arab world.” There are those who feel isolated, frustrated, worried, or filled with shame. And others who soldier on:

The former high school science teacher who now helps out with classes of young students—children in need of food and clothing as well as schooling.

The lawyer who puts on a clean shirt and well-pressed pants to work with another twenty Syrian refugee lawyers—for no pay.

The “soft-spoken pediatrician” who spent twenty-eight days in a cell and was beaten with wooden and metal sticks while hearing girls raped in the rooms nearby. Now he is working with injured fighters in Turkey “treating one wound after another with no end in sight.”

And then there is the filmmaker who is waging two battles: one for Syria and the other for himself. As a gay man, he is considered a criminal under Syrian law. He flees Syria, but later chooses to return to complete a documentary on the youth of Syria.

But others—a deserter from the Syrian army and an economics student imprisoned and tortured for taking part in a protest demonstration—have no choice. There is no return trip home.

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Living Somewhere Between Hope and Darkness

Stephen Franklin
July 26, 2012

YAYLADAG, Turkey (On the Syrian border)—Yasser Jani huddles in a tiny sliver of shade. He wants to escape from the heat and crowding and an uncertain future. But the small patch of trees just outside the camp for Syrian refugees here didn't offer one and his face shows it.

"Most of the people here are hopeless," says the short, middle-aged Syrian, who taught high school science before fleeing last year with his wife, two small children, mother and brother. "They lost their homes, their work, and their money and they don't know anything about their future," he said.

"And I feel the same way," he adds.

As Syria boils, its diaspora lives in disparate worlds of faith and despair, of denial and acceptance, and many places in between. The young bodybuilder whose stomach was plugged with bullets from Syrian soldiers nurtures old dreams while the husband, whose seventh-month pregnant wife was killed as they were fleeing, is frozen in shock.

Daily the specter grows of yet another massive population of uprooted and wounded souls in the Arab world.

Already more than 112,000 refugees are jammed in camps in Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan, with thousands more surviving on their own in these countries. Many more Syrians appear ready to join these ranks and flee their country as the fighting grows fiercer in Syria's largest cities.

Dr. Moustafa, a Syrian psychiatrist now living in the United Kingdom (who would not give his last name), worries about the indelible scars that he says will last long beyond any resolution to the crisis. The only Syrian psychiatrist on hand here, he is forced to flit from camp to camp, dealing with panic-stricken refugees, dispensing medication and trying to measure the depth of the problem.

Where Are the Refugees?



Interactive Map: View in iBooks

Moustafa arrived here only a few days ago from the UK and has since rushed from camp to camp counseling refugees.

“There is almost no psychiatric support,” he said taking a break between long trips to the refugee camps sprawled across southeastern Turkey. “There’s only me,” he added.

“They suffer all degrees of problems from panic attacks to depression to post-traumatic shock,” he said.

Indeed, he worries about the long-lasting emotional problems. “Often these are the kinds of problems that don’t respond well to treatment.”

In one camp he briefly counseled a man who was fleeing with his 7-month pregnant wife when Syrian gunfire hit their car, killing his wife and the driver. In another he met with a 15-year-old who was shot in both legs by Syrian forces as they left his home after searching it.

“What really strikes me is the randomness of the killing,” he said. “I ask them, ‘Were you actually fighting?’ and most of them said ‘No.’”

Yasser Jani is one of those refugees living somewhere between hope and darkness.

Despite his frustration about spending the last year in the small, crowded camp, where he complains about the daily inconveniences, he has helped out with classes for young children. It’s all he can do, he adds.

Likewise, Ahmed Hassoun, 56, follows the same daily routine, which gives him meaning in Antakya, a large city in southeastern Turkey, where many Syrians have gathered. A lawyer from Idlib in northwestern Syria, where the fighting has been intense, Hassoun puts on a clean shirt and well-pressed dark pants early in the morning in an almost empty apartment, where he lives with his children, and heads to an office where he works with another 20 Syrian refugee lawyers. His wife stayed behind in Syria.

He gets no pay for his work. None of the lawyers do. But they have gathered daily, meeting with clients and taking careful notes for the last month and a half. Their goal is to produce an accurate and detailed account of the abuses suffered by Syrians under the Assad regime. They hope to turn it over to the International Criminal Court or to a court in Syria when they return, he explains.



Attorney Ahmed Hassoun compiles records of Syrian government abuses. Image by Stephen Franklin. Turkey, 2012.

They are also working with attorneys within Syria to compile their records.

From the handful of refugees, who visit the office daily to tell their stories or the stories of others who are too ashamed, as is the case for female rape victims, or too overwhelmed to personally recount the events, they have catalogued more than 30 kinds of torture, and at least 1,500 rapes, some of them in groups.

His records show that Syrian torturers use metal and wooden sticks and often electricity on their victims. They also use acid and it is not unusual for victims to die of their burns and wounds, he says.

Soldiers caught escaping “are executed right away by gun or they slaughter them with knives,” he says.

As a fellow attorney sitting beside Hassoun coolly recalls seeing someone beaten to death on the street by Syrian soldiers with a rock, Hassoun adds softly, “I feel terrible when I hear these stories.”

Many of the tortures that Hassoun has been recording were suffered by Dr. Mohammed Sheik Ibrahim, 38, a soft-spoken pediatrician, who didn’t want to leave Syria even after eight months in prison.

“They put me in a small cell for 28 days and they interrogated me four times a day for an hour or two each time. Or they would make me stand for hours. They beat me. They used wooden sticks and metal sticks,” he says. “I heard them raping women and girls in the rooms nearby.”

When Ibrahim came home to Latakia from prison, he continued to speak out to his clients, colleagues and anyone else about the regime’s abuses. “I wasn’t afraid,” he explains. Then one day a high-ranking official warned him that his life was in danger. He fled the next day, nearly nine months ago.

Ibrahim has since been working with injured fighters in Turkey from the Free Syrian Army. When thousands of fellow Turkmens from Syria poured across the border recently, driven by aerial attacks, he rushed to the camp that Turkish officials quickly set up for them here in Yayladag.

As Syria boils, its diaspora lives in disparate worlds of faith and despair, of denial and acceptance, and many places in between.

He is committed, he says, to work with the fighters and follow them into Syria when they launch a large battle. His father has asked him not to go, fearing for his life, but he remains determined to go with the fighters, he says.

He explains that he is a doctor treating one wound after another with no end in sight.

“When I am fixing them (the soldiers), I tell myself that Bashar Assad is the man with the knife and he is the one causing all of these wounds,” he says, moving his arms, and raising his voice.

Like Ibrahim, Dr. Khaula Sawah knows much about the refugees' medical needs because she has been organizing the help coming from expatriate Syrian medical experts like herself. The expats arrive here in waves from across Europe, the United States, and the Arab world. They stay several weeks and leave. Many return.

Sawah also works on finding medical supplies needed inside of Syria. A clinical pharmacist at a Cincinnati hospital, she has come to southeastern Turkey five times this year so far for this kind of work. This time she brought her two sons along with her.



Dr. Khaula Sawah is one of many Syrian-American medical experts, who rushed to help refugees along the border. Image by Stephen Franklin. Turkey, 2012.

Born in St. Louis, Sawah moved as a child to Syria with her Syrian-born parents. When her father was put in prison by the government, the family waited 12 years in Syria until he was released.

Now vice-president of the Turkish branch of the Union of Syrian Medical Relief Organizations, Sawah has lately been filling up a small warehouse with medicine and then finding safe ways to smuggle it into Syria.

“The needs are humungous,” she says. “We’ll pitch in \$100,000 worth of medicine (in Syria) and it is gone in a few days.”

At the warehouse—the basement of a nearby apartment house in Reyhanli—people are unpacking a new delivery of blood absorbing bandages. A U.S. manufacturer had donated the supplies, worth nearly \$500,000, Sawah says.

From visits to the Turkish-run camps as well as clinics that the Syrian physicians have set up, she is familiar with the refugees' frustration.

It's been especially difficult, she says, for those who didn't want to live in the camps because of their stark conditions or isolation. As a result, they struck out on their own, renting apartments and often doubling up with other families. In many places, rents doubled with the refugees' arrival, the refugees say.

“They are all illegal and they don't have any rights,” she explains. Soon they run out of money and then discover that they can't get help at the Turkish hospitals because they are not registered. “I just got a call from a woman who went to the state hospital and said they wouldn't check her child.”



A camp on the Syrian border ravaged by a fire. Image by Stephen Franklin. Turkey, 2012.

But the greatest discontent, she says, is felt by those who have been in the camps the longest. It wells up into squabbles between groups and complaints about conditions. Indeed, there have been three disturbances in refugee camps by Syrians asking for refrigerators, or water and food. Turkish security forces used tear gas and fired bullets into the air to calm an uprising at one camp.

But Sawah has also seen the way the refugees have struggled to accommodate each other and adjust to a future on hold. Some have set up small stores in the camps to earn money and make life more hospitable. And at overcrowded clinics, older patients have given up their beds and slept on the floor to make room for new arrivals.

At the Yayladag camp, where a recent fire took the lives of a newlywed couple who had arrived only a few days earlier, Yasser Jani worries about the young children who he says need more food and clothing, and the teenagers who need a school. He worries too about the women who have to put up with a lack of privacy and other difficulties.

After the fire at the camp, an old factory warehouse minutes from the Syrian border, Turkish officials talked of moving the refugees to another camp. But overcome by the arrival of as many as 1,000 refugees a day and the need to open at least two more camps, the camp here has stayed open.

Privately, Jani worries about not having money and what's ahead. But on another day in the low 100s, he worries about just catching his breath. Most nights he cannot sleep because of the heat.

“But I’m trying to make my life better,” he adds. ◆



Image by Stephen Franklin. Turkey, 2012.

Getting Unstuck

Stephen Franklin
August 1, 2012

I—Mahmoud Hassino is not stuck anymore.

Though he has no place to call home, he has freed himself.

He got stuck when he fled Syria nine months ago for Turkey and soon sensed that his life in exile had become pointless.

He had fled because the two rebellions he was waging were getting dangerous for him.

One was for Syria and one was for himself, a gay man in a country where he was considered an outsider—and a criminal under Syrian law.

An arts and culture writer for a Syrian magazine, he had put his talents into his battle for Syria by spreading the word about the uprising when it took off in 2011.

He helped the uprising's message flow on in print with leaflets, underground newspapers, and new websites on the Internet. Any way that he could possibly think of he tried.

He had also joined a like-minded group of mostly gay and lesbian Syrians in Damascus and they linked up with other Syrians in the opposition underground and soon they had an underground network that sprawled across Syria.

At first, most were strangers.

“The Arab Spring inspired us. We thought we could do something and we could feel that we were recruiting more people,” he said.

Never before had he been an activist. But with people dying in protests or losing their jobs because they had signed petitions or had spoken up, he felt caught up and stepped forward.

One of the hopes that united him and his friends when they met almost nightly was that change would come peacefully.

“But when they—the government—started killing children, we thought if they don't care about children, it would be impossible to do anything. I was the most pessimistic of all,” he recalled.

One still hopeful friend believed they could win peacefully and kept trying to make that point. He would go up to soldiers lined up at a confrontation and hand them flowers.

“But they arrested and killed him,” Mahmoud says.

The day before he left, five more close friends were arrested. Another friend was killed soon after trying to reach the Turkish border.

As for his other battle—his rebellion—he had decided after years of uncertainty and fears to become more open about his homosexuality.

He had started a blog a few years before about being gay in Syria, but he wrote anonymously. He had struggled for years to deal with his sexuality and now wanted to help Syrians like himself who knew what they were facing.

In the new mood of Syria, he felt enlivened, charged to win this battle, too.

But word of his daring spread to powerful relatives, who threatened to do something against him to protect their family name.

So he fled.

But not to a refugee camp, as have thousands now in Turkey. He came to Istanbul, where he thought he could work and start over.

He couldn't. At least, at first.

“I really felt lost. I didn't want to leave the country,” he said. Unable to access his Syrian bank account, he went hungry for days and scrambled for work.

Along with a foreign videographer, he visited the Syrian refugee camps set up by the Turkish government near the Syrian border and was overcome by despair. People were suffering from the shock of war and little was being done for them.

“Children 14- 15-years-old were still wetting their beds. And the people in the camps were being manipulated. They were being told, ‘You are lucky you are alive. People are dying.’ Some camps were not getting enough food. But I couldn't do anything. I wanted to make a difference. I was upset.”

He disagreed with some of the refugees and didn't like what he heard from them. He thought his battle for Syria was over and it was time to move on.

Then came a chance to help a foreign photographer inside of Syria. He went along and worked on his own documentary as well. It's about the youth of Syria and what the struggle has done to them.

That was when he got unstuck.

He met Syrians who were optimistic and had not, as he feared, been turned into monsters.

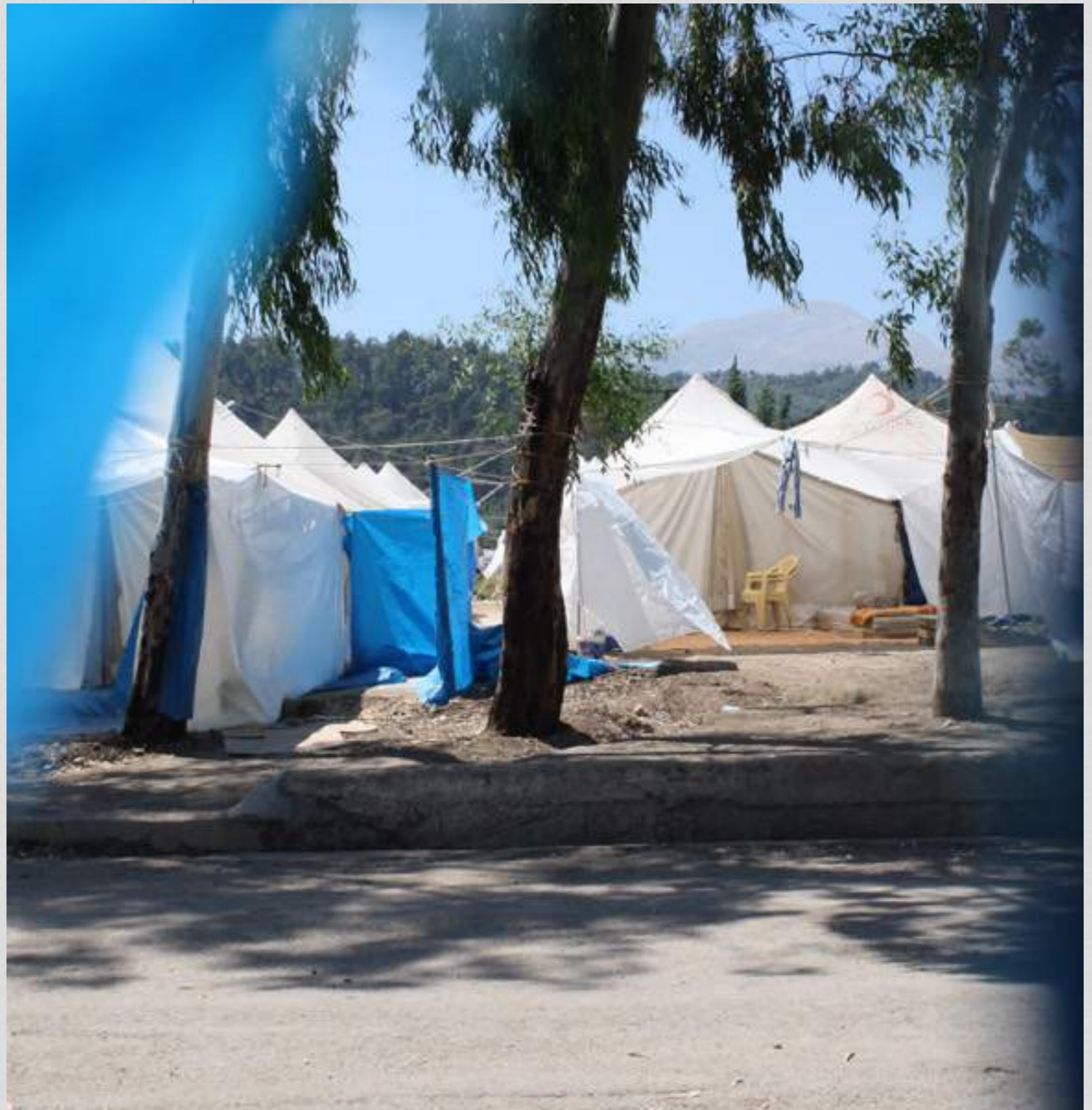
“They didn't want revenge.” But he also met Syrians who were suffering greatly.

He decided he wouldn't leave Syria no matter where he lived. Instead of putting Syria behind as he was thinking, he would "work in my way for Syria."

He would finish his video about the children. He would finish his book and find a publisher for his novel about a young gay man in Syria. He would keep up his blog about being gay in Syria and the Arab world.

He didn't know where he would do this and that has been a worry because he has no visa and his chances of staying in Turkey are uncertain.

But that doesn't matter now. ◆



Refugees struggle to settle into a camp on the Syrian border. Image by Stephen Franklin. Turkey, 2012.

The Scars They Carry

Stephen Franklin

July 24, 2012

ANTAKYA, Turkey—You can't see Cengiz Abdullah's face because of the video he is holding up on his cellphone.

The video shows a man down on the ground, struggling for his life. All you can see are hands pummeling him. Suddenly someone reaches down with a knife and slits his throat in one long slow swoop.

Blood pours out, staining the street and he's left lying there like a slaughtered animal.

You can't see his face, Cengiz explains, because he is a soldier who also deserted from Syrian army. "And they'll cut me up the same way," he says, clutching the cellphone. "They do it everyday and all over Syria."

You can't see his face for another reason, he says.

He still has family in Syria and if the government can identify him, it will go, he says, to his family, capture them and demand his return in order for them to go free.

So the 20-year-old lives here in a refugee camp, which is not far from his village on the other side of the Syrian border. It's a Turkmen village and it has been empty for the last eight months, almost the same time as when he fled Syria. All 3,000 of its residents fled.

He fled the army because he wouldn't follow orders during the demonstrations. His commanders were getting angry with him and he knew he would be in danger soon.

"They yelled at me and so I just escaped," he says.

Some days in the refugee camp that sits in a high valley looking up the Syrian mountains he thinks he can hear shooting coming from his village across the border and he wonders what's happening in his village and why there's shooting.

Most days he does nothing in the camp, which the Turkish government has set up close to the border. He finds work one or two days a month in

A flood of Turkmen from Syria have fled to this new camp, which is providing refuge for 2,500 villagers. The camp is one of several the Turkish government has been forced to set up to deal with a crush of refugees. Image by Stephen Franklin. Turkey, 2012.



Though he has no place to call home, he has freed himself.

nearby Antakya. But he figures that his life will go the same way for a while, so he struggles to adjust.

When his cousin Essam Abdullah, 23, who is standing next to him, smilingly says he is thinking of joining the Free Syrian Army, Cengiz shows no emotion.

“It’s hard,” is all he says.

Down the street from the Turkish government hospital where Essam and Cengiz were waiting in the broiling heat for a doctor’s visit, Ahmet Bettar, 23, was getting his first taste of freedom in Turkey.

He crossed two days ago in the refugee stream that rarely slows nowadays and usually carries a large number of injured and emotionally damaged.

He spent forty days in a Syrian prison after being swept up in arrests at a demonstration. He lived in a cell so crowded that he had to sleep standing up, he says.

He immediately pulls up his sleeve to show where prison guards attached electric wires and where they hit him. It’s a common reflex among refugees here, showing the scars they carry.

He is talking with a group of relatives, one of whom cheerfully says he crosses over regularly to help the Free Syrian Army.

But that thought is far from the thinking of Bettar, who sold all he owned when he left. He was an economics student at a Syrian university before his capture and imprisonment.

“I can’t go back to Syria,” he says flatly.

So just as for Cengiz Abdullah, there’s no return trip home these days. ◆

(This chapter was adapted from articles published by In These Times, Global Post, and the Pulitzer Center.)

CHAPTER FOUR: CLOSING THE DOORS

Writing from Lebanon, journalist Alice Su exposes the injustices faced by Palestinian refugees from Syria. Many simply have nowhere to go—they are barred from entry everywhere they turn.

Alice Su

Human Rights Watch has called for neighboring countries to open asylum to Palestinians and for Israel to permit Palestinian refugees from Syria to return to areas now administered by Palestinian authorities. But meanwhile Palestinians are living in limbo.

“Palestinians from Syria are a minority within a minority, without a state to speak for them,” Su tells us. They are looking for an open door.

Su also reported from Jordan in December 2014—a holiday season for some, but for others “colder weather, hard times and another reminder that they cannot go home, regardless of faith.” She discovered a world where girls marry for survival and children collect garbage instead of going to school. Their parents are denied the right to work. “Jordan does not want its refugees to settle,” Su writes.

One 31-year-old Syrian, Abu Essa, has been in Jordan for two years. He can’t return to Syria legally and he can’t afford to stay in Jordan. His wife remains behind in Syria. He too is looking for an open door.

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When Fleeing War Becomes Illegal

Alice Su
August 20, 2014

EL-MARJ, Lebanon—Alaa, age 24, left Yarmouk in 2012, when shelling first hit the Palestinian refugee camp in Damascus. She now lives in Lebanon’s Beqaa Valley, just a few miles from the Syrian border, in an informal camp with forty other refugee families. As a Palestinian from Syria, Alaa was born displaced. She’s been a refugee for twenty-four years and a double refugee for two. But only recently has she become illegal.

“I haven’t left this camp since June,” Alaa told me. Her Lebanese residency expired a few months ago, and according to Lebanon’s new regulations, Palestinians from Syria cannot renew their residence permits. Fearing detention and deportation, Alaa stays within the camp, a cluster of tents tucked behind a factory building on a rented plot about the size of a football field.

Amid the [millions of refugees](#) from Syria flooding into neighboring countries like Lebanon and Jordan, a minority group is being quietly denied entry, detained, deported, and pushed out in any way possible: Palestinians. They are refugees who literally have nowhere to go.

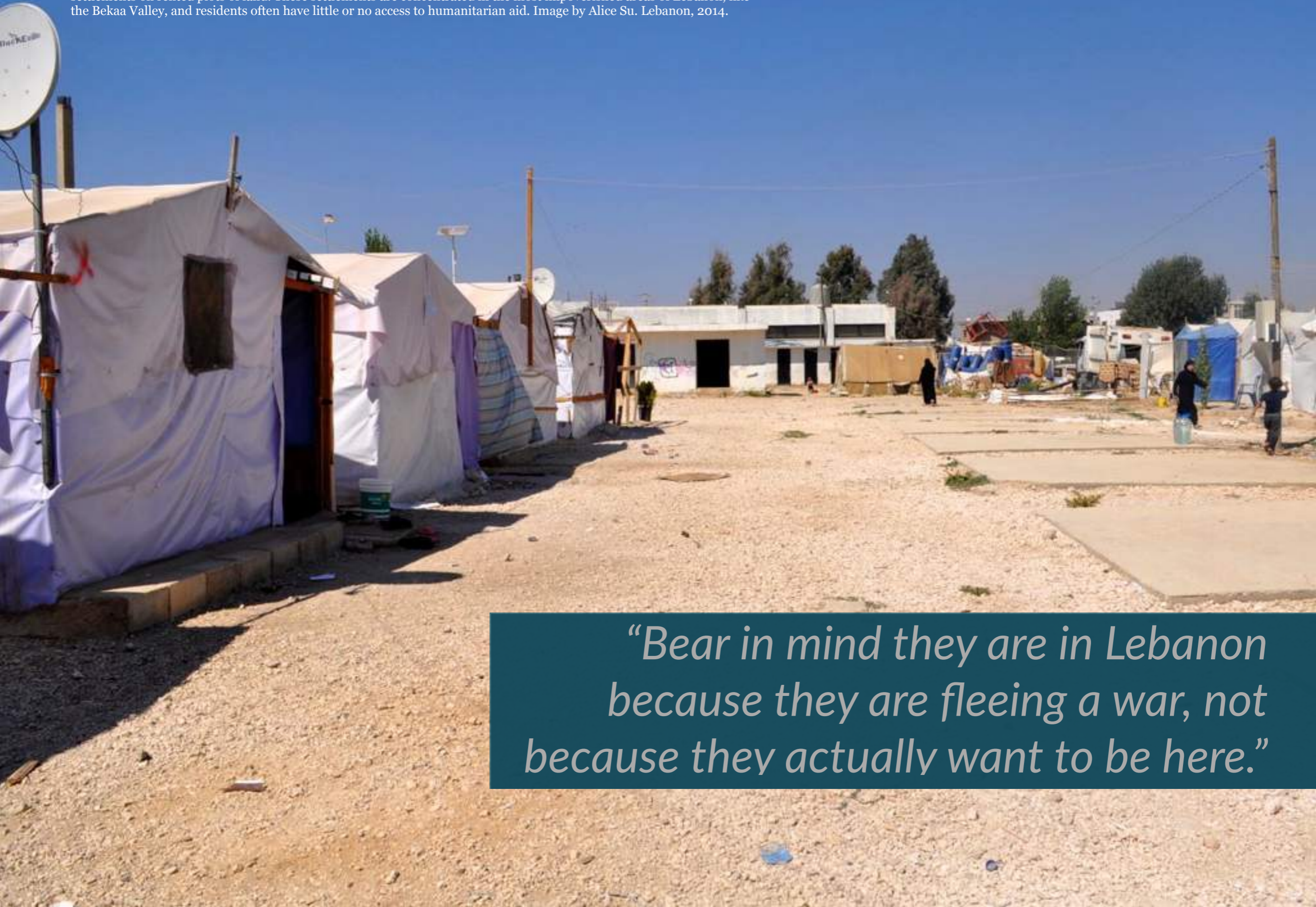
In recent months, Jordanian and Lebanese authorities have acknowledged that Palestinians from Syria are not welcome to asylum in the same way that other Syrian refugees are. Jordan and Lebanon have respectively been barring Palestinians from entry since January and August 2013, in contrast with the treatment of some 600,000 Syrian nationals in Jordan and 1.5 million in Lebanon, according to [Human Rights Watch](#). The organization has also documented forcible deportations of Palestinians—women and children included—from both countries.

Alaa’s family is still in Yarmouk, where severe fighting followed by a months-long siege beginning in 2012 led to hundreds of civilian deaths, mostly from starvation. Once home to some 180,000 Palestinian refugees, Yarmouk has been reduced to a population of roughly 18,000, including Syrian nationals, still trapped with almost no access to food and medical supplies. UNRWA, the United Nations’ specialized refugee-relief agency for Palestinians, tracks its humanitarian access to the camp—or more often, lack thereof—on a [daily basis](#).

“I talk to my parents when I can, but the situation is not good,” Alaa told me.

When Syria’s conflict began, most Palestinians there entered bordering countries, just like others fleeing the conflict. There are now some 14,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria in Jordan and approximately 40,000 in

Lebanon has no formal UNHCR camps for refugees from Syria. Instead, many refugees live in makeshift tent settlements on rented plots of land. These settlements are concentrated in the most impoverished areas of Lebanon, like the Bekaa Valley, and residents often have little or no access to humanitarian aid. Image by Alice Su. Lebanon, 2014.



“Bear in mind they are in Lebanon because they are fleeing a war, not because they actually want to be here.”

Lebanon. But because [UNRWA](#), rather than UNHCR, the United Nations' broader refugee-coordination agency, is expected to handle the specific case of Palestinians regardless of which country they're in, Palestinians from Syria are excluded in all the UN's regional response plans, budgets, and appeals for the Syrian crisis.

The semantic split between Syrian refugees and Palestinian refugees from Syria, in other words, means the UN handles them differently. But as refugees, Palestinians escaping Syria have the same international legal rights as Syrian nationals, and [customary international law](#) compels Lebanon and Jordan not to send refugees back into a conflict zone. "[T]he standards of international law are the same across the board," said Human Rights Watch's Syria and Lebanon researcher Lama Fakih in an interview. Just because a refugee is originally Palestinian doesn't make him any less vulnerable in Syria—deporting him or refusing him asylum is thus a clear breach of international responsibilities.

Lebanon's minister of the interior issued a statement in May saying "there is no decision preventing Palestinian refugees in Syria from entering Lebanon and passing through the country." But the same statement stipulated that Palestinian refugees from Syria could only enter Lebanon if they met difficult and costly requirements, such as having a valid plane ticket for a third country. Amnesty International has also documented instances of Lebanon arbitrarily denying Palestinians entry, or forcibly deporting them.

Meanwhile, Palestinian refugees from Syria already living in Lebanon before the May 2014 statement were first subject to the exorbitant \$200

annual renewal fee all refugees must pay for legal residency and then barred from renewing their residence permits altogether.

"Palestinian refugees from Syria are living in fear," said UNRWA's Lebanon Public Information Officer Zizette Darkazally. Those without valid visas are constantly subjected to detention, she added, and considered illegal without having committed any crime. "Bear in mind they are in Lebanon because they are fleeing a war, not because they actually want to be here."

In Jordan, Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour said that Palestinians fleeing Syria should be allowed to return to their places of origin in Israel and Palestine. "Jordan is not a place to solve Israel's problems," Ensour said in



Lebanon has no formal UNHCR camps for refugees from Syria. Instead, many refugees live in makeshift tent settlements on rented plots of land. These settlements are concentrated in the most impoverished areas of Lebanon, like the Bekaa Valley, and residents often have little or no access to humanitarian aid. Image by Alice Su. Lebanon, 2014.

an interview with Al-Hayat, adding that receiving those refugees would lead to another wave of displacement. “Our Palestinian brothers in Syria have the right to go back to their country of origin. They should stay in Syria until the end of the crisis.” According to Human Rights Watch, the head of Jordan’s Royal Hashemite Court also said a large influx of Palestinians would change Jordan’s demographic balance and cause instability.

The [political issue](#) of Palestinians’ [right of return](#)—that is, the refugees’ right to go back to their land in what is now Israel and the Palestinian territories—complicates the problem. Resettlement, a standard “durable solution” that the UN’s refugee agency seeks for many of its registered refugees, is often taboo for Palestinians. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Arab League reject and actively discourage local integration or third-country resettlement of Palestinian refugees, according to Human Rights Watch, as these options might undermine the right to return. But the alternative, Human Rights Watch’s Middle East and North Africa Deputy Director Nadim Houry pointed out at a press conference in Amman, is leaving Palestinians to die in Syria.

“We cannot sacrifice Palestinian people in the name of the Palestinian cause,” Houry said.

Instead, Human Rights Watch has suggested, neighboring countries should open asylum to Palestinians, with other countries sharing the burden via financial assistance and “temporary resettlement without prejudice to their right of return.” The group also suggested that Israel should permit Palestinian refugees from Syria to return to areas now administered by Palestinian authorities.

Palestinians confronted a similar situation in the early 2000s following the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq and ensuing sectarian violence, when a few thousand Palestinian-Iraqis found themselves trapped in camps on Iraq’s borders with Syria and Jordan. Similarly denied entry by neighboring countries but fearing death and persecution where they were, the Palestinian-Iraqis spent years in these camps. UNHCR eventually sent them to Chile, Iceland, Sweden, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Ireland, and the U.S. over a period of years. That kind of third-country option seems less likely for Palestinian refugees from Syria, though, because UNRWA, which is responsible for them, can provide services but not resettlement. Since Iraq is outside of UNRWA’s mandate, UNHCR was able to step in on behalf of the Palestinians stuck there.

UNRWA, meanwhile, was originally set up as a temporary agency for a supposedly temporary problem, and its geographical and operational scope is strictly defined: direct relief, works programs, five territories only. While UNHCR seeks [durable solutions](#), UNRWA only provides [services](#). But 64 years into the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with violence rising across the Middle East, Palestinian refugees are increasingly unwanted—a condition outside the scope of UNRWA’s capabilities.

Jordan and Lebanon have both had political problems with Palestinians. Yasser Arafat’s PLO clashed violently with King Hussein’s forces during Jordan’s Black September of 1970. The PLO and Palestinian refugees were also involved as both perpetrators and victims in Lebanon’s 15-year civil war—most famously in the Sabra and Shatila massacre in 1982, when thousands of Palestinians and Lebanese were killed in a Beirut refugee camp. Palestinians remain an easy scapegoat for domestic problems in both countries, whether in the form of Palestinian-Jordanian identity

politics or sectarian pressure from refugees on Lebanon's confessional system, which ties governmental positions to an artificial religious ratio. UN agencies, along with non-governmental and human-rights organizations, acknowledge that Jordan and Lebanon are facing formidable refugee challenges. Lebanon has taken in refugees in numbers totaling more than one-fourth of the country's pre-existing population of 4 million. Jordan has registered more than 600,000 Syrians, along with 29,000 Iraqis and some 4,000 others, on top of 2 million UNRWA-registered Palestinians. Both countries are poor, and struggling to keep their infrastructure and economies afloat while fending off violence and extremism across every border.

As Jordan and Lebanon try to stem the refugee flow, the most vulnerable are the first to be kicked out or not let in. Palestinians from Syria are a minority within a minority, without a state to speak for them. The governments that surround them speak of their cause, while shoving them around between camps, sieges, bombings, and war. Their ostensible solution is return, but as Israeli occupation continues and Gaza burns, what are the chances of that?

"Some of the [Palestinian refugees from Syria] in Lebanon are refugees not only for the second time, but for the third and even fourth time," Darkazally said. They join some 450,000 Palestinians who are already living in Lebanon, and suffering from unemployment, poverty, and overcrowding as they wait in the hopes of return to Palestine. These

refugees are registered with UNRWA Lebanon and protected from deportation. Those who came from Syria, however, are legally distinct—so Lebanese authorities can actively push them back into war.



A Syrian family walks down the street in Azraq, Jordan. More than 80 percent of Syrian refugees in Jordan live in urban areas outside the refugee camps, preferring some agency over their lives despite the added difficulties of paying rent and accessing services. Image by Alice Su. Jordan, 2014.

UNRWA advocates that Palestinians be treated equally to others fleeing Syria, urging Jordan and Lebanon to uphold humanitarian principles of temporary protection, said UNRWA spokesperson Chris Gunness. Meanwhile, UNRWA provides Palestinians with relief, protection, education, and health services. But it can't do so if refugees are blocked at the border.

The situation is complex, Darkazally said, but refugees from Syria—Palestinian or not—need protection. "They're fleeing a war. Where should they go?"

"Closing the door in the face of the most vulnerable cannot be the answer," Fakhri said.

"You cannot tell people, 'Just stay and die.'" ◆

(This story originally appeared in The Atlantic.)

A New Future: What Jordan's Refugees Want for Christmas

Alice Su
August 1, 2012

AMMAN, Jordan — Saeed Abu Essa, a 31-year-old Syrian, has been in Jordan for two years, and he shakes his head at his roommate and fellow refugee Abu Walid. The two are standing on a rooftop in Amman, holding their breath as the dusk call to prayer sounds. “Listen, brother. We’ll go to Algeria first, then smuggle to Libya,” Abu Walid says, pacing. “We get a boat there for Italy. Then we go for Germany or Sweden.” The only reason Abu Essa won’t leave is his wife.

Abu Essa narrows his eyes, watching a flock of pigeons flit around a mosque minaret as if chasing echoes of “Allahu akbar.” He rubs one fist against his abdomen as the other hangs limp at his side, paralyzed after a sniper shot him back in Syria. Ever since the regime arrested and tortured him in 2012, Abu Essa’s chronic kidney disease has worsened into

needing regular dialysis, an eventual operation and \$1,500 of medicine every month.

His wife crossed the border to donate her kidney in March but returned home to Syria after the operation. She prefers their home in Syria, even surrounded by snipers and bombings, to Jordan. Abu Essa hasn’t seen her for four months.

His five Syrian roommates labor at a Jordanian aluminum factory from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. every day, earning 125 Jordanian dinars per month (\$176), well below the legal minimum wage. Their monthly rent is 280 dinars (\$394) without utilities, and they support their disabled friend as well. Until now, that is.

On December 1, 2014, the World Food Program announced that it lacked the \$68 million necessary for Syrians refugees’ food coupons this month. A few weeks earlier, Jordan announced Syrian refugees would no longer receive free medical assistance either. Sick and paralyzed, Abu Essa can’t pay for food or medicine. Plus work is illegal, with the risk of being caught and deported to Syria. That would be sure death for Abu Essa, who is wanted for having protested. Otherwise he would have joined his wife long ago, he says. “Syria is dangerous, but you can live. It’s cheaper than Jordan,” he says. “And no one calls you an alien.”

December means holiday season in Western and Christian countries: Christmas lights, family reunions, lavish feasts, generous gifts and joyous parties. For the newest refugees in Jordan—Syrians, Iraqis and others—it means colder weather, hard times and another reminder that they cannot go home, regardless of faith.

Celebration at this time of year is not easy for refugees, said Hanna Massad, 54, a Baptist originally from the Gaza Strip who leads an evangelical service for Iraqis. “You try to encourage them with a Christmas party, but they’re thinking how to survive, pay rent and get food for their children,” she said. “They are hurting deeply.”

A few days after Abu Essa and Abu Walid’s conversation, the World Food Program received more than \$100 million in donations, enough to resume the December coupons. The story unfolded like a Christmas drama, with wealthy donors opening their pockets to save the downtrodden Syrians. But humanitarian appeals and holiday fundraising are not enough.

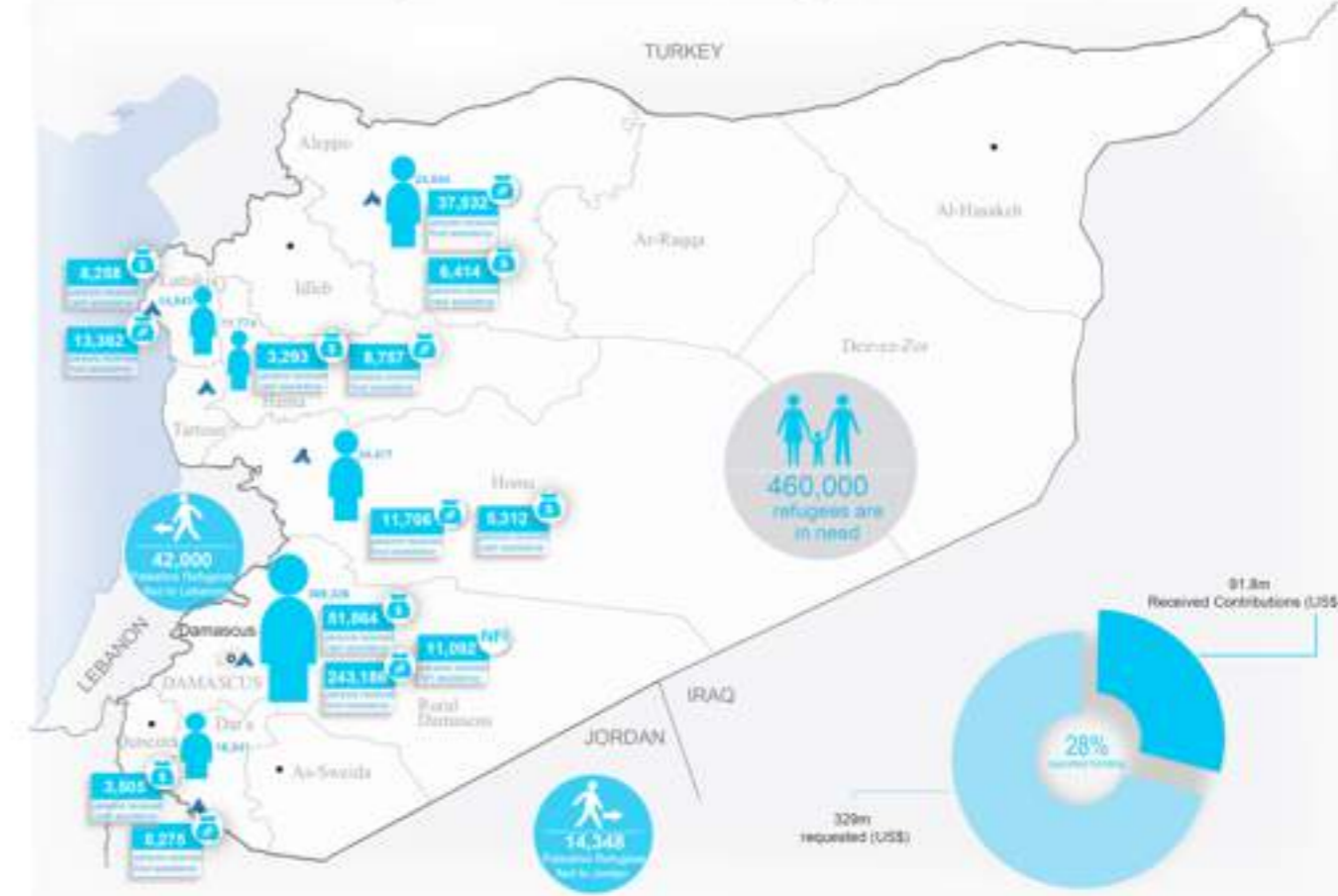
Jordan’s refugee needs are vast, growing and increasingly unmet. Global funding for the U.N.’s Syria appeal in 2014 remains at less than half the requested \$3.7 billion. The longer refugees are stuck in Jordan, the worse their situation seems to get. Personal savings run out as charities become leaner. Meanwhile, the Syrian refugees seek work: [Children collect garbage](#) instead of going to school, girls marry for survival, and men compete for day labor and risk arrest in the process. They hear rumors that the [border is closed](#), and Syrians—including [wounded men and unaccompanied children](#)—are being increasingly deported.

One recent case involved sixteen [Syrian medical workers](#) who were giving urgent treatment to war-wounded refugees. According to Human Rights Watch, Jordanian authorities arrested and deported the doctors and nurses, saying they were operating without a license. This happened a week after Jordan halted health assistance to Syrian refugees, claiming the demands on the system were too high.

“As fighting in southern Syria intensifies, Jordan should not be targeting medical staff and wounded refugees who have nowhere else to flee,” said

Syria: UNRWA - Humanitarian Snapshot, JUNE 2015

In June 2015, UNRWA was only able to conduct two cross-line missions to the Yalda, Babila and Beit Saham areas, located just south of Damascus, where thousands of civilians have fled from Yarmouk, a district in Damascus. Only 2,400 packs of bread, 1,200 food parcels and 20,000 litres of potable water were delivered throughout June, which is woefully insufficient for the needs of the civilian population. After conducting over 30 successful cross-line missions to these areas in April and May, UNRWA has not been authorized to provide humanitarian assistance, including food, water and healthcare, since 8 June 2015.



Adapted from <http://www.unrwa.org>

Nadim Houry, deputy Middle East and North Africa director of Human Rights Watch. “Instead of deporting medical workers, Jordanian authorities should focus on expanding medical services to wounded Syrians.”

Jordanian government officials did not respond to requests for comment. “If we could work, Syrians would help Syrians. We could solve 50 percent of the problems ourselves,” said Abu Shergo, 42, who arrived from Damascus eight years ago as a businessman, not as a refugee. When the

crisis began, he started a medical center for injured Syrian children, especially recovering amputees, mostly orphans. “We are receiving so many calls now from crying families. We feel no hope,” he said. If refugees could only earn money legally, he added, they wouldn’t have to beg.

Jordan has no legal obligation to let refugees work. While the U.N. promotes a refugee right to livelihoods, it keeps the term vaguely defined. In practice, the UNHCR and partner agencies quietly develop informal employment programs—Syrian women’s handicraft workshops, incentives paid to Syrian volunteers in the camps and so on—without explicitly pressuring Jordan to let refugees work.

“These governments are justifiably concerned about the security situation and the economic, demographic and social impact on their countries. In

the best of all possible worlds, we prefer to see refugees living outside of camps and becoming self-sustainable,” said UNHCR spokesman Ron Redmond. “But when you’ve got a million or more refugees converging on a small country, that’s not possible.”

NGOs likewise stay quiet about



A two-month old child sleeps in Azraq Camp. She is one of more than 600,000 Syrians who have sought refuge in Jordan since the conflict began in 2011. Supplies were limited in the first few days of Azraq’s opening, with no baby formula available. This baby girl hadn’t eaten anything in two days, her mother said, until one of the NGO workers brought infant formula from outside the camp. Image by Alice Su. Jordan, 2014.

employment and deportation in order to protect operational capacity. “It is a politically sensitive issue,” said Daryl Grisgraber, Refugees International’s senior advocate for the Middle East and North Africa. “Jordanians want jobs themselves, which makes it difficult to advocate for refugee rights to work. You risk being told you can’t operate in the country.”

She prefers their home in Syria, even surrounded by snipers and bombings, to Jordan.

Donor countries have the most potential to sway Jordanian policy, especially key allies like the United States. Simon Henshaw, principal deputy assistant secretary for the U.S. State Department’s bureau of population, refugees and migration, said they support ideals like open borders—but not so much that they’d demand Jordan comply more earnestly or else lose funding.

“We use our position to advocate for humanitarian principles, but we certainly don’t get into the position of threatening our allies with cutting off funds for different reasons,” he said. So even if Jordan is deporting Syrians in violation of international humanitarian principles, there aren’t many repercussions.

Henshaw’s bureau also encourages refugees’ general right to work. “Situations improve when refugees are given work rights,” he said, citing Turkey and India as positive examples. Criminalizing employment drives refugees to work underground and thus undercut labor costs, he added. “In the U.S., refugees are allowed to work immediately upon arrival. This

gets them settled much more quickly and puts them on a much better economic path.”

But the U.S. has admitted only 306 Syrians since the beginning of the crisis, vetting each with security and health checks before granting them permanent settlement. Jordan has seen more than 620,000 Syrians flooding across its borders, taking jobs, weighing on national infrastructure and posing a security threat. The United States gets to be picky in the resettlement process, but Jordan does not want its refugees to settle.

The alternatives, though, are grim. Abu Walid has postponed his boat plan, but predicted another coupon cut would drive many refugees to join radical groups in Syria. “People want to feed their families,” he said. “If there is no food here but ISIL is offering high salaries back home, where do you think Syrians will go?”

“If we could work, Syrians would help Syrians.”

On the roof in Amman, Abu Essa is thinking of his wife. He can’t go back to Syria legally. Nor can he stay in Jordan unless he finds some way to pay his monthly medical fees, food and rent. But he won’t get on the boat. He’d rather wait or sneak back into Syria, where he might see his wife one more time.

“Syrians have no problem with death anymore. The people are exhausted,” Abu Essa says. “We were dying in Syria. We are dying here. Why not go back and die together?” ♦

(Reprinted courtesy of Al Jazeera America. This article has been modified.)

<http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/12/22/christmas-refugeesjordan.html>



A two-month old child sleeps in Azraq Camp. She is one of more than 600,000 Syrians who have sought refuge in Jordan since the conflict began in 2011. Supplies were limited in the first few days of Azraq’s opening, with no baby formula available. This baby girl hadn’t eaten anything in two days, her mother said, until one of the NGO workers brought infant formula from outside the camp. Image by Alice Su. Jordan, 2014.

CHAPTER FIVE: ON THE TURKISH BORDER

Selin Thomas

Refugees flee Syria seeking safety, believing they'll leave behind the horrors of war, only to face the challenges of survival—finding a place to sleep and a decent meal. Many live on crackers and boiled water and have little access to medical care.

Selin Thomas, a graduate of Boston University College of Communication and now a student at Columbia Journalism School, reported on a large extended family now living five to a room in a village along the Turkish border of Syria. Aid has been “sporadic and short-term,” she tells us. Old and young suffer one illness after another.

Thomas then takes us to the playground of a school for traumatized 6-to-12 year olds—all children who require specialized care. One temperamental child hardly speaks and another “lives in his own head.”

The school closed in September 2014, and now the institution struggles to find a new home. As each month passes, the children face more difficulties and fall farther behind in school.

Thomas encountered stories of grief and devastation, yet what struck her most, she says, were the smiles “unsolicited, unapologetic,” coming from a people who remain “unassured, but hopeful.”

...

Beyond the Camps

Selin Thomas
September 11, 2014

Nestled in obscurity between Antakya's vast crop plains, flanked by distant Turkish and Syrian mountains, lies Demirkopru Koyu, village of the Iron Bridge. Located on the River Asi, Demirkopru connects Antioch to today's Reyhanli district, the southernmost city of the Hatay region, where floods of Syrians have sought refuge since the civil war erupted.

Immediately off the highway down a wide dirt road, past the dilapidated mosque on the left, heaps of garbage and a wrought iron fence lead to the front door of the Koksal family. The three-room shelter, once a cow stable, is larger than those of other refugees in the village, though entirely without hot water or furniture. Bamboo mats and thin cushions furnish the cement floors on which they sleep, five to a room, a single fan blowing the stifling air from one room to another.

"We are more fortunate than most because we have each other," said Mervan, 66, and the patriarch of the family. Originally from Fen el Semali village, in Hama, Mervan crossed into Turkey a year ago with his elderly father, his wife, and their seven children, leaving their home and all of their belongings. Not even a photograph remains in their possession. His brother, Mehmed, and sister-in-law, Azzam, two nephews and a niece, Semuha, joined them shortly thereafter with nothing but the clothes on their backs.

"There is no ending to this war," he said, "because whoever wins will always have an enemy facing him. Assad will take the victory of destroying our country."

From 7-year-old Rabi to 18-year-old Azlemah, everyone in the house looks for work out in the fields on a daily basis. Still, the family can hardly make ends meet.

Prices of basic goods in the area have increased extortionately as Turkish businessmen are seizing the opportunity the war provides to boost their earnings. Shanty apartments that once cost 80 Turkish Lira a month have nearly doubled in rent, and bread, milk and egg prices have soared to almost three times what they were two years ago. For Turks, however, the prices remain at market value while easily identifiable refugees—with critical needs and no alternatives—are easy prey.

"We owe the market money—we are in debt to the landlord and my children are hungry. We never had much, but I've always been able to feed my children," said mother Ayesha, Mervan's wife.



Mervan walks through the front yard of his family's home, where they sleep five to a room. Image by Selin Thomas. Turkey, 2014.

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Slideshow: View in iBooks

The family hasn't been able to pay the 250TL rent and 100TL electric bills in two months, and they live primarily on homemade bread, as they cannot afford the 1.5TL (\$0.72) loaf.

Some locals, however, have played a vital role in assimilating the refugees, aiding them financially and helping them to find work. The village's elected mayor, Huseyin Sahan, is in the process of finalizing building plans for an Arabic-speaking school, which will accommodate 80 students and feature Turkish language and cultural courses in September.

"We need longevity, and these kids need to be able to survive in Turkey for the duration of this conflict, which isn't ending anytime soon," he said.

Mervan's 86-year-old father, Muhammed, is skeptical of the future of his country, having witnessed two generations of brutal Assad rule.

"They will keep their kingdom, they will kill women and children, they will bomb our land until they strike gold. I'll never see Syria again," he said.

The Koksals are one of 65 Syrian families seeking the refuge of shacks and stables in Demirkopru, one family of a total of more than 200,000 refugees in the region living outside of border camps.

The conditions of the state-run camps are far from adequate, in staff, finances and material resources. But the hardships of those who live beyond their borders are even greater. These villagers are without adequate food daily, living mostly on boiled water and crackers. Medical supplies are scarce, many children need immediate attention, and those previously receiving treatment for their



The Koksals family poses for a portrait on the floor of their living room. Five of the older children were working in the fields at the time. Image by Selin Thomas. Turkey, 2014.



Rabi and brother, Sadaam, in the entryway to their house, once a cow stable, shared among fourteen relatives. Image by Selin Thomas. Turkey, 2014.

ailments in Syria have been without medicine for one or more years. Close quarters and lack of hygiene allow illness and infection to run rampant, particularly among children, who constitute more than half of the refugee population.

Mother Fatma Nacus and her husband, Ahmad, had their baby, Hanen, two months ago. Hanen has been tormented with pertussis since she was one-week-old.

Semuha, 3, has lived with a deep, phlegm-filled cough for nearly a year, inhibiting her physical activity and damaging her voice.

Alesir, having fled her Syrian village with three orphans, was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2009 and was receiving treatment before being forced out of the country. More than 40 kilometers to the nearest town, poor and increasingly in pain, she is desperate for medical attention.

As is often the problem with refugees living in these rural communities, aid organizations have not attended to the area, either because it is geographically far and transportation is difficult, or because they are unaware of its existence. Though one aid organization has visited the village to drop food, water and basic medical supplies, the aid has been sporadic and short-term, unable to address increasing need on a more permanent basis.

Despite the increasingly violent conflict, the majority of these villagers are eager to return to Syria.

“Our greatest hope is for our return to our land,” said Mehmed, “but we are with the people, and we will wait, God willing, for them to be victorious.” ◆

Semuha and brother Muhammed play in the front yard of their shared home with cousins Rabi and Sadaam. Image by Selin Thomas. Turkey, 2014.



Children's Voices

Selin Thomas
September 22, 2014

ANTAKYA, Turkey—Children scream as they jump from plastic slides to swing sets. Timid, veiled girls skip and giggle arm-in-arm as restless boys race around them until finally the call to attention bell rings.

Though this schoolyard sounds and looks like any other, the realities of these children are far from the carefree, naive innocence their age would suggest. Their clothes are dirty, torn; their single notebook is worn and already half-full. The majority of them haven't been to school in two or more years.

They have fled from country to country, tent to tent, apartment to derelict apartment until, finally, their relatives were able to find some semblance of normalcy here in the border town of Antakya, where an

estimated 170,000 Syrians have sought refuge from the violent civil war ceaselessly waging on in their homeland. According to the Turkish Red Cross, there are a total of 220,000 refugees in the Hatay region, in addition to 600,000 registered in numerous camps along the border.

“Our martyr is gone, he has gone to paradise. Bashar has killed my people, the son of the slaughter,” the children sing of Syria's leader. “May Allah give us patience. May Allah save you Assad, but He is not on your side.”

Cheering to the songs of the revolution, some children grab each other's shoulders while others lift their hands to the air, forming peace and victory signs with their fingers as they walk in an orderly march to their classrooms for the first lesson of the day.

Situated between Antakya's bustling center and its mountainous villages, Dunya Sehit Cocuklari Egitim ve Kultur Merkezi, or World's Orphaned Children Education and Cultural Center, is the only school in the area built by private Turkish donors. It boasts a modest playground, a vibrant cultural gazebo, Turkish, English, Arabic, math lessons, a prayer room and eight 20-student classrooms.

“What we have built here is opportunity—for these children, for their country and for our country,” co-founder Hayrettin Deniz said. Turkish citizens must do more, Deniz said, to salvage the fate of refugees pouring over the border and showing no signs of slowing.

The student body of nearly 200, made up solely of Syrian orphans, is on summer break and Deniz is leasing it at no charge to the staff and



They have fled from country to country, tent to tent, apartment to derelict apartment.

students of The Generations Center, an 80-student educational camp for psychologically traumatized 6- to 12-year-olds.

The Generations Center represents a mere sample of the millions of displaced Syrian children desperate to get an education in the wake of their country's bloody conflict. Of the more than 800,000 Syrian refugees in Turkey [in 2014], more than half are children, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Arabic-speaking schools have sprouted up in camps, and local townships along the border, but thousands of children have still been without school for more than two years.

Abdul Hameed, 53, once a primary school teacher in Hama, solemnly noted the inadequate educational options available to kids in his adopted Turkish village, approximately 48 kilometers south of Antakya. "This generation of children is lost," he said. "They have nothing without education, and no one to give it to them."

Due to the difficulties of witnessing the atrocities of war, students of The Generations Center suffer from mild to incapacitating psychological trauma. For more than half of them, this burden is coupled with learning

disabilities or mental instability that requires highly individualized, specialized care, much of which they won't receive. Though refugee schools have flourished in parts of Turkey since the outbreak of the Syrian war, especially in the southernmost areas of Hatay, they are barely equipped for the volume of students in need of them.



Students of the "Nur Islam" (Light of Islam) classroom, stand to present their writings. Image by Selin Thomas. Turkey, 2014.

Three boys

Omar is a playful and mischievous age 8. His steely, almond-shaped-and-colored eyes scan his surroundings almost constantly. The tattered, dirty white gauze haphazardly slung around his neck holds the peeling cast around his right arm sort-of-in place.

Once an active, healthy boy in Syria, Omar is now performing in school with the mental abilities of a 3-year-old, according to his teachers. He is unreasonably temperamental, misbehaves often in the classroom, and hardly ever utters a word.

More than half of the 4 million Syrian refugees are children

More than 8,000 unaccompanied children have crossed Syrian borders

2.6 million Syrian children are not in school

“While he was in the hospital, we visited him often to make sure he knew we hadn’t abandoned him or were dead. This is the first thing these children can imagine, and it affects them daily,” Omar’s instructor Zena Merish said.

Jamal, an autistic technology prodigy of the same age, bounces on the balls of his feet as he saunters around, seemingly oblivious to the social world around him, eagerly exploring the schoolyard. He is tall for his age, has a twitch over his right shoulder, and carries his awkward lankiness with an unidentifiable grace, towering over his peers. This is his second day.

Jamal was in a specialized education center in Syria before his father defected from the national army and the family was forced to flee their home in Hama. Because his father requires special permission to leave and return to the camps, Jamal hasn’t been to school since they arrived, a year-and-a-half ago, while his two sisters have been able to attend the camp-run school.

Founder and educator Joudi al Bazari steals his attention momentarily, pulling him onto her lap for a puzzle. He gets bored quickly and squirms away to play by himself until the next flock of students huddle around him, much to his dismay.

“Jamal lives in his own head...but he is brilliant! We can work with him but he really needs a specialist, and individual attention, in order to make lasting progress,” said al Bazari, whose own 8-year-old son, Nouraldin, is autistic.



Founder and instructor Joudi al Bazari greeted by a student who gives her a flower. Image by Selin Thomas. Turkey, 2014.

Similarly gifted in a specialized area, math, Nouraldin barely speaks and cannot participate in the hourly sessions of the school day.

“I give my son a selection of markers. He always chooses black, and he will color the entire page black. Angry, expressive lines, until it’s covered. I try to show him shapes, colors, but he has no interest. He is releasing something, something awful,” Bazari describes.

Finding a new home

Come October, however, as normal schools resume their schedules, The Generations Center will have to find a new home, and the funding to pay for it, an unlikely scenario co-manager Amar Bitar concedes, given that



Founders Joudi Al-Bazari and Amar Bitar, currently funding the school with their own money, are struggling to find the resources they need to continue their work teaching. Image by Selin Thomas. Turkey, 2014.

they cannot currently afford notebooks for the students.

Bitar, Merish and al Bazari were all educators in Syria and met only recently here in Antakya. They decided to open an education center as soon as possible, unaffiliated with any organization and maintained only on private donations.

In partnership with her husband, al Bazari formally established the group three months ago. She used their private funds to do it, including

providing its academic materials and paying salaries to its staff. She could no longer afford to compensate the teachers, so all eight of them have been working voluntarily for the last two months.

“If we miss one single day, the children’s progress will suffer, we cannot stop,” she said.

An entirely new school, including materials, would cost upwards of \$30,000, not including the land they either must buy or lease to build it on. Though the odds of staying afloat are long, the instructors remain optimistic and pro-active in finding support.

“Some of these children want revenge. They want revenge because they have seen relatives die before their eyes; they have seen corpses in the streets, and we have the task of dealing with that,” Bitar said. “It is not



The students spend five hours a day in the classroom, studying English, arithmetic, Arabic, and Turkish, among other subjects. Image by Selin Thomas. Turkey, 2014.

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Slideshow: View in iBooks

enough to simply accept these losses, we have to combat the years these children have lost or it will never be done. They’ll disappear into the darkness.” ◆

Update from July 2015: The Generations Center has remained closed since September 2014. Many of the children who attended the school are now laboring for meager wages in fields on the outskirts of Hatay. None of the children have been inside a classroom, although the instructors are teaching small groups of children in their homes. They are still trying to raise enough money to build a school.



Founders Joudi Al-Bazari and Amar Bitar, currently funding the school with their own money, are struggling to find the resources they need to continue their work teaching. Image by Selin Thomas. Turkey, 2014.

Letter from Hatay

Selin Thomas
October 3, 2014

Of all the things I've seen here in eastern Turkey, among countless Syrian refugees, bearing witness to stories of incredible grief, horror, pain and luck, the most startling has been the smiles—hundreds of them—unsolicited, unapologetic.

What reason have these people to smile? Yet, in the darkened cement rooms of their derelict homes, once cow stables, in abandoned villages near crop fields (where they can sometimes find a day's work, sometimes not) and far from social consciousness, they smile. On a playground of a temporary school, traumatized to silence from seeing corpses limp in the streets of their ravaged homeland, they smile. Having fled their shelled neighborhoods with nothing but the clothes on their backs and sometimes each other, they smile. In an insecure semi-reality, they smile.

But asking the reason is naive for the answer is obvious: At its most absolute—when the distracting varnish of civilization is stripped (or violently torn) away—the calloused, contented wound of humanity is reopened, exposing a bloodied, raw human condition in which a smile is the highest currency.

You see, our nature is far more resilient, courageous, and inexplicably compassionate than we realize (or at least than we've become accustomed to) and far less pessimistic, selfish and ornate than we've come to expect. This realization is not to in any way diminish the strength of spirit each of these individuals has exhibited during such an extraordinary struggle, but to instead connect their unlikely joy. It is joy, in the wake of the ceaseless civil conflict which has displaced their very existence.

What reassurance! To see the most disadvantaged of us, the persecuted, the mournful and the lost, carry the leaden weight of hope on their backs. Not only to see them, no, that would not suffice, but to envy them.

The injustice of what has happened to them is nearly incalculable, far beyond the tempting pursuit of reason or rational interpretation many of us feel inclined toward.

Compelling, indeed, enough to force us to question the progress we, the human race, have made. But then, a smile.

No amount of bloodshed, cruelty, darkness can quell this light, this nature of ours. So, we smile, unassured but hopeful that there will continue to be fuel behind it, that it may illuminate the human condition beyond our mere mortality for those who have neglected or forgotten it entirely. Then, they too can dutifully bear the burden on their backs, easing others, and we can go on.

(Thomas's reporting was originally published by the Pulitzer Center.) ◆



A smile is the highest currency.

Children play in their home, previously a cow stable, along Syrian border. Thirty people now live in its two rooms. Image by Selin Thomas. Turkey, 2014.

CHAPTER SIX: A WAR'S DIASPORA

For many refugees from Syria, Europe is the destination of choice, a place they imagine to be a land of stability and prosperity. Reporter Joanna Kakissis and photographer Holly Pickett tell stories of refugees who travel long distances to seek jobs, health benefits and educational opportunities. Some succeed while others are bitterly disappointed.

Despite efforts to halt immigration, Europe is now experiencing the largest wave of immigrants since World War II—and among them more than 200,000 refugees from Syria. Some countries are proving more welcoming than others, and all are wrestling with the changing demographics. Here Kakissis and Pickett retrace the steps of refugees who made their way to Greece, Germany, Sweden, and Russia. They tell stories of mothers and fathers who struggle to keep their families together and of young people with dreams of becoming architects, doctors or pilots.

We meet the Olywi sisters who travel by motorboat to a Greek Island after paying smugglers thousands of dollars. They find shelter in a facility with no toilet, shower or running water. And then there is Manal and her eight siblings of Palestinian descent who flee Syria after their neighborhood is destroyed. Scattered at first, they become reunited in Germany once they learn Manal has become ill. Determined “to heal her with love,” they take solace in caring for their sister.

A young woman who is blind makes her way to Stockholm after “dodging snipers” in Damascus. She finds a “cozy apartment” and a Braille typewriter, but still longs for the sounds of Damascus.

**Joanna Kakissis
Holly Pickett**

Noginsk, a city outside Moscow, has long attracted tailors to work in factories. Yasser was a Syrian lured by free airfare, a visa, free housing, and a good salary, but since the war erupted he has been underpaid. Like many others, he is undocumented and cannot receive asylum. Still he has no place to go.

Then there are those who turn to poetry. One Syrian who made his way from Greece to Germany has already published three books. "Poems help me remember what we lost, so it doesn't feel lost," says Amir al-Bakri. "Right now, everyone is just trying to survive, and you feel like you're lost in some strange place, a forest, a sea, and you could disappear at any minute, forgotten."

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Joanna Kakissis and Holly Pickett *February 14, 2015*

GREECE

They fled their homes to escape a terrible war. And that was just the beginning of their struggle.

In Greece, the Olywi sisters remember their hometown — Raqqa, in Syria's north — as a place where they could dream big.

Dania, 13, had wanted to study Korean and be an architect like her father, whose successful firm had provided a comfortable life. Her sharp-witted sister, Joud, 10, had hoped to be a doctor.

But in 2013, the self-declared Islamic State overran the city and seized a large part of Syria. The group imposed its extreme version of Islamic law and set up a Sharia court in a former athletic center. The girls and their parents fled to Turkey.

“We don't want to live in a place where you can only wear hijab [head covering] and just show your eyes and just wear black—or die,” Dania says.

Their pregnant mother left first. She went by boat to Greece, then with fake documents on to Sweden, where she had relatives. That's where she gave birth to their baby sister, Susie, a few weeks later.

Then, this past October, the girls and their father followed her to Europe. They left Izmir, Turkey, a popular departure point, early in the morning, packed into two small motorboats with other Syrian refugees. They paid smugglers thousands of dollars for passage to a Greek island at the edge of Europe.

Less than an hour into the trip, Joud spotted men in masks approaching on a speedboat. They waved guns, screamed obscenities in English. The girls had heard horror stories in Turkey about bandits who robbed refugees of their money, passports and cellphones.

“I was scared,” Joud says. “But then we saw another boat.”

It was the Greek coast guard. The boat with the masked men sped away.

The captain of the Greek coast guard was Stefanos Tsagetas, who later took me on a short night patrol in Greek waters toward the craggy Turkish

district of Karaburun, which is a common launching point for smugglers.

“But boats depart from so many other areas, too,” Tsagetas told me. “That’s why we practically have to be everywhere at once.”

It’s a dangerous way for refugees to get

to Europe. More than 3,000 people drowned in the Mediterranean Sea last year, more than any prior year, according to the International Organization for Migration.

Those who make it to Europe often face bleak conditions at primitive and understaffed shelters.

One destination is the island of Chios, where Greek ship owners have summer homes. When we visited last October, at least 200 refugees huddled on a patch of rocky dirty near the sea. There’s no toilet, shower or running water.

That’s where we met the Olywi sisters, seated on a large rock surrounded by trash, their sweatshirts still wet with seawater, the numbers “19” and “20” written in markers on their hands. This is how the coast guard keeps track of the newly arrived. The girls—rosy-cheeked, their long, brown hair tied in loose ponytails—leaned against each other and closed their eyes. They had not slept for three days. The few wooden shacks were already full.

Inside one of those wooden shacks was Joud al-Bakri, an 18-year-old aspiring pilot from Aleppo. “I think being in the air is a good thing because



Coast Guard search-and-rescue crew members tested searchlights while scanning Greek waters for migrant boats near Chios Island, Greece. Image by Holly Pickett. Greece, 2014.



After the Coast Guard processes new arrivals, Syrian refugees usually spend at least a few days, sometimes longer, in this locked detention camp on Chios Island while the police complete documents allowing them to stay in Greece temporarily. Image by Holly Pickett. Greece, 2014.

it makes you feel free, like you are a bird,” she said, her voice bright with confidence. A white headscarf framed her heart-shaped face, but she said she would take it off when she and her parents reached their final destination “Sweden or the Netherlands or Germany.” She sat next to her parents, Amir and Mona, devoted bookworms deep in a conversation about the merits of Leo Tolstoy, Paulo Coelho and Mahmoud Darwish. Her father, an engineer, had published three books of poetry. “Poems help me remember what we lost, so it doesn’t feel lost,” he said. “Right now, everyone is just trying to survive, and you feel like you’re lost in some strange place, a forest, a sea, and you could disappear at any minute, forgotten.”

Joud knocked on the hard-wood floor. “It’s really hard to sleep here without anything,” she said. “And some people are sleeping outside, which is freezing.”

Men from Syria and Afghanistan were sleeping in the dirt outside, some of them without blankets.

Just down the street, the tavernas were filled with vacationing Greeks and Turks eating fresh grilled fish and listening to bouzouki music.

The Olywi sisters and their father walked past them to reach an overflow shelter in a converted city council meeting room. The mayor of Chios, Manolis Vournous, helped arrange for the municipality to donate the space. He had seen too many children in that primitive shelter, some of them forced to sleep outside. He couldn’t bear it.

“You can’t sleep when you’re in your warm home—and you know they’re out there in the cold, freezing,” he said.



Recently arrived Syrian refugees sleep outside next to the sea because there are not enough shelters for the number of migrants at the Greek Coast Guard detention camp on Chios Island. New migrants undergo identification and processing by the Coast Guard before being handed over to the border police, but the volume of arrivals overwhelms the resources of the Coast Guard. Image by Holly Pickett. Greece, 2014.

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Slideshow: View in iBooks

A few days later, after receiving temporary residency papers, the Olywi sisters left for Athens with their father. Within a few weeks, they flew to Sweden with fake documents. Now they’re reunited with their mother and baby sister.

The al-Bakris are now in Munich, Germany.

GERMANY

In Germany, the challenge was to bring a family back together.

Before the war, before the separation and before she was diagnosed with cancer, Manal al-Aydi was a dynamic, diligent bank manager in Damascus. Tiny yet formidable, with a degree in economics and a movie-star smile that made even strangers feel at ease, she was one of nine siblings in a close-knit family of Palestinian descent.

“Our whole family worked together,” her brother Wisam recalled. “We opened a bakery, a clothing shop, a jewelry store, two gas stations.”

Wisam ran the gas stations, and another brother, Mwafak, ran the jewelry store. The siblings often met at the family bakery, which specialized in the puffy, pita-like Palestinian bread, producing a pleasing scent that wafted through their neighborhood, Yarmouk. On Fridays, they gathered at a family-owned apartment building for barbecues on the rooftop terrace.

“It was a quiet life and a beautiful life,” Wisam said. “It was our life.”

The war shattered that life. First, one of Wisam’s sons was injured by shrapnel. Then shelling destroyed their neighborhood. Using their savings, the siblings paid smugglers to get their families out of Syria.

But they were separated. Manal went to Lebanon, Wisam to Egypt, Mwafak to Turkey.

After they left, the family apartment building was bombed and gutted. When I visited Wisam, he showed me a cellphone photo.

“This was our bedroom, and I think that might have been our bed,” he said, pointing at the remains of a charred room. “That was our living room. This house carried all of our memories, my son’s violins, the children’s things. So many years of work, all gone.”

The siblings deeply missed each other. They bounced around from place to place, seeking a more permanent home, but eventually Wisam and Mwafak, along with their families, reunited in the north of Germany, the country that receives the highest number of refugees in Europe.

“Germany is safe and takes care of us,” Wisam said. “But it is so isolating to be without your friends and your family, without your language. You are not comfortable. You are always lonely.”



In Lahr, Germany, Nesrine Al Aydi, right, takes a photo of her daughter Dalaa, 3, and Roa, a family friend from Yarmouk. The Al Aydis fled their home in a besieged Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp near Damascus after it was hit by shelling last year. Image by Holly Pickett. Germany, 2014.

Manal, meanwhile, had moved to Istanbul. She had been diagnosed with advanced cancer and was desperate for treatment.

Late last October, she paid a smuggler for a fake Spanish passport and flew to southern Germany. German police, spotting her fake documents, detained her on arrival.

“I told the police, please, I have cancer, I need to go to hospital,” she recalled when I met her in Friedrichshafen, Germany, last fall. “Everyone was yelling at me. But I said, ‘Please, help me. I am from Syria. I am sick. I need your help.’”

She collapsed. A few hours later, the police sent her to a hospital.

Wisam sent his two oldest sons, who were staying nearby, to meet her. The boys had not seen Manal for two years, and they both gasped when they saw her. She was thin, frail and scared. When they reached her bedside, she cried out.

“Please, please don’t leave me alone!” she said, clutching them. “I don’t want to die!”

Mwafak arrived the next day with fresh lemons to steep in hot tea for his sister. His eyes glistened as he held her hand.

“My brother, my family,” she said.

Mwafak eventually got permission to transfer Manal to a hospital in Wolfsburg, in northern Germany. Wisam and his family traveled there, too. “We are going to heal her with love,” one of Mwafak’s daughters said.

But Manal al-Aydi lost her battle with cancer on Jan. 31. She was just shy of turning 46. Her brothers and their families were at her side.

“We are all to God,” Wisam wrote to his family after her death, “and to God we return.”

Keeping the family together and healthy is one challenge. Integrating into a new culture is another. And life in a strange land is often even stranger for refugees who don’t share a culture or religion.



Wisam and Mwafak Al Aydi take a break from installing the kitchen cabinets and appliances in Wisam's family's new apartment in Lüneburg, Germany. The brothers were fixing up the house to prepare for the arrival of Wisam's family a few days later. Image by Holly Pickett. Germany, 2014.

Slideshow: View in iBooks



With help from a couple of young Syrian friends, the Al Aydi boys carry their luggage from the group home to the bus stop in Lahr. Nesrine Al Aydi and her five children set off from the group home for refugees in Lahr for Lüneburg and their new home, a 12-hour journey involving seven separate trains. Nesrine's husband Wisam had been working on the new apartment in Lüneburg and awaited their arrival there. Image by Holly Pickett. Germany, 2014.

SWEDEN

In Sweden, in the town of Fagersta, the sound of prayer often fills the lone mosque, which is in a basement.

On Saturdays, children sit in a semi-circle on red rugs, reciting from the Quran. Their teacher is a young Syrian in a calico headscarf. The students are young Somalis, Eritreans and Syrians.

Germany has taken in the greatest number of refugees. But Sweden has taken in more refugees relative to its population size than any other country in Europe. This year, it expects to take in 95,000—a record.

A member of the al-Aydi family, the Syrian-Palestinian family we met in Germany, ended up in Fagersta last year. Her name is Lelyan al-Aydi, and she's a young aspiring writer and scholar of Arabic literature. Her friends and family call her Lulu.

I first met her in the lobby of a budget hotel in Athens in early 2014. She had fled Syria with her father, Saif. They described how they had dodged snipers in their southern Damascus neighborhood. Lulu's eyes can only make out vague shapes and light, but she could feel explosions shake her insides. In Athens, she told me she already had a new home in mind, a place where the state subsidizes and supports the blind.

"I want to go Stockholm," she said.

The next day a smuggler arranged for her to fly to Stockholm posing as the daughter of a Greek couple.

"In Syria there is no chance for us," she said.

But in Sweden "our situation [as a blind person] is not sick, but normal," she added. "We can do anything here."

Fagersta, a town of about 13,000 people in central Sweden, is a strange place to launch dreams. Lulu was still adjusting to the cold and to how quiet the Swedes are. "I don't hear anything," she said, "only birds."

She longed for the sounds of Damascus. Even if they're sounds of danger, she said that the familiarity gives her a sense of safety. But Fagersta is giving her what she needs. The Swedish government pays for the cozy apartment she shares with her father. It pays for language courses, even yoga and swimming classes. It pays for the taxis to those classes too.

And it paid for the Braille typewriter where Lulu hopes to compose poems, stories and screenplays. Her father said in exile she could be like Taha Hussein, a famous blind Egyptian writer.

"She has strength and talent," Saif al-Aydi says. "I wish she had grown up in Europe." Because the family is of Palestinian origin, it faced barriers in Syria that they will not face in Sweden. "For more than sixty years, we have not been citizens of Syria," her father said. "But here, we don't have to be stateless. We can be citizens of Sweden."

During her first year in Sweden, Lulu wrote an autobiographical screenplay about a blind girl who flourishes in Europe. And earlier this year, Sweden gave visas to her husband and sister, who are also blind.

As the refugee population continues to swell, a nationalist party in

parliament, the Sweden Democrats, complains that refugees cost too much. The party wants to cut immigration by 90 percent. Victoria Turunen represents the Sweden Democrats on the Fagersta local council.

“It’s always easier to talk about one individual,” she said.

“If you had said we have a hundred thousand Lulus who want to come here, then we have to look at it in a different way.”

Turunen, who is half-Lebanese, said she believes most Muslims do not integrate. “If you go to their neighborhoods, it feels like you’re not in Sweden anymore,” she said.

There are even signs of Islamophobia within immigrant communities like Sodertalje, a city near Stockholm that has the highest concentration of refugees in the country—mostly Christians from Iraq and Syria.



Lulu Al-Aydi, 25, shows off her new Braille typewriter, given to her by the Swedish government, in Fagersta, Sweden, in November 2014. Lulu, an Arabic literature student from Yarmouk near Damascus, fled with her father Seif to Greece in early 2014, and then managed to make it to Sweden. Lulu has been blind since birth and chose Sweden because it has generous social services and is open-minded. Image by Holly Pickett. Sweden, 2014.

Outside a Swedish language class for refugees, Nidal, 35, a Christian from Syria, says he believes Muslims will be swayed by the Islamic State, the extremist group that has captured large parts of Syria and Iraq. “We feel insecure, we don’t trust them.”

Another student and refugee, Mohammad Hossam Janayd, 25, overhears my conversation with Nidal. He’s a practicing Muslim from Damascus.

“I hate the Islamic State as much as Nidal,” he says, shaking his head. “They are terrorists, sick people, not Muslims. Sweden was supposed to unite us. But some of the other students, the Christians, ask me, ‘Why did you come here?’ ”



Residents wait at the bus stop in the Ronna neighborhood, where Syrian and Iraqi refugees are concentrated in Sodertalje. The small Swedish city is known for its open-door policy towards refugees, which is mostly made up of Christian Syrians and Iraqis. People of Middle Eastern origin account for 30,000 of the town's 90,000 residents. Image by Holly Pickett. Sweden, 2014.

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RUSSIA

In Russia, there's a more nefarious force causing strife: Police, knowing that refugees can't go home, are often extorting money from them.

The relationship between Russia and Syria goes back decades. Syrians studied and worked here, and also married Russians.

"We had a common ideological ground with Syria," said Oleg Ivanovich Fomin, who used to head the Soviet-Syrian Cultural Center and lived in Damascus for years. "Michael the Syrian was the first patriarch of our church. There used to be a close relationship between the Baath and Communist parties. And we built it from there."

In the final days of the Soviet Union, when private enterprise became possible, Syrians also opened businesses, including clothing factories.

Noginsk, a no-frills city of factories and bland apartment blocks just outside Moscow, had a reputation for attracting good tailors from Syria's largest city, Aleppo.

Those tailors included Yasser, 25, who now lives in a cramped apartment with his family. He and his father were recruited by a Syrian-run factory and moved here six years ago. Yasser doesn't want his last name used for fear his bosses might retaliate for what he says.

The factories lured workers like Yasser here with free airfare, temporary work visas, good salaries, even free housing. It all went well until 2011, when Syria's war erupted.



Yasser, a 25-year-old Syrian refugee, and his parents and siblings live in this apartment building in Noginsk, Russia. After the war started, some factory owners stopped paying their Syrian workers on time. They also stopped assisting them when they were harassed and forced to pay bribes by Russian police. Image by Holly Pickett. Russia, 2014.

"Everything started to change," he said. "Our bosses stopped paying us on time. They paid us less than what we were promised. And they said if we didn't like it, we could go back to Syria."

But, of course, it was too dangerous to go back. Yasser's temporary work visa expired, and his bosses said they couldn't help him renew it. Police started shaking him down for bribes.

His former boss, Amal al-Naimi, knows the police are extorting money from his workers. But he says there's nothing he can do.



“They paid us less than what we were promised. And they said if we didn’t like it, we could go back to Syria.”

Syrian tailors, mostly from the city of Aleppo, sew pullovers at a Syrian-owned textile factory near Noginsk, Russia. Some of the workers came to Russia after the war in Syria started, but according to human rights workers, asylum for refugees in Russia is next to impossible, despite decades of political cooperation and cultural and economic exchange between the two countries. Image by Holly Pickett. Russia, 2014.

figures of reindeer, young men hunch over sewing machines.

Many workers say they came from Syria after the war started. But there's virtually no chance they will receive asylum in Russia, said Svetlana Gannushkina, a Russian activist for refugees. Russia sees the Syrian regime as an ally and doesn't believe Syrians are in danger if they return, she said.

"The doors are actually closed for these refugees even though the borders are open," Gannushkina said. "That's why Russia's sort of a trap for them."

Gannushkina estimated there are 10,000 to 20,000 Syrians in Russia, including Yasser, who are undocumented but can't go home.

A friend once told Yasser that Russia is like a "second motherland." But, he said, "it doesn't feel that way." ♦

(This chapter is adapted from stories that aired on National Public Radio and also appeared on NPR's website in the multimedia project "Can't Go Home.")



Muhammad, a 27-year-old tailor who came to Russia from Aleppo almost two years ago, sews pullovers at a Syrian-owned textile factory near Noginsk, Russia. Image by Holly Pickett. Russia, 2014.



Yasser, center, a 23-year-old Syrian refugee, at his home with his brother Ahmed, 16, left, and father Abu Yasser, right, in Noginsk. Yasser came to Noginsk with his father in 2008 to work as a tailor in one of the Syrian-operated textile factories in this town just outside of Moscow. Now Yasser and his family are stuck, with little support and no hope of asylum. Image by Holly Pickett. Russia, 2014.

CHAPTER SEVEN: SYRIA'S NEXT GENERATION

Lauren Gelfond Feldinger

Lauren Gelfond Feldinger reports from Jordan near the Syria border where Syrian volunteers have traveled at their own expense to inspire children who have fled the devastating war in their homeland. She finds the Syrian refugee children drawing warplanes, chanting revolution slogans, and remembering family members killed and homes lost.

The young, Syrian nonviolent activists from Syria, the Middle East and around the world—a pregnant woman, a musician inspired by Sufism, students, artists, and business people—admit that the years of war and mourning have changed them, leaving them stoic and in despair about how to help in the face of such tragedy. Yet they have not given up hope for the next generation.

The arts, music, sports and team-building workshops they lead with laughter and jokes focus on teaching non-violent problem-solving, interfaith cooperation, and taking a role in building self and community.

The program leader Nousha Kabawat, a young Syrian armed with a conflict resolution degree and a “Free Syria” tattoo, tells us, “A non-violent revolution could not work now inside Syria.”

“But,” she adds, a nonviolent revolution “could work with refugee children, to create a generation with different values.”

Can volunteers teach Syrian refugee children to imagine themselves as the next generation of peacemakers who can rebuild a new Syria after the war?

...

Lauren Gelfond Feldinger *March 11, 2015*

Three years after Syrian intelligence ransacked her Damascus home, Felicie Dhont stares through the window of a bus driving north in Jordan, rubbing her six-month pregnant belly.

The 23-year-old smiles, watching olive trees, wheat fields and wild red poppies whizz by, reminiscent of the nearby Syrian countryside she loved before the war reduced so much of it to rubble. “Syria, ah, Syria!” she says, pointing to a green sign directing drivers to the now-closed border-crossing.

Jordan's border towns are as close as Dhont is going to get to Syria for what could be a long time. Since the 2011 uprising and subsequent army crackdown—when a journalist staying in her family home was picked up,

jailed and tortured—her stomach has been feeling “like this,” she says, wringing her hands. A 20-year-old student at the time, she never again slept in the home she grew up in. As a critic of Syria's government on social media and in cafes, she didn't stop looking over her shoulder until, finally, she left the friend's house where she was staying to resettle in Egypt. Weeks before her first child is due, dreams of raising a family in Syria remain on hold.

After traveling 500 km alone from Cairo to Amman, and joining volunteers on the way to work with Syrian refugee children, she is filled with anticipation. “This is the first happy thing to happen in years and I want to share my love of Syrians with him,” Dhont says, pointing to her abdomen.

Around us, the chartered bus echoes with laughter and a buzz of Arabic and English. Half is filled with Syrians—refugees, displaced persons, expatriates and some still living in Syria—who seem nothing like the haggard exiles and survivors pictured in the news.

These 20- and 30-something students, artists, musicians, activists, bankers and executives could easily blend with hip graduate students or young professionals in many countries. But behind a veneer of cheerful banter or quiet grace, despair about the tragedy in Syria is carefully tucked away. The war has turned us into “crocodiles,” several of them explain, using the Syrian-Arabic expression for stoic, or someone numb to pain.

Still, joining this expedition, while the violence of Syrian forces, Islamic

State (IS) jihadists and other militants nearby devastates their homeland, they are starting to feel hopeful.

Each has taken a holiday from work, studies or personal life. Instead of heading to beach resorts or cosmopolitan capitals, they are traveling at their own expense to the very places their wealth and education has allowed them to avoid: the disadvantaged refugee neighborhoods just beyond Syria's border. They see the non-violent revolution as frozen in Syria but continuing there.

As analysts debate military options and humanitarian organizations distribute aid, they are focusing on a long-term aim: transforming the hopes and values of refugee children, based on methods used in post-conflict societies. If exposing young people to optimism and respect for diversity, civic participation and non-violence has had a positive influence in such places as Bosnia, Kosovo, Ireland, Rwanda and South Africa, could it also, eventually, help Syria? To combat the values of groups like IS and a regime that doesn't represent them, they are betting it could: teaching Syrian refugee children they have a future and the power to shape it can influence Syria in the next generation, they say.

Meanwhile, their short-term goal is simple: making child survivors of war smile.

Sitting in front of the bus, Nousha Kabawat looks up from her planning. Born in Canada to Syrian parents, Kabawat grew up from the age of 6 in Damascus, where her extended family has lived in its ancestral courtyard-home for two centuries. Like the other Syrians, she has disconnected much of her emotion from the news as a survival technique. Yet the make-up of this volunteer crew has caught all of them off guard. They are

touched, wowed even, that non-Syrians from Europe, and as far as the U.S. and Canada are investing time and money to help Syrian children. Seeing the bus filled with volunteers from around the world wearing the “Amal ou Salam” (“Hope and Peace”) T-shirt of the organization she founded a year earlier, a lump comes to Kabawat's throat.

“It's overwhelming. I'm 24 and all these people trust me enough to come from every country,” she says, running her gold Syria-map pendant through her fingers. “This is turning into a network of people with the same values, connecting.”

The previous day, Kabawat had swept into an Amman conference room like a gust of wind. Training the volunteers, she waved her hands in hyperkinetic circles and jumped on to a table in leopard-skin yoga leggings, crossing her legs underneath her into a pretzel. A “Free Syria” tattoo inked in Arabic on her upper back was hidden, for the moment, under an open denim shirt.

Kabawat doesn't typically cover her forearms or long hair when in the Middle East, and not only because it isn't her style. Ideologically, she wants to remind the Arab world that there always were multiple cultural norms and ways that Arab women of all backgrounds dressed, before Syria and the region became increasingly conservative. She especially wants the children who grow up



Nousha Kabawat, the director of Amal ou Salam, grew up in Damascus and has a degree in conflict resolution. At a training in Jordan, she teaches volunteers how to inspire refugee children to be optimistic, embrace ideas about interfaith cooperation and nonviolence, and to become peacemakers when they grow up. Image by Lauren Gelfond Feldinger. Jordan, 2014.

under the influence of extremist militants such as IS to be exposed to diversity. In Kabawat's youth, skipping through the side streets of Damascus, being modest meant wearing short sleeves instead of sleeveless shirts. When guards at a displaced persons camp in Syria once ordered Kabawat and her female volunteers to cover their hair before entering, she refused and went elsewhere. "That would be defeating the whole purpose," she says. Today Kabawat doesn't take volunteers into Syria but holds the memories of her Syrian childhood close as she works with Syrian children in Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan.

The Syrian children we will meet have lost their homes, are likely to have lost loved ones, and may be singing war chants and drawing revolutionary flags, dead bodies and bombs, Kabawat told the volunteers. "We want them to step out of this. Project Amal ou Salam is very un-political. I'm strict and insist you take it seriously."

With most of the Syrians and Jordanians knowing reasonable to fluent English from childhoods in exclusive private schools, Kabawat continued primarily in English. A smattering of Arabic reverberated around the room, as everyone translated for each other.

Redirecting the energy, songs, conversations, drawings, behavior and mood of the children so that they will feel they have something to look forward to requires easy adjustments, she explained. "We want to focus on positive things." For example, a question about the future: "After the conflict is over we have to rebuild Syria - what do we need?"

Five daily workshops she designed relate to child-friendly conflict resolution theories:

- Arts and crafts use urban-planning tools to redesign destroyed neighborhoods after the war, working with neighbors of all religions and backgrounds to meet everyone's needs
- Photography teaches multiple perspectives
- Music encompasses music-therapy techniques to soothe, and basic music theory to teach that diverse people who never studied instruments can work together to create one beat
- Sports and team-building show that working together creates more success, strength and trust

She summed up with a wink: "Cemeteries no, rainbows yes."



Nousha Kabawat, the director of Amal ou Salam, holds up one of the children's drawings, a "peace flag" for the next generation. Image by Lauren Gelfond Feldinger. Jordan, 2014.

Kabawat honed her theories while earning a master's degree in conflict resolution in the U.S., focusing on peace building in post-war societies. Afterwards, in 2013, she found children in a Syrian camp bored and mimicking the language of anger, violence and sectarianism around them. Relief efforts helped with physical needs, but she started imagining a volunteer-led program to feed the children's self-esteem and character.

Consulting conflict resolution experts, primarily at George Mason University in Virginia where she had studied, she planned a program of traveling workshops to feel like summer camps. Without a background in business, fundraising or management, she used a web campaign and social media to fundraise and recruit volunteers.

After quickly raising \$7,500 for a pilot project, she went in summer 2013 to Turkey with seven volunteers to work with 400 children and then to Lebanon to work with 100 children. As she had no overheads or salaries to pay, and overseas volunteers paid for their own travel and hotels, the money went for art supplies, rented spaces, food and buses.

When I meet up with the group in Jordan in 2014, she has raised \$25,000 and recruited 33 volunteers to work with 1,000 refugee children. She has also started sending supplies to Syrian schools. Her dream, she says, is to “eventually reach hundreds of thousands of children.”

Kabawat, young, female and Arab, represents a new generation of conflict resolution leaders in a field traditionally led by older men. With her frenetic energy, charisma and banter, she is easy to imagine not long ago as a tough, popular high school student. But talking one-on-one, she is somber.

“As Syrians, we've aged so much in the past year it feels like four,” she says, leaning her head and rubbing her eyes, as if to scrub away the tragedies she reads about daily from contacts back home.

“Children,” she says, “are the only hope now left for Syria.”

Meeting the children

The bus pulls up to the gate of a spotless state-run orphanage that Kabawat has rented in the hills of Irbid. Jordan's second largest city hosts about 140,000 refugees, though all we see in the near distance are dry grassy hills, except for a villa, surrounded by Bedouin shacks. Black-and-white sheep graze around them. The orphanage facade, like all the schools and many buildings in Jordan down to some falafel shops, boasts mammoth posters of King Abdullah II and the late King Hussein.

Inside the gated courtyard surrounded by sandstone walls, it is quiet until the buses rented by Kabawat pull up and two hundred 6 -to-13-year-olds pour in.

Syrian activists estimate that at least 200,000 people have been killed in Syria since 2011 and nearly half the pre-war population of 23 million has been displaced internally or to neighboring states. Despite the news focus on refugee camps, 84 percent of the 631,000 Syrian refugees in Jordan live in host communities, according to the UN. About half are children, many of whom are not schooled.

Three years before we arrive, they were just a few kilometers away on the other side of the border. They would have heard about other children close to their age in Dera'a, who had scrawled graffiti calling for the fall of

A young girl in a beige hijab and green shirt is looking through a camera held by another person on a balcony. The balcony has a metal railing and a white pillar with a spherical light fixture. In the background, there is a valley with a herd of sheep grazing on green grass. The sky is overcast.

“The hope we are selling in this project is everything.”

the regime. The government jailed and tortured the children and mocked the desperation of their parents. Non-violent protesters chanting “hurriyeh” (freedom) and “karama” (dignity) were met with tear gas, arrests and torture.

Syrian forces, IS, the Nusra Front and multiple militias have long since rolled over the non-violent revolution.

To meet the child survivors, we have woken at 6 a.m. in Amman to arrive by 8 a.m. A sea of smiles and clean, colorful outfits stare back at us. The kids have fled ravaged districts that look like scenes from Europe at the end of World War II, yet their traumas are not immediately obvious. A volunteer whispers that several have hearing aids, a result of explosion-induced hearing loss.

Many of the boys have black eyes. James Gordon, a U.S.-based psychiatrist, abruptly comes to mind. He has worked in war zones from Bosnia and Kosovo to Gaza and Israel and in such disaster zones as Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina and Haiti after the 2010 earthquake. Everywhere, he told me when I interviewed him in Jerusalem two years ago, he found the same results: survivors of war and disaster often beat their children.

The powerlessness they feel, coupled with traumatic memories and harrowing losses, often lead them to impulsive, violent behavior they later regret.

Children, he said, are at multiple risk because they often have their own post-traumatic stress, which can cause them to express themselves more violently. They model themselves on the way the adults around



A Syrian girl laughs in a workshop teaching refugee children about the joy of movement and teamwork. Image by Lauren Gelfond Feldinger. Jordan, 2014.

them deal with anger, and they often become victims of adults and children who lose their tempers. But there was hope, Gordon emphasized: The tendency towards violence and hopelessness that follow traumatic events can be quickly assuaged if those affected learn optimism, self-expression, and ways to calm their nervous systems. I look around and wonder.

Scooby doo

Cheers ricochet around the courtyard. As the children line up according to age, and—at their request—gender, the volunteers distribute team-color string bracelets, juice and cheese pies, while leading “positive” chants.



Syrian refugee children are greeted by Syrian and international volunteers. Image by Lauren Gelfond Feldinger. Jordan, 2014.

Over the week, we see that many of the kids love to raise their hands into the V-sign for victory and chant “Down with Assad!” and “May the regime fall!” But Kabawat instructs the volunteers to teach forward-thinking cheers unrelated to war, violence or revolution.

“Yom Salam” (“Day of peace!”) shouts Scooby, a Syrian volunteer.

The children follow her lead. “Day of peace! Day of peace!” they scream, raising fists into the air.

Scooby, wearing a clown's red nose, tells them that they don't have to stay forever in Jordan, they can go back to Syria after the war. They can also be part of the rebuilding of Syria one day, she says. Later, she will also drum into them that to be good people and rebuild a peaceful Syria they do not need to resort to violence, lying or cheating. Then, she usually cracks a joke.

The goofiness disguises Scooby's own memories, winding her way through Syria's smashed neighborhoods to bring aid to the hungry, injured and raped. Now, because she comes from a wealthy family, she can also afford to travel to countries hosting refugee children. Visiting, cheering them up and giving them moral messages are not only acts of charity, she argues, it also prevents the children from “becoming terrorists.”

“If you don't give them the right learning they don't know the difference between right and wrong,” she says.

“Nobody smiles for them, nobody visits them. No one gives them hope. Their parents don't have hope, house, food, job, money to go back—they have nothing to give. They are not learning. They will become mean.

“Nobody says, 'Don't worry you'll go back to your home one day!' They say, 'Sorry you don't have a home.' All these things crash on them.

“We tell them, 'You will be someone.' The hope we are selling in this project is everything.”

But helping suffering Syrians is seen as treason that can “get a bullet in my body,” she says, explaining why her real name and country of residence must not be published.

Switching off her overwhelming recollections, she settles easily into the role of whacky camp counselor as she raises the megaphone. “We will rebuild Syria! We will rebuild Syria with peace!”

“We will rebuild Syria with peace!” they mimic.

Then in English, she roars her namesake cheer: “Scooby Dooby Doo, I love you!”

The children don't know who Scooby Doo is, but they like the way it sounds. They all know what “I love you” means.

They begin chanting over and over, in English: “Scooby Dooby Dooooooooo, I love you! I loooooovee yooooouuuuu!”

The children are laughing. Everyone is laughing.

Rebuilding after war

R., a 29-year-old Syrian graphic designer helps run the arts and crafts workshops. Piles of colored paper, glue sticks, tape, scissors, markers and decorations dot the tables.

Some of the children draw suns, trees, clouds and houses. Others draw aircraft dropping bombs. One girl draws a heart with an eye inside. It's not clear if the eye is crying or bleeding.

R. continues the mantra that they can go home after the war. “Eventually we will go back to our homeland,” he says. “What do we need to rebuild it?”



Image by Lauren Gelfond Feldinger. Jordan, 2014.

He tries not to give them all the answers, to get them thinking. “I assume they get enough food and clothes, but they also need to play, to be creative... arts, interaction with people, music... to have their opinions asked—the opportunity to do something,” he says.

The children draw and shape construction paper into new houses. “Who here has lost a home?” R. asks.

“My house was demolished in a bombing.”

“My school was destroyed.”

“The hospital was demolished.”

“The military is living in my house.”

They brainstorm, what else does a neighborhood need besides homes?

“Where will you play?” R. asks.

Some draw parks and playgrounds. A girl designs a butterfly park. They lose themselves drafting neighborhood gardens.

“What else does a city need to function?” R. asks.

He tries not to give them all the answers, to get them thinking.

Eventually, hospitals, schools and airports start to take shape, with sugar paper as walls and colored balls as bushes or patients. A boy named Hamad draws a new school, naming it “Hope and Peace,” after the program.

Another boy, who had been crying that he didn't know how to draw but who was encouraged to try anyway, has found a roll of blue tape and is drawing roads with it. R. tickles and encourages him.

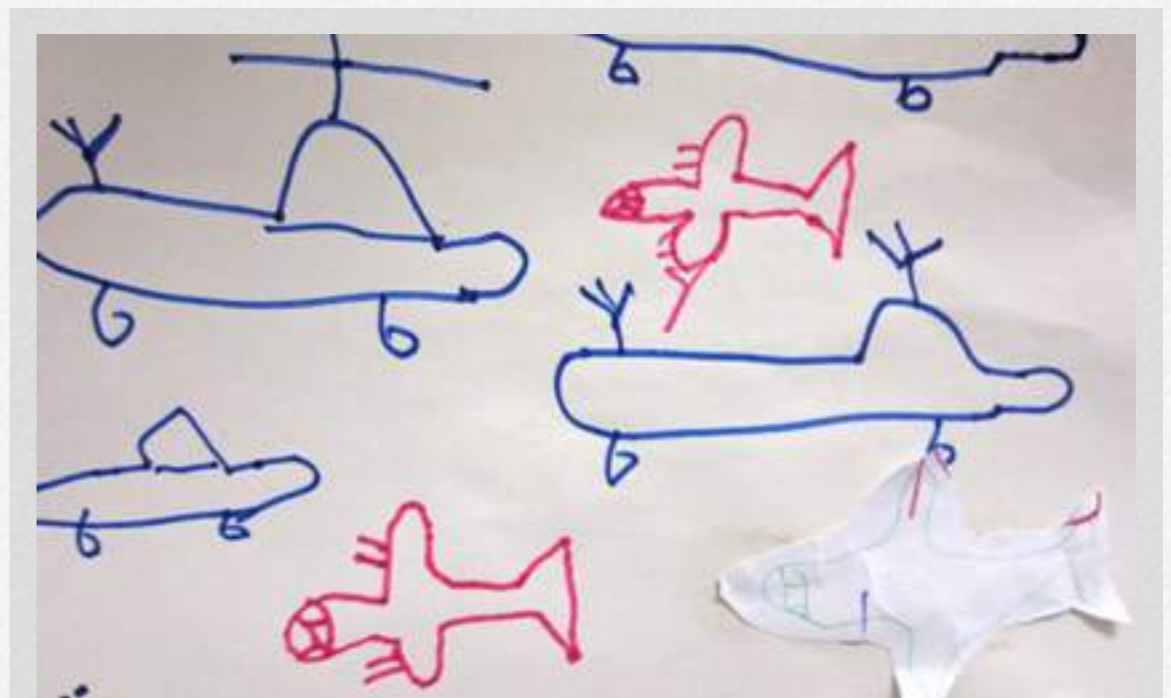
Then a child draws an airport with fighter jets, without realizing that military symbols are against camp rules. After R. explains that airports are for seeing the world and visiting neighbors, the boy scribbles over the jets. But then he draws a tank.

“No,” R. says. “We are designing a non-violent city.” The boy designates the vehicle as a tank of peace and safety.

“But why a tank?”

“This is the time to protect peace,” he says.

A Jordanian boy, Thaksin, 8, who goes to school with Syrian refugees and has joined the group, draws a conversation.



During an art workshop, where children will be asked to depict their new, peaceful neighborhoods after the war, the children start off by drawing freestyle—military air crafts are a common theme. Image by Lauren Gelfond Feldinger. Jordan, 2014.

“Did you know peace is useful?” one figure asks. “Yes, I know,” the other boy in the picture replies.

“What is the drawing about?”

“Jordan and Syria,” he says.

R. plugs his iPod into mini-speakers. White paper is pinned to the wall as R. instructs the kids to draw lines in every direction. Electronic house music bangs against the walls.

Volunteers dance with their arms.

Smiling, a boy draws a pink sun. A girl creates flowers. As R. encourages them to let the music come through their hands without thought, they begin scribbling and jumping with the music.

Everyone is scrawling wildly. A boy with a black eye starts laughing.

“I really find hope in them,” R. says afterwards. “After the war we’re going to have to work together, even if one side wins. Only united we’ll make a difference. Already today the kids feel they are all in this together and this will show that someone is actually thinking of them.”

He holds his head in his hands then puts on his designer sunglasses and heads out for a smoke.

A few kilometers away, IS would soon outlaw the teaching of art and crafts, music and sports.

The playing field

Outside, volunteers blow whistles to begin the sports workshop. A young girl runs to the side, screaming, and curls into a ball, crying. Volunteers race to comfort her, explaining that the whistle is not dangerous and just signals that the games are starting.

Anum Malik, a 21-year-old international development student at George Washington University in Washington D.C., notices a boy with a striped sweater looking nervous.

Eight-year-old Ammar, beneath his jeans and long sleeves, she realizes, is wearing a prosthetic leg and is missing an arm from a bombing in Dera'a. “Everything is going to be fine,” Malik whispers, smiling. He stands in the circle and the girl next to him holds on to his hanging sleeve.

Later, Kabawat sees Ammar playing and tears up. “I saw him having such an awesome time. I was so happy to be able to give him this... I’m so moved by these kids.”

At the end of the day, Ammar's eyes also well with tears as the kids pile on to rented buses.

Another 20 squish themselves into a jalopy van. Most of them practically fall out the windows to wave goodbye, but one boy stares back, looking devastated.

He watches from the window until we can't see them any more.



A Syrian boy seems heartbroken to say goodbye to the volunteers. Image by Lauren Gelfond Feldinger. Jordan, 2014.

Inside the bag he and the others take home, a keepsake card reminds: "Your education is your weapon."

No politics, no religion?

On the fourth day, we head north from Amman, past Jerash, one of the world's best-preserved Roman-era ruins and Jordan's second most popular tourist destination. When we reach Kitteh, a mountain village in the Jerash district, the landscape feels isolated from visitors and time. Olive trees blanket the quiet hills.

It's starkly different from the other refugee neighborhoods we visited in Irbid and Mafraq. Kitteh hosts hundreds of Syrian refugees, but has no proper school. The *mukhtar*, the village leader, organizes 200 Syrian children from surrounding villages to come to the immaculate, white concrete compound around his office. They arrive chanting anti-regime songs, raising their fingers into the victory sign, and shouting

"Allahu Akhbar," God is great.

Children who say they are 7 look 5. The 5-year-olds look 3. The older ones, who have done much of their growing up before the war, look stronger, but squatting against the wall, Mahmud, 10, holds his head in his hands because he is hungry. As volunteers fetch food, a boy with green eyes reports that they woke at 5 a.m. to be on time for this visit. We wonder if they have had play activities or visitors since fleeing Syria.

As the temperature passes 30 C (86 F), many of the kids still wear jackets and sweaters. A little girl runs, wearing a man's full-length leather coat. I gesture to the boy standing next to me to remove the fleece coat over his

T-shirt. His friend points to the sun and wags his finger, "No." Volunteers pour water into everyone's mouths without touching lips and poke holes in the caps to use them as sprinklers.

Kabawat ducks into a small lean-to draped in red, blue, green and white swirled-fabric. Cracking open sunflower seeds with her teeth to snack on, she watches the children—the youngest, most impoverished and traumatized we've met. Here and there, even some of their shoes are crumbling. If they can't learn about the deeper messages of values, Kabawat says, at least they can be given laughter, play and attention.

These Syrian children have had such a different childhood from hers and not just because of war and poverty, she says. Growing up in the 1980s and 1990s in Damascus, "We never had sectarian issues."

Kabawat, from a Christian family, was best friends with Muslim and Christian children. "We never said, 'He's Muslim, he's Christian,' we'd say, 'He's from Damascus, he's from Aleppo,'" she says.

She wasn't allowed to ask about a person's religion. When I ask her why not, she furrows her eyebrows. "Because it didn't matter."

Kabawat's family, always hosting people from diverse backgrounds, had a huge influence on her. Syrian society, though, referred to Jews and Israelis as "the enemy," she says. As a teenager, talking to someone at the U.S. Embassy in Damascus, her eyes opened with curiosity when she heard about a camp for Israeli, Palestinian, Jordanian and Egyptian teenagers, with Americans in the role of third-party mediators. Though she belonged to none of those countries, she hounded the Seeds of Peace admissions board. "I was always rebellious and it was against Syrian law to go

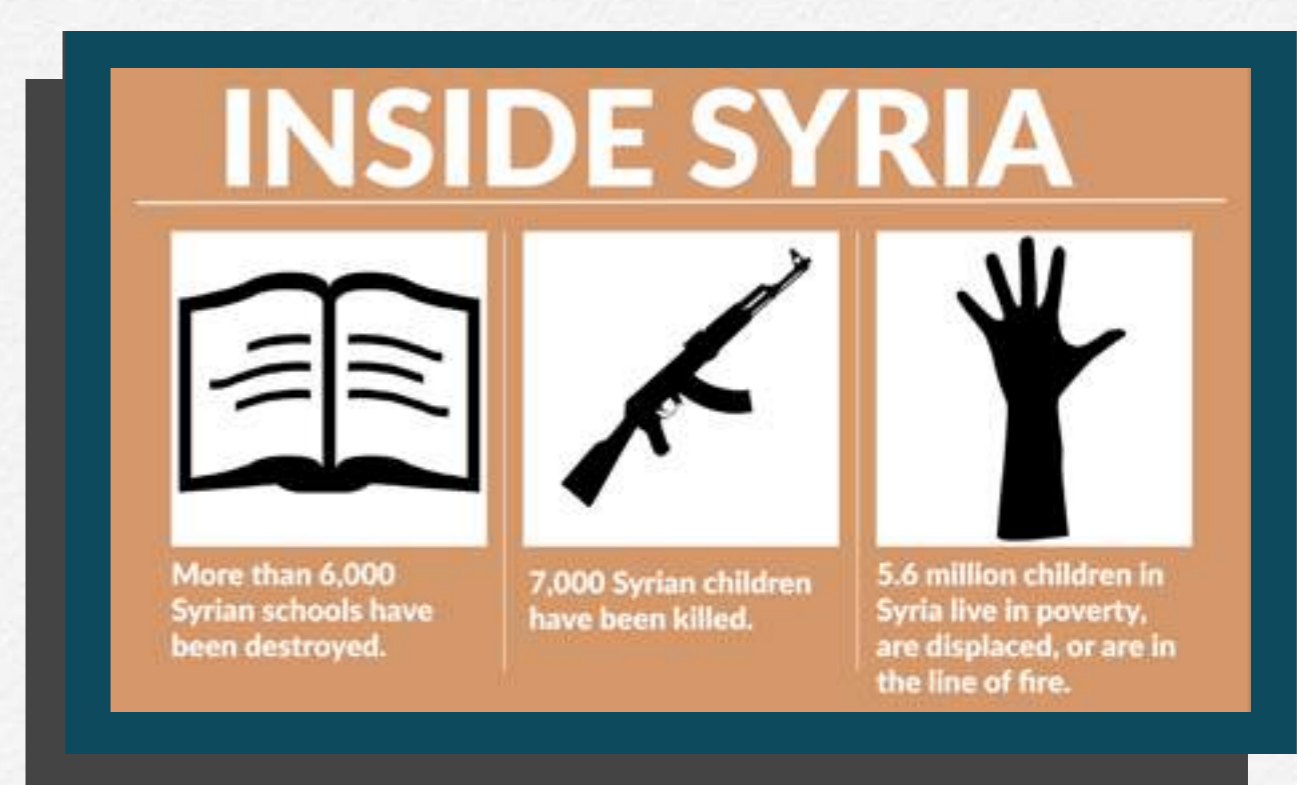
anywhere with the intention to meet Israelis, but I wanted to know beyond what I was living – that it was taboo had a lot to do with it,” she says.

“I told them if I have this experience, it'd build positive relations between Israel and Syria,” Kabawat says. “My parents approved–it being about tolerance and acceptance–but said I couldn't tell anyone.”

There, “with the American delegation, I was the Arab. A lot of Palestinians didn't speak English and the Americans didn't speak Arabic. I realized it was something I was meant to do–to connect people... I realized I was good at explaining different perspectives, getting one to see the other's point of view.

“The point of peace [groups] is to break stereotypes. In Syria you grow up thinking Jews are your enemy and you talk to them and realize that the enemy has a face and common interests and is just like you, but from a different country... The Jews also told me we [Syrians/Arabs] are the enemies, so I was saying how the Israeli and Palestinian girls were shaving their legs together, realizing we're all humans with no differences.” Obviously there were serious political disagreements. “When you're in dialogue you fight it out, but when you leave the room, you have to co-exist, you share the room, sink, food, which I appreciate because not everything is political. It's something we can learn in Syria. We can argue about politics but at the end of the day we live together which is the point of this whole week.”

Years later, studying conflict resolution, she traveled to Egypt where she was thrilled to find a Syria tent in Cairo's Tahrir Square. When Syrians there started asking her what religion she was and making generalizations



about which religious streams support the regime, she felt outraged and isolated. On one hand, the outside world didn't know or care enough about the slaughter in Syria, she felt. On the other hand, Syrians themselves were fighting about religion, while in fact people of every religion were suffering traumatic losses, she says. But she had an epiphany. The non-violent revolution could not work now inside Syria, but it could work with refugee children, to create a generation with different values.

When she got back to the U.S., she got her tattoo.

Peace flag

Getting this message of a “free Syria” across to children who grew up during a war with a sectarian divide has not been easy.

Syrian censuses have not included religion or ethnicity, but experts estimate that 75-85 percent of Syrians are Muslims—primarily Arab Sunni but also Kurdish Sunni, Arab Alawite Shiite, Arab Druze and Arab Ismaeli. About 10-15 percent of Syrians are Christians, including Christian Orthodox Arabs, Armenian Orthodox, Catholic and Assyrian. Christians and other small minorities (Jewish, Circassian and Turkmen) are protected with freedom of religion under Syria's 1973 constitution, though the country's leader can only be Muslim.

Some Sunni Muslims have always seen Alawite Shiite Muslims as unorthodox, yet the various religions and sects enjoyed relatively good relations in the years before the war—something the child refugees may not know or remember.

By the time we meet them, many have been convinced that all Shiite Muslims—and, often, Christians—are responsible for their tragedy, and it comes up in the workshops.

Many children build mosques in the rebuild-your-neighborhood workshop, but “most kids feel rage” when asked to also build a church, says R.

One afternoon, two girls push each other after one insists on building a church and the other snaps that church-goers are heretics. When Muslim and Christian volunteers explain that neighbors should work together in

unity and not blame whole populations for a few, the girls, in this case, end up building two churches—next to the mosque.

When the children are assigned to design a new Syrian flag—“peace flag”—many of them grab green, red and black markers to draw the revolutionary flags, representing the opposition to Assad. Workshop leaders end up confiscating red, green and black markers.

“No Syrian Army flag. No Revolutionary flag!” R. calls out. “We are the future now. Let's dream we are in the future and building a new country. It's peaceful, let's design a flag for the new era.”

Soon their flags boast rainbows, plants, animals, people of all colors, and everywhere, in English and Arabic, the word “love”.

R. is one of the only Syrians who makes it through the week without welling up. But by the backdrop of the colorful swirls of the tent, he pulls me over to show me a drawing made by a small girl in a pink coat. Tukar, smiling up at me, proudly shows me her picture of a helicopter dropping bombs on a bleeding house. Flowers grow around it.

“Why did you draw that?” he asks.

“I saw my aunt's house bombed... she's dead,” Tukar says.

He can't shake this image from his mind.



"I saw my aunt's house bombed... she's dead," Tukar explains of the drawing she made about her hometown in Syria. Image by Lauren Gelfond Feldinger, Jordan, 2014.

La La Land

Syrian musician Shadi, 34, pulls his long black curly hair into a ponytail and straps on his guitar. He stomps around the music workshop in baggy jeans and sneakers, using his arms and legs as instruments. Many of the children have never seen or heard a guitar nor had a music lesson. “Yaay – ya yay – yaaaa! Wooo! Ha ha ha ha!” He sings while strumming, opening his eyes wide, as he makes his way around the circle.

Dhont, hugging her belly, joins Syrian and international volunteers circling the room, singing along.

A performer known around Jordan and Syria for his Arabic rock, folk and Sufi-inspired singing and playing, Shadi teaches music and rhythm, while using elements from music therapy. The kids stamp feet and clap hands.

Since Shadi fled Damascus, where he had studied opera at the Conservatory of Music, he is fed up hearing Syrian refugee children in Jordan sing revolutionary songs. “I don't want them to keep singing these stupid, heavy, insulting, cursing, lyrics. Their parents are angry and it becomes their language. I want to take them back to their childhood and remind them that they don't have to care about this stuff. That's why a lot of the sounds I use are without lyrics so that they can sing [without thinking],” he says.

“Music is the language of peace. When you add lyrics it becomes a message.”

At the end of each workshop Shadi makes an exception. “I sing this song for everyone,” he says of the Arabic folk song Helwa Ya Baladi.

“It is a national song without hate and without being special to any country or people. It's just, 'I miss my homeland; I'm dreaming about going back; we're going to go back to our home.’”

Penned in 1979 by the late Egyptian-born diva, Dalida, the song remains popular across the Arabic-speaking world.

As Shadi plays one morning, Kabawat wanders in, singing and clapping. Surrounded by Syrian children singing of dreams to return to their beautiful homeland, she turns her head, sobbing.

In steamy and disadvantaged Kitteh, where the younger children seem more traumatized, Shadi adds a meditation exercise to the music workshop.

“Breathe in... Hold your breath,” he says to the kids seated on the Mukhtar's porch. “Now let your breath and all your worries go out of your body and send it some place very far away.”

“Where to?” a small girl asks.

“Send it to jehannam [hell]” he says, smiling.

“Ahhh!” the children reply, laughing.

“To calm, this is what they need,” Shadi says, on the patio later. “Children need to play and stop the mind.”

Looking around at the olive trees dotting the surrounding hills, Shadi also breathes in deeply.

“The landscape is exactly the same as in Syria,” says Dhont, slumped in a chair besides him. “I feel like I'm in Syria, where we used to go for a picnic.”
Shadi nods.

For a few minutes, they stare ahead, silent and cheerful.

It is the end of the week and no one but Dhont has slept more than a few hours a night.

The previous night, after saying goodnight to her, we stayed singing and dancing until a few hours before waking-up time, to hear Shadi perform in a small Amman club. His voice is shot from a week of singing by day and night, but he wants to tell me something else.

“We don't want them to go back to kill or get revenge,” he says. “It's so great what we do, saying, 'We are going to rebuild'—It's not violent, religious or nationalistic.”

Heading Home

At the end of the last day, Scooby's group tells her to go back to Syria as a leader to make peace.

“We're going together—Syrians, Jordanians, people from all over the world—we're going back to rebuild Syria,” she says.

“Will we see you in the next government?” a boy asks.

“No,” she says, laughing. “I will always be with the people.”

“No,” some of the kids joke back. “We will look for your name when we grow up and bring you to be in the government.”

They hug her, give her sweets and follow her and the other volunteers around. When she explains that it was Nousha Kabawat who was responsible for the program, they chant, “Nousha, Nousha, Nousha!”

“Thank you and please bring everyone back, OK?”

“See you, inshallah [god willing], soon,” Scooby says.

A little boy replies: “See you in Syria.”

“They will remember us,” Scooby says on the bus back to Amman, impressed that this boy had internalized the message that he can go back after the war and doesn't have to be a refugee forever.



A poor village on the outskirts of Kiteh hosted many Syrian refugee families, but had no schools. The volunteers later helped raise money for a new school. Image by Lauren Gelfond Feldinger. Jordan, 2014.

“I met a man once who remembered for his whole life the people that had visited him when he was in a camp.”

But can such a short program really change them, after all they have been through?

But can such a short program really change them, after all they have been through?

“For sure,” Scooby replies. “There are a lot of small things that make a difference, like the butterfly effect. The butterfly is changing the air with her wings. Even a smile is a huge thing.”

She shapes her hands into a butterfly and stares me in the eyes. “In each one is a monster. If you leave it to grow, it will grow.”

She is terrified the children will join groups like IS one day.

“Everyone looks for short-term solutions. OK—we have fed them. All their lives they will ask for food.

“And if you teach them how to be good— if you smile, touch, give gifts, hopes—it will make a big difference [helping them] not to be someone who kills.”

“It does not even take a week” to change them, she insists. It takes “one second.”

Further back in the bus, Kabawat and the Arabic-speakers are singing Arabic songs, dancing and clapping in the aisles again. Later, the younger volunteers will go out once more. It feels like a celebration, except that the war and the child survivors they have said goodbye to are heavy in everyone's thoughts.

Kabawat pauses for a moment to calculate how many kids she can reach on the next trip.

“As a Syrian it hurts me so much to [know] about kids so traumatized, who will eventually lead Syria. They grew up with a lot of corruption and mixed values. You can easily instill in them the positive values we want to see in our Syria. This is our time to come together to create the Syria we want to see,” she says.

As song circulates the bus, Dhont is tired from running around all week, six months pregnant. She rests her head back in her seat, rubbing her swollen belly. Looking out at the landscape that has reminded her of the home and people she misses, she reflects on how this volunteer work is one of the most important things she has done in her twenty-three years.

She closes her eyes, picturing the children she met and dreaming of the child she will soon have – “the future of Syria,” she thinks to herself. ◆

(This story first appeared in BBC News Magazine. British spellings have been altered.)

HELPING SYRIA'S CHILDREN

Local and International Aid

As of spring 2015, the Civil War in Syria and Iraq has harmed or displaced some 14 million children. Many of them lack basic necessities, and about 2.6 million Syrian children no longer attend school. Organizations like those below stress the importance of food, warmth, and shelter, but also education, civic leadership, and peacebuilding for Syria's children.

Hand in Hand for Syria

Helps displaced people in hard-to-reach conflict zones and remote areas in Syria. Runs schools for orphans, supports a network of field schools, and distributes school supplies.

Syrian Orphans Organization

Founded in 2012 by Muslim Americans, the program sends food, shelter, clothing and medical supplies to Syrian orphans through a network of distributors.

Orphans of Freedom

Operating under the Local Coordination Committees of Syria, the program distributes food, shelter, and clothing to orphaned children, while also providing education and psychological support.

No Lost Generation

A collaboration between U.N. agencies, NGOs, and government partners. Invests in education for Syrian children, focusing on civic leadership.

Project Amal ou Salam

Supports schools for Syrian kids. Hosts workshops that allow Syrian children to think and interact in peaceful, nonpartisan ways, through creativity and play.

Ghiath Matar School

Helps Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan, building child-friendly spaces and temporary schools for refugee children. Also provides psychosocial support.

Najda-Now

Based in Syria and Germany, NNI takes a "strength based approach" to aid, providing supplies, education, and vocational training while aiming to eliminate aid dependence.

The Malala Fund

Founded by Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai. Funds education for Syrian refugee girls in Lebanon and Jordan. (Girls' school attendance lags behind that of Syrian refugee boys.)

International Rescue Committee

Established the first secondary school for Syrian refugees at a camp in Iraq. Within Syria, IRC has founded 3 schools, enrolling about 1,500 children.

War Child UK

Funded by the Saïd Foundation and located in Urfa, Turkey. Educates Syrian refugees, ages 7-11. Beyond a regular curriculum, it offers sports, music and social events.

U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees

Prioritizes the protection and education of children. Also supplies emergency shelter, blankets, heaters, diapers and hygiene items to families.

Syrian Youth for Peace

A grassroots youth movement based in Syria. Connects Syria's youth with peace advocates, local and international, to promote nonviolence and conflict resolution.

FURTHER READING:



**Syria's Displaced:
Regional Implications**
[http://pulitzercenter.org/
projects/middle-east-syria-](http://pulitzercenter.org/projects/middle-east-syria-)



Syrian Refugees in Turkey
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**A War's Diaspora:
Syrian Refugees in a
Troubled Europe**
[http://pulitzercenter.org/
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Turkey: The Crisis at Home
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**Child Survivors of War Learn
Nonviolence, Pluralism,
Hope**
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**Interim Lives: Refugee
Survival in Jordan and
Lebanon**
[http://pulitzercenter.org/projects/
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BIOGRAPHIES:



Hugh Eakin is a senior editor at The New York Review of Books and founding editor of NYR Daily. He has reported from Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, and other countries in the Middle East. His work has appeared in The New York Times, The New Yorker, and The Wall Street Journal.



Alisa Roth, a long-time radio and print journalist, has reported on refugees and asylum seekers in the Middle East, Europe, and the United States. Her work has appeared on Marketplace, NPR, and The World, as well as in The New York Times, The New York Review of Books, and Gastronomica.



Alia Malek is an author and civil rights lawyer. Born in Baltimore to Syrian immigrant parents, she began her legal career as a trial attorney at the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division. After working in the legal field in the U.S., Lebanon, and the West Bank, Malek, who has degrees from Johns Hopkins and Georgetown Universities, earned her master's degree in journalism from Columbia University. Her reportage has appeared in many venues including The Nation, The New York Times, Salon, The Christian Science Monitor, and the Columbia Journalism Review. She is the author of *A Country Called Amreeka: U.S. History Retold Through Arab American Lives* and editor of the *Voice of Witness* book *Patriot Acts: Narratives of Post 9/11 Injustice*, published by McSweeney's.



Stephen Franklin is a former foreign correspondent and labor writer for the Chicago Tribune. A Pulitzer Prize finalist, he has reported from Afghanistan to Peru. He has trained journalists in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and created online courses for journalists around the globe for the International Center for Journalists. He is the author of *Three Strikes: Labor's Heartland Losses and What They Mean for Working Americans*.



Alice Su is a journalist based in Amman, Jordan. Her work focuses on refugees, religion, China and the Middle East, and has been published in The Guardian, The Atlantic, Wired and Al Jazeera, among other outlets. She grew up in Shanghai, China, and is a graduate of Princeton University.



Selin Thomas is based in New York, where she is pursuing a masters degree in political journalism from Columbia University. Originally from San Francisco, and a graduate of Boston University, Selin Thomas has worked for WGBH radio, NBC-7, Time Out Istanbul and The Boston Globe. As a Pulitzer Center student fellow, she reported on Syrian refugees from Turkey in 2014.



Joanna Kakissis has reported for NPR from her base in Athens since 2010. Her work has also appeared in Time, Foreign Policy, The New York Times, The Financial Times Magazine, Businessweek, The Caravan, PRI's The World, Marketplace and other outlets. She has reported extensively on the human toll of the Eurozone debt crisis, especially in Greece. She's also profiled overworked midwives trying to save mothers and infants in rural Afghanistan and Bangladeshi farmers displaced by climate change. She's especially drawn to stories of people adjusting to social, economic and cultural upheaval.



American photojournalist Holly Pickett earned degrees in journalism and history from the University of Montana. She was a staff photographer at The Spokesman-Review in Washington State, before moving to Cairo in early 2008 to pursue freelancing. She has documented news and contemporary issues in Egypt, Gaza, Iraq, Yemen, Turkey and Afghanistan—including three Arab Spring uprisings in 2011: Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. Her work has appeared in The New York Times, Time, The New Yorker, Stern, NPR.org, The Wall Street Journal, The Guardian, Paris Match, and many others. She is a contributing photographer for Redux Pictures photography agency in New York, and to Everyday Africa and Everyday Middle East photo collectives, which use photography of daily life to break down regional stereotypes. Holly is based in Istanbul and continues to cover the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa.



Lauren Gelfond Feldinger writes frequently on conflict resolution, human rights, civil rights, minorities, and the politics of cultural heritage. A winner of the Common Ground Middle East journalism prize in conflict resolution reporting and a North American Travel Journalist Association prize, she wrote for 12 years for The Jerusalem Post Magazine. She has been a correspondent for The Art Newspaper in London since 2003, and her work has also been published by numerous outlets including the BBC, The Daily Beast and Haaretz.

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CREDITS:

contributors

Hugh Eakin
Lauren Gelfond Feldinger
Stephen Franklin
Joanna Kakissis
Alia Malek
Holly Pickett
Alisa Roth
Alice Su
Selin Thomas

cover photo by
Holly Pickett

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editor and producer

Kem Knapp Sawyer

design, photo editing, and producer

Evey Wilson

graphics and research by

Elizabeth Adetiba

Jin Ding

Akela Lacy

Jessica Obert

Anna Ziv


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Jon Sawyer, *executive director*

Nathalie Applewhite, *managing director*

Tom Hundley, *senior editor*

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Rafat Al Aydi, 20, right, takes in the view of southwestern Germany with his brother Naif, 16, during a walk in the Black Forest near their home in tiny Zell am Hammersbach, Germany in March 2014. The four Al Aydi boys, unable yet to speak German, struggled to adjust to life in their new village, but it wasn't long before their family was on the move again, searching for a real place to call home. Image by Holly Pickett. Germany, 2014.