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AND THE LIMITS OF RELIEF

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COVER About 450 migrants rescued in the sea near the Libyan coast wait to disembark at the Sicilian harbor of Messina, Italy, 2015. (Alessio Mamo/Redux)

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MERIP is thrilled to announce Steve Niva as our new editor beginning July 15. Steve has been involved with MERIP for over 30 years, first as an editorial assistant and then as a frequent contributor and past member of the editorial committee. Steve comes to MERIP from Evergreen State College, where he has been a professor of international politics and Middle East studies since 1999. In addition to academic work, Steve has devoted considerable time to public education about the Middle East. His regional knowledge, strategic vision, public engagement and editorial acumen will be a boon for MERIP. Heartfelt thanks to all of those who have helped with the transition, particularly to Michelle Woodward who has provided stellar editorial stewardship over the past four issues, and to Lisa Hajjar and Sheila Carapico, who spearheaded this issue.

The Poverty of Our Humanitarian Imagination

In a world awash with violent, large-scale displacements and with borders closed to refugees across Europe, the United States and Australia, much has been said about the failures of humanitarian compassion. Reports abound of migrants left to drown by the thousands in the Mediterranean,[1] and of those who reach foreign shores being warehoused in under-resourced and dangerous camps. The stories stand as an indictment of the global community's lack of will to deal with—let alone acknowledge a shared responsibility for—these crises.

For those who want to choose connection, to resist the politics of hate and xenophobia, humanitarian compassion often appears as an alternative to government policies of disregard and disdain for mass suffering. In the United States, "no hate, no fear, refugees are welcome here" has been a powerful slogan of opposition to the Trump administration's massive reduction in the number of refugees admitted to the country. In Australia, activists organized Palm Sunday marches to demand better conditions for refugees, asking people to "bring your banners, bring your voices and show your compassion." In Europe, a campaign is under way to gather signatures in support of an initiative titled: "We are a welcoming Europe, let us help."

In recent decades, humanitarianism has provided a central framework to conceptualize and respond to international crises that put millions of lives in danger. Humanitarianism, which originated in the nineteenth century (the trans-Atlantic movement to abolish chattel slavery being one of its earliest incarnations), means, generally, caring about "strangers" because of a recognition of shared humanity and doing something to alleviate their suffering. These days, the language of humanitarian concern links a vast array of international interventions; it encompasses relief in the aftermath of natural disasters, warfare ostensibly motivated to save people at risk from violence perpetrated by their own governments or local armed groups, and the provision of aid to feed and shelter displaced persons in conflict settings. By these measures, the refusal of assistance to people in need is justified through a kind of

humanitarian calculus, turning on whether would-be beneficiaries are deserving of the brands of compassion that motivate interventions. Governmental determinations about individuals' refugee status and asylum claims are central moments for calculating and evaluating the quality of suffering.[2] At the individual level, humanitarianism operates through donations, given or withheld, as means of passing judgement about innocence.[3] Both an insistence on compassion and its widespread refusal are products of the humanitarian world in which we live.

In this complex, dangerous world, humanitarianism can appear as an unsullied way to try to ease suffering and ensure survival. But as we contemplate how to act, who to pressure and what to demand, it is vitally necessary to also ask what it means to choose a path that is "the least we can do." What are the consequences of viewing global crises through a humanitarian lens? What human possibilities does this framework occlude?

For some, humanitarian intervention—especially the militarized variety—represents the latest iteration of colonial and imperial sensibilities that deny equality through the guise of compassion. Many contemporary wars have been fought under the banner of humanitarianism, continuing a long tradition of, in Gayatri Spivak's phrasing, "white men…saving brown women from brown men."[4] Whatever the intentions, humanitarian idioms have a way of crowding out other possible avenues for engagement, such as political solidarity, global justice or even revolutionary politics. Rony Brauman, former head of Médecins sans Frontières-France, famously commented that if Auschwitz was in operation today, it would be described as a "humanitarian emergency"—and he did not mean this in a positive light.

There are plenty of examples of political actors using humanitarian language and institutions to pursue distinctly non-humanitarian ends, not to mention the fact that humanitarian interventions may prolong conflicts and exacerbate crises that cause the suffering they seek to alleviate. But the problems with humanitarianism are not only what Fiona Terry calls the "paradox of humanitarian action"[5] and David Kennedy describes as the "dark sides of virtue."[6] The principles of neutrality that undergird the militarized prerogative to intervene, framed in terms of a "right to protect—R2P," may impede the possibility of bringing perpetrators to account. The criteria for providing assistance or granting asylum and the procedures for identifying and registering refugees may—and often do—impose new restrictions on victims' actions and options. The need to mobilize international compassion to support humanitarian endeavors may involve the exploitation of people's suffering, where pity and benevolence rather than human equality drive actions.

Few humanitarian agencies would consider it within their purview to work actively toward a resolution to underlying causes of suffering, and indeed most see "neutrality" from politics as crucial to their ability to accomplish their goals. At best, humanitarian actors hope that carving out a "humanitarian space" where they can protect lives and alleviate suffering will provide local actors with the political space in which to conclude conflicts and adjudicate responsibility. The fact that warring parties may use the breathing room—or even the services—that humanitarianism provides to extend their violent campaigns is a source of great anguish for these agencies.

Humanitarianism, as presently conceived, can never provide a solution to global inequity that is one of the deepest roots of global suffering. That there is no existing means to counter the vast inequality of resources and the unequal distribution of vulnerability speaks to the poverty of our political imagination. As important as it is to cast a critical eye on the structures of aid organizations—their funding mechanisms, procedures for determining eligibility, restrictions imposed on aid recipients, and the violence they sometimes enact in the course of providing aid—it is vital that progressive communities consider what we fail to see, and what we fail to imagine when we call for humanitarian compassion.

A humanitarian lens impoverishes responses in several ways. If the aims of humanitarian action are necessary, they also are necessarily limited to saving lives and easing suffering. Too often, "the least we can do" is also "the least we can imagine doing." Samuel Moyn has argued that today's human rights are "not enough" because they do not address matters of inequality nor chart a course for their redress.[7] The terrain of humanitarian action, like that of human rights activism, apprehends people as lives that must be saved. This serves, functionally, to target conditions rather than the causes that produce vulnerability and perpetuate exclusions and refusals.

The impoverishment of the humanitarian imagination lies in part in the ways this lens misconstrues existing relations across distance among the world's population. Structured as it is by the dyad of "helper" and "helped," humanitarian language divides the globe into these categories—with the Global North in the position of helper and the Global South in repeated need of assistance. What impoverishes the imagination is the inherent limits of noblesse oblige and the contingencies of compassion. To forcefully address the conditions that cause, exacerbate and maintain large-scale suffering, we need another lens, a broader capacity to imagine, a different means of acknowledging historical realities and conceiving of the perpetration of suffering. As difficult as that is, we need a different language and another politics. ■

—Ilana Feldman

Endnotes

1 Harriet Agerholm, "German Newspaper Publishes Names of 33,000 Refugees Who Died Trying to Reach Europe," *The Independent,* November 13, 2007.

2 Didier Fassin, "Compassion and Repression: The Moral Economy of Immigration Policies in France," *Cultural Anthropology* 20/3 (2005).

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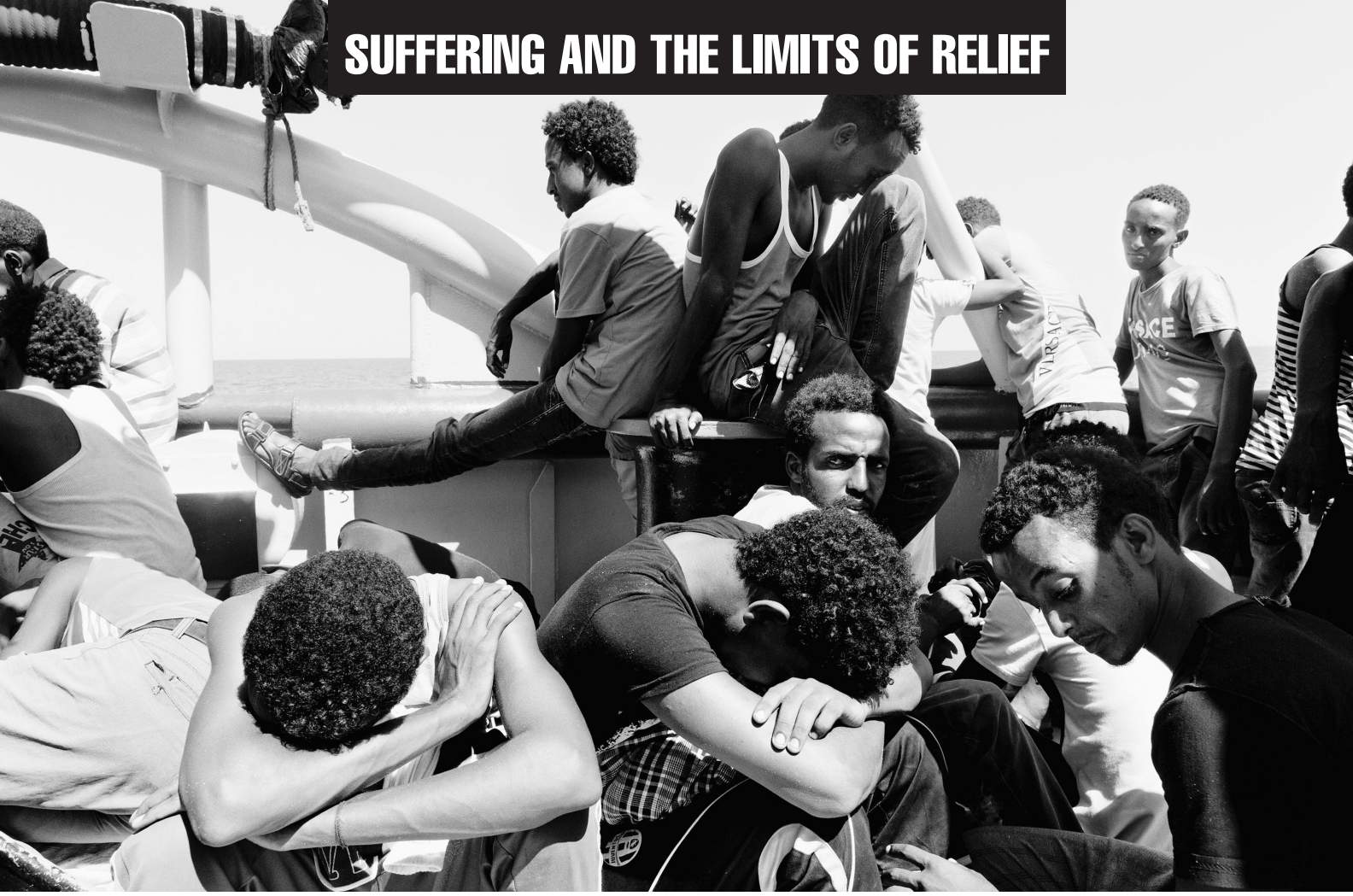
4 Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, eds. *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (Hertfordshire, UK: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), p. 93.

5 Fiona Terry, *Condemned to Repeat? The Paradox of Humanitarian Action* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).

6 David Kennedy, *The Dark Sides of Virtue: Reassessing International Humanitarianism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

7 Samuel Moyn, *Not Enough: Human Rights in an Unequal World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).



Eritrean migrants, who were rescued at sea near Libya, on the way to Reggio Calabria, Italy, July 2015. PAOLO PELLEGRIN/MAGNUM PHOTOS

The Black Mediterranean and the Politics of Imagination

SA Smythe

> The sea in Italy doesn't even recede.
> You need to cross it to get to the stronghold, you need to cross the sea in between, the Mediterranean Sea—the White Sea to the Arabs.
> Many face the White Sea. But from my coasts, on the Horn of Africa, before reaching the White Sea some brave the Ocean on a dhow. They want to know if it's really necessary to go that far.
>
> —*Ubah Cristina Ali Farah, "A Dhow Crosses the Sea"*[1]

On January 26, 2017, video footage surfaced of 22-year-old Gambian national Pateh Sabally thrashing around in the middle of the Grand Canal in Venice, Italy. Hundreds of onlookers were caught on camera jeering, gawking, waiting on the scene's dénouement. As Sabally's torso slowly disappeared under the wet, the water reached up to his neck. As his arms shot straight up, with nothing visible below the elbows, at least one person shouted, "Africa! Africa, oh!" Another demanded, "*Butta il salvagente*!" (Throw the life preserver!) as a boat full of tourists bobbed mere yards from Sabally who dipped and resurfaced with slowing frequency. Eventually a few people on the boat

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Author Igiaba Scego participates in a campaign called Ero Straniero (I was a foreigner) to promote a new law on immigration. Rome, 2017.

stirred and threw two or three of the life preservers overboard. Sabally did not grasp them. One flustered spectator scoffed, "Just let him die then." While Sabally's hands remained up in the air, perfectly vertical, cries of "*Scemo! Vai via!*" (Idiot! Go away!) spat from the crowd. Each time he bobbed, his body went lower. Soon, only the crown of his head showed, along with his fingertips. Then nothing. The rings produced when the life preservers hit the water dissipated. Soon, the sea was still again. The viral video abruptly ends.

In the media reporting on Sabally's drowning, a few headlines drew attention to the shocking complicity of the tourists and lack of "heroism" amidst the onlookers. But the media also incorporated into their narrative the assumption that Sabally wanted to die, with headlines like "African Refugee, Pateh Sabally, Drowns Self in Venice as Tourists Look On" and "Venice to Pay for Funeral of Migrant Whose Suicide Was Filmed by Tourists." The latter article has several quotes from the office of Venice mayor Luigi Brugnaro attesting to the benevolence and good will of the city: "The money [for Sabally's funeral] will come from…Brugnaro's personal cost of living allowance in a gesture of respect from Venice towards Pateh Sabally and his shattered dreams," adding that "[t]he death of this young man has saddened all of us, and we feel pity towards those who, faced with the adversities of life, no longer find the strength to react to desperation." But Brugnaro also opines, "We can't continue to nurture the hopes of half the world coming to Italy. Everyone needs to realize it is impossible for our country to continue managing such a large-scale phenomenon in the way it has done so far."[2] In this politician's expressions of unaccountable pity, Sabally's story—including his unconfirmed, hypothetical motivations—was a symbol of all migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Italy. The significance ascribed to Sabally's final actions and inactions were an ultimate violence to someone whose death was rendered a spectacle, his final gasps for breath a repository of negative emotion and dehumanizing racial hatred.

After identifying Sabally as the drowned figure, reports came in saying that he had initially obtained temporary residency papers for Italy, on humanitarian grounds no less. Others speculated that he had made the trek from The Gambia to a port in North Africa before setting sail across the Mediterranean and arriving in Sicily two years prior, where his claims for asylum were ultimately rejected. Pateh Sabally arrived by sea. He also departed that way.

A similar narrative occurred for 31-year-old Mussie, the Eritrean asylum seeker who lived in Italy for almost two years and who hanged himself on Via Aldini near Milan Central Station. Some of the scant coverage noted that Mussie took his life mere steps from the Arca Foundation, one of Italy's humanitarian non-profits dedicated to welcoming refugees. It was an odd point to observe since he had no discernible connection to the organization at the time. This framing failed to highlight how his death occurred in the context of increasingly aggressive security raids and identity checks targeting racialized masculine bodies in ostensibly public spaces. Some of the "raids" were unauthorized harassment by Italian soldiers at the station whose verbal altercations with presumed migrants occasionally turned physical but led to no arrests or reports against the perpetrators.

Mathematics of Black Life in the Mediterranean

Across centuries and continents, narratives of the arrival of Black people are often bound to the water. Blackness and the fear of Blackness seem to be below the surface, permeating through everywhere and every when. When Black Canadian poet Dionne Brand writes that "water is another country," she invokes the power, trauma and possibility located there.[3] Even as that which is liquid at times appears "ubiquitous and mute,"[4] the voice of our oppressors is the only one left to reverberate, like miscast life preservers on the surface of the sea. This ubiquity of the water is part of what ties us, binds us in time and spirit to the ontological depths of Black presences in historical and material relation to the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean—the routes of African enslavement and genocide and to the Mediterranean Sea.

In October 2013, the Italian government created Operation Mare Nostrum (OMN). Naming this naval and air operation *mare nostrum* (Latin for "our sea") was an imperial call-back to the Roman name for the Mediterranean Sea.[5] This use was not the first revival of the term. During the height of Italian nationalism during the period of *Risorgimento* (Unification), it was a rallying cry used by poets and political agitators who saw Italy as a successor to the Roman Empire and wished to expand during the "Partition of Africa." It was revived again during the era of Fascism, spread through propaganda demanding aggressive territorial expansion and "reclamation" of former lands. The part of northern Africa that included Italian-colonized Libya became known as the Fourth Shore.

The OMN was conceived as a national security system under the guise of an international rescue operation. Its naval and air-based "coast guard" purpose was to arrest human traffickers and rescue tens of thousands of migrants from shipwrecks and other maritime tragedies. It was established on October 18, 2013 after, and in direct response to, the October 3 shipwreck with over 360 confirmed deaths, and the October 11 shipwreck where at least 34 were confirmed dead. Since then, thousands more have died crossing from the northern coast of Africa to Europe, specifically to Italy, via the Mediterranean, making it one of the deadliest seascapes and migrant crossings in the contemporary world. Despite, or in disregard of, this reality the OMN was defunded one year later, in 2014, when the Italian government realized it would bear the brunt of maintenance costs instead of other European states or the European Union.

It would be a helpful provocation to examine the farce of the recurrent practice of enumeration, of counting people without being accountable to them. Such enumeration conforms to the logics of accumulation that structure racial capitalism. In the case of contemporary Mediterranean crossings, the counting of people who die or survive by the International Organization for Migration or various social and mass media entities reveals the quantified abstraction of Black and/or migrant lives. This calculated value of Black life is expressed through the state's own language of deficit, dearth and debt. Katherine McKittrick calls this "the mathematics of unliving."[6]

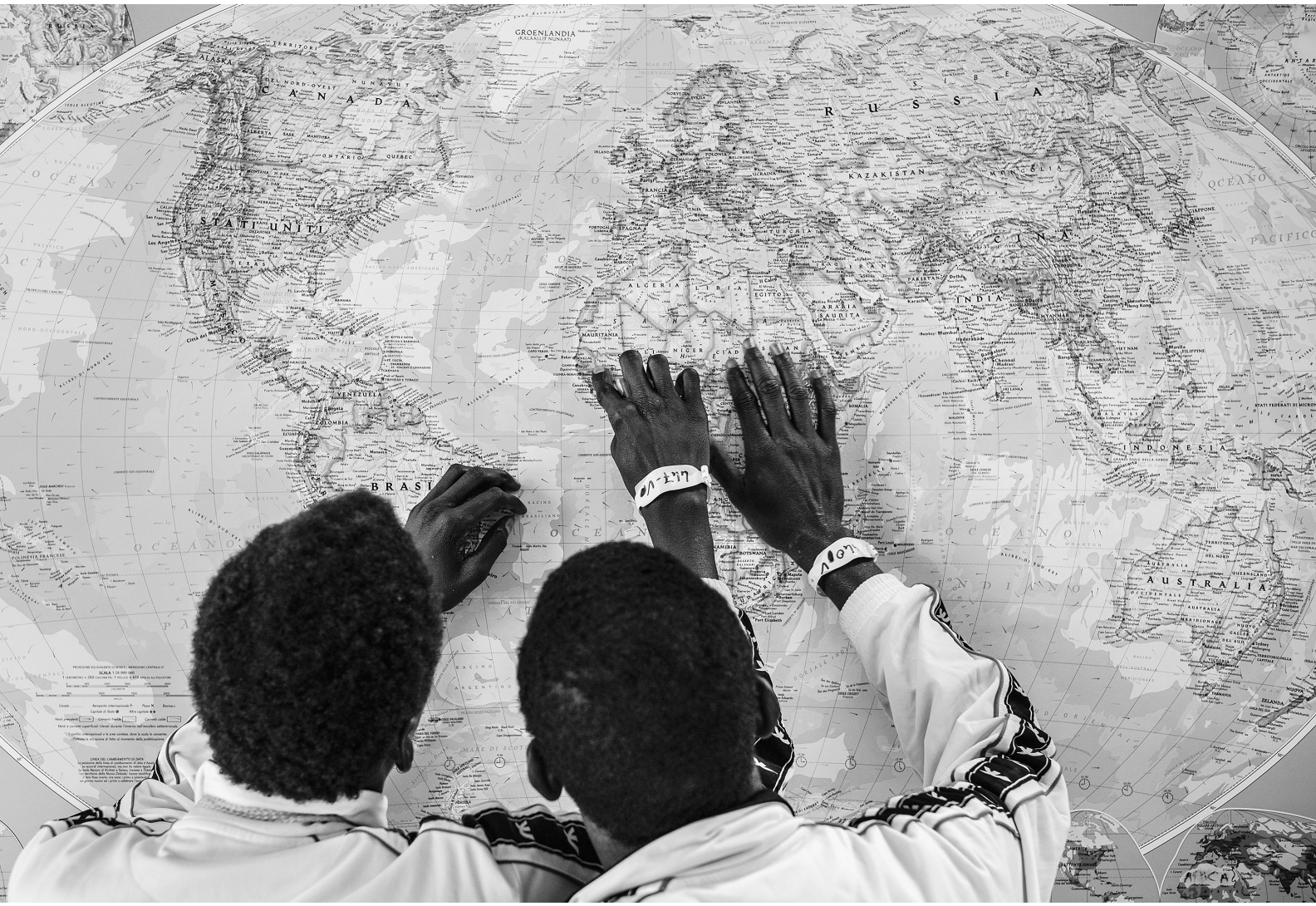
Across the Mediterranean, the death toll rises. These deaths, unlike the rising of the sea, are the result of racial calculus, not "nature." Frontex, the border agency for the European Union, has been charged with responsibility to "oversee" patrols of the sea. Overseeing is not doing, nor even seeing: Frontex has willfully turned a blind eye to thousands of requests for aid and has informed state agencies like Italy's beleaguered Coast Guard that it would not respond immediately to distress calls as it pulled its patrol area further north towards Europe and away from known sites of frequent shipwrecks.

This neoliberal iteration of racial calculus does not account for the loss of Pateh Sabally. Of Mussie. Of Emmanuel Chidi Namdi or the many others who were murdered or "allowed to die" by the necropolitical machinations of callous and dehumanizing statecraft. This focus on Italy is not intended to let other nations off the hook. Iterations of patriarchal White supremacy is something in which all of Europe is complicit, be it for their withdrawal of funding, their past colonial exploitation and gross historical underdevelopment or their current militaristic and neoliberal practices in Africa, which have exacerbated migration across the increasingly treacherous route.

The Racialized Calculus of Belonging

What about those who survive the sea, those who make it to Italy or whose families have undergone such a crossing

SIMONA GRANATI/CORBIS VIA GETTY



Gambian asylum seekers discuss their journey through Libya at a "hot spot," an asylum seeker reception center, in the port of Pozzallo, Sicily, Italy, 2016.

for them to be born there? In the last few years, there has been a concerted effort by groups like Rete G2 (a network of "second-generation" immigrants) for reform of Italian immigration law to offer more rights to systemically marginalized individuals—particularly children who are politically more palatable for a heteronational Italian public (that is, a public bound to ethnonationalism and heteropatriarchy). The assumption is that children would more readily assimilate into the Italian polity, and that education is a significant part of that kind of Italian acculturation. The new law would have lowered the age at which people born in Italy to non-Italian parents can apply for citizenship, from 18 years to between ten and 12. It enshrines the caveat that only children who have spent at least five years in Italian schools would be eligible. Unfortunately, the law has been tabled, and may not go up for debate in Parliament for quite some time, given the recent victories of right-wing politicians in the March 2018 Italian elections. Many of those politicians ran on platforms of ultranationalism and overt xenophobia, and thus these reforms are likely to be deferred. (This deferral is similar to the political brinkmanship in the United States regarding the fate of undocumented individuals and DACA recipients, or DREAMers.) These amendments and new reforms have been repeatedly blocked by right-wing and ultranationalist factions of the Italian Parliament.

This legal reform to expand Italian citizenship to migrants, if it were to pass, undoubtedly would be a boon for many immigrants living in Italy. These new policies, however, bring forth new questions and, in some cases, exacerbate old ones. It is not clear how to calculate criteria for naturalization like *ius culturae* (right of acculturation, as distinct from the legal concepts that confer citizenship, jus soli or jus sanguinis—right of soil or of blood, respectively) or *ius soli temperato* (a compromised version of jus soli). How could one measure the level of an immigrant's cultural integration? What are "Italian values" and who are the ultimate arbiters of the culture? How does this codified

expansion of Italian citizenship facilitate the continued dispossession and displacement of those who remain outside of a citizenship framework, and thus the project known as "Europe" writ large? And lastly, how does this ostensibly more inclusive policy mask or reprise a colonial framework through which rights are bestowed based on cultural, political and racial attachments?

The very fact that citizenship rights are contingent on racially constructed notions of sameness and difference and are resisted in the name of a presumptively "fixed" category of White European interests and fears of a contaminated Italian polity is banal in the Arendtian sense. Citizenship can be, and often is, a banal mechanism in the systematic perpetration of dispossession, disregard and disunity. As we mark the anniversaries of migrant deaths or suicides, the terminations of coast guard operations and some of the major shipwrecks off the coast of Italy in recent years, how do we account for the fact that the people drowned—and drowning—in the Mediterranean will not soon have access to the modest improvements to Italian citizenship, especially given the recent victories of Italian far right and ultranationalist parties? Another orientation is required, one that does not look to state recognition and the calculated valuation of human life, but rather is generative of a new coalitional practice that can be conceived via the Mediterranean's shores rather than national borders.

The Black Mediterranean

Writers from T.S. Eliot to Mahmoud Darwish have observed that the sea does not end at the land's edge. The Black Mediterranean is a site and epistemology that fully acknowledges that reality. This concept, first popularized by Alessandra Di Maio, "focuses on the proximity that exists, and has always existed, between Italy and Africa, separated […] but also united by the Mediterranean […] and documented in legends, myths, histories, even in culinary traditions, in visual arts, and religion."[7]

The Black Mediterranean, which is already being mobilized within and beyond the geopolitical space of the Mediterranean itself, traces back to the Black Radical Tradition and particularly Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism.*[8] Robinson, as Robin D.G. Kelley commends, "continued the earlier legacy of Diaspora studies but also developed a conception of the Black Mediterranean as a precondition to the Black Atlantic and the making of Europe itself."[9] For Paul Gilroy, the Black Atlantic was a conceptualization bound to the Middle Passage and the pervasive genocidal politics born from the transatlantic slave trade and present in the aftermath of slavery.[10] Rather than existing solely as a metaphor, a fixed geography or a paradigmatic site of loss often referred to as a "wet cemetery," the Black Mediterranean is a variegated site of Black knowledge production, Black resistance and possibilities of new consciousness. In my view, the Black Mediterranean and its attendant regionalism foments cultural syncretism, intimacy and expansiveness, while still leaving room for geospecificity within a transnational frame. It engages the Black Radical Tradition and Black imaginative practices to show the way to use fragments of our past, (mis)remembered histories to envision new futures.

In every European state, majorities cling to a set of myths and assumptions about national origin and character. Italy is no different than other nation states in this regard. Those countries with a legacy of colonization tend to reckon with and absolve that bleak history by differing means. Italy has often attempted to render that history utterly contemporary. As Gilroy noted, racism "rests on the ability to contain Blacks in the present, to repress and to deny the past."[11] In *Black Marxism*, Cedric Robinson observes that:

> the history of Black peoples has been recast consistently in both naive and perverse ways. Most particularly, the memory of Black rebelliousness to slavery and other forms of oppression was systematically distorted and suppressed in the service of racialist, Eurocentric, and ruling-class historiographies. The sum total was the dehumanizing of Blacks...For the unaware, nothing was amiss.[12]

The "presentism" of current sociopolitical dynamics are commonly explained in terms of the impact of recent unprecedented immigration into Italy and the tremendous cultural change it portends. According to this narrative, immigration has so overwhelmed and altered the face of the nation that it is no longer possible to assume a monoracial or monocultural Italian national character—as though such a character ever existed. Quite the opposite: Italy must be viewed as an always and already multicultural nation—despite vehement right-wing insistence to the contrary and generalized international assumptions of racial and ethno-homogeneity. In *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning*, Robinson explains that:

> racial regimes are constructed social systems in which race is proposed as a justification for the relations of power. While necessarily articulated with accruals of power, the covering conceit of a racial regime is a makeshift patchwork masquerading as memory and the immutable. Nevertheless, racial regimes do possess history, that is, discernible origins and mechanisms of assembly. But racial regimes are unrelentingly hostile to their exhibition. This antipathy exists because a discoverable history is incompatible with a racial regime and from the realization that, paradoxically, so are its social relations.[13]

Thus, in the case of Europe's White supremacist policies and foundations, it is not just that race is a construct, but that it lies within a panoply of constructs that actively undermine the very idea of Europe. The Black Mediterranean represents a demand to acknowledge the connection between the present and the past—including the history of colonialism,

ASHLEY GILBERTSON/VII/REDUX

emigration and intranational migration—in which Italians have occupied positions of both hegemony and subalternity in different historical times and geographical locations. It also demands analysis of how migrations cause these positions to shift. This is central to understanding how a sense of *italianità* (Italianness) was constructed as the result of these events and why there is such a strong resistance to extending the privilege of belonging to migrants and subsequent generations. But this perspective also creates a spatial transnational continuity with other European countries with their own histories of colonialism and emigration.

The demands to acknowledge the connections between past and present manifest in the cultural productions of Black Italian writers of African origin or descent. They are unearthing and opening colonial archives, denouncing contemporary racism as a legacy of colonialism, identifying processes of racialization at the base of national identity formation, revealing the existing power relations between Italian, migrant and so-called "second-generation" women and mocking the resistance of Italians to considering the intersection of Italianness with Blackness and/or Muslimness. These are radical acts in a society that has historically and erroneously constructed itself as White and Catholic (and afforded primacy to heterosexual men). These themes redound through the works of Carla Macoggi, Igiaba Scego and Cristina Ali Farah—just a few of the Black Italian women writers concerned with geographies and memories of/in/across borderscapes—who articulate the radical possibilities of the Black Mediterranean through their meditations on citizenship, representation and belonging.

The State of Emergency

In "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Walter Benjamin offers a strategic vision and purpose for radicalism and resistance of "presentist" narratives:

> The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the "state of emergency" in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that accords with this insight. Then we will clearly see that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position in the struggle against fascism. One reason fascism has a chance is that, in the name of progress, its opponents treat it as a historical norm. The current amazement that the things we are experiencing are "still" possible in the twentieth century is not philosophical. This amazement is not the beginning of knowledge—unless it is the knowledge that the view of history which gives rise to it is untenable.[14]

The Black Mediterranean, following the disruptive urging of Benjamin and inspired by the radical legacy of Robinson and the creative projects of many of the *italiani senza cittadinanza* (Italians without citizenship), Black Italians, asylum seekers and refugees lends historical consciousness to the "crisis of migration" and the politics of belonging. It takes the term "crisis" literally and etymologically (from the Greek word *krisis*) as a turning point, which acknowledges that the contemporary social disintegration of the calculated cruelty of those in power requires a collective response. In this arsenal of resistance is a new politics of naming and cultural practices of complexity and sustained contradiction that carry with them a more livable destiny for us all.

Ultimately, the struggle for citizenship of second-generation or other Italians, specifically those "of color," remains a question of how to resist the seductions of state-oriented activism and its identitarian pitfalls. An underlying question embedded in practices of codifying citizenship can be further clarified by queer Black studies. What would a politics of citizenship and representation—a queer, radicalized form of *italianità*—look like that would refuse any and all "murderous inclusion"? That phrase was coined by trans theorist of color Jin Haritaworn to describe the depoliticization of LGBTQ people under the liberal rubric of "gay rights" such as same-sex marriage over and against other possibilities of rights.[15] The project of identifying and criticizing murderous inclusion targets those rights upheld or bestowed by the state that result in the "politics of queer subordination" and the limiting affirmation of policies that are neither queer, liberal nor beneficial for the most minoritized or radical within a particular oppressed group. We see this murderous inclusion time and again in the state's disavowal of refugees and asylum seekers, and in the racist parameters and criteria of citizenship. Do we want the state to love us or do we want to be free? Is what we are fighting for conditional citizenship or are we making demands and laying the grounds for our own emancipation?

Where there is emancipatory citizenship, there is the potential for ever more solidarity and for reconciliation and proliferation in the Black Mediterranean, a space that represents continuity with the past and discontinuity of the future from oppressive regimes of the present. As Robin Kelley surmises, "the Black Mediterranean is about the fabrication of Europe as a discrete, racially pure entity solely responsible for modernity, on the one hand, and the fabrication of the Negro, on the other."[16] We see this fabrication in Italians' prevalent ignorance of their own nation's imperial endeavors and their persistent "colonial benevolence" manifest in the popular slogan *italiani brava gente* (Italians are good people) that the mayor of Venice invoked, without irony, after Sabally drowned to a chorus of racist and disaffected slurs.

The implication of how bodies get stratified in relation to citizenship is clearly designated in cultural, ethnoracial, sexualized and gendered terms. Contemporary writings by Italian and Italophone authors of African descent evince an understanding of identity politics, but also assert claims to an emancipatory *futura meticcia* (mixed, as in mestizo,

future) that is not necessarily mired in post/colonial politics. While there are many national and cultural contexts from which to tease out those resonances and upend toxic paradigms cultivated by biopolitical and discursive processes, Italy's fraught history of internal political unification, its position in the European cultural imaginary, its relationship to Whiteness, its complex geopolitics within the Mediterranean and its fraught "(pre)occupation" with Africa make it one of the more powerful examples.

The Black Mediterranean offers a political paradigm shift that is radical, anarchic, collective, Black and queer. It fundamentally challenges state recognition as a goal or end in itself, as well as consumerist individualism and heteronationalist frameworks. It engages and fosters full use of Black imaginative practices, including an abolitionist vision that sees a world without border regimes and the Mediterranean as a site of cultural syncretism and radical possibility rather than a watery grave and site of dispossession, abjection and a receptacle of memory. This project works towards emancipation and affirmation, meaningful solidarity and compassion. The literature from women of mixed Italian and East African descent and art projects by Black migrants and queer people draw upon several grids of intelligibility to offer us new possibilities and pathways to more meaningful belonging, and in the process actively denounce any claims to a monoracial Italian identity. "To affirm," then, is more than just a proclamation; it is an ethical project in which Italy remains a rich archive from which to enact the Black Mediterranean. ■

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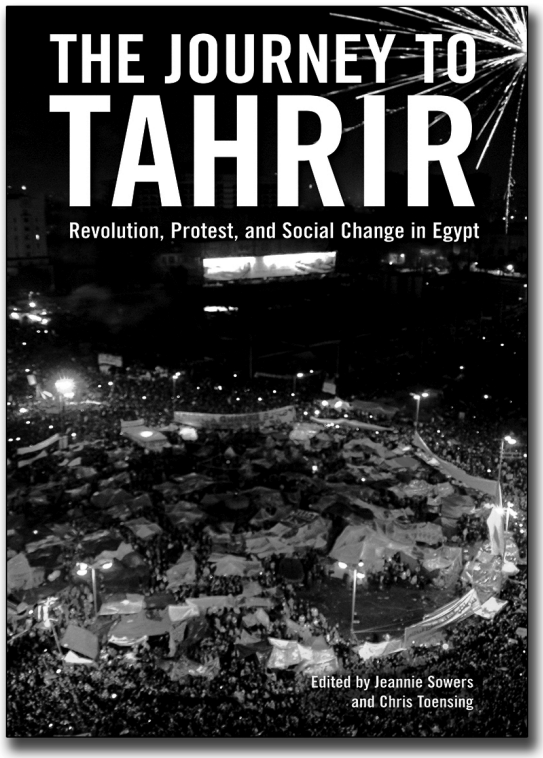

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Dozens of African women who were detained trying to cross the Mediterranean on rubber boats sit inside a makeshift detention center in Surman, Libya, 2017.

Extending the Borders of Europe

An Interview with Aurélie Ponthieu

European policies on refugees and asylum seekers are increasingly restrictive. Borders are effectively being pushed off-shore, extending the problems of border management as far south as possible. Aurélie Ponthieu explains the effects of these measures, including crowded refugee centers on the Italian and Greek borders, deplorable conditions in Libyan detention centers and fewer rescues at sea. Ponthieu, the coordinator of the Forced Migration Team in the analysis department of Médecins sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders), Belgium, was interviewed by Nabil Al-Tikriti.

What is current European Union policy regarding asylum seekers entering Europe from across the Mediterranean and Aegean seas?

European policies on migration and asylum have grown more and more restrictive since the end of the 1990s. As European Union (EU) internal borders disappeared, there has been a reinforcement of Europe's external borders and a gradual transformation of asylum and migration processes into matters of security. Today, most external land borders are heavily patrolled and enclosed by fences. This situation has led to a shift of refugee and migratory movements towards sea borders with Greece, Italy and Spain—a deadly shift. Frontex, which was formerly the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the EU and is now called the European Border and Coast Guards Agency, was established in 2004. Its main task is to support member states in controlling external borders. The agency is one of the main tools of the EU to fight, as the European Commission puts it, "irregular migration."[1] Both its budget and responsibilities have been growing steadily

since its creation: Its annual budget is now 250 million Euros ($295 million).

A restrictive approach to migration and asylum in Europe is not new, but there has been an acceleration of restrictive policies since 2015, in particular policies aimed at externalizing border controls and containing those seeking refuge at the borders. In May 2015, the European Commission adopted the "Agenda on Migration" in response to increasing numbers of people seeking EU protection at Italian and Greek borders, as many were dying at sea for lack of safer migration options.[2] Some of these measures have contributed to worsening conditions asylum seekers face when entering Italy and Greece. For example, the EU creation of "hotspots," as the Agenda states, to "swiftly identify, register, and fingerprint migrants" and refugees arriving in "frontline Member States," and coordinate relocation or returns, have turned out to be chronically overcrowded centers offering not even minimum humanitarian standards.[3] There is also evidence that the EU-designated "anti-smuggling" military operation, Operation Sophia, which destroys migrants' boats at sea to prevent their re-use by smugglers, has led to further problems. Smugglers have turned to using single-use boats, usually cheaply constructed Zodiacs, which are far more dangerous and less seaworthy, for their passengers than the repurposed wooden fishing boats.

Not all of the measures of the European Agenda on Migration are problematic. But those more likely to improve the humanitarian situation, such as the intra-EU relocation scheme, which facilitates the relocation of migrants within EU member states while awaiting asylum adjudication, or the creation of safe and legal migration and resettlement pathways, have been de-prioritized by member states or conditioned on the achievement of a "zero irregular migration" objective, a goal which all recognize is impossible to achieve. The EU-Turkey Joint Statement, which followed the EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan, is a clear example of conditionality in EU migration management. The Statement was adopted in March 2016 and theoretically gave Turkey an aid package worth $6 billion and visa-free travel for Turkish citizens in Europe in exchange for Turkey's prevention of further "irregular migration" into Greece. Turkey was also expected to readmit those asylum seekers whose claims were found inadmissible when they arrived at the Greek islands.

What is the status of the EU-Turkey Joint Statement? Is it, as some suggest, near to breaking down? Has its implementation materially affected the treatment of those continuing to seek refuge on the Greek islands?

The EU-Turskey arrangement remains unchallenged and is perceived as a success by the EU, despite its negative humanitarian consequences. The announced objectives of the Statement were to save lives and put smugglers out of business by reducing incentives for "irregular migration" and offering a safe alternative for people to reach the EU. For every Syrian forcibly "returned" to Turkey, there would be one Syrian resettled in the EU, up to a maximum of 72,000 people. In addition to such a human swap being morally questionable, the deal failed to achieve its stated objective of offering safer options than the smugglers and the sea. Presumably, the only real objective was to "stem the flow" at all costs, and EU member states now present it as a success because the number of crossings has indeed significantly dropped since its adoption. The arrangement, however, remains fragile, as it is not addressing the root causes of these population movements and is based on a financial and political agreement with Turkey. With this strategy, the EU has put itself in a vulnerable position. Turkey has threatened to stop adhering to its part of the deal (keeping people in the country) many times, but so far that has not transpired. There are benefits on both sides, as Turkey has been able to seal its own southern borders to Syrian refugees without any condemnation from the EU.

Since the EU-Turkey Joint Statement was adopted, no one can argue that the number of people in need of a safe haven has decreased. They now have even fewer options. Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) has also documented the effects on the people trapped by the deal on the Greek islands. Living conditions in the "hotspots" are horrendous. In Moria, on Lesbos, there reside 7,500 people, 60 percent of whom are women and children, in a center with a capacity for 2,300. Some people have now been stuck on the islands for more than a year, waiting for a hypothetical forced return to Turkey. The health and lives of asylum seekers and migrants living on the

MOISES SAMAN/MAGNUM PHOTOS

THE EUROPEAN AGENDA ON MIGRATION

(As defined by the European Commission and adopted in May 2015)

EMERGENCY MEASURES

- The budget for FRONTEX Poseidon and Triton search and rescue (SAR) operations was provided an additional €26.8 million and the area of operation of Triton was extended to 138 nautical miles southward of Sicily's coasts.
- The new concept of hotspots was created to swiftly identify, register and fingerprint migrants and refugees arriving in frontline member states and coordinate relocation or returns.
- Common Security and Defense Policy (CDSP) operation EUNAVFORMED-Sophia was launched in the Mediterranean Sea to divert, capture and destroy smugglers' boats.

LONG-TERM STRATEGY

- Reducing the incentives for irregular migration.
- Saving lives and securing the external borders.
- Developing a strong asylum policy (including through the full implementation of the Common European Asylum System—CEAS).
- Defining a new policy on legal migration.

A boat from a search and rescue ship approaches the Open Arms, another search and rescue ship, for a mid-sea transfer of migrants in the central Mediterranean off the coast of Libya, December 2017.

Greek islands remain at risk. They are confined to the islands for months on end with little hope of getting the asylum they are seeking, with inadequate access to health and sanitation services, and at risk of fires, fights and violence.

Despite evidence of the damaging human and health consequences of this policy of containment, the EU has decided to put the survival of the EU-Turkey deal ahead of the safety and protection of asylum seekers, claiming that they cannot evacuate the islands, as Turkey has made clear that they will not accept people who have been moved to mainland sites. The main problem is that the EU-Turkey arrangement is based on a false assumption—the idea that you can easily distinguish between those who deserve international protection and those who do not in a matter of a few days and return the undeserving ones to a third country. The reality is very different. Over the past year, MSF's experience of providing assistance to people caught in the middle of this deal points to only one conclusion: that human beings, with personal stories, individual vulnerabilities and ostensibly-guaranteed rights, are being treated like commodities, warehoused and traded, with severe individual and collective suffering for those trying to move, as well as ethical and moral consequences for the EU vision of visa-free internal travel.

What is the humanitarian and human rights situation in Libyan detention centers? Has this situation changed in the past year, following recent agreements between civil authorities in Libya and the EU?

The situation of migrants and refugees trapped in Libya has been well-known for a long time, and has been documented by many different actors, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the United Nations and the media. Migrants in Libya are treated like commodities, bought and sold at market auctions and facing all types of abuse, from forced labor to torture, sexual violence and exploitation. What is striking is that these infamous detention centers were created under Gaddafi with the blessing of the EU whose member states pushed Libya to start detaining people. Today they claim to be shocked by what they see, which is quite hypocritical. In spite of the outcry, the situation remains scandalously poor.

International protection agencies, such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), still have only limited access to official detention facilities and no access at all to unofficial ones. The detention system has been described by Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, as "broken beyond repair." After a November 2017 CNN video demonstrated the existence of contemporary slave auctions,[4] those detained were evacuated to countries of origin and to neighboring Niger. A few people have been resettled in Europe—but this is a drop in the ocean and unlikely to continue in the long run. We hear more and more about smugglers turning to kidnapping and human trafficking, as their business model

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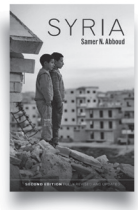

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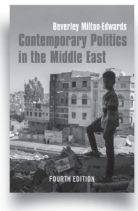

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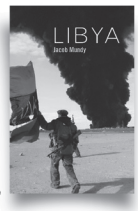

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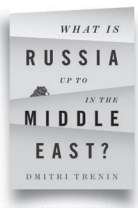

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is impacted by increased interceptions of migrant-carrying vessels by the EU-trained Libyan "Coast Guard," which is more of an informal seaborne militia than a national coast guard. More and more boats are now intercepted and brought back to Libya, meaning those who have managed to escape the atrocities they faced in Libya are being returned to detention centers.

Which NGOs are currently conducting Mediterranean rescue missions, now that these sorts of projects have faced a backlash among some parts of European society, such as the use of harassment vessels and efforts to prosecute those conducting sea rescues?

Proactive "search and rescue" (SAR) operations are indeed under attack. Following severe—if unfounded—accusations from Frontex at the end of 2017, the Italian authorities and judiciary have engaged in a dangerous blame game with humanitarian SAR actors, who are often labelled as "pull factors" for continued migration. Politicians and members of EU governments have even publicly accused NGOs of being human traffickers. Given the failure to reduce the number of people crossing the Mediterranean Sea, someone had to be at fault. NGOs have faced the blame that should have been put on EU governments for their failure to respond adequately to what is, first and foremost, a humanitarian crisis.

Italy, at the request of the European Commission, drew up a "Code of Conduct" in 2017 that search and rescue NGOs working in the Mediterranean were required to sign. The proposed conditions for sea rescue, which MSF refused to accept, led to increased tensions between Italy and the NGOs. The code of conduct mandates compliance with the EU's externalization agenda, most notably by facilitating interceptions at sea by the Libyan Coast Guard.[5] This step turned out to be the first in a process of criminalization of, and deterrence against, NGOs at sea. The second step was the seizure of the *Iuventa*, a boat chartered by the German NGO Jugend Rettet, suspected of "facilitating irregular migration." More recently, a second NGO boat, the *Open Arms*, was seized in Sicily, with its members also suspected of the same charge after refusing to hand people they had rescued over to the Libyan Coast Guard. As a result, there are only four NGOs left operating at sea, only two with sufficient on-board capacity to ferry people all the way to a safe port in Italy. ■

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Suffering from Hunger in a World of Plenty

Hilal Elver

The UN Special Rapporteur for the Right to Food surveys the catastrophic state of hunger and malnutrition and their man-made causes—war and conflict, climate change, massive displacement and global economic inequality. The paradox of this landscape of desperate need is that the world produces more than enough food to feed the planet, but the poor cannot afford it.

Despite decades of economic growth and development, the world continues to be haunted by the specter of mass starvation. Food insecurity and malnutrition remain a universal challenge for rich as well as poor countries. In conflict-torn regions, famine is the most severe form of food insecurity. Last year, the United Nations added South Sudan to northeast Nigeria, Somalia and Yemen as countries with catastrophic famine conditions, marking the first time since World War II that four countries were simultaneously under such threat. The number rose to five in 2018 when the Democratic Republic of Congo was added to the list, along with Burmese Rohingya in Bangladesh refugee camps. According to the 2018 *Global Report on Food Crises,* current food crises requiring urgent humanitarian action reached 124 million people in 51 countries, an increase of 40 percent since 2015.

While the nature of food crises differ greatly, they all stem from man-made causes, whether armed conflict, political turmoil or climate change-related extreme weather events. Hunger and starvation kill approximately nine million people every year, more than malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS combined. More than 1.5 million children are at imminent risk of death, and 5 to 6 million children die every year from malnutrition and related diseases. Child malnutrition, even for a short period, has lifelong consequences.

Hilal Elver *is the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food.*

Famine is only the tip of the hunger and malnutrition iceberg. Even in the richest countries, food insecurity is pervasive. For instance, in the United States, 49 million people do not have enough to eat and in Great Britain, after recent austerity measures were instituted, hungry people increased to approximately 5 million. Obesity, misconstrued as the opposite of hunger, recently has come to be recognized as a form of malnutrition and a universal epidemic. Approximately 1.9 billion people are obese, and this is increasing in all regions, including Africa; in the United States, 40 percent of adults are obese.

While the nature of food crises differ greatly, they all stem from man-made causes.

Ironically, while hunger and malnutrition increase globally, per capita food production has also increased significantly. The world makes enough to feed 10 billion people—more than one and a half times enough to feed everyone on the planet. But people making less than $2 a

Dry agricultural terraces, Yemen. KHALED ABDULLAH/REUTERS

day—most of whom are resource-poor farmers cultivating small, unviable plots of land and fisher folks living in highly vulnerable coastal zones—cannot afford to buy this food.

In a world of plenty, hunger and poverty are intertwined. In poor countries, 60 to 80 percent of family budgets go to food, as opposed to 10 to 15 percent in richer countries. The poor suffer not only a lack of money but also higher food costs. Half of the world's extreme poor live in rural areas of Sub-Saharan Africa, mostly employed in the agricultural sector, and over half are under 18 years of age. Further, over 75 percent of the world's poorest depend on natural resources to sustain their livelihoods, and most of them are subsistence farmers, making them especially vulnerable to climate change-related natural disasters. They are typically more exposed to natural hazards, lose a greater portion of their wealth and are unable to draw on support from family, friends, financial systems or even their governments. As a result, natural disasters may exacerbate gender-based violence, including sexual violence and the risk from diseases.

The direct and indirect impacts of extreme weather events such as floods, droughts, desertification, hurricanes, wildfires, tsunamis and earthquakes contribute to hunger and malnutrition. Almost 80 percent of weather-related disasters are associated with climate change. The frequency and intensity of such disasters has almost doubled in the past decade, now averaging 335 events annually.

Hunger and War

Conflict, a major cause of food emergency, often leads to famine. Rarely, however, does any one factor cause famine; instead, famine results from the convergence of multiple circumstances and reflects the influence of political decision-making. Contrary to popular belief, it is not casualties resulting directly from combat but rather hunger and disease that are the greatest cause of death in

conflict zones, and the proportion of undernourishment in areas of protracted crisis is almost three times as high as in other poor countries where hunger and malnutrition are pervasive. Moreover, the effects of climate change, which limit supplies and access to food, can lead to armed conflicts as people fight for scarce resources in devastated environments.

A 2017 World Food Programme (WFP) study found that countries with the highest level of food insecurity, often a consequence of armed conflict, had the highest outward migration of refugees. Globally, displacement levels are at the highest since record-keeping began. Currently 65.6 million people have been forced from their homes, including 22.5 million refugees. Some 28,300 people are forced to flee every day because of conflict or persecution. Those fleeing conflict must often leave behind their assets, and host communities may also experience strains on their food supplies, especially if they are already facing economic instability. In situations of massive displacement, humanitarian agencies are often unable to fully meet food demand, leaving displaced communities in dire circumstances.

Conflicts hamper the human right to food in various ways. Food shortages can undermine resilience to absorb or recover from other shocks, such as extreme weather events or new forms of political unrest, which may lead to a spiral of conflict and severe hunger. Farmers in conflict zones may be unable to work owing to restrictions on their movement, or they might be forcibly recruited into armed forces or militias. Crops are often plundered, serious damage is inflicted on farming and fishing infrastructure and, as a result, vital food supplies are destroyed. Pastoralists and herders are particularly vulnerable to losses of livelihood in conflicts, being either forced to abandon their livestock, or if maintaining them, facing challenges of gaining access to food and water for their animals.

Conflict also affects household incomes and purchasing power. Mass unemployment and the breakdown of social services limit people's ability to gain access to food, while currency devaluation, price inflation, market disruptions and reliance on costly food imports owing to shortages may render basic food items prohibitively expensive. Extreme food insecurity forces people to turn to negative coping mechanisms, including rationing or skipping meals, begging, early marriage, child labor and transactional sex in exchange for food. Access to information on the availability and accessibility of food assistance is also limited, putting vulnerable groups at increased risk of exploitation and abuse.

Famine as a Crime against Humanity

In many contexts, parties to armed conflict deliberately undermine the food security of civilians by intentionally targeting markets and ports or looting or besieging communities with the aim of causing hardship and starvation. Although starvation and famine historically have been used as tactics of warfare, contemporary international law experts contend that it is criminal to cause starvation. Nonetheless, parties to current conflicts in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Iraq, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen deprive civilians of access to food. Frequently, states and their adversaries use food as a weapon against opposing groups by destroying or poisoning crops, blocking relief supplies and displacing people from their homes with the aim of depriving them of their livelihoods. In other cases, vulnerable groups, such as women, children, the elderly and sick, are subject to neglect or left to starve. Such actions not only constitute violations of the right to food, but also may constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide.

Famine becomes a crime under international law if there is sufficient evidence of an intentional or reckless effort to block certain groups from access to food. The crime of famine could result from acts of omission, but also from indirect action such as blocking humanitarian assistance, failing to uphold the relevant laws of war or failing to provide international relief systems with the necessary resources in the context of famine conditions. Yet there has never been a criminal case against people accused of using starvation as a war tactic.

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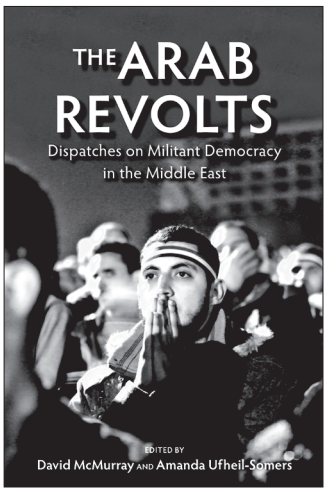

The Arab Revolts

Dispatches on Militant Democracy in the Middle East

Edited by
David McMurray
and
Amanda Ufheil-Somers

Written for a broad audience of students, policymakers, media analysts, and general readers, *The Arab Revolts* reveals the underlying causes for the Arab Spring by extending analysis back over the last two decades to investigate some of the most important historical forces leading up to the recent insurrections.

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Humanitarian Emergency System

In recent decades, the international humanitarian response system has been essential in lowering death tolls and reducing the negative impacts of conflict and weather-related causes of food insecurity. Emergency aid plays a critical role in filling gaps in situations where states are unable or unwilling to meet the basic needs of their populations. However, the humanitarian assistance response often faces serious political, security and infrastructure-related impediments that obstruct effective delivery of food assistance. Countries suffering from long-standing conflict tend to be particularly fragile and have poor governance and weak infrastructure, which hampers the effective coordination and delivery of food assistance. Interference by political forces and cumbersome negotiations can also slow down the humanitarian response.

There are no available funds for long-term agricultural investment and rural development that could raise food security and build resilience.

Humanitarian assistance may also be seriously hindered by fighting. For example, in April 2017, active hostilities in South Sudan forced 100 aid workers from an assortment of relief and UN agencies to be relocated, and this stopped the delivery of assistance to 180,000 people. In northeast Nigeria, attacks by Boko Haram and military operations against the group continue to limit humanitarian access to an estimated 700,000 people who remain extremely hard to reach. Access is further restricted by the presence of mines and improvised explosive devices. An alarming number of explosions were reported in 2017, killing 28 aid workers.

As part of the larger panoply of humanitarian institutions—UN agencies, charitable organizations like Save the Childrens and national and regional organizations—food aid intrinsically suffers from more general shortcomings that plague the system. Rather than being carefully coordinated and deliberately engineered, the humanitarian structure evolved from fragmentary endeavors and is composed of a multitude of autonomous entities with separate governance and accountability structures. Humanitarian assistance also suffers a serious financial shortfall. Donor countries promised to spend 0.7 percent of their gross national income on aid. However, most of them have failed to reach their agreed obligations. The WFP estimates that food aid expenditures more than doubled between 2009 and 2016, from $2.2 billion to $5.3 billion. Despite this increase, international food assistance still falls about $3 billion short. Almost all foreign food aid goes to short-term relief operations just to keep people alive. Therefore, there are no available funds for long-term agricultural investment and rural development that could raise food security and build resilience in regions vulnerable to climate change and conflict crises.

This disparate humanitarian system, which lacks leadership and coordination, is susceptible to inefficiencies, poor communication, bureaucratic restrictions, corruption and costly duplications that prevent rapid, flexible and effective responses to changing needs. Poorly designed, charity-based food aid can do more harm than good, can have negative effects on small farmers in recipient countries by exerting downward pressures on domestic food prices and can adversely affect trade, production incentives and labor markets. In some cases, food aid practices might even violate the right to food, if the aid were distributed unfairly or did not prioritize the most vulnerable. Food aid should serve the best interests of a recipient country's food and agricultural policy, provide long-term livelihood for people and uphold environmental best practices rather than consist of only emergency responses.

Humanitarian Future

The world is experiencing unprecedented levels of famine, mass starvation and hunger, massive displacements, devastating conflicts and a globally warming environment that is having devastating consequences. If world politics continues on its current course, there will be no possibility to realize the ambitious UN Sustainable Development Goals to eradicate hunger and poverty by 2030. The challenges of thinking outside the business-as-usual box are formidable, given the disturbing rise in chauvinistic politics, state racism and unfettered, predatory global capitalism.

An effective humanitarianism demands more than an uncoordinated conglomeration of (sometimes) good intentions, more than short-term emergency responses, more than "just" saving lives. The test is whether it is possible to develop a humane mindset that can give rise to compassionate politics that are responsive to global challenges and forms of collective action capable of tackling the root causes of crises. The health and well-being of all people must be at the center of this political imagination. Overcoming the paradox of massive hunger in a world of plenty is one example of a change that seems, still, imaginable. ■

Hospital beds in the Médecins Sans Frontières hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan, about six months after a US airstrike killed dozens of patients and staff.

The Politics of Health in Counterterrorism Operations

Jonathan Whittall

In the early morning hours of October 3, 2015, a helicopter gunship operated by US special forces circled the Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) trauma center in Kunduz, Afghanistan. It fired precise and repeated rounds on the main hospital building, quickly reducing it to rubble. Patients and staff who survived the airstrikes were shot while fleeing the burning building. By the end of the assault, 42 people had died, including 24 patients, 14 staff and four caretakers. The week prior to the attack on the hospital, the Taliban had taken control of the Afghan city of Kunduz. It was the first time the Taliban had gained control of a provincial capital since its fall from power in 2001 following the US-led invasion of Afghanistan. The MSF hospital in Kunduz was the only fully operational humanitarian project with international staff in a Taliban-controlled area.

The bombing of the hospital demonstrates how medical facilities are incorporated into contemporary armed conflicts. Although hospitals and clinics have always been targeted in times of war, there is something distinctive about the way the provision of health care interacts with military objectives and realities in contemporary counterterrorism wars. In these situations, groups deemed to be terrorists, as well as the civilians in their proximity, are deprived—often deliberately—of the protections typically accorded to hospitals, health care providers and the sick and injured.

In the conflict zones of Afghanistan, where multiple fronts shift concurrently, the lines between who is, or is not, a legitimate recipient of aid and protection are not just blurred but erased. As in other counterterrorism wars, these life or death issues are exacerbated by shifting power and territorial control between a growing insurgency, shrinking coalition ground forces and an escalating use of special forces and air operations. An additional element of confusion, deliberately created to allow room for maneuver, is the interchangeable roles and fluid rules of engagement for different international armed forces. More broadly, the parameters of humanitarian aid are shaped by the state and its international backers' imperative that aid provision should only serve a state-building agenda, while limiting any benefits to the enemy.

In an environment such as Afghanistan, medical treatment in a government-controlled city—where the majority of wounded combatants are likely to be government soldiers—is accepted. But the moment an armed opposition begins operating in the area, any wounded patient who enters the hospital risks

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being labeled as a terrorist or criminal who can be subjected to domestic legislation, often enforced by Afghan special forces. The hospital is therefore forced to act as an extension of the state, and in the case of Afghanistan, an extension of US military interests, serving only those patients and ends that benefit the government. Hospitals are thus accepted or rejected based on their adherence to the state-building functions of health care provision. Special forces, which operate according to secret rules, perceive aid organizations primarily through the lens of limiting the immediate benefits to the enemy. Consequently, independent and impartial humanitarian aid is contested and those who try to implement it risk being attacked.

The Everywhere Enemy

The conflict in Afghanistan cannot be separated from the broader trends of the US-led "war on terror." Derek Gregory argues that the US-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq marked the beginning of the "everywhere war," which is both a "conceptual and material project."[1] This project has three elements. First, "war has become the pervasive matrix within which social life is constituted." Second, US military doctrine has shifted from war having a battlefield to war as an all-encompassing battlespace with "no front or back and where everything becomes the site of permanent war." And third, war is played out in the "borderlands where the United States and its allies now conduct their military operations."[2]

The concept of everywhere war posits that territorial control has become less important, if not irrelevant, to military strategizing. In this scenario, opponents are "extra-territorial," elusive and constantly on the move. Gen. Joseph Votel, in a coauthored article published prior to his confirmation as commander of US Central Command (CENTCOM), suggested that, in the future, warfare will occur within a grey zone that is heavily reliant on highly mobile special forces that work alongside "intense political, economic, informational, and military competition more fervent in nature than normal steady-state diplomacy."[3] In contemporary military operations, this grey zone warfare is often defined by a reliance on local partners who make up the bulk of fighting forces. For the United States and other countries engaged in counterterrorism conflicts, there is a growing unwillingness to deploy their own military forces on the ground. Instead, they rely predominantly on aerial operations such as drone strikes or close air support to small special forces units and their ground force allies.

The beginning phases of the war in Afghanistan were characterized by a highly mobile and fluid insurgency against a large number of NATO and US "boots on the ground." The current phase of the war in Afghanistan, however, is characterized by highly mobile special forces fighting against an insurgency that, at the time of the Kunduz hospital bombing, was gaining more territory in a context of foreign ground troop withdrawals. In response to the growing Taliban threat, but in keeping with US domestic interests to withdraw troops from Afghanistan, the United States redefined the international and Afghan national forces' operational role in 2015 to provide an ongoing combat role for special forces under the broad umbrella of the non-combat NATO mission.

Among the international forces in Afghanistan, the distinction between the different fighting units is purposefully blurred. The overall NATO mission is to train, support and advise their Afghan counterparts. As such, its role is largely limited to policy rather than direct fighting. US special forces, however, serve in Afghanistan under Operation Freedom's Sentinel (OFS), which is primarily mandated to target al-Qaeda and its affiliates. The United States also makes use of the CIA and other US intelligence services to carry out attacks.[4] These clandestine forces carry out drone strikes, night raids and other targeted attacks against those on the US "kill list." While these operational forces and missions are distinct in theory, they are closely linked and sometimes interchangeable. A pilot in an AC-130 gunship might be operating under Operation Freedom's Sentinel one day and with the CIA the next. In practice, this means that various US and other international forces operate under different rules of engagement with different targeting protocols. The blurred command structures are no clearer on the Afghan side. The Afghan state's military effort is carried out primarily by Afghan special forces. These troops are the best trained, best equipped and best able to move from one hot spot to another. They are by all accounts overworked, overstretched and battle fatigued. Supporting this official fighting force is a growing network of government-affiliated militia, defense units and local police.

Within these environments, proclaiming "self-defense" has become an ever expanding pretext to justify offensive military operations. Indeed, US special forces invoked self-defense extremely broadly during their attack on the MSF hospital in Kunduz. According to *The New York Times*:

> The fact that the Special Forces were surrounded by Taliban also meant that the liberal use of American air power in Kunduz could be justified as self-defense. The military went further by applying what it called Persons with Designated Special Status to the Afghan commandos in Kunduz, a designation that allows American forces to consider temporarily defending certain partnered Afghan troops as part of their own self-defense—essentially, self-defense of someone else.[5]

Whereas the beginning of the war in Afghanistan marked the start of the US-led global "war on terror" and fits within Gregory's definition of the everywhere war, there have been significant shifts over the last decade. Today, the war fought in Afghanistan relies more heavily on the counterterrorism operations of special forces. Moreover, the war on terror model has been adopted by many other states that are fighting their own self-declared counterterrorism wars. The "with us or against us" approach has resulted in entire communities being designated part of a criminalized and hostile enemy. This has been seen in Bahrain, Egypt, Syria and elsewhere where those in opposition to the state are castigated as

JOSH SMITH/REUTERS

terrorists, and by extension their health care providers are seen as providing unacceptable support to the enemy.

In the context of contemporary counterterrorism operations, the everywhere war has led to an "everywhere enemy." Shifting focus away from analyzing the evolution of how wars are fought to how the enemy is constructed reveals how the expanded definition of the terrorist enemy is used to justify a certain conduct of war that brings both patients and health workers under fire. Health care delivered on the frontlines of these battles can no longer be considered external to this changing military environment, but rather becomes part of the battlespace when treatment is provided to the everywhere enemy.

Health Care and the Everywhere Enemy

The original Afghanistan/Pakistan strategy, developed in 2009 by President Barack Obama's administration, had two core features.[6] One was the attempt to divide Taliban actors into "good" and "bad" and to engage the good elements in brokering a deal to end the conflict.[7] The other feature was the increasing importance of soft power as a core element of the US intervention. Characteristic of this approach was the 2009 "civilian surge" in Afghanistan, which saw a wave of US civilian experts mandated to increase government legitimacy through state-building activities. At the same time, large sums of money flowed into Pakistan in the form of development aid.[8] These moves were in line with NATO's "comprehensive approach," which emphasized soft power and included the cooptation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs),[9] setting the stage for full integration of the humanitarian system into the state-building and military stabilization project in Afghanistan. Initially, as the NATO troop presence expanded into more remote parts of the country, NGO activities were carried out alongside the provincial reconstruction teams and the coalition military. The military enacted the incorporation of health into military stabilization by directly carrying out medical activities themselves. Later, they focused on more indirect forms of building state legitimacy—such as through support to the Ministry of Health—as a way to undermine support for the opposition.

Today, the vast majority of the aid system in Afghanistan has been incorporated into the state-building effort. The health system is subcontracted to NGOs by the state. The World Bank, USAID and the European Union provide resources to a trust fund that the Ministry of Health administers. NGOs therefore receive direct funding from one of the parties to the conflict for the delivery of health services. The limits on what are considered acceptable forms of humanitarian assistance are defined by this relationship to the state. Compliance is enforced through the criminalization of those who step beyond those limits.

The US and Afghan governments' selective framing of parts of the conflict as a war to combat terrorism has allowed for more leniency when defining standards for acceptable targets and is far more restrictive when delineating legitimate humanitarian action. Domestic laws and minimalist interpretations of the Geneva Conventions are prioritized under a national security framework where international military forces are operating at the invitation of the state in what is classified as a non-international armed conflict. This status allows military operations to be conducted within hospitals for the purposes of law enforcement, thereby undermining the neutrality of medical facilities in the midst of an armed battle. If one side of the conflict can expect their fighters to be arrested by the other side within the grounds of a hospital, the very principle of neutral and impartial medical assistance—enshrined within international humanitarian law—is made meaningless. By respecting the state's sovereign right to conduct law enforcement operations that target criminals, health providers are forced to take sides by accepting the legitimacy of a contested state and the criminality of its opposition. In the case of Syria, for example, the United States would never adopt this approach because it would require accepting the legitimacy of the Syrian state. Agreeing to this approach means that medical providers on a frontline—such as MSF—would only be able to operate within the territorially-controlled parts of those states seen as legitimate by the dominant international politics of the day.

The "war on terror" has created a legal and moral framework for justifying attacks on hospitals. This justification is bolstered by a rhetoric of warfare that claims greater precision in the use of advanced military technology. The loss of civilian life is explained away not as a problem of the conduct of warfare but rather a problem of where terrorists choose to hide themselves or a problem of human and technical errors during the fog of war.

Emerging Norms

While the United States may use the rhetoric of the "war on terror" less these days, its "with us or against us" logic has created a legal grey zone which is gaining ground in the Middle East and elsewhere. Many states, such as Syria, violate humanitarian law with little regard for the consequences, largely because they do not seek political validation from their allies or opponents. Other states, such as the United States or Israel, go to painstaking lengths to justify their actions within the bounds of an acceptable legal framework, constantly seeking the moral high-ground in the court of public opinion. The act of justifying creates greater space for those who would operate with disregard for the law. When the most powerful get away with something, it reduces the political costs of the same action carried out by weaker states.

The Kunduz hospital bombing and its aftermath demonstrate that a lack of accountability is becoming a norm. In this case, US unaccountability was justified by deploying a "mistake" narrative rooted in a "with us or against us" approach to warfare that turns entire communities into acceptable targets before a strike, and into mistaken targets when it is determined, afterwards, that they were in fact not part of hostilities. This shift away from accountability is facilitated by the emerging military doctrine, explored by Neve Gordon and Nicola Perugini, which exempts

the military from restrictions of precaution and proportionality when a terrorist enemy takes "human shields" in locations such as schools and hospitals.[10] This emerging norm was pioneered by the Israeli military in their wars in Gaza. As Lisa Hajjar points out, "This rhetoric of 'innocent civilians' amidst 'legitimate targets' foreshadowed Israel's reframing of 'enemy civilians' as de facto human shields used by groups against whom Israel was waging war, in an effort to shift blame for the civilian casualties caused by Israeli strikes onto the organizations being targeted."[11]

The dangers of this approach for medical facilities become even more stark when one considers the evolution from fighting wars with ground forces to a greater reliance on special forces or remote-controlled drones. For humanitarian workers, there is little room in such an environment to create a space that is not considered part of the enemy terrain if medical facilities are established or functional in areas controlled by an enemy designated as terrorist or criminal.

Beyond Kunduz

Attacks such as the one on the Kunduz hospital can happen in any place where the state determines the acceptable limits of humanitarian assistance and where everyone in the grey zone is a potential enemy. In Syria, the provision of health care by non-state actors—including state-opposing armed groups and political structures (or "shadow governments") and NGOs that are funded primarily by states supporting the opposition—represents for the Syrian government a challenge to the central prerogative of the state: the delivery of social services. This prerogative is deeply rooted in the ideology and practice of the post-colonial Syrian state.[12] For this reason, the only humanitarian organizations that have been able to work there without risk of deliberate attack by state forces and their allies are those that operate under the full control of the Syrian government or through its auxiliary, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent Society. The tactic of besieging opposition areas and attacking their populations demonstrates how the battle for the provision or denial of health services is at the center of the Syrian government's struggle to maintain and extend its control.

What is evident in both Afghanistan and Syria is that attacks on health care facilities are defined by the relationship between the provision of care and the interests of the state, and the extent to which the destruction of the infrastructure of life and health can be justified as necessary and legitimate in the battle against terrorists. The assertion of a sovereign prerogative to battle one's own terrorists is being actively supported by members of the UN Security Council, four out of five of which have been involved in attacks on MSF-run or supported health facilities over the past few years. This self-serving position can be seen in Security Council resolutions—such as the one calling for a ceasefire in Syria's Eastern Ghouta—that contain the clause that the ceasefire does not apply to attacks on terrorist groups. These resolutions therefore contain loopholes so big that you can flatten an entire city through them.

The mutual complicity of the foreign backers of the warring parties must be seen for what it is: the most powerful have an interest in preserving the space to battle whomever they consider terrorists. From Eastern Aleppo to Mosul, Raqqa and now Eastern Ghouta, the various armies and their backers want to keep the trump card of fighting terrorism as the ultimate justification for any atrocities committed against trapped populations. The question for health care providers is whether the notion of an impartial hospital can fit within an environment where the "conventional ties between war and geography have come undone."[13] Instead of conflicts being delineated by territorial control, there is now a grey zone within which hospitals can come under attack for treating patients from a designated enemy that can incorporate entire communities. The "war on terror" narrative is used to justify the elimination of a population's means of survival, with the ultimate goal of reasserting the monopoly of the state over the provision of social services as a source of legitimacy. The role of NGOs is entrenched in the state building logic. Therefore, when they operate impartially, they are considered a hostile part of the battlespace.

The full incorporation of the hospital into the battlespace occurs not only through the direct targeting and destruction of medical facilities but also through raids on hospitals to arrest patients or through the criminalization of health care provision itself.[14] The "war on terror" has sought to create a new framework of justification for the inclusion of the hospital as a legitimate battlefield target. This is facilitated by the vague status given to combatants, the applicability of domestic law enforcement within the hospital, the evolution of the military doctrine of legitimate targeting of human shields and the kill/capture approach of special forces going after high value targets, often under the guise of self-defense. These trends have set new limits on what are considered to be acceptable forms of humanitarian assistance. In the context of the everywhere war, the hospital is now part of the battlespace, and, in the context of the everywhere enemy, everyone is a potential target. ■

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The Psycho-Politics of Wellbeing
An Interview with Orkideh Behrouzan

Iranians have repurposed, reconfigured and transliterated the psychiatric concepts of depression and trauma as depreshen *and* toroma*. In this wide-ranging interview, Orkideh Behrouzan speaks with Sheila Carapico about the politics of Iranian mental health care policy, public discussion of the effects of 40 years of revolution and war and the ways in which a younger generation is forming identities through* depreshen*-talk. Behrouzan is a physician, medical anthropologist, scholar of science and technology and the author of* Prozak Diaries: Psychiatry and Generational Memory in Iran*. She teaches in the anthropology department at SOAS, University of London.*

Your book, Prozak Diaries: Psychiatry and Generational Memory in Iran (Stanford University Press, 2016), analyzes psychological discourses in the post-1980s Islamic Republic. What have you learned from your research?

Prozak Diaries is about three interrelated topics: one, the medicalization of life in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution (1978–1979) and the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988); two, the pedagogical history of psychiatry in Iran and a cultural analysis of psychiatry in terms of its dominant beliefs and mindsets; and three, memory, youth culture and generational identities. I focus particularly on the cultural and emotional formation of self-proclaimed mini-generations (such as the *nasl-e sukhteh*, or the burnt/skipped generation, and the *daheh-ye shasti-ha*, or the children of the 1980s) who define their identities, both online and offline, in relation to the psychological and cultural legacies of the 1980s.

Initially, I was curious to understand a cultural and psychological shift in post-war 1990s Iran. At that time, alarming statistics of suicide and medication with anti-depressants were circulating in the media inside and outside of Iran, and a Persianized psychiatric vernacular was becoming commonplace in ordinary talk with the use of terms such as *depreshen* and *toroma* (from the English words depression and trauma). This normalization of medication (especially among youth) and psychiatric talk was unprecedented for a society where it is common to articulate feelings in extremely concealed, private, poetic or religious terms and where melancholic inclinations are still valorized in Persian mysticism, Sufi traditions and the Shi'i ethos. Meanwhile, after the Iran-Iraq War, previously shunned psychiatrists and psychologists were given a platform to educate the public about mental health. By the early 2000s, psychiatric discussions had become public and explicit.

Based on media reports of increasing medication and self-identification with *depreshen* among youth, it is tempting to assume an epidemic of clinical depression, as if *depreshen* was a direct translation for clinical depression. But my research showed that *depreshen* could refer to a range of states, including individual or collective grief, dysphoria, anxiety, melancholy, situational depression, clinical depression and/or what psychologists call "learned helplessness." I investigated the lived experience and meaning of these clinical diagnostics in people's lives in order to understand the complexity of their choices. Our choices—of languages, concepts, quantitative standards, and the different types of knowledge and diagnostic criteria we draw upon—are never value-neutral. We choose from what is culturally and historically legitimate and available to us. My ethnography shows that *depreshen*-talk is indeed rooted in Iran's over 70-year history of modern (individual-focused) psychiatry, post-war mental health care policies and the 1990s state-promoted educational campaigns in the media.

But unlike clinical depression, *depreshen* is also situated in the social, political and economic anomie and double binds of ordinary life, uncertainties about the future, as well as the generationally specific experiences of the 1979 revolution, the 1980–83 Cultural Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War. The language of *depreshen*, and speaking about life in clinical terms in general, made it possible to publicly speak the unspeakable and to talk about the cultural and psychological experiences and losses of the 1980s without crossing the red lines of ideological propaganda or censorship. Understanding *depreshen*, therefore, requires understanding the dynamics of today's generational cultures in relation to this particular decade. In the narratives of illness that I collected, young people explained their so-called *depreshen* by persistently pluralizing and historicizing it in generational terms. For example, they

would say "we are the children of the 1980s," children of the war, hence *daheh-ye shasti-ha.* Consequently, a book that was meant to be about mental health became a book about generational memories of the so-called burnt generation and the 1980s generation.

Since the early 2000s, compelling accounts of the paradoxes and anomies of the 1980s have circulated among Iranians, creating new modes of self-recognition, a new sense of voice and a new identity politics for young Iranians. After two decades of silence, there were now spaces (such as the blogosphere, which I explore in detail in the book) and vocabulary (terms such as *toroma* or *depreshen* that are borrowed from psychiatric lingo but are hardly direct translations) that made memories of the 1980s audible outside the shadow of official and institutional accounts. In doing so, they demarcated several new generational identities and labels, such as *daheh-ye shasti-ha.*

These generations are not necessarily defined through temporal junctures, but through their incommensurable aesthetics of memory that are both psychologically and politically informed. They are psychologically informed by the contradictory emotions that childhood memories of the 1980s harbor and evoke (fear, anxiety, double binds, nostalgia, dissociation, compulsive repetitions). And they are politically informed, in terms of having lived through the 1980s ideological propaganda, political oppression and genuine patriotism. As such, these generational sensibilities are often articulated, whether nostalgically or sarcastically, via the cultural symbols of the 1980s: its objects (often reminders of austerity and sanctions such as ration coupons or iconic domestic brands such as the *Darougar* shampoo), sounds (martial anthems or the sound of the siren during city bombardments) and images (children's television programs and their characters). I dedicate a significant portion of the book to a sensory reading of these material cultures to understand the compulsive returns of their memories and the socio-political meaning of such remembering both online and offline. The virtual space was both a key ethnographic site and object. I engage with it as an affective space (as opposed to a politicized landscape, as depicted in most analyses) and as a site for the reconstruction of generational memories, identity politics and new forms of sociality and kinship.

In sum, the book emphasizes the importance of thinking about the broader trajectories of illness as culturally and politically situated experiences. It also creates a conversation among anthropology, psychiatry, psychoanalysis, science and technology studies (STS) and cultural analysis. It complicates the binaries of health and illness, tradition and modernity, individual and collective, biological and psychological, and social and cultural. Scholars often tend to take for granted certain privileged conceptual frameworks (for example, medicalization in anthropology or trauma in psychology) or forms of knowledge and diagnostic categories (such as depression in Western psychiatry). My hope for this interdisciplinary conversation is to challenge the assumptions of each discipline and explore what they can offer one another.

What is medicalization?

Medicalization is a term that anthropologists use to describe situations where social, behavioral, emotional or cultural phenomena come to be defined in medical terms, turning them into a medical problem and therefore subject to medical intervention. Consider, for example, childbirth or death. In Western biomedicine, they are increasingly seen as only biological processes located in the individual body (as opposed to being understood in their sociocultural contexts).

Medicalization is a double-edged sword. It can be humanizing and therapeutically effective—think addiction, alcoholism or HIV/AIDS. On the other hand, medicalization can be de-socializing, de-politicizing and abstracting—think attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), depression or sexuality. It can mask the sociopolitical context, trajectory or meaning of the condition, reducing it to clinical and biological artifacts and thus defining normalcy in biomedical terms and creating the impression that biomedicine is the only proper response to the problem. The history of psychiatry is fraught with instances of the latter: psychiatry has often been critiqued as a domain of power struggles, silencing and the diminishing of the patient's agency, as well as for its troubled relationship to the pharmaceutical industry, biological reductionism, colonialism and imperialism. Also, anthropology has had a long fascination with psychiatry and top-down medicalization: analyzing, for example, how Western psychiatry acts as a hegemonic system that takes away the agency of patients, reduces their struggles to neurochemical changes and masks the broader socio-political contexts of illness.

Of course, the story of *depreshen* in Iran is a story of medicalization, which raises the question of when, how, why and by whom a psychiatric discourse was legitimized and publicized among laypeople as a way of understanding emotions and as a language of talking about life. I analyzed the 1990s Iranian public campaigns around mental health from a top-down perspective, examining the way this medical way of understanding emotions was institutionalized and formalized in the domains of policy, training, state-run media and educational campaigns. I look at how this discourse obscured the socio-political contexts of post-war anomie and post-revolutionary disillusionment.

A top-down account, however, does not sufficiently explain why this discourse also found an eager audience among people whose wartime concerns were with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety and panic attacks and were later replaced with post-war depression and dysphoria. Society was genuinely struggling and manifesting symptoms of mental illness, a condition to which the state tried to respond in technical and rational ways. But what fascinated me was how young people were actively internalizing and mobilizing this psychiatric mindset as a mode of thinking and talking and creating a bottom-up process of medicalization. In the late 2000s, many young people were self-identifying with *depreshen* and the use

of antidepressants was skyrocketing. A purely clinical reading of alarming statistics fails to explain this self-medicalization and the cultural and political import of what *depreshen* or *toroma* meant in this particular socio-political context and its specific psychological grammar. So, in order to understand the cultural meaning of these terms, I analyzed young people's own explanatory models and the meanings that they assigned to their narratives of illness. This is where I discovered the significance of their historical and political experiences and their generational memories, identities and desires.

My interlocutors were not always passive, pill-popping followers of biomedical norms. Pills did not always diminish their agency nor did diagnoses always silence them. Rather, they constructed their *depreshen* in relation to cultural discourses and historical memory. Their psychiatric subjectivity (the term I use to describe the ways in which they internalize and enact a psychiatric mode of thought) was extremely performative, despite and sometimes hand-in-hand with scepticism. Particularly when one's pain is unacknowledged and placed outside of legitimate cultural and institutional discourses, people may seek recognition and relief in the promises of biomedicine. It is important to acknowledge these very real desires for recognition and genuine attempts at dealing with psychological pain.

These ambivalences and desires suggest that medicalization could be a cultural and political resource. In the highly ideological and scrutinized public domain of post-war Iran, the sanitized, de-politicized and increasingly legitimized language of psychiatry and neuroscience provided many young Iranians with a sanctioned vocabulary for articulating life itself. This mode of speech made possible an otherwise silenced public discourse about the war and allowed an articulation of the unspeakable experiences of the present, anxieties about the future or memories of the 1980s. It was a way of raising questions about their generation's wellbeing and sense of self. Medicalization also created new forms of sociality, online and offline, making this story different from most anthropological analyses of medicalization and psychiatry. What is outstanding in their narratives is the simultaneous historicization (locating their present malaise in childhood experiences of the war, for instance) and medicalization (using biomedical diagnostics as identifiers) of what individuals perceive as *depreshen*.

Depreshen, in other words, provides a language to articulate a past filled with ruptures that could have been overlooked in the process of clinical diagnosis. I call these young narrators aspiring "historians and diagnosticians." Their urge to bear witness to a past they feel has been unacknowledged has both a psychological and a political function. In this sense, my work required going beyond conventional anthropological critiques of Western and universal diagnostic criteria. At the same time, it necessitated recognizing the multiplicity of clinical, psychiatric and psychoanalytical approaches and appreciating the complexities and nuances of clinical practice. Finally, it demanded analyzing generational memory as well as addressing the question of representation in order to critique dominant individual-centered "trauma theories" in psychoanalysis. The findings, I hope, can be relevant beyond Iran and contribute to a conceptual framework of medicalization that leaves analytical room for the desires of the medicalized individual, especially in post-war contexts.

The subject of trauma is now popular in Middle East studies, given the violence wracking the region. You lead a project called "Beyond 'Trauma': Emergent Agendas for Understanding Mental Health in the Middle East." Tell us about this project.

Prozak Diaries shows why it is important to rethink the psycho-politics of wellbeing in the Middle East. It reveals the reductive quality of clinical conceptual frameworks that are used for understanding mental health in the region. The result is that a complex set of lived experiences has been equated to the singular and universal concept of "trauma" without contextualizing and questioning the concept's historical trajectory in the West. Ignoring these issues has political and clinical implications. Even when the usage of "trauma" is critiqued, most accounts fall short of providing alternative frameworks.

In the book, when analyzing the Persian terms *toroma* or *toroma'tik*, I intentionally don't use the term trauma, in part in order to eschew disciplinary connotations that burden the term and the assumption of its universality. Living through the 1980s in Iran, for example, is not easily mapped or translated onto the term trauma. I use the word *rupture* instead, which allows Persian terminologies to emerge (as opposed to being stifled) and acknowledges the complexity, multiplicity and diffusion of historical conditions and their afterlife across generations. Trauma is universal, individual and singular. Rupture is particular, shared and fluid. It takes our focus away from the external event and toward the consequent processes of sharing, remembering and working through memory wounds that are overlooked by paradigms of institutional memory or clinical classifications.

I launched this "Beyond 'Trauma'" project as I was finishing *Prozak Diaries*. The idea of it took shape over the years amid moments that highlighted the urgency of the topic. In 2013, for instance, I was interviewed as part of an expert panel on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq. I went in expecting a critical engagement, but I clearly had not received the memo. I was shocked to hear prominent scholars celebrate the "success" of the "operation," abstracting ruptured life-experiences to some justifiable collateral damage and what they considered normal statistics of PTSD. Of course, I was censored in the final production (though my face was still there as the only woman interviewed) and later, some senior male scholars advised me not to be emotional about the experience. This extreme experience might be rare and easy to dismiss, but it captured some of the consequential gaps in public and health care policy: namely, the opacity of the terms Middle East and

mental health, the medicalization and de-politicization of conditions that are profoundly political and require political solutions more than clinical intervention, the scarcity of interdisciplinary dialogue due to unfortunate hierarchies of expertise and finally the conceptual limitations of psychiatric concepts and diagnoses such as trauma or PTSD. Despite their limitations, particular conceptual paradigms, both in social sciences and in psy-sciences, remain institutionally and structurally central to mental health care research, practice and policy-making.

Debates about mental health in the Middle East are also deeply intertwined with a crisis of representation. In these debates, the region is often misunderstood and misrepresented, if not altogether equated with "conflict" or "trauma." Most of these debates underplay the diverse ways in which psychological wellbeing is understood, enacted and conceptualized in different cultural contexts within the Middle East. The crisis of representation in the Middle East creates a very particular context for debates on mental health: institutionalized narratives of politics, medicine and/or public health often fluctuate between the extremes of heroism and victimhood, between "trauma" and "resilience." "Beyond 'Trauma'" challenges us to go beyond such binaries and instead to explore the space in between, where individuals carve out strategies of living. What are the cultural and clinical resources that people mobilize for this purpose? What means are available—culturally, clinically, historically—to work with or through psychological pain, to sustain a moral life outside rigid clinical or cultural categories? I thought that a critical and interdisciplinary conversation was long overdue. Our 2014 London workshop was a first step towards a new dialogue that goes beyond dominant global health paradigms characterized by an individual-centered emphasis on trauma and PTSD.

Psychiatric medicalization and the universal assumptions of diagnostic criteria have already been critically analyzed in various disciplines including medical anthropology and social medicine, as have mental health and public health in practice and policy. But these conversations rarely have been brought into a serious conversation with the contributions of Middle East Studies. In the "Beyond 'Trauma'" initiative, I aim to place these debates in a conceptual and methodological dialogue, on equal footing, and to open a critical conversation about both cultural and clinical realities and experiences of psychological conditions in the region. A first step is to revisit what we assume we know and to ask what is at stake ethically, clinically and politically when mental health becomes an area of inquiry and intervention in the Middle East, and what happens to mental health paradigms as they travel.

This project is a call to re-think pedagogies and ethics of mental health care research, practice and policy. It is a multi-sited, collaborative and comparative project inviting contributions from and about different parts of the region. It also invites disciplinary engagement with art, literature, history and social sciences, which are, and should be, integral to mental health care research and policymaking. Psychiatry or psychology cannot deliver without engagement with political and cultural analysis.

Even though one of the aims of the project is to understand the region beyond the tired trope of "conflict," inevitably it must still engage with the afterlife of various states of conflict, many of which have turned from wars to prolonged states of endless chaos. From Iraq to Syria to Yemen, the condition of children alone qualifies as a humanitarian crisis. But it is also a reminder of the need for our sustained, long-term and committed attention to the psychological afterlife of ruptures for generations to come. Beyond manifesting in higher rates of physical and mental illness, war and displacement alter individuals' and communities' sense of wellbeing. In psychiatric terms, war experiences are often evaluated in terms of individual diagnoses such as PTSD and depression (themselves based on Western diagnostic standard manuals). Such a biomedical approach risks reifying these experiences into the diagnostic category of PTSD, which is treated as only something to be cured, erased and cleansed, as opposed to recognizing the experience in its sociopolitical as well as clinical entirety and as a part of lived life that people want to remember and bear witness to. The recognition of such sociopolitical and moral undertones can have therapeutic potentials. While mental health practice primarily focuses on the individual and the inner self, the social sciences and humanities often focus on the outer, the socio-historical and the political. How can clinical and cultural sensibilities be combined to make sure our health care paradigms will not reduce history to artifacts of clinical symptoms?

Since the publication of our 2015 special issue of the journal *Medicine, Anthropology, Theory* (2015), several colleagues have joined the conversation. I am also glad to announce that, together with my colleague Nora Parr, we are organizing the second "Beyond 'Trauma'" workshop in early 2019 at SOAS. So stay tuned!

Medical anthropology is a vibrant, growing field of inquiry, attracting Middle East researchers as well as undergraduate students across regional specializations. As medical practitioners-turned-anthropologists, however, you and Omar Dewachi, author of *Ungovernable Life: Mandatory Statecraft and Medicine in Iraq* (Stanford University Press, 2017), bring special insights from across a conflicted international boundary. Can you tell us how medical training and experience has informed your research findings?

In hindsight, what drew me to medicine was a profound need to engage with the human condition. Of course, it didn't hurt that I was geeky and equally fascinated with anatomy and genetics, with understanding the intelligent working of the body and with the problem-solving aspect of diagnostics. But I started medical school at age 17 while writing and publishing poems and short stories and pursuing independent studies in Persian literature. Years later, I looked

back and was struck by the extent to which my writing then was preoccupied with anthropological themes. My first encounter with anthropology happened long before I knew what anthropology was and during an extracurricular project I did with two friends when I was 14. It started with a revelation in biology class: that leprosy and tuberculosis were caused by the same bacteria, meaning leprosy was also treatable with antibiotics if diagnosed in time. The stigmatized image of the leper we had known from film and fiction was turned upside down. The real tragedy and violence, it turned out, was in the language, in poverty, in ignorance. It was a whirlwind from then on. We now had a plan for our project, starting with ploughing through medical textbooks. In those pre-Internet days, we got our hands on a copy of the 1963 documentary, *This House Is Black,* by the iconic poet Forough Farrokhzad and watched it at our biology teacher's house. We were transformed and compelled to find out more. We spent that summer commuting to a leprosy clinic on the outskirts of Tehran. We spent days interviewing patients and shadowing the attending dermatologist who ran the clinic with such grace. (Seven years later, I attended his lectures in my dermatology rotation in medical school and was elated when he said he remembered those three naïve schoolgirls.)

What has remained of that summer is a neatly bound handwritten thesis on leprosy, copies of the pamphlets and posters we made for the many presentations we gave at any venue that would have us and many poems and short stories about misunderstood leprous patients, especially women. Our de-stigmatization campaign was as rigorous as it was innocent. And that's when I decided to study medicine, after having fought the idea with all my might until that summer (my dream was to pursue literature or architecture). Fast-forward a decade. After medical training in Tehran and studying genetics in Oxford, I transitioned to anthropology and science and technology studies. I didn't see this as a departure; rather, the move still feels like going full circle to what medicine always was for me, to that leprosy project.

Though not very consciously, my medical background continues to shape me as an ethnographer in a couple of ways. First, I often think about how clinical training, internship in particular, was an entry point into ethnography long before I became an anthropologist. Clinical practice compelled and humbled me. It confronted me with the sheer reality of suffering, with what it means to acknowledge the limits of what medicine can do and with the utter complexity and fragility of life. These themes were constants during my fieldwork. *Prozac Diaries* deals with extremely intimate accounts, some of which were spoken and confided for the first time. I had to learn a lot about psychoanalytical transference beyond ethnographic empathy and recognize the courage it took for people to share with me their inner life stories. Days and nights spent on wards prepared me for remaining deeply attached ethnographically and emotionally. To pay homage to the experience, I have named four of my former patients in the acknowledgement of my book right next to my teachers and mentors in Iran because they taught me about medicalization more than any theory ever could.

The other connection between my clinical and anthropological training is clinical knowledge itself as an ethnographic and conceptual resource. On the one hand, the interdisciplinary aspect of my work relies on it. Ethnographic listening and clinical listening have a lot to offer one another. On the other hand, medicine has its own language. Speaking it helped me to bypass the early stages of building rapport with clinicians during my fieldwork and perhaps prevented some from dismissing my anthropological "musings." It also helped me read between the lines of interdisciplinary rivalries, negotiations and histories of discipline formation. But more immediately, familiarity with the nuances of biomedical explanatory models or the rites and rituals of psychiatric training helped me both to engage with practitioners' situated knowledge and to parse out elements of biomedical rationality from which anthropology can benefit or learn. The scientist in me, for example, appreciates the contributions of neuroscience and epigenetics to understating memory work, which served as a point of rapport with psychiatrists.

Finally, there is the question of positionality and reflexivity when I study medicine as an ethnographic object. Being an Iranian woman, physician, scientist, anthropologist, poet and former blogger meant that I was embedded differently in each of my field sites (such as youth culture, medicine and the Iranian blogosphere), and that people perceived me differently and in different registers. Navigating my ethnographic encounters with clinicians and non-clinicians felt like being an immigrant, code-switching between different languages and geographies, listening for signals and secrets and rumors, embodying their local norms in order to feel each setting fully. When talking to psychiatrists, I was returning to a pedagogical space that was more American than Iranian and that implied certain assumptions. But the more significant part of my ethnography was with non-clinicians and mostly with Iranian youth. Sometimes, I was made acutely aware of my position as *khanom doctor* (the deferential Persian term for addressing a female doctor) as many Iranians still call me, assigning me a place in unspoken hierarchies of expectations. My medical background was barely lost on my non-doctor interlocutors, whether they assumed an invisible clinical gaze to be reassuring or unsettling. This hybrid ethnographic relation was a learning experience particularly in relation to my gender and my generational kinship with some of the people I was interviewing. The clinical and the ethnographic gaze required management, on my part and theirs, and combining these perspectives served to soften assumed hierarchies, encouraged curiosity and allowed mutual vulnerability and trust.

I'd like to thank you for prompting this conversation and to MERIP for dedicating space to the timely topic of mental health in the Middle East. ■

People run in panic after a Coalition airstrike hits ISIS fighters' positions in the Tahrir neighborhood of Mosul, 2016. GORAN TOMASEVIC/REUTERS

Civilians in Mosul's Battle of Annihilation

Nabil Al-Tikriti

Understanding the course of events and identifying the participants in the battle of Mosul is a difficult task. What is certain is that all parties neglected the fate of civilians and were unable to provide proper emergency medical relief. An examination of the battle is crucial to understanding the evolution of international humanitarian law in conflict zones.

Details about Iraq's battle of Mosul, which raged from October 2016 to July 2017, have trickled out slowly and remain incomplete. The battle was fought by Iraqi and international forces to annihilate the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (Daesh in Arabic and also known by the acronym ISIS). After it ended, reporters, human rights organizations and relief agencies uncovered evidence of massive destruction, wanton cruelty and multiple violations of international humanitarian law. Drone videos of Mosul's city center show physical damage frequently compared to 1945 Berlin, as well as to more recent devastation in Falluja, Gaza, Benghazi, Homs, Aleppo, Raqqa, Sanaa and dozens of other smaller urban population centers obliterated by civil conflict.

Civilian casualty figures are scarce and unreliable.[1] Widely disparate estimates exacerbate this battle's particular fog of war. Does one use Patrick Cockburn's maximum claim of 40,000 civilian deaths made right after the conclusion of hostilities,[2] the Associated Press estimate of 9,000 to 11,000 civilian deaths,[3] the Iraqi government estimate of 5,000,[4] or the 356 civilians confirmed, toward the end of the battle, as killed in attacks by the US and international coalition?[5] In 2018, reports described hundreds of corpses lying all over the ravaged cityscape, with minimal government interest in even properly disposing, let alone identifying, bodies or investigating causes of death. One report has described an estimated 1,000 bodies dumped in a mass grave outside the city, burying together non-combatants and militia fighters.

As with conflicts in Syria and Yemen, documenting what occurred is complicated by the multiplicity of participants engaged in fighting. On one side was ISIS and their supporters, which included former Ba'athist locals, Chechen fighters, European volunteers and ideologically committed warriors from throughout the Middle East. The transnational, and in some cases transactional, nature of the ISIS alliance, along with a determination by the Iraqi and international coalition to wipe out the movement altogether, greatly complicates attempts to render justice to any transgressors in the wake of the battle. On the other side lay an even more complicated array of institutional actors, including Iraqi government forces of varying levels of competence, popular mobilization units from ideologically diverse militia organizations, Kurdish Peshmerga units and the international military personnel from the Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR), the military component of the Global Coalition against Daesh. Composed of 74 participating countries, the Global Coalition against Daesh is an exceedingly complex organization tasked in part with assisting the Iraqi government to reassert sovereignty over the districts occupied by ISIS. In the battle of Mosul, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, the Netherlands and Great Britain actively assisted the Combined Joint Task Force and its estimated 6,000 US service members who were committed to air and ground battlefield support in July 2017.[6]

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In the course of the battle, Coalition military leaders chose not to prioritize the protection of civilians. Instead, US commanders blamed any civilian deaths on ISIS' well-documented use of human shields during combat. Moreover, ISIS family members were apparently categorized as combatants.[7] It is unclear how a pilot flying a mission, or an investigator seeking information several months after the fact, can determine whether someone is related to an ISIS fighter. It is clear, however, that the laws of war do not allow the intentional killing of combatants' family members.

Documenting what occurred is complicated by the multiplicity of participants engaged in fighting.

Beyond neglecting to protect civilians, US Secretary of Defense James Mattis hinted at the level of sanctioned violence: "We have already shifted from attrition tactics, where we shove them from one position to another in Iraq and Syria, to annihilation tactics where we surround them."[8] In the same interview, Mattis discounted the legal ramifications of killing civilians by adding that "civilian casualties are a fact of life in this sort of situation."

Many parties to the conflict violated international humanitarian law, although in very different ways. ISIS disregarded humanitarian law altogether by considering the legal regime itself corrupt and biased towards the interests of Western governments, and also largely ignored by the very governments that originally negotiated it. Consistent with its behavior elsewhere, ISIS used Mosul residents as human shields, executed civilians who tried to escape, accepted no responsibility whatsoever for providing non-combatant medical assistance in the hospitals under its control and proved unreachable for humanitarian negotiations.[9] Ominously, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) claimed that, for the first time ever, it was completely unable to negotiate with both sides of a conflict because it found it impossible to establish lines of communication with ISIS.[10]

Iraqi government and Coalition authorities also chose to ignore international humanitarian law in several instances, while never openly disavowing the strictures of the Geneva Conventions. As with ISIS, they did not accept responsibility for providing non-combatant medical assistance. The Iraqi government claimed to have insufficient resources, while the Combined Joint Task Force quietly declined to extend its substantial medical assets to assist anyone except injured Iraqi soldiers or Coalition advisors. Instead, these governments

chose to fund medical assistance provided by the World Health Organization (WHO).[11]

Further complicating matters, serious frictions emerged between WHO and the two most prominent medical humanitarian organizations, ICRC and Médecins sans Frontières (MSF/Doctors Without Borders), while planning for the battle of Mosul in the fall of 2016. The dispute eventually left WHO as the provider of last resort after ICRC and MSF declined to serve as WHO's implementing partners on the front lines of the planned battle.[12] ICRC and MSF objected to the terms of engagement presented by WHO officials prior to the conflict, stating that they compromised their humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence. All humanitarian agencies conceded that neutrality was unattainable, since in practice it was impossible to negotiate with ISIS. But MSF and ICRC also balked at being instrumentalized as the fully integrated medical relief arm of the Coalition when Iraqi forces were aggressively screening everyone trying to cross the front lines to reach safety and medical relief. United Nations and WHO officials, on the other hand, advocated a "Humanity First" doctrine, which prioritized saving as many lives as possible over the other three main humanitarian principles.

Many parties to the conflict violated international humanitarian law, although in very different ways.

Eventually, this disagreement forced WHO to rely on non-traditional partners such as militia-affiliated volunteers, NYC Medics Global Disaster Relief, Aspen Medical and Samaritan's Purse as first-line medical providers. These groups fully integrated their operations with Iraqi government forces and Combined Joint Task Force advisors, a process that WHO officials referred to as "co-locating," while external observers preferred the more well-known term "embedded." There were problems with each of these providers. The militia-affiliated medical volunteers had an inconsistent level of medical skills. NYC Medics were primarily ex-military who wore military-style uniforms, collected intelligence and acted like members of the US military. Aspen Medical, a for-profit company, initially provided no more medical services than the minimal trauma treatment stipulated in their WHO contract. Finally, Samaritan's Purse, which successfully built a field hospital in a matter of days, was overly "bunkerized," with a full military contingent protecting it. In addition, this American evangelical Christian relief organization so fully embedded itself that it practically served as an arm of the US military. When Mosul residents were asked after the battle who had provided medical assistance during the conflict, over 50 percent replied that "the military" had provided the medical relief, even though that was nowhere the case.[13]

Meanwhile, during the battle, MSF opened three independent field hospitals beyond the purview of the Combined Joint Task Force's authority. While this move sufficiently preserved MSF's humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence, it also meant that their facilities served relatively fewer patients than the other WHO contractors, who received patients directly from the front lines with the assistance of Coalition transport.

Coalition officials categorized the battle of Mosul as a non-international armed conflict (NIAC), a classification which renders certain international humanitarian law clauses moot. Human rights agencies refuted this categorization, accusing Coalition partners of breaching humanitarian law in their use of shelling and aerial bombings. Confirming what drone videos now show of Mosul's destruction, Amnesty International documented numerous cases where Coalition military forces were insufficiently precise in their targeting of ISIS fighters and insufficiently restrained in their choice of munitions. In one frequently repeated scenario, ISIS fighters locked civilians inside homes in order to use them as human shields. Spotted shooting from the roofs of these houses, the fighters were then targeted by Coalition forces, often with large, less expensive, non-discriminating munitions.[14]

The battle of Mosul attracted relatively scarce media coverage. Its particular significance for the ongoing evolution of international humanitarian law and the provision of medical relief in conflict zones has yet to receive the attention it merits. Due to a confluence of state interests, unknown thousands of civilians died in a "battle of annihilation" and have been tragically ignored. ■

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Caught in the Circle of Punishment

Omar Al-Jaffal

The politics, sensibilities and lives of Iraqis born in the 1970s and 1980s were intimately shaped by harsh US sanctions on essential and non-essential goods, Saddam Hussein's wars and the US invasion in 2003 with its devastating war and aftermath. What can a young Iraqi possibly hope for now?

In one of his most succinct poems, "This Is the American Master," late Iraqi poet Sargon Boulus likened death to a thirsty master who will drink the fuel and water from the oil wells and rivers of Iraq. As evident in the title, Boulus did not hesitate to indicate that death will come from the United States. In his poem, Boulus further describes this master as eating thousands and thousands of our children. Boulus' eloquence lies in the way that he never says this master physically came to Iraq to eat the children; he merely ate them. Fifteen years after the US-led invasion of Iraq and the coming of death in the shape of an American master, this poem by Boulus describes US treatment of Iraqis as punishable subjects.

A sanction, and in particular its plural, sanctions, is not only a fundamental term in the vernacular of the generation of Iraqis born in the late 1970s and 1980s; it is also an essential component of their mental and social formation because it played an important role in forming the political consciousness of those who found themselves caught within the circle of US sanctions their entire lives.

On a personal level, I found myself within this circle of sanctions in the 1990s, when I was a ten-year-old boy. Following the internationally-enforced economic blockade imposed on Iraq after its invasion of Kuwait in 1991, I was forced to leave school and work on the streets selling cigarettes. At a time when the coffins of children who died due to dehydration or lack of medicine were passing before my eyes, my small eight-inch black and white television transmitted images of Saddam Hussein eloquently and proudly celebrating his extravagant birthday parties. Back then, the Iraqi dictator was not affected by the strict sanctions that the United States insisted must be the harshest in the history of the United Nations. It was the Iraqi people who perished due to the lack of medicine and food.

When I recount these years, I can only remember the minimum living standard that was imposed on us. In the 1990s, the United Nations assembled a "food basket" for Iraqis, enough to sustain our bodies to wake up every day and practice our role in depressingly hard labor in the shadows of a dictatorial regime. Children such as myself started helping our families to obtain basic food that rarely extended beyond potatoes and eggplants.

At that time, US Secretary of State Madeline Albright was asked on a CBS television interview whether the deaths of a half million Iraqi children was a price worth paying for the continuation of sanctions on Iraq. She replied, "This is a very hard choice, but we think the price is worth it."[1] These sanctions were a form of collective punishment, as Albright admitted, rather than a targeted reprisal against Saddam Hussein and his cronies. When Saddam's son survived an attempted assassination, he was able to receive excellent medical treatment, whereas the Iraqi public had to endure the pain of being treated for injuries without anesthetics, which were unavailable to them. Patients died of suffocation for the lack of oxygen in hospitals.

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In the years preceding the sanctions, the United States directly and indirectly supplied Saddam's regime with weapons to sustain the momentum of a war against Iran that lasted eight years and took over 1 million lives from both sides. Saddam's aggression was not sated by this costly war. In 1991, he invaded Kuwait and soon after he was defeated by an international coalition led by the United States. These losses pushed Iraqis to sense the regime's weakness and drove them to rise up against Saddam in most provinces. The US administration, however, did not prevent the regime's use of fighter jets against those who rebelled. Saddam was killing the Iraqi people again while the whole world was watching. The US-imposed sanctions created an even deadlier situation. They were imposed not only on vital goods necessary for the survival of an entire population, but also on pens, notebooks, cinema tickets and diapers!

We did not know back then that sanctions were only a lead-up to the bigger punishment that Iraq would suffer under President George W. Bush beginning in March 2003. It was not only a war on despots, but on the Iraqi citizenry and all of the nation's accomplishments over thousands of years. The war was cancerous for the bodies of those in cities where internationally banned weapons with radioactive components were used. This US war completely demolished facilities and infrastructure, as well as the country's rich natural and educational heritage. Although Saddam's regime was toppled, the outcome consolidated the corrupt network of ruling powers in Iraq. These were not mere results of the war, but a master plan that aimed to punish the Iraqi people simply for being.

A few months ago, I turned 30. When I look back at the mad years of my youth, I ask: Why was I, along with my entire generation, left in the midst of the circle of punishment?

After the occupation of Baghdad in April 2003, the US administration, with the support of numerous Western countries, established a new political system for Iraq, which constitutes one of the most punitive modern systems. This regime utilizes all democratic tools available: elections and the alternation of power, monitoring bodies and engagement with United Nations treaty bodies that aim to ensure human rights and social justice. All these tactics, however, are in reality nothing but a waste!

The current political system, a continuous whirlpool of bureaucratic measures, is a massive machine that can only be run by those who have established it and put a guard in place to make it work. It is difficult for newly established political parties to compete for a place in parliament and to form a coherent opposition that can reach power. The infrastructure of this new system, in addition to election regulations, deters the formation of smaller parties. Citizens must also contend with the increased presence of some political parties' armed factions. For most Iraqis, therefore, "democracy" tastes bitter.

The new political system was engineered in a way that mirrors the traditional Iraqi metaphor of choosing between the rabbit and the deer, except that one can only get the rabbit. The choice of the deer is a mere illusion. Iraqis have been forced to make a more brutal choice, which ruins their lives and livelihoods and makes for a living hell. What makes this political system more bitter is the fact that it continues to derive its power from a majority of international organizations and Western countries.

In return, Iraqis have tried for the past few years to change their reality. They went out to the streets in popular demonstrations, they used social media to establish online campaigns, they spoke before Western parliaments and the United Nations and they attempted to topple the entire political process in the summer of 2016 when they occupied the Green Zone, the protectorate of Iraqi politicians. However, their attempt at self-determination received no international support. International organizations urge them to be patient, and, in the meantime, they count the deaths among Iraqis on a monthly basis. On the one hand, international organizations issue reports on literacy and basic human rights, while, on the other, they extend their hand to establish agreements with the successive governments.

This reality pushes Iraqis to despair—yet despair also seems like a luxurious option. The hopeless individual today does not have many options, for he or she lives in a locked prison whose keys are in the hands of a bunch of politicians. The hopeless individual lives within a limited sphere of rights and freedoms, which is increasingly taking a classist form—about 40 percent of Iraqis live below the poverty line today. These individuals cannot change their situation, neither through elections nor through political or direct actions. The network of economic relations with the West following the fall of ISIS has only increased people's despair. The future of Iraq is indebted to banks and international corporations. The Iraqi is born today with a debt of $3,000. According to the world's political map, this means that Iraq will remain in this situation so the debtors can be paid off.

If hopeless individuals previously had the option to leave, to escape the dictatorial regime, the prospect of getting a visa to another country today is non-existent. If one manages to reach a neighboring or regional country, it will likely not allow them to reside there. If one dreams of reaching a Western country, then the prospect of being granted asylum is slim to nothing. Due to the cooperation between the Iraqi regime and some Western countries, Iraq is now classified as a safe country. In the most optimistic case, where an Iraqi is granted asylum following escape on a rubber boat, they will struggle with being out of place.

I prepare myself to count the losses of the years to come, after I have finished recounting the losses of my last 30 years. I sit and wonder about the next modern punitive measures that Iraqis will face. Will a new master come from the United States or elsewhere to drink what is left of the souls of Iraqis? ■

Endnote

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Palestinian patients receive medication at a clinic run by UNRWA in the Shati refugee camp, Gaza. WISSAM NASSAR/PICTURE-ALLIANCE/DPA/AP IMAGES

UNRWA Financial Crisis
The Impact on Palestinian Employees

Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh

President Donald Trump's decision to reduce the United States' contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to only $60 million in 2018—compared to a total of $364 million in 2017[1]—has been widely denounced as a brutal form of collective punishment of the Palestinian people. Current fundraising campaigns are attempting to fill the gap to keep schools open and medical services available for Palestinians across the region. The campaigns are focused on the rights, needs and dignity of Palestinian infants, children and adults in their roles as patients, students and recipients of emergency cash assistance. However, another related, unspoken crisis threatens Palestinian refugees' future: a crisis of employment for the tens of thousands of Palestinian UNRWA staff who provide these services. The jobs, pensions

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and futures of thousands of Palestinian refugee families across Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Gaza and the West Bank are at risk.

To confront the "most critical financial situation in the history of the Agency," UNRWA's Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl launched a major emergency fundraising campaign on January 22, 2018.[2] The #DignityIsPriceless campaign aims to mobilize donations from states and civil society worldwide to keep open the 700 UNRWA schools that educate 525,000 Palestinian children and to ensure that UNRWA can continue to provide lifesaving emergency food aid, emergency cash assistance and essential medical services to millions of Palestinian refugees.[3] UNRWA aid recipients include 400,000 Palestinians who remain at great risk within Syria, almost 1 million people who rely entirely on UNRWA in Gaza and 50,000 Palestinians from Syria now living precariously in Lebanon and Jordan. By the end of April 2018, the UN Secretary-General's office reported that $100 million had been committed to UNRWA by the states that attended the Rome Extraordinary Ministerial Conference, Preserving Dignity and Sharing Responsibility: Mobilizing Collective Action for UNRWA, in March 2018.[4]

At the same time as launching the fundraising campaign, Krähenbühl, in an official statement, called upon

> UNRWA's 30,000 full-time staff of doctors, nurses, school principals and teachers, guards and sanitation laborers, social and psychosocial workers, administrative and support staff: be at your duty stations to serve the community with the same dedication and commitment that you have always shown. This is a moment for internal cohesion and solidarity. Times are very critical but we will do our utmost to protect you.[5]

Due to the precarious nature of UNRWA's budget since its inception in the 1950s, full-time permanent employees are supplemented by staff on fixed-term and indefinite contracts. In addition, thousands of people are employed on daily contracts for years, and often decades. These precariously employed "dailies" are called up on an ad hoc basis to fill short-term gaps as they arise, including as substitute teachers and doctors to cover sick leave.

It is important to note that UNRWA is one the main employers of Palestinians in the region, and indeed is seen as having an obligation to employ Palestinians as part of the effort to uphold their rights. This role is particularly important in Lebanon, where Palestinians are formally prohibited by the Lebanese state from working outside of the camps in two dozen professions, including as doctors and engineers, and where only 42 percent of Palestinians were estimated to be economically active in 2017.[6] In the context of such high unemployment and their formal exclusion from the labor market outside of the camps, many UNRWA employees—including the Palestinian teachers, guards and sanitation workers I have been speaking with across Lebanon—do not believe that UNRWA can truly protect their jobs and futures. Indeed, potential job cuts in Lebanon's vocational centers were recently announced. My interviewees informed me that throughout the first three months of 2018, dozens of UNRWA daily workers have either been cut or have not had their contracts renewed. Palestinians are left to wonder if the United Nations and international donors are taking UNRWA employees' needs and rights seriously.

Exceptional Measures, Major Insecurities

Also in January 2018, UNRWA headquarters in Amman, Jordan sent employees an internal Area Staff Circular,[7] in English and by email, noting that, "In view of the severity of the funding shortfall that the Agency currently faces," the Commissioner-General was announcing a series of exceptional measures. The circular announced that UNRWA would no longer grant any extension of service beyond the official age of retirement of 60. Furthermore, "posts that become vacant due to retirement of Area staff members are not to be filled until further notice." It announced that "conversion of fixed-term (X) appointment to indefinite (A) appointment is suspended" as of January 18. Moreover, "Area staff members with 10 years of continuous service as of 18 January 2018 or later, and eligible for an indefinite appointment, will instead be considered for extension of their fixed-term appointment in line with applicable rules and instructions at the time of the extension."

Sara's heart dropped when she read this circular.[8] She is a Palestinian teacher, born in a camp in Lebanon, who was first employed as a daily teacher and then, for the past eight years, as a fixed-term full-time UNRWA employee. Since 2011, she has been teaching Palestinian children from Syria who are seeking sanctuary in her home camp. Sara explained why she felt that her future had been pulled out from under her:

> If my contract is not converted to an indefinite one, I will have nothing to support me or my family after I am 60. As a "B" employee [the term Palestinians use to refer to workers on fixed-term UNRWA contracts], I would only receive my own savings as a lump sum, with no contribution from UNRWA.

Upon retirement, UNRWA employees receive no monthly pension, and only UNRWA employees who are on indefinite contracts (known as "A" employees) are eligible to receive the full Provident Fund lump sum. This retirement fund is what Palestinians refer to as *ta'weed* and is the full compensation employees receive from UNRWA for their many years of service. The fund is a combination of the monthly contributions deducted directly from their salaries, plus an UNRWA contribution. Fixed-term employees like Sara would only receive her own savings in one lump sum, which would never be sufficient to support herself and her family.

Employees of UNRWA take part in a protest against the US decision to cut aid, Gaza City, January 2018. MOHAMMED SALEM/REUTERS

After several days of despondency while imagining her family's enforced destitution, Sara was partially relieved to receive a second UNRWA circular, also by email and in English. It stated that the "Conversion of Fixed-Term to Indefinite Appointment is reinstated as per previous terms, effective 18 January 2018." In theory, Sara should have been happy. The implication of the second document is that when she reaches her ten-year anniversary of working on a fixed-term basis for UNRWA, her contract could still be converted to an indefinite one. However, having received devastating news once, Sara still fears that UNRWA's ongoing funding insecurity will mean that, in the end, she will never be offered an indefinite contract.

Her fears are not unfounded, as Sara informed me a short time later that she and her colleagues had been dealt yet another blow. UNRWA reportedly informed them in February that even if they have been employed for ten years or more, UNRWA will be unable to pay its retirement contribution to any UNRWA employees due to the funding shortfall. If this is the case, employees will only receive their own savings when they turn 60. While no formal announcement has (yet) been made, Palestinians' fears and mistrust must be situated in the context of their knowledge of UNRWA's past operational changes over the course of the agency's multiple financial crises, and also in relation to the nature of UNRWA's uneven communication with its employees. In this context, Palestinians' insecurities are linked simultaneously to actual operational changes, apparent policy reversals which many people believe cannot be trusted and sometimes unconfirmed potential changes that are passed on by word of mouth.

What is certain is that Sara and her colleagues face an insecure future and increasingly difficult working conditions since no new recruitments will be made as posts become vacant due to retirement. Sara recently felt the consequences of reduced funding for staff when UNRWA did not hire a daily substitute teacher when her colleague was on sick leave. Instead, Sara's class of 35 students had to absorb the other teacher's class, leaving her with 70 children to teach in her small classroom. It also means that young Palestinians who had hoped to work for UNRWA, including prospective teachers, doctors, clerical and facilities staff, will have increasingly limited employment possibilities, leading to increased levels of unemployment, underemployment and related long-term insecure living conditions.

Miscommunication and Continuing Fears

Abu Issa, a diligent UNRWA sanitation worker who commutes three hours a day to keep UNRWA hospital rooms and

operating theaters clean and functioning, does not have an email address so he never receives UNRWA's circulars. This situation means that he had to wait longer than Sara for the revised message to reach him through word of mouth. He explains:

> Those of us who are employed in the lower grades don't receive emails. We need UNRWA staff who are higher up to tell us the news about our jobs and futures. Not everyone knows what is going on. And, remember, not everyone working for UNRWA can read, including other people who work with me as cleaners and guards at the hospital. We need to wait for other colleagues to explain what is going on.

Even employees who are "higher up" find it difficult to follow UNRWA's notifications. Khamees, who is the head teacher of an UNRWA school in Lebanon, stressed:

> These notifications are always issued in English first. Sometimes they are translated into Arabic, but not always. Even when they are translated into Arabic they always arrive several days after the English version. Why don't they arrive at the same time? Why does the Arabic version sometimes not arrive at all?

With important messages arriving in complex English sentences, several of my interviewees noted that they have never really understood the exact meaning or the implications of the statements that are issued by UNRWA. Khamees asked:

> Why does UNRWA HQ always issue several circulars within two or three days of one another, saying they are going to do one thing and then changing part of their decision in the next message? Are they camouflaging their decisions, or trying to pretend that they are being kind to us by only withdrawing some of our rights rather than all of them?

UNRWA employees often dwell on the first message and overlook the second one, especially when they depend on other people to keep them up to date. My interviewees, including Sara, Abu Issa and Khamees, expressed their suspicions that sending many messages in complex writing might be a purposeful UNRWA strategy. When UNRWA appears to reinstate a particular right that it had just withdrawn, people wonder if the UN agency is aiming to ensure that other, more significant changes, will pass peacefully and without resistance from employees.

An Uncertain Future

During my conversations in Lebanon in early 2018, my interviewees repeatedly asserted their fear that it is their own and their family's futures which are at risk. Not only do the US funding cuts mean that they may be unable to access UNRWA educational and medical services, but also that any sense of future stability through their employment has been pulled out from under them. Even if UNRWA services are available, and even if Sara continues to be employed until retirement, she and her family will not be able to afford to buy food, clothes, household goods and medicine if she does not receive full compensation from UNRWA after her retirement. It is unclear under what employment conditions, if any, future generations of Palestinian teachers, doctors, clerical and facilities staff will be recruited.

Guaranteeing fair wages and secure pensions is seen as a less attractive fundraising goal than the need to protect the rights and needs of children and other vulnerable groups. The images and text used in the #DignityIsPriceless campaign consistently echo this prioritization, and indeed fundraising and advocacy campaigns around the world typically focus on the needs of vulnerable and innocent social groups—with "womenandchildren"[9] at their core—since they are most easily identified by potential donors as ideal victims who are truly worthy and deserving of material and political support.

In the context of the current funding crisis, when children's access to school, pregnant women's access to prenatal care and lifesaving emergency cash assistance are all at risk, Sara, Abu Issa and Khamees ask who will prioritize employment and pension rights and their family's futures? UNRWA employees are being implored to work and serve the members of their refugee community even if UNRWA cannot pay fair wages, and even if they are at risk of staffing cuts with long-lasting implications for their present and future wellbeing. For each UNRWA staff member whose contract is not made indefinite, for each person whose job is cut, for each daily staff member not called upon to substitute for a colleague, for each potential employee not recruited to fill a gap left by retirement and for each person whose full Providence Fund will not be paid by UNRWA, an entire family's, and community's, livelihood is being undermined not only today but in the months, years and even decades to come. ■

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Syrian refugees at Azraq refugee camp, Jordan. MOHAMMAD ABU GHOSH/XINHUA/EYEVINE/REDUX

Refugee Rights Hit the Wall

Sophia Hoffmann

I was in Damascus in early 2007 to conduct research on the situation of newly arrived Iraqi refugees when I went looking for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Syria office. I found it in a two-room apartment downtown, staffed by a single Syrian protection officer. The pressures on the organization were becoming intense, she told me. Earlier that day she had spontaneously handed out some cash to a young Iraqi man who had nowhere to stay so that he could pay for a hotel. The thought of him having to sleep in a park was abhorrent and scandalous. UNHCR Syria's annual budget was $1.4 million at the time.

Two years later, UNHCR mounted its biggest regional operation ever in Syria, managing a total annual budget of $130 million. In Jordan, UNHCR's budget rose from $3 million in 2006 to $404 million in 2015. Since 2013, UNHCR's regional budget has regularly topped the staggering amount of $4 billion. At the same time, the region's once-open borders have closed, hard visa regimes have been imposed, Turkey has built a wall along its southern border and refugees endure a situation of increased repression and impoverishment.

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The expansion of humanitarian aid in Syria and its neighboring states has gone hand-in-hand with a growing restriction on refugees' right of movement and ever-stricter control over refugees' personal information and biometric data. UNHCR and the Syrian and Jordanian governments share two interests in particular: to raise humanitarian funds and to centralize information and control over refugee populations. Disastrously, this shared interest has created a control regime for refugees in the region that is much stricter and more violent than what existed before humanitarian actors' large-scale involvement. This situation is sad and tragic, given UNHCR's outspoken commitment to human rights and track record of alleviating refugee suffering.

Syria and Jordan have decades-long experience with hosting and managing refugee populations.[1] While the arrivals of Palestinians by the tens of thousands in 1948 and

1967 are the most well-known examples, both countries have also integrated other displaced (and nomadic) populations throughout the twentieth century. The Iraqi refugee crisis, which began in earnest in 2005, was the first displacement crisis of the twenty-first century and it differed from all the others in one crucial aspect: it brought the international apparatus of humanitarian response to the Middle East, led by its central organization, UNHCR. The massive involvement of UNHCR-led humanitarianism meant that the meaning of refugee suffering became framed in a very particular way, which eventually replaced all other, earlier ways of portraying refugee existence in the Middle East. The cornerstones of this portrayal are that refugees are a burden on host societies and a potential security problem. Both aspects are crucial for mobilizing donors. But this framing also means that humanitarian measures have become increasingly entangled with state security measures that oppress refugees.

Three examples show how humanitarian and security concerns are now entwined. First, from 2012 onwards there has been a move to keep Syrian refugees in Jordan in camps. Second, the collection of refugees' biometric data by UNHCR is opaque and growing. And third, UNHCR has acquiesced to the Syrian government's demands that it cease operations in opposition-held areas.

Between 2005 and 2009, hundreds of thousands of Iraqis arrived in Syria and Jordan (and Lebanon). International observers were often surprised that these governments refrained from building camps. While neither government ever explained whether this was a deliberate policy, it was widely assumed that the Palestinian example, in which camps became permanent features of society and often developed into centers of political resistance, served as a deterrent. Both governments' reluctance to apply the word "refugee" to Iraqis (which would have served as another comparison with the Palestinian situation) bolsters the idea that there was no interest in turning Iraqi flight into a political issue. Unlike Palestinian refugee suffering, which has been used—by the Syrian government in particular—for decades to remind regional and global powers of the ongoing injustice of the Israeli occupation, Iraqi and Syrian refugee suffering was from the onset framed exclusively as a humanitarian issue. To be precise, before the involvement of international humanitarian actors in 2007, the new Iraqi presence was largely silenced in both Syria and Jordan, as Iraqis were discouraged or forbidden from displaying any Iraqi symbols or references.

Large-scale encampment of Syrian refugees began in Jordan in 2012, with the construction of Zaʿatari camp, which today houses around 80,000 people. While Zaʿatari is a relatively open camp, Azraq, the second Jordanian camp, which opened in 2014, comes close to being a remote prison in the desert. Azraq houses around 55,000 people. New arrivals from Syria are brought directly to Azraq. As the Jordanian government cracks down on Syrian shanty towns, those inhabitants are also transported to the camp. Departure from Azraq is difficult, both administratively and physically, due to the remote location. Simultaneously, the Jordanian government has gradually barred more and more humanitarian provisions to Syrians living outside of camps, including health care, in an obvious move to force more Syrians into Zaatari or Azraq. As has been the case generally, humanitarian organizations have accepted this increasingly draconian crackdown on refugee rights without protest.

Encampment has coincided with the gradual closing of all regional borders to Syrian refugees. Today only the most privileged Syrians can obtain the administrative and financial means to leave their country. The unfortunate remainder is stranded outside of border crossings. Both the Syrian-Jordanian and the Syrian-Turkish borders are now populated by such "trapped" populations, as humanitarian jargon refers to them.[2] Jordan and Turkey argue that these refugees pose too much of a security risk to be allowed into the country. The Jordanian government initially restricted all humanitarian provisions to the make-shift border camps on the grounds that fighters were supposedly hiding among the impoverished masses. Turkish forces routinely open fire on Syrians trying to cross the border.[3]

The massive growth of UNHCR operations confronted the organization with two related problems: how to manage an explosion of paperwork and how to ensure an effective distribution of aid. As a solution, UNHCR turned towards technology, combining big data management with an ID regime based on biometric data. This approach was made possible by the relative sophistication of both the Syrian and Jordanian economy (compared to other humanitarian crisis arenas), combined with a highly educated population from which most humanitarian personnel are recruited. Recipients of humanitarian aid in Jordan and Lebanon today pay for their groceries by having their iris scanned, and when they cash in a voucher, participate in a camp meeting or collect any other humanitarian service, it is often registered automatically via their chip card or ID. This process enables humanitarian organizations, including NGOs such as the Norwegian Refugee Council, to collect a wide array of "user data," which aid recipients have no choice but to provide if they want to receive assistance. In a report on this innovation, the Norwegian Refugee Council enthuses about the "wealth of disaggregated data with which access and protection issues for vulnerable groups can be identified" if voucher codes are connected to UNHCR-issued identity cards.[4]

UNHCR piloted iris scanning of refugees in Jordan in 2013. According to a 2017 UNHCR fact sheet, 98 percent of Syrians are processed using biometrics, in partnership with a British Company called IrisGuard. Children from as young as six years old have their eyes scanned in the registration process.[5] It is hard to escape the thought that an impoverished, desperate population is being used as a guinea pig to test and develop a new security technology that remains unacceptable in the West. According to a corporate press release,

A Syrian refugee uses eye-verification to purchase goods, Zaatari refugee camp, Jordan, 2016. MUHAMMAD HAMED/REUTERS

the IrisGuard technology "has already detected and stopped multiple refugees attempting re-registration both locally and across national borders."[6] While the "unified regional iris repository" is housed within UNHCR's offices in Amman, the technology can communicate data across the region no matter where the refugee is located, which, according to the press release "helps to determine the size and composition of refugee populations."[7] The coinciding of humanitarian and security interests is perfected in a technology that allows refugees to pay for groceries while simultaneously communicating their whereabouts, as well as information about the items they actually bought. Incredibly, not a single humanitarian actor on the ground has raised serious concerns about this development. Instead, the United Nations and NGOs are united in a chorus of praise about how cash-less shopping raises refugee dignity, guards against aid misappropriation and allows for an overall improved aid response.

Finally, the failure of UNHCR (and other humanitarian actors) to put up serious resistance against the Syrian government's horrendous crimes against civilians, including refugees and internally displaced people, has resulted in the complete decoupling of humanitarianism from human rights in the region. When the Syrian conflict began in 2011, UNHCR had, due to the preceding Iraqi crisis, developed into a small but significant actor in the country. Since then, UNHCR has spent several billion dollars in aid within Syria, much of it channeled through government ministries. The influence that the Syrian government has had over the aid effort has been mind-boggling. It has been able to prevent aid deliveries to opposition-held areas, has carried out brutal sieges of entire neighborhoods under the nose of humanitarian actors, dropped poison gas, fire and cluster bombs onto residential neighborhoods, deliberately destroyed hospitals and schools and was even allowed to edit a UN aid report, deleting words such as "siege" and "besieged."[8] Given the fact that most of the affected civilians are internally displaced or (humanitarian jargon alert) "war affected populations," they very clearly fall under the mandate of UNHCR.

Why has the largest humanitarian organization working in the Middle East failed to speak out or at least put up a significant fight? Is this simply a sign of a craven attitude? Are its Syria operations so dependent on biased personnel structures? Or has the organization been taken over completely by the belief that refugees need to be managed and controlled, and that it is enough to simply keep them alive? The United States is UNHCR's largest donor by far, followed by the European Union, and these governments have influence over the organization's policies. But with no secure legal footing in

either Syria or Jordan, its smooth integration into authoritarian contexts is due more to a co-optation of senior UNHCR personnel by Syrian and Jordanian elites through a degree of coercion and consent.

Sadly, the massive expansion of UNHCR-led humanitarianism in the Middle East has in no way contributed to a greater assertion of human rights, either for citizens or refugees. Instead, it has proven to critics the utter failure of humanitarianism to provide an emancipatory path toward justice and actual peace. As the British sociologist Marc Duffield, who has analyzed humanitarian politics for decades, depressingly argues, humanitarianism merges seamlessly into existing structures of political and economic oppression, reinforcing instead of challenging them.[9] The need for humanitarian intervention to save refugees has become, materially and ideologically, linked to portraying them as a threat to economic stability. Refugees are considered a security threat because they may become frustrated and angry and dangerous. They are thought to import dangerous religiosity and to overcrowd infrastructure. The depoliticized humanitarian rhetoric completely leaves out the perpetrators whose violence caused refugees to flee in the first place.

Instead, blame for their existence is placed fully on refugees themselves. Humanitarian interventions focus on changing and controlling refugee behavior, while calls for a change to the external, political and economic injustices determining refugees' plight are practically absent. Where no hope, vision or interest exists to engage in national or international fights for refugee rights, humanitarianism becomes a doctrine with no alternatives.

That this view has taken root in the Middle East is particularly disheartening. The region was shaped by refugee populations and by a strong tradition of accepting those chased from their homes, together with a longstanding history of calling for refugee rights and justice. The growing exclusion of refugees from increasingly nationalized populations spells the end of this positive element of Middle Eastern politics. ■

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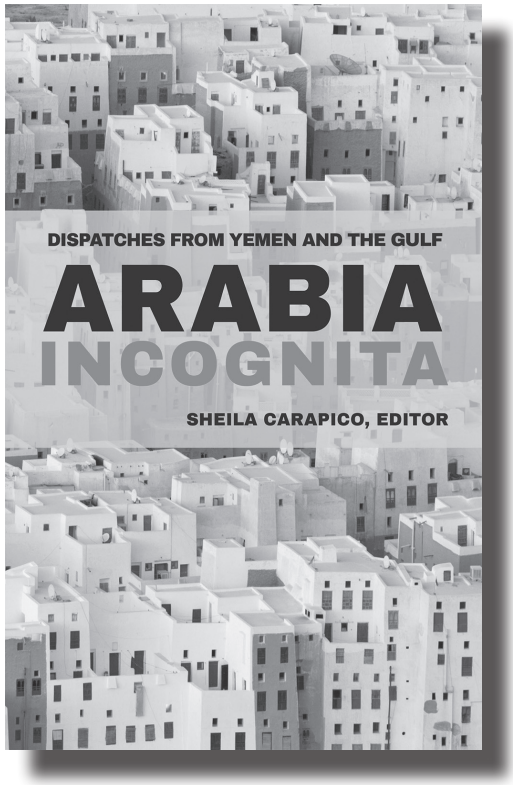
ARABIA INCOGNITA

DISPATCHES FROM YEMEN AND THE GULF

Edited by Sheila Carapico



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Residents collect their belongings in the Qabaris neighborhood of the Old City of Homs, Syria, 2014. YURI KOZYREV/NOOR/REDUX

Conventional Humanitarian Solutions Fail the Test

Parastou Hassouri

Syrians experienced the largest single-day exodus of the war on March 15, 2018. Seven years to the day since the start of the uprising in Syria, some 45,000 civilians fled their homes in besieged Eastern Ghouta. The fact that such large-scale displacement took place over the course of a single day as the conflict entered its eighth year is a stark reminder that the displacement caused by the war has not abated and will not end any time soon.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the international agency mandated with the protection of refugees, has repeatedly called attention to the unprecedented scale of displacement in the current "refugee crisis." The term itself deserves scrutiny. Panic in Europe about large numbers of refugees crossing the Mediterranean in order to seek asylum, peaking in the summer of 2015, led to the increased use of the phrase, especially in the international media, despite the fact that the vast majority of Syrian refugees continue to reside in neighboring countries. Crisis itself is a loaded term, particularly in the context of international law, where it would normally invite action or intervention. The responses to this so-called crisis, however, have been inadequate.

Indeed, the number of refugees worldwide seeking safety by crossing international borders is at its highest since the agency was founded in the aftermath of World War II. In addition to the huge numbers, the duration of displacement is increasing, leading to what the UNHCR calls "protracted refugee situations" where refugee populations of 25,000 or more have been in exile for five or more years. In this kind of situation, refugees are caught in a prolonged state of limbo in the countries to which they fled, but where their basic rights and needs are not met, leaving them frustrated, unfulfilled and feeling stuck. The scale and duration of displacement has exposed the limitations, or even the complete failure, of the tools that the international community—namely, the donor countries to agencies like the UNHCR that shape its policies and actions—has relied on for more than 60 years to assist refugees and to support the countries that take them in.

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Durable Solutions?

The UNHCR was created by the United Nations in 1950 with a double mandate: to provide refugees with international protection and to seek permanent solutions to their plight. It was promoted as a lofty, humanitarian and non-political project based on two principles: that refugee status should be temporary and that a long-term presence of refugees is a problem that must be resolved. The UNHCR proposes three "durable solutions" for refugees: repatriation, in which refugees return voluntarily, in safety and dignity, to their country of origin; resettlement, in which a third country accepts refugees from the first host country and grants them permanent residence; and local integration, in which refugees remain in the country to which they fled, but enjoy legal, economic and social rights. Examining the massive displacement caused by the war in Syria provides a way to gauge how these potential solutions to mitigate the suffering of refugees have held up under the weight of crisis.

The statistics are staggering. Half of Syria's pre-war population of 23 million has been driven from their homes. Roughly half of those are internally displaced and half are now living abroad as refugees, primarily in neighboring countries. Turkey hosts 3.5 million Syrian refugees, Lebanon has 1 million, and approximately 650,000 are in Jordan. There are over 5.6 million Syrians registered with the UNHCR as refugees, which does not include hundreds of thousands more who are unregistered. For instance, in Lebanon, there are an estimated half million unregistered Syrians since the Lebanese government instructed the UNHCR to suspend new registrations in May 2015.[1]

The regional response to the Syria exodus has been influenced by previous large-scale forced displacements. The countries of the Middle East have long been host to refugees fleeing other conflicts and oppressive regimes, such as the hundreds of thousands of Sudanese now in Egypt and the dispersal of Iraqis after the rise in sectarian violence following the 2003 invasion led by the United States. In addition, the region still grapples with the reality and repercussions of one of the world's longest protracted refugee situations—that of Palestinian refugees. The highly politicized issue of Palestinians has significantly shaped government policies on Syrian refugees, especially once it became evident that there would not be a quick political resolution to the Syrian conflict.

Repatriation

Each of the durable solutions—repatriation, resettlement and local integration—promulgated by the UNHCR has faltered or outright collapsed. The ongoing violence in parts of Syria has deterred voluntary repatriation. Current military dynamics, which have shifted in favor of the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Asad, coupled with the implementation of de-escalation zones (agreed upon in May 2017 and guaranteed by Russia, Iran and Turkey) have given new impetus to discussions of the possibility of return for some refugees. Many analysts, however, agree that the prospects for a genuine peace that would truly allow Syrians to return in safety and dignity is remote.

Even if a political resolution brings open conflict to an end, large-scale voluntary repatriation of Syrians is not likely because of ongoing violence in certain areas, fear of reprisals and devastation of the economy, livelihoods and infrastructure. Most Syrians wish to return to their places of origin where they may have homes, land and other family, rather than to low-tension areas, which may not remain peaceful. The scale of destruction in Syria, however, is so vast that many question to what exactly Syrians would be returning. It is estimated that 85 percent of Syrians in Syria now live in poverty, with access to livelihoods, homes, infrastructure, education, health provision and other basic services severely compromised.[2] In addition, in some areas that have been reclaimed from ISIS, for example Deir al-Zour, returnees would have to contend with the fragmentation of social structures and disruption of social cohesion, the undermining of the city's role as a regional economic and political axis and the severance of its links to other regions.[3] Tensions between Arabs and Kurds and fear of reprisals also keep some who have fled from returning.

Resettlement

Resettlement has its own limitations. It is not a legally recognized right and countries must voluntarily allow resettlement. Generally, the UNHCR submits cases for consideration to countries of resettlement, which in turn decide whether to accept the refugees using their own admission criteria—with no obligation to take any. On a global level, only a small minority of refugees are resettled. In 2017, the UNHCR submitted just 75,188 cases for resettlement, out of which 65,109 actually departed to their resettlement country. That number of resettled refugees is a significant decline from the year before, when there were 126,291 departures (out of 163,206 submissions).

The political atmosphere in the countries of resettlement presents another problem, especially now when the issue of migration has become highly politicized. The drop between 2016 and 2017 is largely due to the change in US policy following the election of President Donald Trump. Immediately upon taking office in January 2017, Trump instituted a temporary suspension of resettlement, followed subsequently by announcements that resettlement numbers would be reduced.[4] Moreover, the resettlement process is bureaucratically burdensome and may be quite lengthy, routinely taking two years or even longer to complete. There is no question that some refugees do benefit from resettlement, but in its current form and in the current political atmosphere, it cannot be the primary durable solution to the refugee crisis.

Local Integration

Local integration remains the only possible permanent solution—among those proposed by UNHCR—for refugees. The majority of the world's refugees remain in host countries. In

many situations, refugees have spent decades in those countries without being truly integrated and attaining critical civil and political rights. Palestinian refugees are a prominent example. Although their situation varies by country, in those places where they have not obtained citizenship, Palestinian refugees live with severe restrictions on the right to free movement, to employment, to forming organizations and associations and much else.

MAURICIO LIMA/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

Syrian refugees from Deir al-Zour in the makeshift camp outside Moria on the Greek island of Lesbos, 2018.

The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees—a UN multilateral treaty—is the foundation for the international legal framework governing refugee protection. It defines who is a refugee and outlines the rights and responsibilities of the signatory countries. A key principle in the Convention is that of non-refoulement, which prohibits states from sending refugees back to territories where their lives or freedom would be threatened. The non-refoulement obligation in Article 33 is seen as the cornerstone of protections that states must provide. Many argue that this principle has been elevated to customary international law, meaning that even states that are not signatories to the convention are bound by it.

The rights of refugees—such as the right to free exercise of religion, free movement and ownership of property, among others—are also set forth in the 1951 Convention. Some states developed domestic asylum law and legal frameworks that enshrine those rights for refugees. Other states that do not have domestic asylum laws, but are signatories to the Convention, have made reservations to some of its articles. For instance, Egypt has made reservations that exempt it from committing to provide refugees with public relief, access to primary education, labor protections and welfare.

True local integration means that refugees, during their stay in the host country, acquire a progressively wider set of rights that ideally culminate in citizenship. Article 34 of the Convention states that "the contracting states shall as far as possible facilitate the assimilation and naturalization of refugees. They shall in particular make every effort to expedite naturalization proceedings." In the Middle East, the local integration of refugees has been hindered for various legal, economic and socio-political reasons. Only a minority of the region's states are signatories to the Convention or have meaningful domestic asylum legislation. In most countries in the region, the UNHCR operates through memoranda of understanding with the state and fulfills a quasi-state function for refugees.

The UNHCR is, however, not a state. It is constrained by personnel and budgetary issues, as well as by the host governments, which set the parameters for what it can and cannot do. The reality is that the UNHCR and its implementing partners can never adequately provide essential services to refugees. In Lebanon, where UNHCR was ordered to halt refugee registration in May 2015, refugees without registration papers or any form of documentation are extremely vulnerable to abuse and exploitation and can be detained or deported at the whim of authorities. In Egypt, a signatory to the Convention, Syrians obtain yellow cards from the UNHCR valid for 18 months. But Egyptian residency stickers that must be affixed to the card are valid for only six months. Residency must be renewed through an arduous process that can take weeks. Refugee status, even when it lasts for years, does not eventually lead to citizenship or even permanent residence.

The economic barriers to refugee integration are also considerable. First, the countries hosting the greatest number of refugees have their own economic problems. Second, refugees across the region face restrictions in employment. In Lebanon, they are not permitted to work legally. In Egypt, they are not barred from employment per se, but must meet the same regulations governing employment of foreigners, meaning they must have employer sponsorship and approval of the Ministry of Labor, a standard many cannot meet. In 2016, Jordan became the first country in the Arab region to issue work permits for Syrian refugees. There are now 10,000 temporary work permits (renewable annually) issued to Syrians to work in the construction industry (the applicants must also purchase insurance and obtain certificates attesting to their qualifications). Though limited in scope, the agreement represents the first effort to formalize the right to work for Syrian refugees in Jordan, where unauthorized employment was once a leading cause for detention. Overall, the crisis has intensified as people exhaust their savings, as donations

to international aid agencies decline (for example, in 2015 the World Food Program was forced to cut in half its cash assistance to Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon due to lack of funds) and as refugees' situation grows more desperate.

Finally, socio-political factors have impeded full integration. In theory, integration into countries of the Middle East should be easier for Syrians. With the exception of Turkey, they share the same language with their host countries. Despite hopes for change and democratization after the Arab uprisings of 2010–2011, however, the political atmosphere remains repressive across the region. Refugees are also viewed as a political issue. Since 1948, Palestinian refugees have often been a convenient scapegoat for political instability. Their full integration has been blocked both because the right of return to their homes remains a cornerstone of Palestinian demands for statehood and because in some countries, such as Lebanon, local concerns for sectarian balance among the population have taken precedence.

Syrian refugees also have to deal with political backlash in their host countries. In Egypt, after the 2013 coup against the elected Muslim Brotherhood government, state media and President Muhammad Mursi's opponents led a campaign that accused Syrians of supporting the Brotherhood. Syrians consequently faced much hostility, discrimination and arbitrary arrests and detention. In Turkey, opponents of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan have accused him of promising naturalization to Syrians in order to use them as a base of support for his reelection. As the conflict in Syria continues, Turkey has grown weary of the Syrian presence in the country, and the political discourse has shifted towards encouraging their return to Syria. There is also a high degree of political separation and tension between the countries of the Middle East, despite their linguistic, religious and cultural similarities and the fact that these modern nation states came into existence fairly recently. Visa rules for travel across their borders have become far more restrictive, whether because of the refugee crisis or for security reasons, such that it is common to hear of visa denials for even short visits.

Shifting Political Tides

One by one, the tools advocated by the United Nations to address the vast suffering and political consequences of displacement have failed. The increasing tendency towards protracted refugee situations stems from both political action and inaction, in countries of origin and host countries. In Syria, the ongoing conflict and flagrant violations of human rights and humanitarian law perpetrated both by the regime and by non-state actors continues to spur the flight of citizens and renders return unthinkable for many.

Except for a brief period in 2015 when some countries in Europe, led by Germany, adopted a more generous policy of admitting those fleeing the war, the political tide in Europe is against accepting more refugee arrivals. The March 2016 agreement between the European Union and Turkey has led to a dramatic decline in arrivals to Europe (according to UNHCR, boat arrivals in Greece dropped from 856,723 in 2015 to 29,718 in 2017). The agreement stipulates that asylum seekers arriving irregularly in Greece can be returned to Turkey in exchange for financial assistance and the loosening of visa restrictions for Turkish citizens. Since this arrangement began, the Greek government has adopted a containment policy that restricts arriving refugees to camps on the islands on which they land until their cases are adjudicated. The adjudication process is slow, and camp conditions are extremely difficult, which suggests the policy is deliberately attempting to deter further arrivals to Europe. Italy is making deals with the authorities in Libya to prevent boat arrivals, despite widely circulating reports about horrific abuse of migrants and asylum seekers there. Increasingly, European and other "destination" countries have adopted various strategies of externalization to prevent asylum seekers from arriving on their shores.

Granted, the scale of Syrian displacement is virtually unprecedented, and it is not the only ongoing refugee crisis in the world or even the region. But forced refugee flows in Europe, Southeast Asia and Latin America were in the past resolved through comprehensive plans of action that involved the resettlement of much larger numbers of refugees than have been resettled recently. Some scholars suggest that the tide has turned since the end of the Cold War.[5] As the issues of migration and national security have been conflated, governments appear to have given up on the humanitarian principles that supposedly underlay the Refugee Convention: the need to take in those who are driven into exile by war and despotism, to share the burden of helping them and the need to provide for their return.

There are plenty of reasons why those principles have been abandoned. Local populations have their own woes that divert them from the suffering of others. Politicians use nationalism to wield power and turn their populations against outsiders. What is clear, however, is that displacement will continue to be a feature of our world. Whether for political reasons or for reasons not addressed in the 1951 Convention, such as environmental and development-related causes, people will move if their survival depends upon it. The current framework for addressing this displacement is failing those in need and will not improve until the mechanisms used to address forced migration are changed. The current system, which either pushes people into choosing increasingly dangerous paths of irregular migration or leaves them languishing for years in refugee camps or host countries without basic rights, is untenable. ■

Endnotes

1 Refugee statistics and numbers are from UNHCR: http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/syria-emergency.html

2 Leila Vignal, "Perspectives on the Return of Syrian Refugees," *Forced Migration Review* 57 (February 2018).

3 Kheder Khaddour, "Back to What Future? What Remains for Syria's Displaced People," Carnegie Middle East Center, January 18, 2018.

4 Micah Rosenberg, "Exclusive: Dozens of Refugee Resettlement Offices to Close as Trump Downsizes Program," Reuters, February 14, 2018.

5 B.S. Chimni, "From Resettlement to Involuntary Repatriation: Towards a Critical History of Durable Solutions to Refugee Problems," *New Issues in Refugee Research*, UNHCR, May 5, 1999.

Ziad Doueiri's *The Insult* and the Returns of the Lebanese Civil War

Max Weiss

There is perhaps no better recent example of a historical moment in which the past is not even past than the case of the Lebanese civil war and its afterlives. Over the nearly three decades since the Taif agreement formally put an end to the Lebanese civil war (1975–1989), Lebanese artists, intellectuals and ordinary people have struggled to interpret and represent the diverse experiences of bloodletting, mayhem and political dysfunction against the backdrop of local, regional and international conflict. The ongoing war in Syria has not only thrown new light on the Lebanese civil war but also threatened to inflame tensions that had been at the heart of the Lebanese conflict and remain unresolved: political sectarianism, state collapse and the persistence of the Palestinian refugee problem.

There has been no satisfactory resolution of these tensions and other core issues that led to the decades-long conflict. Grievances concerning the status of stateless Palestinians in Lebanon as well as the rights and representation of certain religious communities within the framework of the Lebanese sectarian nation-state remain unaddressed. Some argue that the civil war has still not truly ended. Over the course of the 1990s and 2000s, though, new expressions of popular culture served as spaces through which individuals and the society more broadly could reckon with some of its causes and consequences. While there is no consensus account of the Lebanese civil war taught in state textbooks, for example, it is commonly discussed in the press, in everyday discourse and in public culture more broadly. If the war was once referred to in sanitized terms, such as "the events" (*al-ahdath*), it is far from uncommon now to hear mention of "the civil war" (*al-harb al-ahliyya*).

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, film became an important site for the investigation of memories and injuries of the war and its afterlives. The celebrated and cherished films of Maroun Baghdadi, for example, offered a celluloid window onto social and cultural life in the context of the civil war. The dreamy cinematic meditations of Mai Masri and Danielle Arbid identified the collision between desire and destruction in the maelstrom of the war as well as the incomplete manner in which the country reckoned with its aftermath.

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Ziad Doueiri is perhaps the most widely recognized filmmaker of the Lebanese civil war. His first film, *West Beirut* (1998), was a nostalgic look at sectarian difference amid the outbreak of war told through the lens of childhood, friendship and young love. His two subsequent films, *Lila Says* (2004) and *The Attack* (2012) were set in France and Israel/Palestine, respectively. *The Attack*, based on a novel by Algerian writer Yasmina Khadra about a Palestinian suicide bomber, set off a firestorm of criticism across the Arab world when it was revealed that Doueiri had traveled to Israel to shoot the film. For that reason, the Lebanese government, the Egyptian government, Palestinian civil society organizations and others called for a boycott of the film, accusing Doueiri of "normalization" of the Israeli occupation through his collaboration with Israeli institutions and visit to occupied Palestine. In September 2017, upon returning to Lebanon from a film festival in Europe, Doueiri was detained by state security for violating Lebanese law barring visits to Israel, and the status of the film in Lebanon remains precarious. In October, a screening of the film in Ramallah was cancelled because the film and the filmmaker were seen as contributing to normalization.

His most recent film, *The Insult* (*Qadiya Raqam 23* or *Case Number 23*), which was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Picture (but eventually lost out to the Chilean film *A Fantastic Woman*), returns to the topic of the Lebanese civil war in order to meditate on the state of Lebanese society, politics and memory today and the status of the civil war in public culture and collective memory. *The Insult* is disarmingly direct in its engagement with the problem of sectarianism, civil conflict and the Arab-Israeli conflict, tackling these issues in a manner that would have seemed unimaginable even 20 years ago. The film raises legal, ethical and political questions about the state of Lebanese cultural production. In Arabic, the title *Case Number 23* is more banal, less explosive, than the English and French title, *The Insult/L'Insulte*. The simple title masks a much more complex narrative film that cuts to the heart of ongoing debates within Lebanese cultural politics and political culture.

Insult and Injury

Tony Hanna (played by Adel Karam) is a hard-working family man who owns a car repair shop in Fassouh, a working-class

Christian neighborhood in East Beirut. He and his wife Shirine (Rita Hayek) are expecting their first child. Shirine has grown tired of the stress of urban life and constantly tells Tony they should move back to Damour, his ancestral village along the Mediterranean coast just south of Beirut. He is also an ardent supporter of the Lebanese Forces, a right-wing political party and former Christian militia, which the English-language subtitles refer to as "the Christian Party." He publicly displays his loyalty to "the martyr" Bashir Gemayel, the founder, and unstinting support for "the doctor" Samir Geagea, the current party president.

Tony's life is turned upside down by a seemingly unremarkable incident, when a leaky drainpipe spills water on construction workers and engineers who are working in the area. One of the foremen, Yasser Salameh (Kamel El Basha), who also happens to be a Palestinian from the Mar Elias refugee camp, and who is 15 years Tony's senior, takes his own initiative to repair the leak from Tony's balcony. When Tony discovers what Yasser and his men have done, he takes a hammer and smashes the work. At this point, Yasser calls Tony a "prick," according to the English-language subtitles, though the term used in Arabic means pimp. (Doueiri has indicated in interviews that the germ of the film was a similar run-in he himself had in Beirut.)

At this point, Yasser's boss Talal tells him that he needs to apologize. Tony has demanded an apology or he will not let the construction crew work in peace. Yasser's wife Manal (Christine Choueiri) convinces him this is the right thing to do. When Yasser shows up at Tony's garage, a video of Bashir Gemayel attacking the Palestinians as a rootless and worthless people blares in the background. Tony loses his patience and echoes Bashir Gemayel when he tells Yasser the Palestinians are a "rootless people," parroting the Zionist adage that Palestinians never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity, and then saying the Jews were right to force them out of the country. "I wish Ariel Sharon had wiped you all out," he snarls. At this point Yasser punches Tony in the stomach. Tony is taken to the hospital with two broken ribs.

From here the plot takes some predictable but no less dramatic turns. Tony sues Yasser, infuriated that the police cannot do anything because they do not have jurisdiction in the Palestinian refugee camps. When Yasser turns himself in, the two men wind up before the court of first instance, neither of them with legal representation. The presiding judge asks about the specific insult that led Yasser to strike Tony but neither man will say. The judge shames Tony for his own violation of the law (his leaky pipe) and throws out the case. Tony goes ballistic ("If only I were a Palestinian!"). There is a brief cold peace, until one evening Tony pulls a muscle trying to pick up a heavy battery, at which point he and Shirine wind up in the hospital where their child is born prematurely and placed in the neonatal intensive care unit.

Enter the white-shoe lawyer Wajdi Wehbeh (Camille Salameh), slick and polished, who takes the case on a pro bono basis. Wehbeh is famous for his involvement in other high-profile cases, including a failed defense of the leader of "the Christian Party." The woman hired to defend Yasser (Diamand Bou Abboud) is an idealistic young lawyer whom we meet as she steps out of her stylish Mini Cooper in high heels and strides into the Mar Elias refugee camp to visit Yasser and his wife Manal. The viewer later learns that the defense lawyer is none other than Nadine Wehbeh, daughter of Wajdi, introducing a thread of family rivalry and generational conflict to the story.

The trial that follows becomes a meditation on the politics and legacies of the civil war, of the relationship between verbal injury and physical assault, on the possibility of reconciliation through individual apology, forgiveness, retributive justice and truly "turning the page." Part courtroom drama, part historical education, the film turns into a morality tale about the Lebanese civil war, the status of Palestinians in Lebanon and the question of injury and speech and the limits of retributive justice.

One remarkable aspect of this melodramatic show trial is the introduction of historical and visual evidence into the courtroom. When video of Bashir Gemayel's hateful speech about Palestinians in Lebanon and around the region is played, Wajdi responds in protest, claiming those words are just words. "We are in the Middle East," where the term "enmity" was coined, he says, eliciting a chuckle from the crowd. Wajdi makes other incendiary claims about the region, including the strange argument that if Tony had not invoked Ariel Sharon killing Palestinians but rather raised the Eskimos or the Smurfs doing so, they never would have wound up in court. "When a Jew kills an Arab it's a problem," Wajdi provocatively argues, "but Arabs killing Arabs is not a problem."

Inevitable Sectarians?

As the case heats up, it acquires national and then international significance. The president of the republic invites Tony and Yasser to the presidential palace in Baabda, where he beseeches them to end their dispute for the good of the country. Tony aggressively challenges the president, telling him that he is a public servant, asking whether he believes the Palestinians in Lebanon are "God's chosen people." The president retorts, "Do you want to start a war?" The question implicit here, of course, is whether the war ever ended, in the minds of Tony Hanna and Wajdi Wehbeh, in the minds of Yasser and his wife, in the mind of Ziad Doueiri himself, to say nothing of the audience.

In one of the film's most poignant scenes, Yasser's car will not start as they are both leaving, and Tony casually helps him get it running. Despite the good feeling created in this moment of humane and even tender care, a question arises that uncomfortably stalks the entire film: are these two men—is the country—capable of reconciliation or tolerance? And, even more difficult: is the liberal principle of tolerance embedded in this gesture—and the melodramatic music that attends it—all that Ziad Doueiri has to offer? Can tolerance take the place of an adequate accounting of the horrors of the Lebanese civil war and stand in for the work of mourning that would be required to "turn the page" on "the events," as Lebanese politicians

say so often? When the leader of "the Christian Party"—a surrogate figure for Samir Geagea—appears on screen in a fictional episode of the actual television program "Objectively Speaking" ("Bi-mawduʿiyyah") in order to bemoan the fact that the country "never had a real national reconciliation," he addresses Tony directly on camera: "I know what happened to you. We can't change the past." Nevertheless, the political leader goes on to admonish Tony that he—that the Lebanese people—must recognize that "the war is over." The notion that one of the most unrepentant militia leaders in the history of the Lebanese civil war, one who has been reintegrated into the political system by way of the amnesty law that pardoned all warlords and political bosses who were largely responsible for the intractable fighting, would arise as the voice of reason in this moment strains credulity.

When Tony takes the stand in court, Wajdi blindsides him by introducing video footage from the massacre at Damour. Fighters from the left-wing Lebanese National Movement (LNM) and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) besiege the village and clash with the local Christian militiamen as their leadership tries to evacuate women, children and families: some are taken to Kaslik, others elsewhere; some attempt to go by sea while others run along the nearby train tracks. With archival video and visual imagery present in the courtroom, it would seem that the Lebanese civil war itself is now on trial. Tony glances backwards to see his father doubled over in pain, in tears, at which point he switches off the video and storms out of the courtroom with his father in tow. In a sense, Wajdi has introduced the problem—without using the term—of what might be called comparative victimology, that is, an attempt to quantify relative suffering and then to litigate physical, emotional and psychological damages.

Sitting alone back home in his garage one night, Tony emerges to find Yasser out in the street, asking how many of his ribs he had broken, provoking him, telling Tony that he talks too much, that all of his problems had befallen him because he did not know how to keep his big mouth shut. Yasser taunts him mercilessly: "you think you're a victim"; "victim, my ass"; "you all were tourists during the war—hanging out in Switzerland and shopping"; "you are spoiled brats" who don't know the meaning of suffering. He continues until Tony punches Yasser in the stomach. It is only then that Yasser mutters, "I'm sorry."

In his closing argument, Wajdi says, "No one has a monopoly on suffering." Be that as it may, the presiding Judge Colette Mansur returns the verdict: a two to one vote declaring Yasser Salameh not guilty. As Tony and Shirine are about to be taken away by a police escort, he looks back up at Yasser atop the courthouse steps, smiling slightly as Yasser stands there with a wistful smirk on his face. In the final shot, a rearward view of Beirut expands to fill the screen as the camera takes the audience up, up and away from the scrum of daily life. The helicopter-shot view of Beirut zooms us out of the city and away from a place that seems unchanged, condemned to an eternal and cyclical fate.

Although this ought to be a punctuating moment in the film, the climax of a taut narrative, what anyone is actually feeling in this moment, as they all shake hands and hug and walk away, remains hard to describe. Indeed, it is unclear what any of this is taken to mean altogether. What does Wajdi think about the fact that his daughter Nadine has won her first case against him as they sit uncomfortably side by side in their counselor's chairs, the prodigal daughter having defeated her larger-than-life father for the first time? There is little sense of whether they have learned something about each other, about their own (Christian) family history or about the role of the law in the adjudication of Lebanese history. In other words: What was this all for? What are the consequences of this defeat for his political project and that of "the Christian party"? What are Tony and Shirine thinking as they drive off under police escort? What are Yasser and Manal feeling as they head back to the Mar Elias camp? What will be the fate of other Palestinians in Lebanon who are still unable to legally work in most sectors of the Lebanese economy? What will Yasser, in particular, do now that he has been fired from the job he had been on when this whole mess started? The expectation would seem to be that everyone will quietly, however repentantly, return to the status quo ante.

The Law of No Victor, No Vanquished

While some critics mock the film's melodramatic predictability—"a diverting, junky courtroom drama" according to one critic[1]—*The Insult* has been widely acclaimed for its forthright consideration of controversial issues in the Lebanese and Palestinian contexts. The Academy of Arts and Motion Pictures saw fit to recommend the film as the first from Lebanon to be on the short list of nominees for Best Foreign Picture. But there are complex ideological dimensions to the varied reception of the film in the US and Europe, on the one hand, and its reception in the Arab world, on the other, that need to be taken into account.

There is a problem embedded in the narrative of the film regarding the relationship between sectarianism and violence. After the court of first instance rejects Tony's claim against Yasser, Tony's father, a survivor of the Damour massacre, chides his son for being so sore about the whole thing. "That's how wars start…you were in the wrong," he says. But historians and other analysts of the Lebanese civil war should be forgiven for responding by asking whether this is indeed how wars start, whether a war such as the Lebanese civil war starts because of individual insults or because of a political system that institutionalizes sectarianism. The Arab-Israeli conflict, which created the Palestinian refugee community that wound up in Lebanon in 1948, 1967 and 1970, increased the hostility of the Lebanese Forces and is one of the leading reasons why the wars in Lebanon broke out. These thorny issues are skated over as the politics of sectarianism and civil conflict in Lebanon are reduced to personal differences.

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Masculinity also plays a key role in this regard. The verbal insult Yasser hurls at Tony may have kicked off the conflict, but it is the physical assault—the punch to the stomach—that sets off the legal case, which will in turn precipitate the national crisis, driving the country to the brink of civil war. To the extent that there is a resolution of the conflict at the core of the film, it only comes about when Yasser goads Tony into punching him in the stomach, which is the moment at which Yasser apologizes to Tony. Even though Tony loses his case, the film concludes on a note of begrudging acceptance between the two sides. Tony the mechanic has fixed Yasser's car and Yasser has expressed some sympathy for the difficulty Tony and Shirine confront in their everyday life. No victor, no vanquished. Everyone saves face, but only by affirming their masculinity through throwing a punch. Is the viewer to understand that fistfighting is how real men apologize, working out their own need for violence as the means through which retribution or reparation or justice might be achieved? The fact that the legal case is thrown out—that justice cannot be achieved in the courts, whether national or international—might be read as indicative of the politics of the film.

The denouement is even more mystifying. Those who argue that the Lebanese civil war never actually ended do so in light of the problem that none of the political and sectarian leaders in the country were ever brought to justice. An amnesty law ratified in 1991 effectively codified the fuzzy principle of "no victor, no vanquished" (*la ghalib wa-la maghlub*), so the idea that the Samir Geagea-like character is the moral conscience of the film is an interesting counter-factual narrative, one in which Lebanese Christians get their recompense even after "losing" the war. Again, it is unclear what kind of emotional sense the final images are meant to evoke; shot from a helicopter as it draws away, up and out of the hurly-burly of Beirut, they elevate the viewer and the filmmaker alike above the petty squabbles of a tortured people who seem unable to avoid dramas they have created themselves that have their origins in wounded pride and machismo and unresolved vendettas. One wonders whether Doueiri is not simply throwing up his hands and choppering his way out of there himself. Or perhaps this is better understood as a moment of undecidability? As in other punctuated moments of collective violence in Lebanese history during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the message here would seem to be that restorative justice simply cannot be done because of the irreducible and irreconcilable claims of the warring parties.

The Insult is a skilled and accomplished film, to be sure, which is one reason why it earned a nod from the Academy Awards for 2018. The film raises difficult questions with universal significance about memory, justice and forgiveness. The very fact that Doueiri manages to take on these issues speaks both to his skills as a filmmaker and to the moment in Lebanese history when these questions could be screened and considered.

If there is a sense at times that the Lebanese civil war itself was a series of exercises in futility, though, then the film is itself particularly galling for the viewer given that there seems to be little reconciliation possible. For Doueiri, individuals would seem to bear responsibility for the making and unmaking of the country. But must the Lebanese people be represented in the international arena—at the Oscars—as being held hostage to primordial hatreds and personal vendettas that prevent them from reconciliation? Are those unquenchable thirsts for revenge what truly prevents Lebanon from moving forward? Are there not institutional or structural realities of Lebanese life that merit mention or critique? Has the Arab-Israeli conflict not played a major role in shoring up and perpetuating the destructive forces of sectarianism in the country? Who, in the final analysis, is fit to judge or be judged in Lebanon?

For showcasing the suffering of the Christian community in Lebanon, some critics claim that Doueiri is a partisan in the post-memory of the Lebanese civil war. And, indeed, in an interview, Doueiri said:

> My background was with Yasser, and my present stance is with Toni. I grew up in Yasser's world. With time continuing to pass, I now belong more in Toni's world. This is how we evolve in life. I grew up always thinking that the Christian right wing had no narrative, that they were considered the enemy. Period. With time, you get to sit with them and negotiate with your neighbor and you start saying, "Wait a second." We accuse those people of all sorts of things, but in reality, they aren't this-and-this. They aren't traitors. They are not collaborators. They are actually the opposite. They are the people who really fought, suffered, and sacrificed in defense of a certain ideal that I like.[2]

Setting aside the political ramifications of his statement, the more unsettling question at the heart of this film may be whether any of this actually matters at all. Doueiri seems willing to conclude there can be neither victor nor vanquished in law, in politics or in popular culture. ■

Endnotes

1 Ignatiy Vishnevetsky, "From Lebanon Comes *The Insult*, an Oscar Nominee that Pulls Its Punches," AV Club, January 30, 2018.

2 Diana Drumm, "'The Insult': Ziad Doueiri on Humanizing a Story's Politics," No Film School, January 16, 2018.

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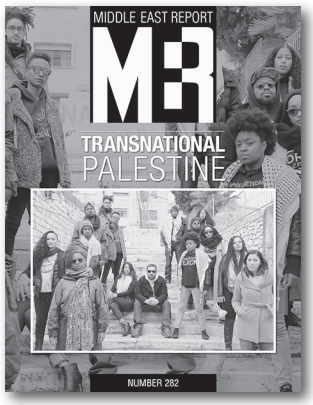

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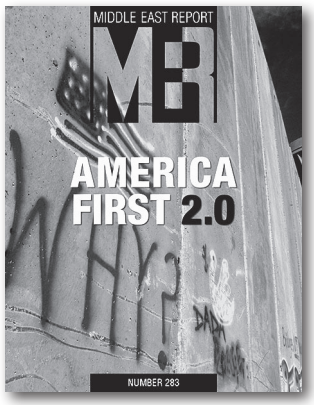

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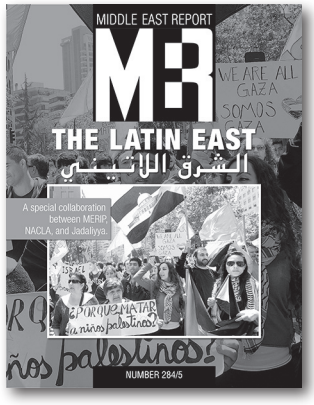

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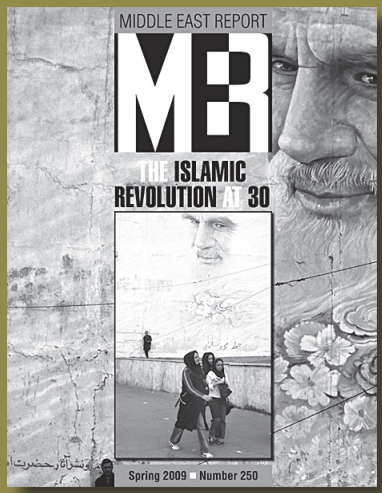

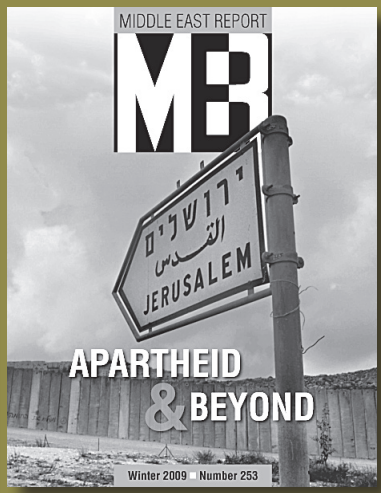

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