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Research Article

Stress Factors of Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Pre-Migration, Post-Migration, and Coping with Nostalgia

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ABSTRACT

The clashes that began in Syria in March 2011 between regime forces and their opponents transformed into a protracted civil war. While the host governments have focused on ways to solve the problems of the refugees, one area that they, as well as researchers, have neglected is the longing or nostalgia that refugees feel for their homeland. The long-term goal of most refugees is to return to their homelands, while in the short term they attempt to cope with their memories, both good and bad, of what they left behind. By conducting semi-structured interviews with Syrian refugees who live in Gaziantep in Turkey, this study attempts to explore what type of stress factors the Syrian refugees deal with in the pre-migration, migration and post-migration processes. Although they are pleased with the safety that Turkey provides to them, they are unable to shake feelings of longing for what they left behind. How do Syrian refugees living in Turkey cope with the nostalgia, and what types of coping mechanisms do they utilize to cope with their new lives? This study also discusses how migration causes changes in refugees' identity, their perceptions of home and their expectations for the future.

Keywords: Syrian refugees, Turkey, nostalgia, stress factors, coping mechanisms

1. Introduction

And you, Mother
And Father and brothers
Relatives and friends
Maybe you are alive
Maybe you're dead!
Or maybe, like me
You just have no address!
What good is man
Without a homeland
Without a flag
Without an address?
What good is man?

(Mahmud Darwish and Ben Bennani, 1980,
from *A Letter from Exile*)

For many years, the term *diaspora* was used to describe the condition of Jews exiled from their perceived homeland, dispersed to the different parts of the world, where they suffered the cruelty of others (Safran, 1991). However, over the course of time the concept has taken on a broader meaning and has transformed such that it now also refers to various other groups whose people have dispersed to more than one country (Dufoix, 2008), such as "expatriates, exiles, ethnic minorities, refugees, migrants, sojourners, and overseas communities" (Tölölyan, 1996, p.10). While the concept of diaspora now applies to many different groups (Cohen, 2008), this research focuses on those individuals who have spread throughout the globe due to conflict, and who have escaped perilous conditions at home to seek refuge and asylum in other countries. The specific event that is at the heart of this research is the Syrian refugee crisis.

In March 2011, in the Syrian city of Daraa, a couple of children were arrested after the Assad regime's security forces claimed that the children's graffiti represented an anti-regime slogan. After their arrest, the children were tortured, which sparked public outcry. The people's reactions to these events became increasingly intense, and the number of protestors pouring into the streets grew as each day passed. This resulted in the regime's use of disproportional violence against unarmed protestors, which in turn led to a relatively minor crisis to devolve into a civil war that spread across the nation. Since the eve of the Syrian civil war, approximately 6.2 million Syrian citizens have sought asylum in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, and Germany. Since Turkey alone hosts 3.6 million Syrian citizens, making it host to the largest refugee population in the world (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2019), several studies have focused on this mass asylum movement (Aksu Kargın, 2016; 2018; Erdoğan, 2015; Kirişçi and Ferris, 2015; Yazgan, Eroğlu Utku and Sirkeci, 2015).

When refugees engage in a mass asylum movement, the primary priority of both the governments of the host countries and the relevant international organizations is often to meet the basic needs of those arriving. For this reason, the stress factors refugees face as they are uprooted from their homes and must assume refugee status are often overlooked. Thus, this academic work endeavors to address three research questions related to the narratives of the Syrian refugees residing in Turkey. These questions are as follows.

- What kind of stress factors affected the refugees pre-migration, in transit, and post-migration?
- How has the migration experience affected the refugees' habits, identities, and perceptions of their homeland and their future?
- How does "being a refugee" make an individual feel, and how do the Syrian refugees experience the sense of nostalgia?

Within the context of this research, semi-structured interviews[1] were conducted with 30 Syrian refugees in Gaziantep, which is one of the provinces where the majority of Syrian refugees have chosen to reside due to the city's geographical and cultural proximity to Syria. Research permission was obtained from Uşak University Institutional Review Board, and before starting the study, the researcher explained to the interviewers in detail the purpose of the study and that the study did not pose any risk to the participants. The interviews were conducted in Arabic and Turkish in refugees' homes and workplaces, and in public spaces such as parks and gardens.

The researcher applied a *snowball technique* to the study, recorded all interviews, and field notes were coded in the Dedoose qualitative data analysis program. Primary codes and subcodes were extracted, and analysis of the data was completed. Although it was observed from the interviews that most of the Syrian refugees were experiencing high levels of war-related stress and anxiety, clinical investigations are needed to formally diagnose the extent to which these individuals have been affected by these traumatic events.

2. Stress Factors during the Pre-migration Period and while in Transit

The migration process presents a number of challenges for immigrants and refugees, due to their need to adapt to a new country, language, and culture, all of which can result in psychological pressure (Lipson, 1993). In addition, while immigrants and refugees experience migration similarly in some ways, their experiences are largely quite different. For example, unlike immigrants, refugees are uprooted from their homeland against their own volition and may be exposed to any number of traumatic events. As such, unlike immigrants, refugees may be exposed to numerous stress factors associated with their often reluctant and perilous journeys.

Among the pre-emigration stressors refugees may experience are threats to their lives in their homelands, exposure to intense violence and harassment, the death or disappearance of family members or relatives, economic hardships, and serious health problems (Lee and Lu, 1989). Once migration has commenced, refugees may experience stress factors such as separation from their loved ones, hunger, rape and killing (Lee and Lu, 1989). In addition, once refugees have arrived at a host country, they may suffer financial woes, including the inability of the refugees to benefit from the host country's social services, unemployment and the resulting inability to make a living; negative reactions from citizens who comprise the host society; homesickness; and a lack of necessary communication skills.

How the migration process psychologically affects individuals and how individuals manage this painful process is important to be examined. Adapting to life after the loss of either a loved one or one's homeland is both a painful and complicated process. Those who have been forcibly uprooted from their homelands have almost certainly left something incomplete, unspoken, or unexperienced, and this may feed the individuals' longing for their homeland and myth of return (Um, 2019). Being unexpectedly and forcibly displaced from the places where they intrinsically

1 The interviews were conducted between July 26th 2019 and August 5th 2019.

belong may leave refugees psychologically and physically worse for wear (Lin, Tazuma and Masuda 1979).

The migration experience can also result in a kind of alienation in that the individuals break away from places that are familiar to them, the places they call home, and this shift from familiar places and people to those that are foreign can be isolating (Ahmed, 1999). In addition, during migration, refugees not only leave behind their homelands, homes, jobs, and people they love, but they also must rebuild their identities and social roles once they enter new environments (Porter and Haslam, 2001). Being forced to leave their homes and take refuge in a new country does not mean coming together under the roof of a new house; rather, among refugees, this means missing home and experiencing losses and deficiencies together (Ahmed, 1999).

The interviews conducted for this study permitted the researcher to evaluate the stress factors that have affected Syrian refugees who chose to emigrate from their homeland. Most of the interviewees stated that the stress factors that prompted them to leave home included the increase in armed clashes; consistent air strikes and bombardments; the killing and the disappearance of family members, relatives, and friends; and witnessing the death and torture of many civilians, including children. These interviewees noted that they felt the need to leave Syria before it was too late. One of the interviewees in Gaziantep, Afra, explained why she left Syria:

> I experienced all the cruelty of the war. It is hard to talk about it. Bullets, corpses... We could not look anymore. Everywhere is in ruins. We're trapped in a corner. Nothing to eat or anything. We were hungry and the war was draining us. [Bashar al-Assad] started shooting us with chemicals. He started throwing barrel bombs. However, many kinds there are, he began throwing them all onto his people. Let me tell you this: Syria was completely ruined. We were searching for corners to hide. We were hiding in basements for two or three days. I experienced war for five years … but only God and I know what I have gone through. It was not normal.

As Afra and many other interviewees pointed out, the escalating clashes in Syria, the air strikes, and the mass killings, which resulted from both regime and anti-regime actions, forced the refugees to migrate out of fear that they and their families would suffer injury or death if they remained longer in Syria. In addition, access to essential goods and services such as electricity, water, and Internet had become increasingly lacking, and nutritional deficiency, unemployment, damage to refugees' properties, serious injuring, and fear of being forcibly conscribed by the regime were among the other significant factors that prompted the Syrian refugees to migrate to Turkey.

As noted previously, however, the traumatic events the Syrian refugees experienced are not limited to the pre-migration process, as many of these individuals also suffered from a number of stress factors during their journeys out of Syria. Farrah, an interviewee residing in Gaziantep, discussed how she crossed the border while on her way into Turkey:

> [The Free Syrian Army] opened a safe path. When we started to pass through, there were so many bullets flying over us, and I thought my daughter would die. One [bullet] came through, but thank Allah [God] protected her. Then, I turned my head around, a woman, in her fifties, had a bullet in her head. She passed away in front of us. So, she died instantly. How much I tell you? It is not enough. Those who see these events can only know. It is really hard to talk. Very painful.

While the traumatic events, human rights violations, and severe living conditions the Syrian citizens experienced at home were among their greatest stressors and thus reasons to leave Syria, the process of migration was not without its challenges and dangers. For instance, Syrian refugees feared the prospect of being raped, wounded, or killed during the crossing, they experienced financial difficulties, and they were detained by border security before being held in camps; these rank among the stressors the refugees encountered while in transit.

3. Stress Factors Encountered during the Post-Migration Period

Unfortunately, for many refugees, stress is not alleviated once the individuals cross the borders into their respective host countries. Once in the host country, refugees are stressed due to the lack of language skills, the inability to find regular jobs that will help to address living expenses, the obligation to provide financial support to family members left in their homeland, and the need to adapt to the hosting society and its culture (Lee and Lu, 1989).

When interviewed, refugees were asked how they felt in the early days when they had first arrived in Turkey. Many of the refugees stated that they were afraid when they first arrived because they did not know the language or the temperament of Turkish people, and they felt lonely and homesick. Being uprooted from their home, and being forced to undergo a journey to an unknown place, which resulted in the loss of family and friends and detachment from the land where their ancestors lived, connected the refugees through shared experience. Being deprived of social support mechanisms upon arrival to a foreign environment was yet another common experience that served to connect the refugees to one another (Volkan, 2017; Volkan, 2019). The refugees were left uncertain regarding their futures and thus how to go about starting new chapters in their lives, and their lack of familiarity regarding their host country's language and culture fed their fears, their stress, and their feelings of hopelessness, which in turn made it more difficult and more painful to accept their losses and adjust to their new normal.

Just as other refugee groups have experienced (Wahlbeck, 1999), Syrian refugees have experienced the adverse psychological effects of leaving their loved ones behind. While telephone calls and Internet connections allow for migrant groups (Wahlbeck, 2002; Ainslie et al., 2013; Abdelhady, 2011), including Syrian refugees, to maintain their communication and ties with their relatives back home, there remains an uncertainty and a sense of fear among the refugees regarding the security and living conditions of those left behind. While some interviewees stated that, when the communication network allows, they ask about both their families' living conditions and the political-military course in Syria, others stated that they avoid asking about the political and military conditions because they are afraid that questions of this nature might put their relatives in danger.

Though they worry regarding the loved ones they left behind, the refugees consider the events taking place in Syria and the cruelty they witnessed before leaving, and this keeps them from experiencing regret over their decisions to leave home. Similarly, per an academic study on the adaptation processes and mental health of Bosnian refugees in the United States, Bosnian refugees occasionally experience loneliness, grief, and nostalgia, but they do not feel regret over coming to America because they recognize that by leaving home, they left behind the fear of death and welcomed a safer life elsewhere (Keyes and Kane, 2004).

Despite not experiencing regret over leaving home, many refugees do experience incredible grief over the loss of loved ones, and this requires that many go through a process of mourning (Kroll et al., 1989). Freud and Strachey describe mourning as "regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's

country, liberty, an ideal, and so on" (1957, p. 243). When in the process of mourning, individuals become firmly attached to what are often referred to as linking objects, which remind mourners of the people they lost and often result in feelings of nostalgia (Volkan, 1999; Volkan, 2017). For instance, Khalida, a woman who has been undergoing clinical treatment for over four years discussed the wound the war has left in her:

> Cemal's [her younger brother who was shot dead] pajamas are with me. Chawki's [her elder brother who disappeared] shirt. I am still keeping them. I can't forget. Pajamas are more expensive, look how cheap human life is. Cemal's dead. I asked his wife, "What did he love most?" She said, "His red pajamas." I said, "Okay. I will get his red pajamas." I smell it and speak to it. I say, "Cemal, did you think of me when you were shot? Did you say to yourself, "My sister was coming on Friday and they shot me on Thursday evening [crying]"? One day left. There was only one day left … I can't bear this pain. Believe me, if I knew who killed him, I'd shoot him. I feel that way.

As noted previously, when engaged in the mourning process, the survivor treats the memory of the person he or she lost as a magical object and believes that by talking with the object, he or she can connect with the individual who has passed on (Volkan, 1999). For instance, it has been observed that Palestinian refugees give psychological meaning to the term "key," which represents their lost homeland, and thus, keep alive the notion that they will one day return to Palestine and rebuild their homes (Volkan, 2017). The mourning process also brings up other feelings. Per the interviews, some Syrian refugees who lost relatives during the war, and who have thus experienced mourning, are left with the feeling of *survivor's guilt*. People who experience survivor's guilt often feel that they betrayed those whom they lost since they were unable to protect them; this makes it difficult for survivors to resume their lives post-loss, and this psychological burden may result in a mourning process for which there is no resolution (Niederland, 1981).

In some cases, refugees might assume *avoidance behavior*, which results in their refusal to speak of traumatic events, rather than to discuss them and thus keep those events alive in their minds and in the real world (Goodman, 2004). Zaad, an interviewee in Gaziantep, shared his feelings about Syria:

> My father was a member of Free Syrian Army. My uncle died during the war. While they were going to bury him in the cemetery, ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria] arrived. They killed my father, my uncles, and all of my uncle's children there, at the cemetery … I feel uncomfortable when I think about Syria. Sometimes, my aunt's children come to visit me and we sit. They start talking how we spent those days. If they remind me of those days, I get out of the house. I don't want to remember those days … I can't stand it.

Per Zaad's experience, the primary impetus behind refugees feeling and behaving in such a way might have to do with their desire to control their stress as much as they are able, and remembering traumatic events makes them uncomfortable and destroys any peace of mind they might otherwise be able to secure (Kinzie et al., 1986). For some, the events experienced at home might result in such deep scars in the individual's memory that though they long for what they left behind, their place itself may very well transform into something of a *bête noire* for them (Akhtar, 1999). As such, it is reasonable to suggest that being forcibly displaced may not yield the same experiences or responses, or the same painful feelings, among all refugees (Dudley, 2019).

Syrian refugees in Turkey are also stressed due to the *culture shock* they have experienced and the difficulties they have had in adapting to an unfamiliar society and culture. The refugees experience a bi-directional pressure in that they had to leave everything behind when they left Syria and also have had to rebuild their lives surrounded by strangers and with very few possessions. Another noteworthy stressor associated with unfamiliar culture has to do with language, as the Syrian refugees are largely unable to speak the host country's language, and this has had an adverse effect on the refugees' wellbeing. A Syrian Arab interviewee in Gaziantep, Majd, explained his communication problem:

> [Arab Syrians] had a lot of difficulty with the language. Since I don't speak Turkish, I was going into all of the streets when I wanted to buy something, to be able to see what I will buy. After that, I was pointing and taking. So, it is hard not to know the language. [Turkish people] were saying something, and I was saying something, but we didn't understand each other. So, if you knew Turkish, maybe it was a very simple thing, but I was having a hard time since I didn't understand.

Language, which is one of the most fundamental elements of the diasporic identity, is a means by which to maintain the diaspora communities' ties with the places they belong but cannot be psychically present (Hua and Wei, 2019). However, it is also of great benefit to refugees to be able to speak the native language of the host country, as this can go a long way to eliminating most of the problems the refugees experience (Wahlbeck, 1999). The inability to speak the language of the host country results in numerous barriers that prevent the refugees from developing close relationships with those in their host country as well as from being able to fully adjust to their host society (Keyes and Kane 2004). In addition, language, which has the capacity to bring people who share the same history beyond time and space together, can result in discrimination against the individuals new to a foreign environment (Hua and Wei, 2019).

As the interviewee stated, the Syrian refugees in Turkey who are of Arab origin have had a particularly difficult time trying to both communicate and interact with the local people and cover their basic needs. However, thanks to their language skills, the Syrian refugees of Turkmen origin have encountered no problems communicating with Turkish citizens. In fact, they occasionally hide their Syrian identities so that they can avoid the backlash they might otherwise receive from their Turkish neighbors and friends who are discontented with regard to the Syrian refugees' presence in Turkey.

Another stressor that adversely affects refugees in the post-migration period and that may even lead to the loss of their self-esteem among the refugees is the exclusion of these individuals from the host society. Omra, an interviewee living in Gaziantep, discussed the treatment that she has experienced in Turkey:

> I really don't like [Turkey]. [Turkish people] didn't accept [Syrian refugees]. They didn't like us. Therefore, I used to say that I wish I would have died instead of coming here. I always go to work on the minibus. Every day Syrian down, Syrian up. I hear it many times every day. Okay, there are [Arab Syrians] who don't speak Turkish. He doesn't understand … but some people understand. It really gets hurtful … Swearing everyday; they came and took our rights … Wherever we go, "Look, Syrian's sitting." Can't the Syrian sit? Doesn't that Syrian pay the [minibus fee]? They don't even let us sit on the bus. You ride with your money; I ride with my money. I don't beg for money from you, you don't have to say that, and you don't have to hurt people like that.

As Omra and many other Syrian interviewees have stated, Turkish citizens initially treated the refugees well and provided both financial and moral support, but as the Syrians' stay in Turkey has persisted, the local people have reacted such that the refugees have experienced social exclusion, discrimination, or humiliation. A few female interviewees, in particular, claimed that on occasion, some Turkish men have referred to them as being cheap, and this has sometimes resulted in verbal and sexual harassment.

4. Experiencing Nostalgia, Coping Mechanisms, and Transformation of "Home" and "Identity"

In addition to coping with several practical problems in their host countries, most refugees have to deal with the sense of up-rootedness and alienation (Wahlbeck, 1999). In particular, the refugees who are unwillingly separated from their homelands and are thus forced to leave behind their loved ones, homes, schools, jobs, and properties may feel a stronger sense of alienation and longing for home. In host countries where the refugees feel ill at ease, they may also feel greater longing for their pasts and their homelands, even they may even idealize these things (Mezey, 1960). When the interviewees were asked to describe how being a "refugee" makes them feel, a great majority of them describe feeling lost. Ezra, an interviewee in Gaziantep, described this feeling:

> We are five siblings. Five sisters, each of us in different places. One of us is in Turkey, one of us in Lebanon, one of is in Qatar, one is in Germany, one is in Syria. I swear our life is bare. Our lives are wasted. We feel sorry for ourselves because our lives are wasted. We either stay here, or can we return to our homeland. Our future is lost; we have no future. My kids have no future; the future of my children is lost.

Nothing created in their new lives or in their new environment has the capacity to bring back to the refugees the social relations they once enjoyed or the familial connections they may have lost, and this results in a sort of exile and feelings of loss (Wahlbeck, 1999). The Syrian civil war did not only force traumatic events on the Syrian refugees, it also served to ultimately deprive them of social support mechanisms such as family. As a result of the war, several Syrian refugee families have been dispersed to different parts of the world and have been forced to live with the myth of return and unite again. In the interviews, when the refugees are asked about what they miss most about Syria, the majority of them stated that they missed the feasts during which they would enjoy time with their extended families.

The process of migration is accompanied by varying notions of *home*; home now refers to a memory, a loss, a fear, an identity, and it also refers to something the refugees cannot physically access, as migration means multiple homes, which, like the refugees, are mobile (Tolia-Kelly, 2019). For instance, according to Iranian refugees living in Sweden, *home* can refer to multiple places: to the homeland that they left behind and that they long for; to Sweden, where the refugees are able to meet their needs and enjoy protection; and to a third country to which they one day hope to migrate (Graham and Khosravi, 1997).

During the interviews conducted with the Syrian refugees, it became apparent that the concept of *home* has changed among the Syrians. Faik, an interviewee in Gaziantep, described what *home* means for him:

> To tell you the truth, the home is the place the human being was born, where he grew up, so Aleppo. But if I answer this question with my logic that is where one feels safe, where one can work. It is where he puts his head on the pillow peacefully in the evening. Now my home is Turkey. In Turkey, we can get out and get into our house. At least, it's a safe place. There is no war … the house is not a place with only four walls. The environment, its neighbors, so … when I send my child to a grocery store, at least I know that he'll come back. There is safety. There was such a period in Syria that we couldn't even get in front of the door. We have a saying in Arabic, "Even heaven cannot be set foot without man." I have a house in Syria, but it is surrounded by ruins, and I couldn't be happy in a house in ruin.

In pre-war life, the individual was a part of his or her home, and that home allowed for a secure life. The war, which resulted in abrupt changes in the lives of refugees, forced the refugees to seek out new places in which they could find or develop a sense of belonging (Keyes and Kane, 2004). For instance, a study on Lebanese immigrants who live in Paris, Montreal, and New York states that the concept of *home* for these immigrants does not necessarily mean physically being in Lebanon; rather, it is something that can be felt and rebuilt as the refugees find creative ways to maintain their Lebanese culture and traditions in their host countries (Abdelhady, 2008). Another study on Moroccan women in Italy found that the concept of *home* transformed into a hybrid notion for these women, as it began to refer to both a place where the individual physically resides and a place wherein the individual symbolically imagines herself. In addition, these women seek to feel at home via the goods they transport with them between Morocco and Italy (Salih, 2003).

During the interviews, the majority of the Syrian refugees stated that they still see Syria as their homeland, but since Syria is now unable to provide them with the protection and normal lives a state should ensure its citizens, and since Turkey ensures the security they need, they see Turkey as their home for now. Additionally, a large portion of the Turkmen Syrian interviewees have noted that there is no difference between Turkey and Syria for them, and since they know the language and are familiar with Turkish culture, they may remain in Turkey permanently, even when the war ends. However, a few refugees have stated that they no longer know where their home is and they feel lost. This suggests that the concept of *home*, the sense of belonging, and even the identity are transformed via the migration process (Eliassi, 2019).

The process of migration requires that individuals physically move, of course, but it also requires that individuals mobilize their homeland-specific ideas, beliefs, cultures, and traditions as well (Pasura, 2019). In particular, the preservation of traditions and the act of transferring them to subsequent generations is vital for diaspora communities, as it is what allows for the protection of national identity and prevents the destruction of values rooted in a people's homeland (Um, 2019). For example, the Afghans residing in Germany and the UK (Fischer and Dahinden, 2019) and the Kurds in Finland (Wahlbeck, 1999) still maintain their cultures and traditions via the associations they have established. Similarly, per the interviews, the Syrian refugees seek to maintain their culture and customs, but the Syrian families also want their children to adapt to Turkish culture given the likelihood of their permanent residence in Turkey. Fadil, a Syrian interviewee from Gaziantep, shared his ideas regarding this:

> We continue with the same customs in respect of honor. But the style of clothing, we are trying to adapt to Turkish style a little bit. Again, many of our customs have not changed, like the cus-

> toms in Syria. But maybe, from now on, I can teach my children a little bit about the traditions of the Turks. So, I can make them adapt. But, after this time, I can't dress my wife like the Turks. Even I accept, my parents won't.

During the interviews, some women refugees stated that they began to modify their clothing after arriving in Turkey. For example, wearing chador is uncommon in Turkey, so doing this would cause Syrian women to stand out in the community and look weird to the local people, which would in turn serve to make them feel further stigmatized. As such, the refugees began dressing less conservatively the way Turkish women do; they began covering their hair with basic headscarves and wearing long jackets. According to the interviewees, nearly all Syrian refugees have continued their habits of cooking and celebrating their religious holidays. Traditional food is one of the basic cultural elements of a society and is an important feature of the diasporic identity (Graham and Khosravi, 1997; Scully, 2019). Traditional dishes allow refugees to preserve their culture and to prevent the disappearance of their roots and identities. Cooking traditional food also permits the refugees to draw strength from their past lives (Tolia-Kelly, 2019). Sadi, an interviewee in Gaziantep, explained he talks with his children about Syria at home:

> I'm talking to my kids about Syria. I say we had a house. I say we had a nice workplace there. I'm saying nice things to my kids about Syria. They were very small when they arrived. They didn't remember Syria. Only my older son will remember a bit because he came from the war. I want them not to forget that Syria was their homeland. I want them to know that Syria is their birthplace.

Per the interviews, most of the Syrian refugees talk to their children about Syria so that they might keep their beautiful memories of the country vivid in both their own and their children's minds. This also allows the refugees to instill in their children a love for their homeland, even if there is little possibility of eventual return. Similarly, Palestinians have employed oral history as a means by which to maintain identity; they have shared images and memories of the past with their children so that subsequent generations might keep the Palestinian cause alive (Dorai, 2002).

When refugees are forced to leave their homeland, their families, and their friends behind, and when they are tasked with trying to survive in new environments and endure a longing for home, their identities are tested (Garza-Guerrero, 1974). With migration, individuals' identities can change such that they may create multiple identities by trying to reconcile their respective cultures with the culture of the host state (Wahlbeck, 1999; Abdelhady, 2011). Stuart Hall (1990) identifies the diaspora identities as "those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (p.61). Although the majority of the Syrian interviewees continue to maintain their culture and traditions, they may engage in or assume Turkish practices and customs that do not challenge their traditional way of life, and their desire for their children to combine Syrian and Turkish cultures in order to adopt a dual identity rather than an identity rooted in a single culture.

Despite the fact that their homeland is severely physically damaged and has become home to mass graves, most of the Syrian refugees interviewed share in their feelings of nostalgia for their home. Taha, one of the elder interviewees, expressed his longing for Syria:

> I miss everything about Syria. I miss its everything, its mountains, its stones, its water, and its air. I swear life in Syria is all a memory. It is not one or two. All of them, since childhood. I can't convey it all with words. It is a matter of life. Long-running.

It was apparent during the interviews that elder Syrian refugees experience feelings of nostalgia more deeply than younger ones . Elder refugees are at a greater disadvantage than their younger counterparts as they are less likely to learn the language of the host country and have maintained longer social relationships due to the amount of time they spent in their homeland. As such, these individuals are likely to experience greater sorrow due to displacement and the loss of social status, which in turn might prompt them to go through the post-migration process with heavier hearts and more profound feelings of nostalgia than the younger refugees.

Refugees may develop very different means of coping in order to address and control the pain they feel as a result of being forced from their homeland. For example, praying, developing social relationships, chatting with friends, trying to look at everything from a glass-half-full perspective, reading books, and participating in sports are among the more positive coping mechanisms individuals have developed in order to manage the pain they feel. Some less positive coping strategies involve abstraction, crying, continuous sleep, and drug addiction (Al-Smadi et al., 2016). Maha, one of the interviewees in Gaziantep, explained how she handles her feelings associated with being a refugee:

> I would sit and cry. I felt blue, and I would sit and cry. For example, when I talk to my brother, it's like I've been to Syria. I feel that way. Or I'm talking to my mom. I'm asking about our relatives in Syria. How do you watch movies? What films did you see? It is like I live in the same house. I have that feeling. When I talk to my brother, it's like I'm in Syria.

When the Syrian refugees were asked about how they coped with the memories of their former lives in Syria, many interviewees stated that they took refuge in God and that they accepted their destiny, and some of them cried when thinking about Syria. An academic study on Sudanese refugees indicates that refugees cope with the difficulties they face during the migration process by taking refuge in their faith, praying, and spending time with their families and friends (Khawaja et al., 2008). A study on Bosnian refugees living in the United States found that those refugees worked long hours to keep their minds busy and to thus deal with the traumatic events they experienced (Keyes and Kane, 2004).

Per the interviews, it appears that since the Syrian civil war seems to be without end, the refugees' feelings about the future are gradually devolving into feelings of despair. Most of the Syrian refugees stated that they had plans and dreams, but with the outbreak of the war, these plans and dreams were left incomplete, and the refugees now hold no hope for their futures. Omar, one of the interviewees in Gaziantep, shared his perspective on the future:

> Now if I answer this question, you'll laugh, since I see no future for us. I am a university graduate. I'm a teacher. I gave 15 years to this occupation. If I can't transfer my own profession [to Turkey] now, and instead working as a porter, then there's no future for us.

That many refugees are unable to transfer their skills to the host country is a factor that can affect the individuals' personalities and self-image (Yako and Biswas, 2014). Today, a significant

number of Syrian refugees in Turkey are not able to maintain their prior professions; thus, in order to provide for their families, most refugees are forced to accept work for which they are underpaid. Many Syrian refugees work as unskilled labor for less pay than Turkish citizens and usually without insurance (Aksu Kargın, 2018). In addition, when refugees are unable to secure work that enables them to tend to their families' basic needs, their children often take up working so that they might also contribute to their families' livelihoods. This increases the risk of the emergence of a *lost generation* among the Syrian refugees, and it is this younger generation that would serve as the target population of terrorist organizations. During the interviews, it became apparent that some Syrian refugees were less pessimistic regarding their futures, even though their dreams remained unfulfilled. It has been observed in other refugee communities as well that after all of the losses they experience and suffering they endure, some refugee parents attach all of their hopes to their children (Lee and Lu, 1989; Miller et al., 2002).

Many of the refugees interviewed stated that despite all of the hardships and traumatic events that they had experienced in Syria, if the war ended and life returned to normal in their homeland, they would return. However, the majority of those who fled the Syrian civil war are Sunnis, and they fear that if the Bashar al-Assad regime remained in power, they would be punished for seeking refuge in a country that supports the fall of the regime. For this reason, these interviewees stated that they would only be able to return to Syria under the condition of general amnesty. However, unlike the Arab Syrians, some Turkmen Syrians stated that since they have no problems with communicating with the local people or any serious cultural conflict with Turkish society, they might not return to Syria even if the war ends, as they would simply build their futures and those of their children in Turkey.

5. Recommendations: Mental Health and Integration

The civil war in Syria, which has now entered into its eighth year, has resulted in ferocious, nation-wide armed conflicts, which make permanency of Syrian refugees in Turkey increasingly likely. The Syrian refugees have remained in Turkey for far longer than it was expected they would, and this has resulted in *compassion fatigue*. It has also resulted in socioeconomic and cultural problems that have made worse grievances that already existed between the refugees and the Turkish people (Aksu Kargın, 2016; Ferris and Kirişçi, 2016).

Today, an increasing number of individuals flee from wars, human rights violations, socio-economic problems, discriminatory practices, and violent acts being carried out in their homelands. When these individuals flee their homes, they generally seek asylum from other countries, making asylum the primary agent of the migration phenomenon. Undoubtedly, the separation of refugees from their homelands, their loved ones, and the environments that allowed them to feel safe has profoundly affected these people's emotional states, bodies, and dreams (Dudley, 2019).

Edward Said spent his life writing about exile, and in his seminal work, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, he describes exile as "strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is an unhealable rift forced between a human and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted … The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left for ever" (2000, p. 137).

Per the interviews conducted in Gaziantep, where the majority of Syrian refugees reside in Turkey, it is apparent that the cruel practices and human rights violations of the Assad regime since the eve of the crisis in Syria, as well as the loss of hundreds of thousands of innocent civil-

ians' lives, have negatively affected the wellbeing of the Syrian refugees and have left long-lasting emotional scars with which they will have to deal with.

The trauma that refugees experience as a result of war may not be immediately apparent to the refugees themselves or to those institutions and organizations tasked with coming to their aid. However, if refugees' mental and emotional health are not assessed, and if trauma-related issues are not addressed appropriately and in a timely manner, then proper intervention cannot take place, and the individuals may suffer profound psychological problems and difficulties in adapting to the host country (Pumariega, Rothe, and Pumariega, 2005). This is worth considering, given that, per a study which has researched the prevalence of PTSD among Syrian refugees in one of Gaziantep's tent cities, has found that 33.5% of the Syrian refugees who participated in the study experience PTSD (Alpak et al., 2014). In Germany there are centers for Victims of Torture and Human Rights Violations that have been working for thirty years. Currently there are twenty such centers across the country and Syrian refugees are seen there (Trix, 2018), but Germany has funds that Turkey does not have.

In Turkey, there is a limited number of individuals available who can speak fluent Arabic and who can provide psychosocial support to Syrian refugees. This has resulted in a delay in addressing Syrian refugees' mental problems. It is thus important for both researchers and clinical experts to determine what stress factors these individuals have experienced at each stage of the process of migration, and to what extent the individuals have been affected by these events. Knowing this can allow for appropriate rehabilitation and treatment efforts to commence. In addition, working with the experts in the field, linking the treatments to standard practices, and closely monitoring the health status of these individuals via follow-up visits are important steps in providing efficient mental health services for these traumatized people (Mollica et al., 2004). According to the face-to-face interviews conducted as a part of this study, all Syrian refugees experienced at least one traumatic event in Syria, and it would thus likely benefit all refugees to talk about these events with experts who value their feelings and pain. This process may help to lessen the refugees' fears and hopelessness regarding the future (Lee and Lu, 2004).

The fact that most of the Syrian refugees have been unable to transfer their professions and skills to Turkey, especially the Arab Syrian refugees who do not speak Turkish, serves as a stress factor among refugees in the post-migration period. At this point, it is important to provide qualified Syrian refugees with opportunities to maintain their professions and to provide more courses for them that will permit them to improve their language skills. In addition, community and individual support both may further help to mitigate some of the trauma-related effects the Syrian refugees experience. This would require, among other things, increased tolerance within the Turkish community toward the Syrian refugees. It would be of great value and would likely establish a bond between the local people and the refugees if cultural activities were organized and if refugees were given more opportunity to contribute to the Turkish economy and culture.

Diaspora groups, like all societies, differ from one another in accordance with their respective religious beliefs, ethnic identities, and ideas regarding gender. As such, these groups' notions and feelings regarding homeland and host country can vary considerably (Um, 2019). However, despite their differences in culture, and regardless of the different experiences they may have as refugees in the various stages of the migration process, they are all affected in some profound way when they are uprooted from their homes. In addition, many of them experience a sense of nostalgia that keeps them longing for their homelands and their prior lives.

Almost all of the Syrian interviewees expressed a longing for their old lives in Syria and a great sorrow regarding the current state of their country. At this point, all countries that provide military, political, or logistical support to the regime or anti-regime factions in Syria should consider receding their support as soon as possible, as this may help to keep this humanitarian crisis from growing further. In addition, these countries should help to facilitate the restructuring of Syria such that Syrian citizens may live safely, decently, and with dignity in their home like any other human being. During the interviews, Omra, an interviewee in Gaziantep, said the following prayer:

> Syria was very sad when I went to Syria after the war. She was crying. Syria had gone far back. It collapsed, and I was very sorry. Syria was sad. It was so sad that it was evident in every aspect. Even the walls were talking. Let it end, let our people return. We need love now. Return! She was calling us.

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