



PHOTOGRAPHY
PROJECT BY
MARIA BOGDANSKA

EXHIBITION

KA

exilium. show us the way to bitter exile.

euripides, the bacchae

“You are here.” This is your position on the map. Now you can relate yourself to all these routes and places I am trying to tell you about. Imagine yourself standing in the middle of fields or mountains and trying to make sense of your next move. You left your house yesterday, 2 weeks ago, 6 months ago, 2 years ago... Where will you go? What will you take? You are here...

I started working on the Exilium project in 2012. The idea was genuine and I continued with great help of different people (thank you Bente, Haid, Hiba, Mouna, Layla, Marc, Nawel, Khaled, Hani and all the people who you will meet reading their stories). We traveled around Lebanon (and of course, we could travel even more and more) and spoke to people, trying to understand what they were going through. People who had to leave their houses and their country. Their place on earth.

All the people whom I met during this project told me important things about themselves and their experiences. That is what I am trying to convey to you. I know I am not merely a messenger; I intervened during the process of this project, I asked the questions, I present the outcome.

“I never thought that a thing like a burned match, or a scrap of paper in the mud, or a fallen leaf, or a rusty worthless nail might have a soul.”
—B. Traven, *The Death Ship*

I asked each person about an object, an item, that they had brought with them from Syria and how they traveled to Lebanon with it. While working and gathering stories it became more and more apparent and heartbreaking to find out that a lot of them did not bring anything. Others brought pain, suffering or wounds. Some have kept only memories. They had no time, no space to think about their possessions. They grabbed their children and left dressed in what they were wearing in that very moment.

The object became a symbol, it turned my attention to something else, something much more important. This whole experience shifted the orientation of the project: the symbolism of an object extended to the symbolism of what was lost, or what is the actual meaning of things that tell stories, as anthropologists would say.

Asking people about an object, something meaningful and important to them, made me understand that the real reason to do this project is to look for a way in which we can talk about millions of people being displaced around the world and not abandon their unique personality, experience, and their individual story. They left their homes because of war, destruction,

fear, and poverty. I will not give you big data. I will not give you numbers and scary statistics. I think you know them (I hope you do not forget them). We cannot objectify them and their experiences by turning them into columns of numbers, piles of papers, pages of reports. Our condition as human beings, as Sartre would say, makes us prone to objectifying others. We need to be aware that by the mere act of seeing or addressing another person we can put them in the position of being the object of our gaze, speech or action. The grammar structures of languages themselves make it hard to avoid this situation as well. We always speak about something or someone. However at the same time this object of our attention or affection can start to mean more than we had initially imagined. How can this happen? What can we do? Have we lost touch with our hearts? Where is our understanding of others?

“What then must we do?” asked a tragic character from Peter Weir’s film “A Year of Living Dangerously”. This question remains open. It summarizes the sadness, the despair, the hopelessness, but at the same time the need to act, the need to shift perception, the will to rework our positions. This might not be significant. Not a grand gesture.

It is an attempt to look for other ways to react and object to all the suffering that we see. Maybe it is possible for us to, instead of talking about someone, start addressing ourselves, and our own position and privileges. I can try to shift attention from the refugees to myself, to situate myself within the situation and not outside of it. To become more than only a spectator. Can it reverse the usual narrative? Can we recognize ourselves in these stories and experiences?

“The paradox I want to point out is that these objects which always have, in principle, a function, a utility, a purpose, we believe we experience as pure instruments, whereas in reality they carry other things, they are also something else: they function as the vehicle of meaning... There is always a meaning which overflows the object’s use... there is no object which escapes meaning.”

—R. Barthes, *The Semiotic Challenge*

I hope that this object that was a focus for my project and allowed me to tell stories, using the tools and means I know how to use, will point to problems with our own perceptions of refugees and displaced people nowadays. I want to object to this perspective. We need to look back at ourselves.

We are here. Where are you?

Marta Bogdanska

Ruba, 4 years old

We come from the city of Idlib. We emigrated to Lebanon about 10 months ago, in the summer of 2014. This is my daughter Ruba. When we left our house she would not leave without taking her favourite red jacket, even though it was summer and it was very hot when we left. She would not go without it because this jacket was a present from her father. He had bought it for her, here, in Lebanon. He got one for her and another for her brother. Her brother did not care about taking it but she cried until she was able to bring it with her.

When we were on our way to leave Syria, I first took my 6 children to Damascus. Afterwards we moved through Masnaa to Lebanon where my husband was waiting for us. He has been working here since before the events, and when the shelling intensified in Idlib, we decided to come to the Bekaa valley for safety. We have been here legally until now but our residency ends in 2 months. The General Security came here with the army and took all the men that did not have their papers in order. They kept them for 2 to 3 days and then let them go. However they asked them to regulate their status. It is not easy. I do not know what will happen to us...



Hussein, 16 years old

I am from Daraa. I escaped to Lebanon 3 years ago. The shelling intensified in my city and the deaths multiplied around us. We had come to stay for a short period of time planning to go back afterwards but my father decided at some point that we were going to stay.

Back in Daraa, my older brother had taught me how to breed and train pigeons. He instructed me on how to catch the pigeons and whistle to make them come back to our roof. Now my brother is in Sweden. He went to Turkey and then traveled to Sweden. We would gather the pigeons in cages at night and let them fly free during the day. We bred them and fed them in our hands. I miss them... That is what I left behind in Syria. That is what I remember and wish I had been able to bring with me.

I started to learn how to write rap songs here in Beirut, in Sabra and Chatila camp. I loved it and I started writing about Syria, and the war. The more I write, the more I miss Syria.

*"I was sitting comfortably, nothing was bothering me,
I loved people and people loved me,
I never hated anyone nor anyone hated me,
suddenly my head started aching from the thinking:
I started imaging my head as if it was like any city with
murder and destruction,
hate and revenge in my imagination building up...
So I went to take a pill for pain
hoping this ache would fly away,
I felt my whole body relaxing and not wanting to move
anymore,
because all the wars in my head were gone.
I felt relieved and all the pain in me disappeared,
Less than seconds later it felt like when the water I drank
reached my stomach,
it had turned into gasoline and started to burn some poor
people,
how can you burn in the name of religion..."*



Ali, 70 years old

I come from the city of al-Tabqah in the province of Raqqa and I migrated to Lebanon 2 years ago with my family. Shelling started in the city so I feared for my children. We gathered our things and went to Damascus first. From there we traveled to Masnaa legally since our papers were valid and complete. However since the new law was introduced in Lebanon our movements out of the camp have become scarce because we are afraid of being arrested. The visa renewal has been almost impossible.

I did not bring anything except for a radio I have owned for 35 years. It is older than my oldest son. I bought it from a man who did not know its real value. This radio is very dear to my heart and I do not allow anyone to touch it. I put it out of reach so no one can drop or break it. What if my daughter dropped it? What am I to tell her then? They do not realize how important it is to me and they have no business with it. When I am away I lock in a closet so no one touches it. This radio is a piece of my body and through it I learn about the news of the whole world. It has been working ever since I got it. If anything malfunctions I repair it myself and never take it to anyone else to have it fixed. I know all the detailed parts of it; every signal and every LED light. As a Japanese product it is special and the best quality there is. One must have a feeling for it to fully understand it and pieces for it are not being produced anymore. Back in Raqqa I used to have a whole collection of

music tapes. All of them used to work on this machine but I did not bring any with me. The radio stations and the news remain the base of what I listen to. That way I know what is going on in the world without moving an inch. I know all the stations on it and the exact time the news is broadcasted on each one of them. The radio has 3 stations and depending on the time, I know what to listen to. I mean there is Monte Carlo that broadcasts the news at a certain time... and Radio London at another time, and Syria has a different schedule. But the news is like being lost in the sea... every time there is a wave you find yourself on another side... every time I tune to a different station, I go to another side, and at the end I just sit in the corner...

I used to work as a driver in Syria but now I have no job. I have 9 children, one of whom is a child with special needs, and I do not have enough money in my pocket to even take a taxi to the doctor, before I can even consider paying for the doctor's visit itself!



Fadia, 38 years old

I came to Lebanon about a year ago, around April 2014. Even before that I already had to leave my hometown al-Quassayr after it was heavily bombed and go to Damascus. I stayed there for a little while until I was faced with the same situation: killing, bombing and destruction. I decided to leave Damascus. I went to a smuggler and we, along with a group of people, shared the same car and the fees requested for human trafficking. We entered Arsal and from there we went to Halba where I stayed for about 4 months.

I was struggling to pay the rent but fortunately I met a woman from the women's association who told me about shared housing in Koucha, and helped me with my relocation request. I was moved to Koucha and have been living here ever since.

While I was still in Damascus I went back to al-Quassayr one day; I went to see my home and I was in tears. The whole area had been demolished and destroyed; no house remained as it was. After I found and recognized my home I wished I could take lots of things dear to my heart but I could not. In the end I took a number of photos that my son loved and a book that was a present from my daughter. I took the book with me even though it was torn and filthy due to the destruction happening all around. I still have the book with me until this day.

When I try to remember what we used to have at home in Syria I can recall the house, the car, the furniture, maybe some clothes... However all these things do not mean much to me because in my opinion all of them can be replaced whereas the memories from our homes and from Syria are what we really lost. One of the things I am sad to have lost is my home library. I love reading and I had an uncountable number of books, along with a few presents from my friends. Things with sentimental value are what matter to me.

When I arrived in Lebanon I was feeling fear and devastation. I became withdrawn and stopped socializing with people. I felt as if I was being tortured. Today though, especially after moving to Koucha, I feel like I am getting my strength back bit-by-bit, day-by-day. With the help of the people here, I started recovering and I feel like I am slowly standing on my feet again. I am getting my self-confidence back and regaining trust in people around me.

My state of mind is better than before; of course the longing for home and for the memories of it are still with me. It is something that I can never ever forget. Nevertheless life has to go on and I have faith that life will keep going on, whether it is in the past or in the present, it will keep going. So why should we let it go on with pain, sorrow and despair, while we are still standing? No! One should always be up to the challenge, and able to stop and rearrange one's days all over again.



Ahmad Mahmoud, 65 years old

I have been in Lebanon for about a year now. I am originally from al-Burhanya. I was at home, standing outside, when a shell exploded about 15 meters away from me. It exploded and hit me in my stomach. My 3 boys came to my rescue, God rest their souls, and carried me into the car and straight to al-Quassayr. I had surgery and then returned home. I was bedridden until my wounds started to heal. More and more shells hit our town so we had to move to al-Quassayr. From there we went to Qara. In the end we decided to travel by car to Aرسال.

My daughter-in-law brought me and paid for the travel costs. When I arrived in Lebanon I spent 2 nights at my daughter-in-law's place in Aرسال. Then I travelled to Zahle in a shared cab. My own daughter was already here when I arrived. She has been in Lebanon for about a year and a half. My wife also arrived in Lebanon before me. We have no IDs, nothing. When I came to Lebanon my boys stayed in Syria. They could not get out. They were there, shells continued to fall and they were hit. I lost the 3 young men so dear to me; The last time I saw them I was in between life and death.

One day, some people came to tell me that my 3 sons were gone. When we heard the news my wife immediately had a stroke and died shortly after. She stayed in the hospital for 2 days before she passed away. They refused to give

me her body unless I paid. The hospital wanted about 16.000.000 Lebanese Pounds! She was dead and they would not give her back to the family. If I had not had the help from other people she would still be in the hospital. We thank God who sent them to us so we could retrieve her body. We did not bring anything with us, no papers, nothing. And now all I have are these wounds from Syria. The only thing that is left.

Young men cannot get through the borders without IDs. I did not have my ID either. I arrived to a checkpoint manned by 3 soldiers. They made us get out of the car. Those who had their IDs stayed in the car, and those who did not were prompted to go see the officer. I went to the officer; I went in with another family. He asked why I did not have my ID. I told him that when the shelling started at night we ran away without bringing anything with us. He told me "What if I let you go now and another checkpoint caught you without your ID? I will be the one to blame." I asked him to let me go and not to worry about it. With the help of God it went fine and I was able to get all the way without any ID or anything else. God only knows if my children would have been as lucky if they had been with me. They would never have let young men go through. Impossible! Even for me, if I had not looked so old, it would have been impossible.



Islam, 24 years old

We came to Lebanon in 2011, originally to visit my aunt's family for what was supposed to be a 4 day stay. We did not know that those days were going to turn into years. I am Palestinian and used to live in the camp of Daraa with my family. When we arrived here people called us from home and told us that the situation was getting worse. They advised my father not to come back. And that is what happened... We stayed.

We did not bring much because we did not know we were going to stay. I brought an old 5 Syrian Pound banknote with me. I had kept it since 9th grade. I had asked all my friends at the time to write me something on it as a souvenir for me to always remember them. I have kept it in my wallet ever since.

I communicate with 2 of them whenever I can until this day. They are still in Daraa and problems with the communication networks often stand in the way of us keeping in touch. Before we came to stay in Lebanon, we first went to Damascus to my grandparents' house and from there to Aramoun. We stayed at my aunt's house for about 2 months. Then we went to Chatila camp in Beirut where my father rented a house. However the situation in Shatila is very bad. There are lots of very tiny streets and alleys and no good medical services. The water is salty... very bad... a life and environment that we are not used to.

After 5 months we moved to Bourj el-Barajneh camp but during our stay in Shatila I came across the Najda Now organization and started working with them. Now I teach the children there. Before we came here I was in my first year at the faculty of Economy and Commerce but when we left Syria I had to drop out. I was very sad about it. My work with the children comforts me a little. I wish I could go back to Syria to complete my studies.

I wish people could be more understanding. Especially now that we are in Lebanon I wish they would legalize our situation. In the end, we are just guests here and the country is small. There is not much potential for us here. It is not our fault that we had to run away from war and death, blood and murder. We do not ask for much. Simply to have papers which allow Palestinians and Syrians to come into Lebanon and visit their families. I wish for us to also be able to enter Syria to see our relatives.



Khalil, 24 years old



I have been in Lebanon for 3 and a half years. I came here when there was a chance the regime army would destroy my village and arrest me there, in Tel Kelekh in Halaat, around February 2012.

Since I was just a student here, I did not have difficulties arriving. I used my student identification and entered Lebanon legally. I took a road from Tel Kelekh to Halaat and then from Mashairfe to Akkar. Finally I arrived in Tripoli. The picture I brought with me is of my cousin, who tried to cross into Lebanon a few days after me, but drowned in a river during the attempt. He had been my friend since childhood. He took this picture 12 years ago when he obtained his first passport because he was going to travel to Kuwait. It was a passport picture. He gave it to me at the time and I have kept it ever since. I used to keep it in my wallet with my ID and *carte de visite* wherever I went. I think he was in 5th grade at the time, 11 or 12 years old.

My cousin decided to come to Lebanon because there was no way he could have handled any more bombings. Since he was a Lebanese national, he was worried sick because it was so tense and he was afraid of being arrested. He decided to take the smugglers' road through the river instead of the official crossing. It was raining heavily that night. When he was almost on the other side of the river he was surprised by a wave that swept him away. We tried to help

him but the difficult weather prevented us from reaching him. We later found his dead body at the side of the river. For me, it was a tragic loss. He died just because he did not want to risk being arrested by the thugs of the regime.

I do not think I can go back to Syria before the regime is toppled. Then we could go back in dignity. I used to be humiliated at checkpoints by soldiers because my father had been arrested. They were always saying that I was smuggling information in my laptop. They always searched my laptop and books, and took them to the officer for a secondary search. Sometimes, to get rid of them, I would go without carrying anything just to avoid this treatment.

I left my mobile phone card with my cousin in the picture because he was of Lebanese nationality, which meant they would not give him as much of a hard time as they gave me. All the men in my family are wanted by the regime. At least 6 of them have already been arrested, even before the revolution. My father too, afterwards. I am due for military service but of course I am not going to serve in that army.

The regime thinks my village is hosting terrorists. My friends were killed by the army and their families have not received their bodies yet. It is risky for me to go back right now. Also, I am doing more things from here than what I can do inside. The situation there is really bad and I would be living under siege. My hands would be tied.



Halima, 45 years old

I have been in Lebanon for 11 months. I come from Raqqa, the province of Raqqa. We traveled to Lebanon through Masnaa using the official legal channels. I was with my husband, my 2 boys, and my girl. I have 2 other girls also. We are from the countryside. When I was a child our neighbor made my face tattoo. It hurt. It was done with a needle. I do not know what it means. It is a traditional decorative thing. My daughter does not have one. My husband says that why would she have it? We are in the 21st century!

I have had my rosary for 6 years. I would wear it around my neck. I was wearing it when I left. I would have forgotten to bring it if I was not wearing it. I take it off when I shower and then put it back around my neck. We left with the clothes we were wearing... and everything else. What could we have brought? I use the rosary for prayer.

I will not lie to you. When we had the chance we just left even though no strikes hit us directly. Around us, the situation was different, yes. We do not think of going back because the situation is not very good. Still, our country is dear to us.

I have nothing but my husband and these little children. I do not have any older ones. We have nothing, no land, no farm to harvest, nothing. How can we survive? We have nothing, no one who can work. This old man here, my husband, cannot work. He has an ulcer and he cannot do much. He

is sitting at home. We get help and food from the UN. My oldest son does not work; he is a child still. We have all our relatives in this camp. What can we do? Lebanon feels kind of normal to us but we miss our home.

To come here we took a bus straight from Raqqa. We travelled at night so I do not know which cities we passed on the way. My husband says that we came through Palmyra, Damascus, and Masnaa.



Juma, 33 years old

I left Damascus on 15th of October 2011. I took a taxi and travelled along the main road from Damascus to Beirut. I had no problems at the border. I was worried that something would happen but it was ok. There was something unexpected that happened though. Before I left I had a strange feeling. There is this land between the borders: between the Syrian side and Lebanese one. When I was crossing the border to Lebanon, I passed the Syrian check-point and we entered this 'no man's land'. When I got there I felt a kind of relaxation because I had been worried before. Suddenly, in the middle of this no man's land, I saw Syrian soldiers with guns and it made me feel tense again.

I had a lot of possessions back in Damascus. I left them there. I just brought the most important things: clothes. You really need them. I also managed to bring an item with me, a tablecloth. It is called tantal in Kurdish. I had received it from my older sister. I really like it. It is very colourful, with a lot of brightness. She made it herself. Hand-made. It is traditional for the region that I come from, the North, the Kurdish region. I wanted to keep it with me. In general I do not like colours but it is more like a memory. And you need it daily. My family is still there... in Syria.

When I came here I told myself that I still had my memories and my archives left. They will not get lost, I kept them with a friend, many video tapes. They are important to me, and

sure enough, they are considered illegal by the regime. For me, staying there was "suicidal" – like committing suicide. It is not about danger. If you stay there you are put in a position where you will get killed or will kill someone else. I was working on documentary projects and in the middle of March, when it all began, they were stopped. I stayed for 7 months doing nothing, just sitting at home. It was a very negative feeling.

I felt some euphoria for a moment when it all started but all my friends were in jail, people were getting killed, watching the news was horrible... It was not easy. I could not feel in touch with Damascus anymore, the city I had once liked so much.

We all know that the regime will change but I know it will not be easy, a lot of people will be killed, a lot of blood will be spilled.



Fouad, 24 years old



I escaped to Lebanon with my mother and 3 of my sisters about a year and a half ago, around September 2013. We come from al-Quassayr in the province of Homs where we lost our father, who went out one day to collect his salary, and never came back. We had asked and looked for him but we could not find any clue as to his whereabouts. We still do not know what happened to him: maybe he died, or has been living in some basement, only God knows. Before leaving al-Quassayr we had spent close to a year living underground. I stayed in a basement with my family and the fights took place above us.

My sister Batoul contracted a skin disease for which we cannot find a cure. It started while we had to live in that basement for a year. Our never ending fear and all the traces of the war were reflected on her face and eyes. With no electricity, barely any food, we stayed there. At some point we could not find any candles anymore so we started burning oil, and along with that came the choking from the fumes. We were in a desperate situation and we had to use anything that was available. In the end the regime army wanted to get into the area where we were staying. If they had managed to enter then the civilians would have been stuck. That would have been the end of us.

I have 7 sisters. Four of them are married and they live in Lebanon with their families. The remaining 3 and my

mother are with me. I was a student at an institute back in Syria and I could not finish my studies. My father was the one providing for the family and he disappeared in the beginning of the events. I was born with a hole in my heart that prevents me from doing any physically demanding activities. I was wounded in Homs in one of the air force attacks of the regime on the city. I was on my way to arrange a car that would take us to Lebanon when it felt as if the sky started falling down on me. As the bombs were falling down they began to grow in my eyes, and became bigger and bigger, right behind me. One of the shells hit me and broke a bone in my skull. You can still feel it when you touch my head.

Our lives resembled the story of the ancient caveman. Burning wood in a basement to heat some water! And on top of that, towards the end, the distance between the regime forces and us hiding became as short as the distance from here to the exit of Koucha. Every civilian they saw they would shoot on the spot. We spent 3 nights in the woods with a group of rebels until we arrived in "the city of dreams", an area I had heard of before in Syria but I never got to visit. We felt a drastic transition as if we were moving from hell to heaven. The stores were open, the streets were full of people and life was normal. When we arrived to that area the rebels told us that whoever wants to stay there can do so, and that we had arrived at a safe place. Those who would like to come with the rebels to Yabroud can leave in order to continue to Lebanon from there. We told them that

we wanted to continue and leave Syria. I mean we had no one in the "city of dreams"; We had no relatives there. My sister and her husband were staying in a camp in Tripoli. She was my way out. We spent a night with a family who took us in; or better said they took my whole family in except for me. At that time my head and arm were covered in bandages, and my beard and hair grew very long. In the "city of dreams" I was considered one of the rebels so I had to spend the night at the doorstep. Someone felt sorry for me and gave me a pillow.

The next day we took off for Yabroud. A week later we were able to sneak into Aرسال in a big, crowded car in which people were sitting on top of each other. It felt like a judgment day. We finally arrived and with the help of some relatives in Aرسال we were able to pay the fees to go to Tripoli. First we stayed in Maniara camp for a year, and then we moved to Koucha. We have been here for about 8 months and with the help of people here I found a job that does not require a lot of physical effort. Our situation is better. However Batoul still suffers from the skin changes and her state remains the same. We found out that the only cure is to change the climate, which means to travel. I tried to get in touch with my aunt who migrated to Norway. If I would reach her she could then apply for a family reunification as soon as possible and we could finish the treatment for Batoul. All I care about is her state now since the doctors told us that the older she gets the worse it will become. The disease will progress on her skin... We are waiting...



Haj Zaher, 51 years old

We came to Lebanon about 2 years ago and did not go back to Syria ever since. Our clothes, the Quran, and a suitcase with our identity papers are all we brought from Syria.

I come from the countryside of Raqqa. I am a father to 8 girls. Three of them are married and 5 are single. One of the married daughters stayed in Syria with her husband and all the others came with me.

I brought the Quran with me because we read from it on a daily basis. I keep it in a special suitcase. My girls read the Quran. I read to them as well. We all cannot do without it; it is just like our identity. All my children were getting an education in Syria but there is no more schooling for them here. Therefore we at least gather in the evening and read from the Quran, and my daughters help each other learn.

We left Syria because of the lack of everything. We could not find anything anymore. No food, no bread, nothing. No more gas nor oil. Everything was lacking. We did not have enough money to buy the things we needed because everything became too expensive. The situation there was very miserable. We were running away from everyone no matter if it was Al-Nusra, ISIS, the Free Syrian Army. All these factions were present there and they were all after you, so we had to flee. At first we stayed in someone's tent in Tamnin for 5 months until we regulated our papers and bought a tent to move in.

Out of my 5 single girls 4 work a day or 2 a week depending on the work availability and the fifth one cannot. She became Hemiplegic after a car accident in Syria. They work to bring us some bread. Our situation here is better because we do not worry that we will be hit by a bullet or killed by someone, but we are struggling with things related to our residency and its renewal. Every 6 months we need to renew it. To do so we have to pay 200 US dollars per person and we are asked for papers and a Lebanese citizen to sponsor us as well. There is no one to sponsor us here. The land we live on costs money. We manage somehow, we get by. Back in Syria there was nothing at all. No work, just... nothing.



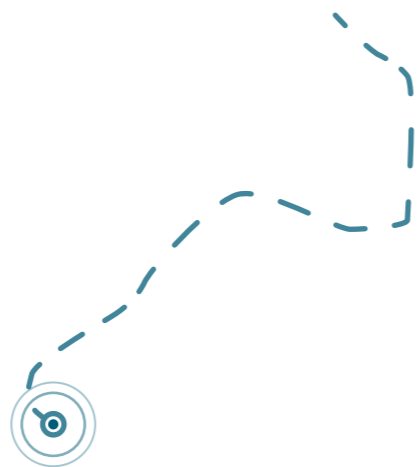
Ibtissam, 40 years old

I did not bring anything from al-Quassayr, anything except for the picture of my missing son. It is all I have from there... I lost track of him 3 years ago in Syria. He was 16 at that time. Now he is 19 and we have had no information about him ever since we last saw him. My husband was also detained when they took my son. He was with his friends in a nearby field when they stopped them all at once. I heard the news and was told that they wanted his ID card in order to access his file. I gave them what they wanted but they did not give me my son in return. When my husband got out of detention he did not find his son home. He tried asking the International Red Cross and gave them all the information. Unfortunately it did not get us anywhere.

Me, Ahmad, my husband who is 47, my son and my daughter came to Lebanon in May 2013. We are from the countryside of al-Quassayr, in the province of Homs. We fled from there when the shelling intensified. We headed towards Hisyah and from there we came to Arsal by car. We ran to Lebanon through the mountains. It took us about 3 to 4 hours. We paid some money for the passage. My husband Ahmad did not come with us. He had to go through a different experience on the day me and our children came. We had taken the road through Qara while he took the one through Burajj. His trip took about 6 hours.

In the beginning we stayed in Arsal for a year and a half until we had to move into an underground shelter for 10 days because of heavy shelling. Then there was a truce and we left the shelter. As soon as we emerged from underground and saw the sun we were told that all the tents had burnt down and that we could leave now, during the truce. I feared for my other son who is 16 years old and therefore we left.

After our tent in Arsal was destroyed, we spent a month at my parents' place until we were able, with the help of a sheikh, to get another tent here in al-Faour and we have been here ever since. It has been 6 months...



EXILIUM

Photography project realised by:

Author:

Marta Bogdanska / tobiku@gmail.com

Graphic Designer:

Mouna Abu Assali

Translator:

Layla Mouhallami

Editor:

Christine F. G. Kollmar

Fixer:

Marc El Mouzawak

Published by Heinrich Böll Foundation - Middle East in 2015

The views expressed herein are those of the author and cannot be taken to reflect the opinion of the foundation.

©You can download an electronic version online. You are free to copy, distribute and transmit the work under the following conditions: Attributions - you must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of work); Noncommercial - you may not use this work for commercial purposes; No Derivative Works - you may not alter, transform, or build upon this work.

Pictures, illustrations and photographs used in this work may not be used outside their context without seeking approval of the artists/photographers.



EXILIUM

Show us the Way to Bitter Exile

Photography Project by Marta Bogdanska

We are here. Where are you?

 **HEINRICH
BÖLL
STIFTUNG**
MIDDLE EAST