



## THE SYRIAN MONOLOGUES !

Personal stories of Syrian Refugees in Jordan )

Training )

Editing & Translation )

By )

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Part of the Social Psychology Program )

Care - Jordan )

June 2015 )

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## **Amal Ibrahim - Edleb**

I wish the old days would return, but not the bad ones. My husband died when I was still young and I had to continue the harsh and difficult path of raising my children alone for more than 22 years. Then the war came and destroyed everything in the blink of an eye: the house I built and the education of my children, which was the priority of my life. The outbreak of the war did not allow them to finish their education and obtain their certificates, since we had to leave the country before their graduation, which ceased their opportunities in working and destroyed my dreams and overwhelmed me.

When the revolution erupted; it was peaceful in the beginning. Demonstrators were only calling God's name: 'Allah Wa Akbar'. During one of these demonstrations, I was attending a wedding at my neighbour's house. The calling started to rise and the sounds of the bullets started to fill the space. It felt like rain pouring down from the sky. I looked out of the window and saw soldiers rushing into my house in pursuit of a young boy. I was not able to reach my house due to the intensity of the shouting, and my daughter was at home alone. She was very afraid, when the soldiers came into the house, she started screaming: 'This boy is not my brother, he is not my brother.' Yet the boy was insisting: "she is my sister, she is my sister." The soldiers took him and left her in panic.

The revolution grew into a war in no time. I escaped to my sister's house, because it was safer there. One day while I was with my sister shopping in the market, the tanks entered the neighbourhood where she lives and besieged the place. We were stuck outside unable to go back home. We bought bread and food and waited to see what we could do, and when the shooting would stop. The bombing was with planes from the sky and with tanks from the ground. We took a corner and stayed there waiting. I called my nephew but wasn't able to hear anything except the shouting and the crying around him. He said: 'Don't try to come back. The shelling is intense here, and our neighbour's house had been totally destroyed.'

My sister and I started to cry and pray. A car passed by and we asked the driver to take us home. He said: 'This is like going into death on your own feet. If you want I could drop you at a nearer neighbourhood.' We started debating, my sister and me, who should go with the car and who should stay. We finally decided to go together and if fate desires, die together. We jumped into the car and went to the neighbouring road. The car was shaking left and right from the loud noises of the bombs. When we left the car, we started to walk across the walls to protect ourselves. We were crying, laughing and calling God to guide our way to reach safe to our children.

When we arrived home, our children started laughing at us for we were comically jumping from one corner to another to protect ourselves from the shelling. My youngest

nephew was crying loudly because we did not take him with us to the market place as he wanted to go out and see the planes raiding.

The shelling continued. With every attack, my sister hides behind the door. Thus we would ask her cynically: 'Do you think the door would protect you when the whole building collapses?' Her daughter tarts to shout 'take the ground' and we all submit, every one under something; a chair, a table or a bed. When the bombing stop we start to laugh at our movements. My niece started to play the role of the journalist, asking us questions and finishing by the comment: 'charming, despite your fear and pain, you were charming.'

Fear and pain continued to be part of us. I will never forget the horrible day my daughter and me decided to flee the country in order to save the young children who have no stake in this war. That day, we started our journey after we agreed to pay money to the smuggler to take us to a safer place. The smuggler betrayed us, left us mid-way after handing us over to another smuggler. We couldn't protest or argue, so we handed our fate to God. We went into another car, my daughter and I with her husband and their three children; the eldest was only four years old. We paid the agreed amount to the first taxi, and for the second one, we paid an amount of twelve thousand liras to take us to Al Laja. We arrived there and the taxi driver said: 'There is a truck for cattle commuting to the borders, but you have to pay six thousand liras. The truck will drive only at night, using no light for the soldiers are on the way and will be shooting at any passer-by.' We refused and started to walk.

The image that haunted me during this journey was that of the Palestinian diaspora drama series. I was holding a sack on my head, carrying a bag in my hand and another - with food - on my back. My daughter carried her little daughter and her bag. Her husband carried his two other daughters. At 2pm, the smuggler handed us over to two young men and informed us that we had to walk for two more hours to reach the next point. The whole day passed and the night started to fall, but we had not arrived yet. We were not able to rest. The kids were not allowed to cry or scream otherwise the army troops who are 200 meters away from us, would shoot on us. On the way, I had to get rid of the food and other things too. We arrived at the destination set by the smugglers who started to quarrel violently among themselves and threatened each other with the weapon. We started to shout and the children to cry. One of the smugglers won the quarrel and took us to the centre where a car was supposed to drive us to the city of Suweidaa. We waited there for four hours - in pain and hunger - waiting for more people to come and fill the vehicle. I met a woman from the city who brought us food and water. When we reached the right number the truck came to pick us up and he wanted six thousand liras. We did not have any choice but to accept, for it was cold and the children were hungry and feeling cold and the adults were very tired.

The journey started at night and in the middle of the way, the truck broke down. What can we do? What is the solution? It was so cold and we were very afraid that the soldiers would see us. The children and the women started to cry and scream. My daughter was very angry, she asked the smuggler: "what did you do to us?" he answered her: "shut up or else I will shoot in the air, and see what the soldiers would do to you then." She hugged her daughter and started to cry silently. We continued our journey by foot until we arrived to the gardens of Suweidaa. A trailer came and took us to Suemreh, the point from where we will go to the Jordanian borders. The citizens of Suemreh welcomed us and gave us food and water.

A big trolley came to take us all. We were crammed inside it; there were no place to put our legs straight. For this journey, the smugglers asked us to pay hundred thousand liras. We could not succeed in gathering the whole amount. The smugglers refused the money and said: 'Get all the money or go back home.' We helped each other out, collecting from those who had more to support those who had less. The trolley set on its way that was very rough and dangerous. Every time the trolley tilted from its heaviness, we would panic and start to curse the reason behind our exodus.

After twelve hours of horror, we arrived to the Jordanian borders and found other families waiting for their turn to enter Jordan. When their turn arrived, we took their food, water and space to be our temporary place. The next day, Jordanian soldiers came and gave us food and water. It started to rain; my son in law gathered some sticks and plastic bags to make a fire for us to get warm. On the third day, I got very sick and could not stay any longer with my daughter and her family. A car picked me up and I crossed the borders. When they brought me water and food to eat I refused for I remembered my granddaughter telling me: 'I'm hungry grandma, I'm hungry.' The Jordanian commander saw me crying. He took pity on me, went in the rain and the horrible weather and brought my daughter and her family to me. I thanked him dearly and left to A-Sarhan Square not knowing whether we will be accepted in the refugee camp or not. Five days have passed, during which we went completely missing.

## **Bashar Asfar – Daraa**

This is the war – it came to Syria not knowing who's inside the country.

People started running around asking everyone to leave their homes, for the rebels want to liberate the area. My mother told us in great fear: "We will be leaving permanently to Jordan." My siblings and I started to prepare our bags and gather the things we like. Though we like all our belongings we could only take few of them.

That night, time has passed very quickly and the sun rose earlier than usual to tell us: "It's time to leave." The moment I never wished for had arrived; to be forced out of my country. We took our luggage, put them in the cab and my heart was crying before my eyes. Hence I was asking myself: "Oh my country, how long would I leave you? And when I return would I find you the same?" Sorrow was strangling me making me weak.

I used to live in Daraa, a city few hundred meters away from Ramtha - Jordan. Every Friday after the prayer, we would go to the market place to buy humus and bread, to find half of our fellow customers coming from Ramtha; as neighbouring cities would naturally do.

We arrived to the Jordanian borders and despite the good reception; I felt I became a refugee, which made me very angry. We got registered, my mother and my siblings, in a food program which turned us into numbers; numbers for food, numbers for mobility, and numbers for health care. However, I am a number that dreams to go back to its home and humanity.

I respect those who helped us, opened their homes and hearts for us. When I used to pay the rent for our Jordanian landlord, when we first migrated; his eyes would go into tears every time I offered him money and he would say: "keep it until your financial situation gets better." I also respect those who listen to our stories and sorrows and try to help us. But I don't like to be abused. And I don't like gas-men who come in the morning waking me up, while playing their ugly music, as if the houses are empty.

## **Bashar Ghazawi – Daraa**

As I return from work hungry and tired, my wife meets me at the doorway, takes my suitcase and tells me “God bless you”. She waits for few minutes and then showers me with her questions: “Where did you go today? Why? How long you stayed? What did they tell you? What will you do tomorrow?” I wait until she finishes her inquiries to tell her that I’m hungry and I want to eat. She brings me tea and goes back to her infinite questions until I answer them all. In return, I try to be very abrupt and serious in my answers so she would not ask for details. This act became a habit in my life, though I cannot adapt to it since it reminds me of the security interrogations I had to face back in Syria.

I’m from Daraa, the cradle of the revolution, I have left the city after I became wanted and hunted by all the Syrian security forces. I was a university student when one day I participated in a peaceful demonstration demanding for our rights to improve our living conditions; in return the security chased us and labeled us. I had to flee my university that day jumping over its wall, breaking my ankle. I spent six days on the road from Hums until I arrived to my home town and my home - my safe haven.

The security forces kept breaking into our house to arrest me and my six brothers but I was always lucky to escape. In return, they used to mess up our house and break all the furniture under the pretext of searching. They even started to beat my old father and insult my mother and sister, which drove my older brother to revolt, thus we had to flee to Jordan in 2012.

My house was my shelter; it had a blue gate that leads to a garden filled with roses. My father used to care for his flowers sometimes more than for us. The last imprinted image of our house in my mind was just before we left it; my mother is cleaning the doors and the windows to leave the house spotless; my sister is arranging the silver wear in the kitchen; I’m assembling my important documents and my father is roaming inside the house as if measuring it with his footsteps; my younger brother is playing on his computer and my older brother is looking outside the window awaiting for someone.

My mother stood by the door and told our neighbor: “take good care of the house.” She gave her the keys while crying. Another neighbor was plowing the land under the heated sun. My father went to the roof to hide his tears, while the tears of my mother and sister flooded.

My sister held her luggage, my brother held two and a small bag. My father told them to leave the house before him and my mother said I’ll be following but did not move. I stood by the blue gate and felt kicked out of my own house. I felt that my house is going to be eaten up by the trees and swollen by the ground as we leave it.

We approached the borders - my mother was holding my sister's hand, my father carrying my 4 years old nephew and holding him tight as if someone is trying to kidnap him - we were all walking in great fear from being shot at. We crossed the borders and reached Jordan. The sun was high and burning. We were driven to a refugee camp. There was no place for us to stay, so we were given mattresses and left under the sky. We were still afraid, even the weather was against us, which turned from a very hot temperature into a very wet tempest that we could not avoid, being left outside. We decided to go into the city and look for a shelter. We found a small empty place that we rented. Having no more money to furnish it made my mother sleep on the bare floor with her shoes serving as her pillow; she slept with tears in her eyes and heart from pain and shame.

During the first month, I used to go out every day to look for a job with no success, until we reached a dire situation. I got disappointed and started to cry. My mother held me like a child. I broke off her arms and went to the courtyard and cried my eyes out. I stayed there until I released all my pain and frustration, calmed down and started questioning myself: "why is this happening to me? What is wrong with me? Why don't I work with my profession? I'm an English teacher and I studied that at university?" Thus I decided to work as a private tutor.

I started to teach a young boy from our neighborhood for a very small amount of money in return. The student improved at school and started promoting me to his friends, who joined him later. Time passed until one day a student in his senior high class came to study with me. When he excelled in the national exams, I felt his success was my success and the real start of my new career.

## **Diala Asfar – Daraa**

A wasted dream... I deeply respect my pain, and refuse to share it with anyone. But this time I want to reveal it, maybe I'll find someone to soothe me. I used to live with my dear family in a house filled with love and warmth. But a war came over my beloved Syria and shredded its body and soul.

My mother used to fear for us immensely; for the grave of my father was still wet and her wound was bleeding and her pain was not buried yet. War started to grow and fear started to control our emotions. My country turned from being a peaceful, friendly and serene place into a fearful, devastating and destroyed place. Out of fear and caution, my mother started preparing us that she will take us away from our adored country. We refused the idea totally and completely, though we understood that my mother is not able to bare the loss of anyone after my father. We therefore decided to submit and leave to where she wants. One gloomy day she said: "tomorrow we are leaving to Jordan."

We started to pack, and I did not have enough time to say goodbye to my dearest person after my parents - 'Farah' my cousin - who used to fill my life with joy. I said goodbye to my grandees and to my aunt who lived with us during the war. We were crying and they were telling us: "take care and don't worry you'll be back, you'll be back." On our way we saw my uncles and they were crying as well. I started to feel torn and my body started to collapse from the intensity of my weeping. I will never forget the sight of my grandmother and my aunts: Siham, Wafa', and Aziza who raised us with my mother; telling us with their eyes: "don't go and leave us alone, stay with us we love you." I was strong from the outside, but burning from the inside and no water in the world could have set my fire out.

Four years have passed in exile; pain and longing are still killing me. How I wish we go back to our treasured country, to our relatives, friends, and neighbors; I long to throw my body in the arms of a soul that I need more than mine.

## **Dua' Salameh – Daraa**

My country is a body without a soul. Syria - land of security, generator of all virtuous and source of all kindness, who caused tears for millions of people and forced us to leave to Jordan; due to the pain, rage, damage and fear that it had to bear. Oh how I hope that Syria would go back to its previous status, the country of safety, prosperity and hospitability to all its guests.

One summer day, we were gathered happily for breakfast in our courtyard, when we heard the sound of a Meg airplane above our heads trying to identify a target. The plane started to raid and the sound was so loud that all our windows were broken and all doors were shaking. The plane hit a nearby house of two stories and destroyed it. No one of the inhabitants of that house stayed alive, except a baby girl who flew off the window from the intensity of the bombing and lived deprived of her parents and family.

The events accelerated until my last day in Syria. I went with my husband and child to our house after we fled it to my in laws; we were not able to stay at home due to the intense raiding on our neighborhood. I went home after being away from it for a long while and felt I will never see it again. I took some food from the kitchen and went into the bedroom to gather some clothes for my children and husband. While putting them in the bag, I started to hug my husband's outfits and smelled them closely as if it was the last time I would touch them.

As we intended to leave the house, the raiding exceeded and my child said: "mother we are going to die here." We were barely able to get out, my husband dropped us at my parent's house because it was safer and he went out with his friends. I wished to leave Syria because I was afraid for my children and my husband. I had a feeling that something bad will occur to him.

One hour later, my family were information that the cellar in which my husband and his friends were, had been raided. My family did not inform me out of pity on me. I've seen the bombed place and the burnt people lying on the floor, I even crossed over my husband not knowing that it was him telling myself: "I know this face, may God protect him." At night my nephew informed me that my husband was among the injured. I rushed to the hospital and for the second time I could not recognize him, due to the burns on his body and face. He stayed four days in bed but was clinically dead. Many days had passed but that horrific day never left my mind, it is carved in my memory with its minutes passing over hours and its hours over days.

After my husband's martyrdom, I felt that life had stopped there. However, I keep saying: "God is the provider of patience."

## **Fatmeh Al Zoubi - Daraa**

The funniest thing that happened during the war and is stuck in my mind was that little boy who knew many war games, especially how to act; yes to act. How can a toddler less than 3 years old act?

When I used to go to my university exams in Damascus, I used to take my child with me. For there were many checkpoints on the road and sometimes I won't be able to return home, even though it is only 140 km away. So I would take him to make sure he's safe. Lest the soldiers attack my town, 'Taher A-Rouh' will be with me under my wings and I will be breathing the same air with him, eating the same food together and at night he will be sleeping in my arms peacefully, and when I wake up in the morning his innocent face will be the first thing I would see.

We used to leave at dawn from my hometown Al Mussefra to reach Daraa and then to Damascus. This journey would take five hours in each direction due to all the imposed checkpoints that are run by either the army or the rebels. When the bus leaves my town, it carries 14 people including me and my child. After 3km, starts the first checkpoint and with it the suffering begins; a long and hard waiting time until the checking is over, one car after another until we get to our turn. This happens at every checkpoint until we arrive to Damascus.

The fun part was that 'Taher' my little boy used to distinguish between checkpoints. He would know which one is for the State Army and which one for the Freedom Army; when we are stopped by the State Army, he would put his little head out of the window and starts to shout: "God, Syria, Bashar only, God protect the army." When the commander hears him he laughs, approaches him and asks: "What's your name? How old are you? Where are you going? Where is daddy? Do you love Syria? Do you love Bashar?" and when my son finishes answering; the commander would laugh and ask the soldiers to open the checkpoint and give way to the bus, uttering: "this boy is from us."

Everyone in the bus starts to laugh and recall the scene; how my child spoke and how we were all saved because of him, how no one was arrested or asked to show his/her ID card, and how we passed quickly. After 40 km, the bus is stopped again at a checkpoint for the Freedom Army, so 'Taher' started yelling: "God, Syria, Freedom only, May God protects the Freedom Army." He did this at every checkpoint we encountered until we arrived to Damascus, and every time the soldiers would laugh and allow us to pass without searching us. This had saved his innocence, protected his dreams and guaranteed his mother's way to her exams safely and peacefully.

The clashes accelerated and I had to take the decision to get to a safer place. I decided to leave my country, my family and my dreams. To leave the warm heart, in which I

spent my most beautiful detailed time. I decided to leave my heart and soul in my country.

I took my children; one in my arms and the other in my womb; left my house and reached to the first point of my immigration saga. I was in A-Tayba area, still breathing my country's oxygen, walking over its soil and protected by its shades. I kept soothing my soul with the fact that I'm still breathing the same air as my beloved ones. Though every time I heard the sounds of the army's boots and bombs, fear would eat my heart up, I would panic for those I left behind and for those I carry in my arms and in my belly. While my innocent child, kept holding tight to me and asking me: "Mother would we arrive?"

I reached to the first point of my exodus. We were put in an old house that had cracked walls like our shattered dreams and ruined doors like our torn souls. Its windows were sealed and every time I looked at them I wondered; would they ever open? Would we ever get our pursued freedom? Would there be a new dawn over my country? Would the war end? I waited very long before the night fell and before we were able to leave that house to our escape journey. I waited and waited but the widows never opened. Hence we left the house and took the car leaving that house behind.

I forgot my coat in that grim house, I tried to get back for it, but the smuggler refused and the car went off. I did not want the coat because it was very cloudy and the wind was blowing off our bones. I wanted my coat because of the smell of my father was still on it; he brought it for me, with tears in his eyes, worried about my unknown future.

The car started the journey. I was still on our soil, smelling the scent of my beloved, tasting their salty tears, watching the fear in their eyes and hearing the echo of their voices in my ears. How I wish to go back to them; to my father's arms and to my mother's bread. A woman's voice, about my mother's age, woke me up saying: "come on, we're starting to walk." I started sobbing and I was not able to distinguish between my tears and the rain, as if heaven was embracing my weeping, and the sound of the wind was surrounding the cry of my broken soul.

I felt I want to go back, I was terrified, I started asking myself: "what kind of stupid decision I made? Would I reach to a safe haven? What would happen if I'm not able to cross over the war zone?" An internal voice cried: "you have promised your child to take him to a safety shore." I also promised my father – who taught me how to be proud - to call my new baby after his name.

The smugglers started to yell: "stop the babies from crying, they have to sleep so the soldiers would not hear us and attack. Do not talk; we will walk with some protection in the front and another in the back." I was carrying my child and a small bag filled with his

clothes, and his brother's heart inside me, was beating every minute in my ears. The night was dark and the fear was dominating everyone.

One could see the misery in the faces of the worried people. A young man approached me and said: "give me the bag, I'll carry it." I gave it to him and thanked him. We were 5 men and 6 women with their children. During the walk, all we were able to hear was our heart beats filled with fear, and the sound of our steps and those of our children, walking slowly and silently.

The route was rough, filled with stones and thorns. I was not able to tell anyone that I'm pregnant, to spare them the extra burden. I carried myself and my children and continued this dark and empty road. All of a sudden, we heard the cry of a baby who was longing for his mother's milk and wanted to breathe her affection, for his father was carrying him. The smugglers started screaming at the mother: "hush him, hush him up" and they changed our way into the wood to reduce the sound of the screaming baby. We sat under the trees, while the smugglers covered the mother and the baby with blankets. The baby was fed and slept calmly.

We continued our journey. My child was still in my arms. Now I started to feel his weight getting heavier. I realized that he is sleeping, as reaction to darkness and fear that forced his filled eyes with tears, to sleep. I also felt that my fetus is not moving anymore, he was also tired from his brother's weight. I felt I was not able to continue, and that my body is collapsing.

We arrived at the high hill that we have to cross, I was not able to climb; a man came through the darkness, covering his face with the Syrian flag, and told me: "you have to climb the hill." I said: "I cannot, I'm pregnant." His tone changed and said: "why didn't you tell me? I'm here to help you." He took my child so I could walk. We crossed over the hill and our feet started stumbling towards the Jordanian borders.

The sound of the children's footsteps during our journey is still alive in my memory until today. Their steps were scattered and scared, yet light and innocent like their dreams, in the beginning; then became fast and hasty because they approached the borders that led them to safety. Their later footsteps were filled with joy and hope as they were overcoming the fear and pain they endured during their bitter journey.

To all the leaders of the World: stop the war in my country. Stop the bleeding, stop it.

I hereby declare in all the languages of the world, I miss my country, my home, and my children whom I used to teach the art of living.

I miss my university that used to feed my knowledge.

Stop the war. I miss the walls of my destroyed house, my broken mirrors, and my scattered furniture.

I miss the ground specs in front of my door and the flowers I have planted in my garden.

Stop the war, the destruction and the killing. I miss the dream I depicted in my country and was shredded by the wounds, the pain and the war.

I miss my memories, my sighs my happiness, and my wishes.

I miss my 25 years I spent in my country.

Stop the war, stop the massacres; I've been waiting for long on the pathways of hope and in the alleys of dreams.

Stop the war; I want to miss the sounds of missiles and tanks.

## **Maeda Al-Buwaidani - Duma**

Syria is my beloved country, my life. The day I left Syria I became a body without a soul, fleeing was not a solution, but it bought us time to rearrange our life. Asylum is a sea of suffering, oppression and fear, but it is also a feeling of safety and stability.

I left my house in Duma near Damascus the first time when shrapnel of a bomb almost killed me and my children, that day I was sitting on the balcony and the sound of shooting was getting louder, the minute I moved to another spot, a bullet penetrated the place I was sitting in with my son. We moved with all of the neighbors to the shelter out of fear from the bombing and the tanks, the children started crying terrified of the blasting sounds. An old woman started laughing and said: "You cowards, this is only the sound of fireworks", everyone laughed, and the children stopped crying. The bombing continued over 14 hours, later the news came that 5 of our neighbors from the same family died and only a 6 month old baby was left alive.

At the beginning of the revolution, there were demonstrations every Friday; which was one of the hardest days of the week for martyrs fell on that day. One Friday, a demonstration in my city Duma continued from 6:00 am until 3:00 pm, people usually finish their Friday prayers and they go from there to demonstrate. That day my husband, my children and myself decided to take refuge at my mother in law's house, we drove the car between burning tires and bullets filling the streets, and passed by the blood of the martyrs who fell that day. The streets were empty when we took off, suddenly, we were surrounded by a group of ten security members, they pointed their rifles towards us and told my husband: "you have ten seconds to turn around and go back where you came from, or we will rain bullets on you, your wife, and children", we were scared out of our wits, so we went back and stayed under siege for ten days, and couldn't get out or else we'll be killed.

When the siege was lifted, we went back to our house in Duma to take our stuff. As we got home I was in shock of the condition of my house, it was in ruins, smelled very bad, flees were everywhere, worms has eaten up my mattress, and the floor was swamped with water of the water-tanks and pipes which were bombed. That day, the bombing was relentless, my husband was pleading for me to hurry up in packing our belongings, and my children were screaming of fear. We packed what we could of the luggage and our children's clothes, and headed towards my brother's house to take shelter from the bombing; as soon as we got there a grenade fell on his house and destroyed part of it. We were traumatized and set off to another area called Adra Al-Ummalyeh which was a desert; we stayed there for four months in terrible conditions, later we decided to take refuge in Jordan following my family.

We headed towards the Jordanian borders; I took drinking water, food for the children, and all of their belongings, as we were expecting a long wait on the borders especially that the border has gotten stricter. I went to Jordan where I will be reunited with my siblings and parents.

We reached the borders by car, after dodging a lot of checkpoints on the way, the Syrian security forces wouldn't let us enter the Jordanian borders unless we pay a huge amount of money which we didn't have. We were stuck for days on the borders like everyone else of our case. One day a high ranking Jordanian officer came, he only comes once every ten days, they asked for our passport, and we stood in a queue for hours waiting our turn... the queue where men were standing was much longer than the women's queue, so I took all of the passports and stood in line waiting.

When it was my turn, the officer called me and asked: "why do you want to enter to Jordan?"

I said: "To protect my children from the bombing"

He said: "And if they ask you about what is happening what will you respond?"

"I will say, Allah is my suffice, and the best protector"

"You won't say what happened to you?"

"No way... I only plea to God"

"And if you get in, what will you say about the officer who let you in?"

"I will say that he is a gentleman who fears God"

He stamped our passports and we entered Jordan, I was extremely happy and grateful, especially that I was reunited with my family and it was Al-Adha holidays so we could all celebrate it sound and alive.

We started being more stable, my children enrolled in Jordanian schools, and I could see the happiness in their eyes, they told me "mom, our confidence is back to us", that's when I cried of joy, and was grateful to Jordan for providing us with the safety and stability which we have lost for years.

Though problems started surfacing again when my husband started working in a faraway area, his salary reached to 700 JDs, but the manager would not pay him the amount and told him: "you are Syrian, go file a complaint; they will take you to Al-Za'tari refugee camp." This was our first shock; he moved afterwards to work with another person, who fooled him with 300 JDs, that's when he decided to stay at home. My husband learned a lesson since then that you either be a wolf lest you will be eaten by wolves... however, we don't want to be wolves, we want peace and to return to our country.

## **Maha Al Masry – Hums**

We walk through life uncertain, though our path always leads us forward, despite the dark jungle we live at. I flee with my children from aspects of life that frighten us not knowing where to go. I feel choked not knowing my way towards the light. I feel lonely not knowing who to long for, and how long this loneliness would last.

I want to go back to my country and my previous ordinary life that I used to enjoy. Nothing left in my memory except the voices of those I love. Their sounds are beautiful melody in my ears - the voice of my sister and her children; the praising of God in the mosques when the people are answering the prayer together; my dreams of my country in which I spent my most beautiful days. All this had past and turned into ashes and the house turned black from continuous burning.

One day during the siege, we were 50 persons sheltered in our house, because it was safer than other houses in the area, or so we thought. Burning barrels and bombs were dropped on us like hail. But the sound of our laughter was louder and stronger than the shelling; we were in a hysteric mood from our cynical situation.

We prepared dinner for all and sat to eat; each person started commenting:

I don't want to die hungry

I want to eat before I die

Who will die before who?

I don't want to die with a burning barrel

I want to die filled with food

I want to die light

Maybe this will be the last time we eat together

Between our amusement and seriousness, we started to think how we are going to escape from this shelter; for we have no way out due to the continuous bombing outside and because the house started to burn from a flamed barrel that fell on it. We dug a hole in the wall to be able to escape through it, and started to leave one after the other. But the hole was small and many were stuck passing through it, which made us go back to our hysteric laughter.

We left our house rapidly with our children, family members and neighbors and started to walk; the sounds were surrounding us, filling the space with tears. The sky poured rain on us and the wind pushed us backward every time it blew, to a point where we were almost stuck in the mud. The road was long and hard and neither nature nor people spared us; bullets started flying over our heads, and we did not know where to go or how to protect ourselves.

We walked for 3 hours without food or water because we were not able to carry anything from our house that was totally burnt. During our walk I used to stop the people and ask them for some food or for a sip of water for my kids but all in vain. I walked carrying my one year old daughter and my two other daughters were clung to my dress. I was worried not knowing what to do to protect them except by calling out for help. My cousin was walking next to me carrying his handicapped daughter trying to run away from a sniper's bullets. Around us were children who lost their parents, asking every woman they saw about their mothers, with tears filling their fresh eyes and accelerating their cries.

It was dark and rainy. There were no electricity, no water and no food. We felt in a whirl not been able to differentiate one another. God was our only protector and the trees were our shelter. We continued our road this way until we reached the Jordanian borders. I opened the bag I was carrying, wanting to change my daughter's clothes, to discover that I was carrying all through a bag of an old fat lady who was with us in the shelter. I started to laugh and cry at the same time.

## **Manal Al Buwaidani – Duma**

Imagine your beloved one is killed in front of your eyes and you cannot do anything to save him? Imagine your house and your neighbor's house are destroyed and the kids are running and screaming looking for shelter. What a weird feeling to be escaping towards the unknown looking for safety for you and your children, to protect them from a gunfire, a sniper's bullet, or a left behind bomb.

In the midst of this escape I used to forget my name, anxiety and weakness would overrule me, like all innocent children who have no fault in what's going on. They would ask me about my name and I would ask the people around me. How can I remember who I am when all this devastation is taking place and my country is been destroyed?

My father refused to leave his house and said: "it's easier for me to die in my house than in someone else's house." but our neighborhood is in danger, and the fight is at its utmost between the different parties. My father's health became suddenly acute, and my brother started blaming us for not leaving. My father's fever got very high. I tried to relief him with cold pads on his limbs while my fear is amplifying. The situation calmed a bit and we were able to take my father to the hospital, where we learned after the necessary checking that he has cancer in his Pancreas. My father's illness was a surprise for him and for us for he never felt sick before.

We were paralyzed; the war, the bombing, the bullets all added to my father's illness. He became psychologically unwell due to his illness. He kept blaming himself during his constant journeys to the hospital for our safety. His situation as well as that of the country became more complicated and critical. He needed an operation so we took him to the intensive care. He did not stop cursing himself, wishing to die, to not put us in danger. My father died after the operation, from lack of oxygen machines and other medical supplies at the hospital. The doctors were waiting for someone to die to use the oxygen machine for my father.

The death of my father was a big trauma for us. He was a patriotic person. I learned from him how to love my country. Thus leaving Syria was not an easy decision; however our fear of losing someone else from the family had pushed us towards this choice.

Leaving Syria was like pulling the soul out of the body. I left, but kept my gaze fixed over Syria and my tears streams down over it. For Syria is my life and the air I inhale, so how can breathe away from it.

## **Mohammad Al Hamad – Daraa**

Syria is like a tree stripped off its leaves. In my county during the revolution, the people used to live like a cone of corn; one voice gathered them “Allah Akbar” - Praise the Lord. These words were constantly repeated by men, women, children and elderly throughout the night; in one voice. The sound used to travel through the city and form a harmonic melody. What was more beautiful is that the praising of God, used to happen from inside the houses, with the participation of all the family members. People would sit on the floor, put the light off, open their windows, and start enchanting in one voice: “Allah Akbar... Allah Akbar” The sound used to frighten the soldiers at the checkpoints and drive them hysterical. Henceforth they start to shoot in all directions and at the houses. But the voices were louder than the bullets.

This collective action used to happen every day without previous consensuses between the inhabitation. It used to start from one house to another and from one neighborhood to another, like flaming fire; taking seconds only to spread all over the city with the words Allah Akbar, Allah Akbar.

During that period I used to live in Damascus a state compound, a well-protected area, as I was working in a sensitive mechanical industry. Every weekend I used to go to Daraa my home town, and every Friday there used to be a demonstration in the city. One Friday I participated in a demonstration with the rest of the people; had my face covered for I was still working with the government; to protect myself from being arrested. While at the demonstration, I heard one of my friends calling me: “Mohammad, Mohammad, what’s wrong with you?” I did not know that I was wounded with shrapnel of a bomb that was thrown at the demonstrators. It cut the right side of my lower stomach, but I was not able to go to the hospital because I was afraid to be interrogated and executed. I took a sick leave but the security forces discovered that I was with the protestors and thus an arresting demand was allotted against me, which forced me to flee my house with my family to Daraa. In result to my escape, an execution verdict was issued against me, as my Christian friend told me; he even specified that the army will soon attack my house.

The next day at exactly 10:30 am my eyes left my home which I built over 23 years. I entered my bedroom, opened the drawer to take some of my clothes. I took my wedding suit, my graduation uniform, and my evening outfits. I started reminding myself of the different events linked to my clothes; this is from my wife for my birthday, this I wore at my brother’s wedding, and this at my child’s birth and this is this and this is that... to a point I found myself carrying all my clothes. I was not able to take any of them so I left them all behind and took the photos that carry these events instead, together with my wedding video and those of my brothers.

I went to the kitchen to take food for the road. We needed food more than clothes. I have 6 children the eldest is 17 and the youngest is 3 months. I gathered the food that is easy to carry and went out to say goodbye to my brothers who were in their homes, refusing to leave the city and staying to protect it.

I left my house while the doves were calling me to stay and the wind blew pushing me back inside. The rebels came and said: "come on you have no time left." I left but could not take my sight away from the graffiti on the walls of my house, nor from the grape vine in my garden. I couldn't take my gaze off the children of my martyred brother Dr. Samer, or from my brother Osama who had tears in his eyes and I so did I. I never saw that brother again because he was martyred.

On the way I asked my wife: "did you bring the brown bag that has all our certificates and that of our kids, as well as the check book and the land certificates?" she said: "no I did not." Now that was a big shock to me, for we could not go back since the army has attacked the city, and started to arrest the people and burn their houses; our house was one of them. Later I learned that it was totally destroyed.

When I entered Jordan they put me in a temporary hospital for I fainted, because of my previous wound, later I was taken to a large hospital in Amman to be treated. I was separated from my family at the borders and did not know where they were. They put them at Al Za'tary Camp, and did not inform them in which hospital I was. We stayed like this for two and a half months, until I rejoined them at the camp.

## **Mustafa Horan - Homs**

I returned to our neighborhood after having fled to Damascus with the rest of our neighbors out of utter fear. I found it totally empty, electricity poles were covering the ground, tree branches were broken, building blocks were scattered around and holes were filling the streets. In a corner of the alley that leads to my house, I saw fifty cats looking at the sky following the track of a scouting airplane, gently meowing lest they attract the pilot's attention, as if cats have become fearful of destruction like humans.

On my way home I stopped by my store and found that it was totally robbed. I knew from the neighbors that a massacre took place in that neighborhood and 70 persons from the same family were slaughtered with knives, I thanked God that our loss was in material not in lives.

I stood in front of my house with my son, returning from our first forced refuge in Damascus. My first surprise was that I didn't find the door of my house in its place. I have seen several houses without doors. I stood where the door used to be and found it - in spite of its inexistence - locked in my face. My son wanted to enter, while fear of the unknown overwhelmed me. I asked my son to call the neighbors to support us in case there are armed people inside. Some neighbors gathered holding sticks and tree branches to protect us. As I got closer to the entrance a bad smell filled the air and I feared that it might be from a dead body. As we entered we saw the house covered with dust and our belongings scattered all over the place. The bad smell was coming from the fridge filled with rotten food since the power was always off.

Death kept haunting us and we have approached it several times; though one time I was born-again when I heard the word "un-tie them". I will never forget that horrible day. After we fled to the farms of Homs, the army troops entered with their artilleries to where we are staying at my uncle's farm. On Friday January the 2nd, at eleventh am, armed troops with light weapons and knives surrounded the farm and a group of them entered inside the house, where the young men, women and children were. The militants took them outside and started beating them.

I was in a nearby farm, when I returned I saw a member of that troop standing by the farm's gate, he asked me for my ID card and I gave it to him. When I approached the house I was shocked to see them beating the youth. My wife and her sisters were all standing with tears in their eyes. I asked an armed man what was happening and explained to him that we were not from the area but fled to it. He answered calmly that they will take the youth to interrogate them, and will detain those who they suspect. They searched the whole place and found nothing. They asked us to put our hands over our heads and walk in a line. One of them hit me with his Kalashnikov on my back, I felt I was going to faint, he then asked me to raise my hands and follow the queue, so I did.

When we were outside the farm they put us in a vehicle; while kicking us with their feet, and the heels of their guns. One of them saw my fancy watch and asked me if I have money; I said yes. He hit and kicked me again, this time on my head, which made the blood run on my face. He took my wallet. They blind folded us, so as not to see the route they are taking. The truck arrived at a farm. They asked us to kneel against the wall. My knee had a previous injury and my joint was damaged, thus I was not able to move it freely. A man hit me on it which increased my pain and made me fall on my good leg.

We stayed like this for a long time. I was terrified for my family. After seven hours, came the words that warmed my heart and revived me and the others: “un-tie them, they are respected”. After they untied us and gave us back our identity cards and returned my wallet, I discovered that they have robbed 155 thousand pounds. When I asked for the amount I was told that they were not thieves, so I replied that indeed I have forgotten what I had.

When they released us, I checked on the young men who were threatened to be slaughtered and sacrifices for the New Year. I saw the knife marks on their necks. I couldn't believe we survived that gang. That day I decided to immigrate, thus I head to Jordan; there I will be safe with my family.

I don't like to be a refugee holding a number at the International Relief Agency and beg for help. I don't want the international community to feed me and provide me with shelter. I want them to stand by my side and provide me with peace and freedom. I want to live in my country without the laws of terrorism controlling me. I want laws of dignity and pride. I want to be proud that I am human. I do not want to be an oppressor neither to be oppressed. I want the United Nations with all its organizations and bodies to stop the criminals before calling for their trials; I want them to end the injustice before securing for me, a tent.

## **Nidal Harbal – Damascus**

Oh Damascus of Jasmine! I was born in you, my childhood and my memories were on your land. Your water runs smoothly in my veins. Today I see you broken and inflamed. You became like a dried out stream that seized to aggregate the land. Like the condition of your people; they all packed and left you into different directions. Forgive me Damascus, today I leave you with a broken heart. Today I am a refugee and my rights are wasted. Today I am safe but my country is deceived. Someday I might be back, as fire cannot win the water my dear Syria.

The situation in Syria started to escalate and become more difficult. One day I was sitting with my family, looking at my wife while she was cutting a watermelon which looked so delicious; waiting to eat from it, all of the sudden we heard a huge sound of a nearby explosion which shattered all of our windows. My little daughter woke up crying, my wife started screaming, and as I was terrified, I got out of the house to see what has happened.

As soon as I opened the door I was shocked at the sight of blood filling the street, I looked to my right and saw a women with her 9 year old daughter, their bodies has turned into shreds from the intensity of the explosion, when I turned to my left I saw women getting out of their houses screaming, children crying, and men shocked from the terrifying sight, people were running in the street in every direction not knowing what to do, or where to go.

I went back in, picked up my child, took my wife, but my sight was still fixed on the delicious red watermelon which I left behind. In the street I crossed over the blood of women and children, the joyful color of the watermelon started mixing with the sad color of blood in my head. I looked to the sky and found it red as well. I ran with my daughter in my arms, as fast as I could and my wife on my side to reach a safer place.

I headed to east Damascus where my parents live; that area was also targeted. The bombing was very violent which intensified my fear especially for my new family. My family's house was bombarded with one of the shells, and I got injured with shrapnel in my left foot, this infuriated me and left me with an inner conflict between running away from the country, or staying in the house where I spent my childhood and youth in. Hence I was forced to make the hard decision and flee from the country to protect my family.

We left in the middle of the night without taking any of our belongings due to the random and heavy bombing. All women were crying of fear, the children were screaming hysterically, and I started to cry from all of the loss we have been through. My family and I managed to escape and refuge in Jordan, where I was treated. I know there will

come a day where I will return to my country like leaves which grow again over the trees every year and flowers that blossom yearly on my land.

## **Rawan Mohammad Al Hamad – Daraa**

I long for my homeland where my beloved are buried, though still alive within me.  
I fear for my family and I'm scared to lose them in this insane and unrealistic situation.  
I hate the sound of young men asking for help for the injured but find none.  
I also hate the sound of the mothers when her child is arrested and she cannot rescue him. Despite all that I regret I left my country.

Before we fled we were living in our new house, in an area where we were not able to have demonstrations or even to praise God at night, because it was a security zone. On November 25<sup>th</sup> it was my father's birthday, we prepared the table and put the cake and started to sing. The phone rang, it was my uncle on the line; he spoke to my father, praised God and said: "your brother is been martyred, I buried him and his blood is still on my hands... don't stay in this area leave it otherwise they will kill you too, otherwise they will arrest you." We started to cry for my uncle and on the situation my father is at.

The next day, we left in the morning to school at 7:00 am, but instead of taking our books we took our clothes, although I did not know what to take my clothes, my books or my dolls. My mother who was much stressed, she did not take anything, and on the contrary she started to clean and organize the house, on the hope that we will come back, though I was sure that it was impossible.

We left the house and traveled in the car to another city. There we started to walk, it was night and very cold, and we were forbidden to make any noise or turn on any light, so the army won't notice our presence. On the road my father was injured and he suffered from a heart attack.

When we entered the Jordanian borders the soldiers took my father to the hospital. My mother, my siblings and myself we were put in Al Za'tari Refugee Camp. For 3 months we did not know anything about my father and had no connection with him; thank goodness he was not arrested. Six months later we left the camp and were informed that our house in Syria has been occupied and my father is wanted dead or alive.

## **Rawda Salameh – Damascus**

Oh Syria! Your people are falling like tree leaves... since the revolution erupted and the people demanded for their freedom, they lost what's most dear to them.

I don't know where to start, but I will begin from our modest house that I wish to go back to one day. An Arab House with four rooms, a kitchen and a courtyard, where my mother and I used to plant flowers which filled our world with their scent, together with the orange and olive trees and the vines that used to shade our evenings while we entertain underneath. How I wish to go back to these days when my grandmother used to prevent us from picking grapes before they ripe, though we will not listen to what she says, instead we would fight between us - the siblings - about who would pick the fruits first.

One day we were gathered all the family under the orange tree in our courtyard, my nephew who likes to jock a lot, came and picket me up from behind and carried me around the place. I started to laugh and scream at the same time. Then he started to play vigorously with my brother- his uncle, which irritated my father who told them: "you are both fathers and you play like this! what did you leave for the children?" We all responded that these are the days that we'll never forget, and it will always stay in our memory.

The next day, my nephew went with his friends to a demonstration to ask for freedom, but fate did not spare him the time, a sniper shot him in the head and killed him. I was not able to bid him farewell or attend his funeral neither was my sister - his mother, nor his sisters because we were stuck in our city that fell under a curfew after that incidence. Thereafter, only my mother and my brothers were able to bury him.

It seems that fate denied me from saying good-bye to any of my beloved ones who died. Oh brother, being away from you and my family increased my agony. I did not believe the news around your martyrdom until I've seen you in the video on the ground and your friend calling you: "Mahmoud, Mahmoud, are you OK?" then I could not stop crying and screaming and asking why all this oppression? Oh brother, you have spent seven years in the state prisons, and enjoyed your freedom for one year only, in deed it was a beautiful year. I'll never forget when you visited me after you were released; on the first day of Al Adha feast. That day I did not believe my ears and tears ran down from my eyes, tears of happiness of course. But today my tears are blue every time I remember you, for the angle of death was faster than any of us and embraced you before your family was able enough to hold you.

I miss you brother, I miss my country, and I miss all those I left behind me. I wish I would close my eyes and open them to see myself back in my country and all what happened was just a troubling dream.

## **Samar Taha – Daraa**

Dear Syria, you are the Jasmine in the alleys, the beauty and the flora, the coffee smell and the admiration, the voice of Fayrouz in the morning, the action and the passion. Your girls are like lime buds and your children are concealed pearls. Your women are akin to blossomed trees and your youth to high mountains. All this beauty was lost in no time, died out like a soul leaving the body; like an infant losing her mother; like a bird cut off its wings that flew in pain alone.

The day I was afraid to encounter since the clashes erupted in Daraa – the cradle of revolution, had arrived. A big explosion filled the space one morning while I was still sleeping with my four children. We felt that our bodies flew off the ground. A car exploded in the near market. In result, the pedestrians and the shop keepers who happened to be in the place lost their lives. A dreadful scene; that left the place empty except from ghosts and destruction, had shocked our safety and serenity and left us victims of fear that haunted us. Fear of becoming casualties like many others.

I escaped with my children; Mohammad, Bashar, Omar and Dalia to my parent's house that was safer. My brothers brought loads of food and bread because it was possible that we would stay for a long time in their house under curfew. When my mother saw all the food my brothers brought; especially the amount of candles in case of power cut, the big bag of flour and the bags of sweets for the kids; she told them: "why all this food children? Is there a famine in the country?" They replied: "Samar and her kids are coming over, Mohammad and his family, as well as Tareq and his family. We don't want any food shortage."

The fights increased and instead of staying three days we stayed for twelve, due to the intensity of the bombing. We were a large group of people at the house; like a beehive we kept bumping into one another. I was with my four children; my mother and my sisters: Aziza, Siham and Wafa, in addition to my brothers and their children. My sister's room became a food store, filled with sweets and the children would spend most of their time in it. Even the cleaning was a big burden; my sister Aziza was the one who used to clean up, but as soon as she finishes sweeping the place, it gets dirty again in no time. She kept telling us: "should I follow you with a mop all the time?"

We spent days and nights in the same routine; forbidden to go out, the streets were sealed and the electricity was down. We learned that our neighbors ran out of candles so we gave them some. My brother - who is a heavy smoker, bought enough cigarette packs before the curfew; he gave some packs to the neighbors who felt like finding a treasure. Our neighbor brought us a big bag of meat; her husband owns a Shuarma restaurant. They have extra meat and no electricity to keep it safe in the fridge. Hence

the building turned into a market place where the people traded what they have extra with what they needed.

Many hard days passed while we were still at my parent's house. One day we were sitting in horror on the floor of the kitchen – thinking it is a safer spot. We sat one next to the other and out of fear we started rubbing the knees of each other, not realizing what we were doing. When I recognized my motion I found myself rubbing my sister's knee, my daughter rubbing her brother's knee, and my sister rubbing my mother's knee. We started to laugh at ourselves and at our situation.

Mother, sisters, brothers; I'll never forget the day I left you; my tears were filling up the universe. I carried my sentimentally heavy bags, filled with nostalgia to you though I was still with you. How can I leave thee, when you are the heart and the body to me? I'll never forget your heavy tears running like December's cold rain. Your eyes were asking me not to go, while your hearts were wishing me and my kids, safety and security; pushing me out of the country and its borders.

I long to the view of my window, to the sound of doves flickering over my house, to my neighbors' voices in the early morning forcing me to wake up, although I want to sleep longer; for I was a school teacher and Friday is my day off. I yearn to the children's noises in the streets and to my neighbors' loud voices. Yet if I go back now, I know that I will not find any of them for they have died under the sticking missiles and bombs that killed them all. Oh how hard to lose them, they were like brothers and sisters to me; their smiles, their gentleness, their love and support, all became a painful memory. I long for my house that I built and decorated every part of it. I miss my mother in law calling me to help her in the kitchen. I miss the voice of my old neighbor inviting me to drink coffee and follow our small talks. I ponder about my school where I used to teach art and couture and for the faces of my students and my fellow teachers.

All this and more have vanished and got destroyed... my house, my school, my family. We became drifted and strayed in the different countries: my husband's family is still in Syria, my mother and sisters in Egypt, one brother in Sweden, another in the States and I'm in Jordan. Our bodies are separated however our spirits, wishes and dreams will always be together.

Jordanian brothers, when I see my younger child playing in the courtyard with Jordanian kids and they deal kindly with him; and when I see him exercising his life normally with his classmates and they play with him friendly; I feel like kissing every Jordanian kid.

We left all behind and fled to protect our children, therefore we plead you to tolerate our heavy presence among you.

## **Suleiman Abu Ghalioun – Hums**

Demolition, destruction, and fear; air forces, barrels and soldier; the land, the country and home, all got mixed up and the situation became unbearable.

Oh good old days, Oh gardens, Oh summer gatherings; kids at the sea shores, women pouring juices and men bubbling their shishas and all goes well. Safety vanished and war started from all sides.

Escaping, evading, fleeing; I went from one city to another with my wife and children. In every corner hunger and thirst, in every street tanks and destruction; children are starving and women are terrified.

I lost my sister and my cousins and went out unconsciously running to look for them. The path was dark and the walk was always forward, no gaze towards the back and no return to the horror; until we arrived to Jordan and entered the refugee camps. We then started to raise our voices and tell our stories but the World was deadly silent.

I was with my family at our house in Hums; we heard the sounds of air raids and airplanes. Kids were crying from fear and all were asking for a shelter. I carried my children, my wife carried some stuff and we walked towards the main street, while the sounds of bombing were haunting us. We went out to the street and we found the rest of our neighbors running like us, looking for a safe haven. We walked for 2 km and we found a car that we took and went far, far from the raiding, all the way to Damascus, to my in-laws. We stayed there for 4 months, until the war reached that place and forced us to leave ones more, this time to Al Kiswa where my cousins live. There I received a phone call telling me that the soldiers have entered the area, so we fled hastily one more time; but this time it was an unexpected joke from one of my old friends, so I went back laughing at myself and him laughing at me.

Two months later, the army truly reached the city that day and surrounded it, which forced us to flee again for the third time. So we stayed at the countryside for two months before my father decided that I need to check on our house in Hums. I went home and took the keys with me, but when I arrived I found none of the doors left. I stood there looking at the keys laughing at the absurdity of the situation; “keys without doors and doors without houses.”