DRAWN ACROSS BORDERS

TRUE STORIES OF MIGRATION



WALKER STUDIO

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With thanks to Emily Miller from the Migration Museum, London

Some names have been changed to protect individuals' anonymity.

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Abdullo



Farouk



Abdul



Abed



Hasan



Zouhair

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Hani



Guram



Farid



Ahmed



Yusef



Mustafa

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Karam



Hadi



Abbas



Manfri



Hamza



Ibrahim

INTRODUCTION

It is an unusual feeling to walk into a place that everyone is leaving. I have been stared at as if I am lost or mad, and sometimes I have felt as if I'm both. However, by resisting the temptation to turn around and walk away I have made these drawings. I made them in refugee camps, war zones and on the move, and as I drew, people told me their stories.

I was often only able to spend a short time with these people, but they displayed such humanity and such generosity of spirit, that for that moment they eclipsed the traumas and pressures that were forcing them to migrate.

People move around the world for many reasons. Some migration is voluntary; most is not. People move for love, work, security, war, food and family. They have done so for hundreds of thousands of years and they still do. It runs deep in the human condition, but is an intricate, sprawling subject for anyone to comprehend.

We live in an increasingly interconnected world but run the risk of having a far shallower understanding of the individuals in it. I hope this book can offer a glimpse into some of the reasons people have for leaving behind places they once called home, places that many still call home.

What is clear to me as we begin a new decade – as the population increases, resources remain limited and climate pressures mount – is that migration will vastly alter the future of the world and our species. Only by understanding individual cases better can we properly respond to migration as a whole.

I'm grateful to the people who sat still for long enough to be drawn, but even more appreciative of the time and energy it takes to tell a personal story, having tried it myself. I hope the images do the honesty of their words justice.

George Butler.



Leila



Mama Nazak



Jeelan



Khalid



Karam



Ezat

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Syria

ARRIVING IN A PLACE EVERYONE ELSE IS LEAVING

In March 2011, following peaceful demonstrations against the government, a civil war erupted in Syria and flared quickly into a bloody conflict. Many militias were fighting for different reasons, and all sides were capable of acts of extreme violence, in particular the government of Bashar al-Assad. The civilian casualties were rising faster than they could be counted.

A year later, in August 2012, I walked across the border from Turkey into Syria expecting to find an exodus of people trying to get away. But the border was empty. So empty I had to search for officials to stamp my passport.

I was picked up by the Free Syrian Army and driven past bullet-ridden buildings, olive groves damaged by tanks and a petrol station caught in crossfire. We soon arrived at Azaz, a town in northern Syria. Muhammad, my translator and an English student from Aleppo University, explained how thousands of people had fled this small town when the fighting broke out. Most people moved to family homes in the countryside, not expecting the shelling to last. Few believed they would have to leave the country.

Later that day in the town square I drew children playing on a burnt-out government tank as two old men examined the total destruction of their town in bewilderment. Their homes would continue to be the targets of government air strikes for years to come.



Burnt-out tanks in the town of Azaz, northern Syria.

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Iraq

FAMILIES ESCAPING THE FRONT LINE

In April 2017, in the middle of the Old City in West Mosul, the Iraqi Army Golden Division were at the forefront of the world's fight against the radical militant group Daesh (also known as Islamic State or ISIS). The army had circled the Daesh stronghold and many local people were caught up in the fighting.

On my way to the front line, out of the pillar-box view of the Iraqi Army Humvee, I saw a family pushing their grandmother in a wheelbarrow. Dressed all in black, she waved at us as if this was normal, as you would from the top deck of a bus. Like many others they were fleeing the destroyed city and heading for the camps for those who were internally displaced.

Once I arrived on the front line in the Tanak district of West Mosul, I sat with Ahmed, a young soldier. We talked and he smoked shisha as he waited for leave. From the rooftop above it was his and his colleagues' job to guide in missiles to Daesh positions, destroying another building, another home, and displacing civilians.

The fighting caused chaos for the people who lived here. The roads in West Mosul were completely blocked, littered with burnt-out cars, or destroyed by tactical air strikes to stop Daesh movements, so many people were forced to leave on foot.



Al Nabi Street, Tanak district, West Mosul

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