

The rise and fall of a city in the endless Game of Thrones



la ville de Qamishili. Source: page Facebook de Qamishili.

An important part of my job as a legal translator in my city Qamishli, situated in north-eastern Syria on the border with Turkey, was working with asylum-seekers and refugees, especially Iraqis who had fled their country following the American invasion in 2003 and wanted to find refuge in the asylum countries.

I was preparing their dossiers: translating the documents, fixing appointments with the embassies, filling the formulas etc. Hundreds of families came to my office, each had an extremely painful story of deportation, persecution and displacement. It was very distressing to hear the narratives of these unfortunate people, who once had lived a fairly stable and comfortable life, then all of a sudden their world

turned upside down and having lost everything they found themselves homeless refugees in other countries.

Being myself a descendant of a refugee family, their stories were not totally strange to me. My grandfather was the only survivor of an extended family massacred during the Armenian genocide perpetrated by the Ottoman government against the Armenians and the other Christians of Turkey during and after the World War I. In 1920, like many of his compatriots, my grandfather could only survive by miracle, traversing on foot the enormous territory separating his ancestral village situated in the province of Diyarbakır in southeaster Turkey and the Syrian border town of Ras al Ayn. Therefore, tales of displacement and mass killing had always haunted my memory since I was a child.

Nevertheless, putting myself then in the shoes of the Iraqi refugees, I could not help thinking of what might happen to me and my family had we experienced the same devastating war in Syria? The mere thought of it was terrifying and nightmarish.

But, what I then thought as something incredible soon became a reality in 2011. The civil war started in Syria and the Pandora box, with all the evils of the world, was opened widely. This time, the troubled faces of my countrymen started streaming into my office, carrying alongside their precious documents, gruesome stories of kidnappings, lootings and killings as the entire security system in the country collapsed, the vital services completely crumpled and considerable territories surrounding the city fell into the hands of Daesh ISIS.

Ironically, the grandchildren of the refugees who one hundred years ago had founded this beautiful frontier city as a safe haven from persecution, were now frantically fleeing from the impending apocalyptic devastation and killing, by seeking refuge in Sweden, Germany and other European countries.

The lights of the lively, multi-ethnic, prosperous city of Qamishli suddenly dimmed, the buzzing activities died down and the streets became deserted and lifeless.

Another sad story of the rise and fall of a city in the endless game of the thrones.

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Infos:

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