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**“ALL OF US IN SEARCH OF HOME”: A STUDY ON THE ETHNOGRAPHIC MEMOIRS OF  
SAMAR YAZBEK AND NUJEEN MUSTAFA**

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**ABSTRACT**

The assertiveness is inevitable when considering the fact that Syria is an ordinary country with ordinary people trying to live their lives and trying to make the ends meet as the war slowly creeps and strangles the country. Syria as seen through the ethnographic memoirs of Samar Yazbek and Nujeen Mustafa has become an example of the civilization being betrayed by humanity and also one could view the resilience of the people caught up in what has become one of the greatest tragedies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century where it seems the only victor is death. Is this condition not the prophecy of an apocalypse? The memoir is also an explicit narrative of the psychological makeup of the ordinary people who are forced into horror and that makes one wonder how a country can ever recover. Syria has become the host of death and the refugees are on an exasperated search for home. It is just a hard reality that hits everyone as the memoir screams with bombs and cries of the stranded and the strangled that at the end we all have become refugees to humanity and are in constant search of home.

**Keywords:** Syria, Refugees. Ethnographic Memoir, Home

For the past few years majority of the population have been the global witnesses to millions of people fleeing their home in the search of elsewhere. This huge displacement has resulted in the streaming of the displaced into other countries like Germany and India leaving behind their life, home, past and their roots. If one could recall the Paris attack of 13<sup>th</sup> November, 2015, where a beautiful evening in the city of light ended up in violence where men carried out attacks with guns and bombs, the question of migration, exile and alienation to a new place becomes unwelcoming and necessarily ambivalent.

Syria is one of the oldest civilizations in the world. The assertiveness is inevitable when considering the fact that Syria is an ordinary country with ordinary people trying to live their lives, of girls trying to read bedtime stories to their baby sisters while sheltering them from the pathetic echoes of terrorism, of the mums and dads toiling and trying to make the ends meet as the war slowly creeps and strangles the country. This idea hits like a punch in the stomach as one traverses through the ethnographic memoirs of Samar Yazbek's *The Crossing: My Journey to the Shattered Heart of Syria* and Christina Lamb with Nujeen Mustafa in *Nujeen: One Girl's Incredible Journey from War- Torn Syria in a Wheelchair*.

Syria is a country in Western Asia with Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, Jordan and Israel as its neighbours. The capital of Syria is Damascus. The religious groups include Islam, Christianity and Druze. The Sunni Muslims

form the majority in Syria and the Shia are the minority in Muslim sect. Syria has been involved in the civil war since 2011 with the rising of the Arab Spring Movement. The civil war is between President Bashar-al-Assad, his Syrian Army and the Free Army which consist of various groups of people who are in opposition with the rule of Bashar-al-Assad. They are mostly called the rebel group. It should be noted that there were many foreign interventions also in the civil war.

Bashar-al-Assad is a Shia Alawite. Samar Yazbek, a writer and journalist fell out of Assad regime and was forced into exile. She currently lives in Paris with her daughter. Samar is a single army who is in a constant fight to rebuild her beautiful Syria from war to peace. She identifies herself as a Syrian and becomes the first hand voice and evidence of the real condition of Syria, once the most beautiful oldest civilization being torn down to ruins due to the constant shelling and massacre. Her translated works include the novel *Cinnamon* and *A Woman in the Crossfire* and her diaries of the first four months of the Syrian Uprising for which she was awarded the PEN Pinter, PEN Tucholsky and PEN Oxfam Novib prizes. In 2010 she was selected as one of the 'Beirut 39', the top thirty nine Arab under forty years of age during that year.

Acclaimed journalist and the co-author of the New York bestseller, *I Am Malala*, Christina Lamb joins with Nujeen Mustafa in narrating yet another story that is nerve cracking and is an interrogation of humanity amidst the existence of free will. The inspiring true story of the significant young hero, Nujeen Mustafa, a sixteen year old, born with cerebral palsy and her irking journey from the war torn Syria to Germany in a wheelchair, this ethnographic memoir is an unanticipated yarn of fortitude, grit and hope that adds another lens to the view of the greatest humanitarian issues of our time, the Syrian refugee crisis. Nujeen embarked on this arduous trek to safety and new life. The gruelling sixteen month odyssey by foot, boat and bus took her across Turkey and the Mediterranean to Greece, through Macedonia to Serbia and Hungary and finally to Germany. Nujeen's extraordinary optimism never flickered amidst the spiteful journey of miles. Narrated by the acclaimed British foreign correspondent Christina Lamb, this book is a powerful and groundbreaking memoir that gives distinctive voice to the Syrian refugee crisis.

An ethnographic memoir is a nonfiction text that usually has a first person or personal narrative and recounts the past experience of the individual who is a representative of a particular sociocultural group. The ethnographic memoirs of Samar Yazbek and Nujeen Mustafa help us understand that the world must change and also offers an inspiration to transform that change into reality.

The flight and the settlement patterns of most of the refugees according to Egon F. Kunz as discussed in his kinetic model of refugee theory shows two types of displacement. Anticipatory refugees anticipate danger prior and thus follow an orderly departure even before the crisis arises. Acute refugee movements are the reaction to an inordinate pressure where people are forced to flee their homeland on an acute span of notice. In 1981, Kunz expanded his refugee theory to include three other ideas. The majority-identified refugees are usually the rebels who have opposed any social or political events in their home country. Event related refugees are those who get displaced because of the discrimination directed against the particular group to which they belong. Those who flee their home country because of personal reasons are the self-alienated refugees. The treatment of the host country to the refugee applications varies based on the categories to which they belong. Applying this kinetic model of refugee theory Samar Yazbek can be categorized under majority identified refugee and Nujeen Mustafa falls under acute refugee category. This division directly reflects on their take on leaving their homes and seeking asylum elsewhere.

Samar Yazbek in her memoir takes a view on the conditions inside Syria and her nodal focus is on women and the children. Samar shows a great attachment to her once beautiful country and her reaction each time she crossed the borders of Syria illegally to meet her people, her emotions were mixed. "How we had crossed from being lost in one wilderness to being lost in another. It had been a moment of oscillation, of teetering on line between exile and homeland." (Yazbek 9)

Her nostalgia which is actually the very first picture of Syria that Samar provides the reader through her memoir is a crystal clear explanation of how people find it difficult to forgo their roots and identity:

The Syria that I remember had been one of the most beautiful places in the world. I thought back to my early childhood in the town of al-Tabqa (also known as al-Thawra) near the city of Raqqa on the Euphrates river, and my teenage years in the historic city of Jableh on the coast, followed by Latakia, the principal port city of Syria. (Yazbek 5)

Focusing on the women and children plights in Syria, Samar takes on how the patriarchal society has left the woman and children suffer in the hands of war. Samar's main aim of the crossing is to empower women. She settled to work and met with a lot of women and heard their stories, of how their sons and husbands were killed and the picture of terror of everyday life while death cradles near them making a constant reminder of its presence.

Samar recounts her visit to the hospital in Reyhanli, a Turkish town in the border. The encounter with two girls in the hospital was a major blow to the emotions of Samar and it turned out to be one among the many reasons to participate in this fight more actively. She meets Diana, a four year old who had been hit by the bullet on the spinal cord and also Shaima, eleven years old whose legs have been amputated due to the shelling and her left hand maimed by shrapnel. Encountering these incidents made Samar freeze and go stiff in her legs. Yet the men constantly reminded her that she need a skin thicker than that and this incident taught Samar to postpone her sadness and distress and confine it to herself. This taught Samar one heavy lesson of Syria and of life. "All the same, the only victor in Syria is Death: no one talks of anything else. Everything is relative and open to doubt; the only certainty is that death will triumph." (Yazbek 11) Thus Samar recounts the life of people inside once the beautiful Syria that has been shattered by the civil war between the Dictator and the people with democratic vision.

Nujeen Mustafa in her memoir recounts her long and inevitable journey from Syria to Germany on a wheel chair. Mustafa's memoir is all about the hope that each refugee carries in his or her arduous journey in search of new homes. Nujeen's story is a crystal clear take on what happens after the people flee their homes in Syria. A true insight into the refugee crisis, Nujeen shows the fading of humanity as she strongly asserts the position of refugees in any country. "And now you have read my story I hope you see I am not just a number- none of us are." (Mustafa 268)

Nujeen Mustafa also talks about other children who make it or perish in the journey and she addresses the story of Alan Kurdi. A small boy washed away on the shores of Mediterranean Sea, dead, made the headlines on newspaper few years back, and Nujeen tells the story of that lifeless body, Alan Kurdi who never got to know what life was but he had a story, the story of how he died. Nujeen in contrast had accepted her displacement and her optimism proved her eagerness for new life like many other refugees who dreamed of a proper home and a peaceful life. "Since leaving Aleppo, we had travelled more than 3,500 miles across nine countries from war to peace-a-journey to new life, like my name." (Mustafa 215)

Nujeen gladly talks about her new life in Germany while Samar is deeply attached to her home country. Samar constantly recalls her exile in Paris as not so welcoming life and it has become a moving from one wilderness to another. The story that Nujeen Mustafa and Samar Yazbek shared with the world involving refugee crisis are not news and they are not just numbers but a groundbreaking reality that exists some million miles away from us.

Some 33,000 children arrived in Greece, Italy, Bulgaria and Spain in 2017. Some 20,000 Unaccompanied And Separated Children (UASC) arrived in Europe in 2017 according to UNHCR. What wrong did these innocent children do in the capitalistic and the autocratic fight of the savages? Do they not deserve to have a peaceful wholesome breakfast, attend school or university, hang out with friends, have the mothers read bed time stories and have a peaceful life? Even if excluding the highest hopes, do they at least not deserve a simple assurance that they will be alive and lead a normal life?

Syria as seen through the ethnographic memoirs have become the example of the civilization being betrayed by humanity and also one could view the resilience of the people caught up in what has become one

of the greatest tragedies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century where it seems the only victor is the death. Is this condition not the prophecy of an apocalypse?

The Memoirs are also an explicit narrative of the psychological makeup of the ordinary people who are forced into horror and that makes one wonder how a country can ever recover. Syria has become the host of death and the refugees on an exasperated search for home. It is just a hard reality that hits everyone as the memoir screams with bombs and cries of the stranded and the strangled that at the end we all have become refugees to humanity and are in constant search of home.

Afghans and Somalis and Iraqis and

Eritreans and Syrians.

All of us impatient for sunrise,

all of us in dread of it.

All of us in search of home (Hosseini np)

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