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# Images of Syrian Refugees in Transit through Minefields in Turkey, 2011–2015

Juan A. Roche Cárcel 

This article presents a qualitative analysis of photographs taken of Syrian refugees by the the Turkish photojournalist, Kemal Vural. There is an exceptional situation at the Turkish border. I will describe how these people cross the border, the dangers they face in walking through minefields, and the emotions that they experience then. The article concludes that refugees are portrayed as being displaced in transit through a flow that has not yet been defined. Finally, the analysis has been contextualized in the Syrian conflict and the problems this has entailed.

## PHOTOGRAPHING REFUGEES

In April 2019, on a visit to Gaziantep University, in Turkey, I met with the photojournalist Kemal Vural Tarlan, appreciated his work, and immediately proposed to him to do an article about his photographs of Syrian refugees on Turkey's southern border. Kemal<sup>1</sup> is a member of the European Sociological Association and a lecturer in Communications at Gaziantep University, where he also acts as a researcher and documentary photographer. In addition, in that same city, he is general coordinator of the Kırkayak Kültür Center and director of the Center for Social and Cultural Research on the Middle East.

This article is based on two of his exhibitions, "Left Overs" and "Syria in Transit." The first one,<sup>2</sup> from 2012, presents a collection of photos of people, objects and spaces along Turkey's border with Syria, as well as Jordan, Lebanon and France. It also includes sections devoted to the crossing of the border by groups of individuals, as well as the remains, things and objects left behind by those who cross that border as quickly they can, also the hospitality, places of refuge, work and meeting in Turkey.

In 2012–15 Kemal developed a project consisting of photographs, video, audio and physical objects entitled "Syria in Transit,"<sup>3</sup> which followed the

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journeys of Syrian refugees from Turkey toward various European countries, from 2011 to 2015, and which has been exhibited in Gaziantep, London, Berlin, Kiel, Madrid, Waterloo and Istanbul. The photos in this exhibition show the crossings along old routes that smugglers had used for years, through the gaps and roads located in the midst of minefields of a "land where death is buried." He also documented the waste left along the roads, the hospitality of people, and the consequent liminality, dissolution and evaporation of the national border between Turkey and Syria. Its protagonists become witnesses of an effort to escape from barbarism, war and death. Along the way they reveal what is normally hidden from the public eye and conscience.

We believe that the content analysis we offer of a selection of photos from these two exhibitions makes them a social document about displaced Syrians who were forced to leave their homes, their villages, their cities, their jobs or daily activities and, in short, their previous lives. They risked everything for foreign territories, strange people, for mined border areas, until they ended up either in refugee camps, in places where they could find work, or were able to meet and so obtain refuge.

Specifically, we believe that the photographer has created a representation of the situation that the Syrian refugees went through while crossing the Turkish border. Hence, in synthesis, the fundamental objective of this work is to make a qualitative or content analysis, from the perspective of visual sociology, of Kemal's photographs. First, we will describe how people cross the border, the dangers they face and the states of mind that pervade their journey. Secondly, we will unveil the meanings hidden in the objects, scraps and remnants left behind, abandoned or forgotten, in their transfer. And thirdly, we will define the border territory through which they pass, whether or not it represents a liminality between nations; or, on the contrary, if it is dissolved, thus transcending the regional character to become an international issue.

## THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL BASES

### Comprehensive Sociology and Visual Sociology

To achieve these objectives, I will use comprehensive sociology and visual sociology as well as the hermeneutic method materialized in "visual framing."

The first key reference for our work—Weberian comprehensive or interpretative sociology (Weber 2006, 13, 43–44 and 172; González García 1992, 37; 1998, 208), according to which both the social world and the relationships that it generates are meaningful—was chosen in the hope that, through "correspondence in meaning" or "elective affinities," we might identify the common links between the different cognitive dimensions—*aesthetic, ethical, economic, political, religious and social*—that modernity has fragmented (López 2001, 23) and, more specifically, correspondences of meaning existing between Syrian refugees, their bodies and emotions, and the border territory through which they pass.

Secondly, we use visual sociology, which in the main addresses two issues: the analysis of the image in its different forms, on the one hand, and the use of

the image as a way to collect information about social reality, on the other. Both dimensions converge in the ultimate goal of the subdiscipline, which is the production of social knowledge through the image (Echavarren 2010, 2). However, it is clear that the social sciences have historically always privileged written sources and consequently have marginalized or even excluded other ones, mainly sound and visual ones. Specifically, the latter “have been disqualified as 'data' and also as 'research instruments'” (Davila Legerén 2015, 288).

Even so, the subdiscipline has certain excellent underpinnings (Bourdieu and Touraine 1965, 36; Goffman 1979, 84; Becker 1981, 96; 1982, 392; De Miguel and Ponce de León 1988; Huici Urmeneta and Dávila Legerén 2019). In addition, the list of studies made in the sociology of photography is long, as indicated by Eduardo Bericat (Bericat Alastuey 2012b, 70). For example, close to our concern are the works of Bruce Jackson—life in prison (1977, 1978); Douglas Harper—the vagabonds (1988); Lewis Wickes Hine, a sociologist and photographer, who called his works “photointerpretations” (working ever since 1908 on childhood in the United States); John Grady (2007)—the segregation of Black people; and also Davila Legerén (2011, 80–84, 2015, 295); and Bericat (Bericat Alastuey 2012b, 70). At present the subdiscipline is experiencing “a new rebirth [ ... ], with young researchers more versed in new technologies” (Echavarren 2010, 2).

In this sociological tradition which articulates photography and sociology—both modalities of exploration of the social—there have been, on the one hand, according to Howard Becker, three perspectives in the reading of any photograph: as journalistic, as documentary, or as visual sociology (Bericat Alastuey 2012a, 185–86). On the other hand, in synthesis, there have been two major approaches in visual sociology: working *with* or *on* photographs already taken. The first case refers to the incorporation of the said practice by the research team itself, working from or creating the photos. In this way photography acquires a role in the research process itself, but changing its consideration. As a secondary source (to the extent that the photographs handled have been made for purposes other than the research process, giving rise to a collection, a foundation or an archive); or as a primary source, insofar as those are original observations made for or through the specific sociological research in question (Faccioli and Losacco 2003; Davila Legerén 2011, 2015).

This article contributes to the sociological work *on* photojournalistic images, since it is proposed to work on photos from a documentary repertoire, in this case one of a professional nature, as they were generated for the press. Nonetheless they take on a particular sociological interest when considered in terms of self-presentation and when approached according to the very conception that a society has of itself at a given moment, that is, of how it imagines itself (Appadurai 1999).

We will also take into account the following considerations about photography:

1. Photography and sociology have contemporaneity in common (Harper 1988, 55).
2. Every photographic image is an “index,” that is, “a trace that there had been a real phenomenon of which it was a reference” (Amezaga 2019, 36).

3. Photography contributes to the creation of “the socio-identity worldview” (Cazarin Brito and Davila Legerén 2014).
4. The emotional charge of photography is always much greater than that of any written text, and consequently it helps to humanize the social problems of lonely and uprooted people (López del Ramo and Humanes 2016, 88); that is, it makes them, for the spectators, into individual human beings, sufferers and fighters rather than generalized abstractions.
5. The interpretation of photographic images cannot avoid being historical, insofar as it depends on prior knowledge of the situation and on the fact that several years have passed before the analysis (De Andrés, Nos-Aldás, and García-Matilla 2016, 35) and the publication of dozens of works.
6. The photograph represents an alternative discourse on the experience of the refugees and does so, as will be seen here, from the perspective of an experienced photojournalist (Aguilar Idáñez 2011, 100 ff.).
7. Photography is a tool of social analysis that contributes substantially to the construction of social reality (De Miguel and Ponce de León 1998, 84–86).
8. As photojournalists are the ones who “have to produce clear, immediately understandable, interpretable and descriptive images to include on the pages of newspapers” (Bericat Alastuey 2012a, 203–04), their images become a prime social document; but also an essential source of information to give an image—affective—of the extreme situation of the people in their transit through the mined border of Turkey.
9. Photographs derive their meaning, as do the rest of cultural objects, from their context (*ibid.*, 185–86).

### The Hermeneutic Method Concretized in the Visual Framing

The “hermeneutic or interpretive method” is especially useful for comprehensive sociology, insofar as interpretation constitutes its central problem (Ricoeur 2008, 39). Certainly, it is based on a philosophical reflection, of sociological scope, about the understanding and axial role of the interpretation of the human in relation to the world; in fact, what is interpreted with social hermeneutics are the things themselves, but seen in context (Beltrán 2016, 3–4). More precisely it is a matter of finding the profound keys to photographic images, that is, of revealing their inner meaning from the external ideological discourse (Grondin 2014, 10–11 and 43–107). The ideology is a system of ideas, values, and precepts which organize or legitimize the actions of individuals or groups; whereas discourse can be described as an action and social interaction mode located in social contexts, i.e. both discourse itself and its mental dimensions (e.g. its meanings) are part of specific situations and social structures (Van Dijk 1998, 16–19).

The hermeneutic method is here specified by means of the *visual framing*, above all because the latter is very appropriate for content analysis (Abreu 2004, 1; Muñiz, Igartua, and Otero 2006, 103; Casanova, Eugenia, and Guijarro 2018, 110) and varied combinations (Bock 2020, 1), but also because of its link with the concept of ideology (Tuchman 1978; Gans 1979; Gitlin 1980). Although it originates from the field of communication studies, it has been influenced by the sociology of Gregory Bateson (1972/1955) and Erving

Goffman (1974), and it is not without merit that visual elements link the discipline to the journalistic genre (Barboza Martínez 2005, 347). Its conceptualization remains vague, often neglecting the richness of the images (Bock 2020, 1), but numerous publications focus on this method of visual framing (Fehrenbach and Rodogno 2015; Ghajarjazi 2016; Mortensen and Trenz 2016). Here we are interested because it visually frames reality and information (Casanova, Eugenia, and Guijarro 2018, 111; López del Ramo and Humanes 2016, 91; De Andrés, Nos-Aldás, and García-Matilla 2016, 31), which refers to the "angle, focus, perspective or treatment of information that is manifested in the choice, emphasis or importance attributed to the different elements" (Entman 1993, 52; also Muñiz, Igartua, and Otero 2006, 106–07; López del Ramo and Humanes 2016, 88).

In short, visual frame analysis seeks to describe—as does hermeneutics—the rationality of the image or the "external ideological discourse expressed through its formal dimension—form, color, tone, material qualities, composition, expression, framing, depth of field, image speed, lens used, diaphragm, angle of view, etc.—its visual syntax transmitting an idea, and its visual or narrative structure" (Amador Bech 1995, 15–22). After the rationality of the image, it is a matter of finding its "inner meaning" and, for this, the considerations made by Erwin Panofsky, in *Studies on Iconology* and in *The Meaning of the Visual Arts* (1972, 15; 2004, 45–48), on the analysis of images can be useful. In those books the art historian states that the latter possesses three levels of significance: in the first, the elements that make up the work are described, the rational logic of the image, one could say; that is, how the different elements that make up its composition—characters, objects, landscapes, actions, gestures, dialogs ...—are related to each other; in the second, the symbolic values are carefully observed; and in the third, the intentions, latent or manifest, of the artist or photographer are found and formalized in the visible. Thus the visual framing performs the interaction between three levels of reality: the world (i.e. the Syrians, the objects and the border), photography and the photojournalist's intention. With these three levels we will analyze Kemal's photographs of displaced Syrians crossing the border.

But at this point I must summarily recall that, for the visual frame to achieve the interrelation between the three levels of reality, it must be coordinated with comprehensive sociology, visual sociology, and the concepts related to the world of photography to which I have alluded above. Therefore I will first describe the formal rationality of the images produced by Kemal Vural on Syrian refugees. Secondly, concerning the rationality of the image, I proceed to unveil the ideological discourse of the photojournalist. And finally, I will contextualize his photos socioculturally in the Syrian Civil War and on the Turkish border, in order ultimately to confirm whether they indeed become social documents—in the sense of Karl Mannheim (Barboza Martínez 2005, 391–414)—about the passage of Syrian refugees.

Regarding the number of photos selected from the two exhibitions referred to, by Kemal Vural—in "Leftovers" and "Syria in Transit"—it has been nine, and even though the corpus chosen is small and consequently arbitrary, as



always (Abreu 2004, 2), we have tried to make them representative and significant. But without forgetting that these images, although they are not reality, are based on it and do represent it, while having their ontological, ethical, political, aesthetic and sociological aspects. In other words, the images should include the essential issues and values with which the photographer observes the reality of Syrian refugees and, at the same time, they should reflect as objectively as possible the real circumstances in which life trajectories unfold. Thus these photos fall between the subjective concerns of the photographer and the objective aspect of the historical reality of Syrian refugees.

To accomplish the proposed objectives and, following the theoretical and methodological bases, I have organized this article in two sections, preceded by an introduction and conclusions. The first section is devoted to the context of the displaced Syrians on the Turkish border, and I have subdivided it into the following subsections: the concepts of refugee and border, the Syrian Civil War between 2011 and 2015, and the transit of Syrian refugees across the mined Turkish border. Finally, the second section focuses on crossing the mined border.

## THE CONTEXT OF THE DISPLACED SYRIANS ON THE TURKISH BORDER

### The Concepts of Refugee and Border

To achieve these objectives and to complement the theoretical and methodological bases mentioned above, it is useful to define the concept of refugee, border, and refugee camp. It could be said that "a refugee is just a normal person in abnormal circumstances." In fact, Article 1 of the 1951 United Nations Convention describes him as a person who is outside his country or habitual residence, and who fears persecution because of his race, religion, nationality, or membership in a particular social group or political ideology. Therefore, the refugee is a human being who flees from violence and who is considered externally as such and is perceived as such; that is, who knows and feels what he is, while others make him aware of it. It is not surprising that the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol provide the basis for their protection. Specifically, it states that they should not be expelled or returned to borders or territories where their life or freedom may be threatened (Gabanés García 2014, 190–98).

On the other hand, something that also defines refugees is the deprivation of territory, which means the loss of one of the basic structures for their social identity. In fact, these people lack territory in both the physical and symbolic sense, so they have nothing, neither status nor property, and therefore no space to identify themselves with. Hence Zygmund Bauman defines them as a "problem," as "human waste" that is "out of place" in the receiving societies (Bauman 2004b, 16).

In short, the situation of refugees is redolent of poverty and deprivation, and, like stateless people, illegal immigrants, and displaced persons, they are

"no-rights people" (Gabanes García 2014, 190–200). In fact, many of them are quite unaware of their rights and obligations (Zetter and Ruaudel 2014, 9).

Before becoming a refugee, the person who flees and his family are forced to cross the border but, at that moment, they cannot yet be considered, strictly speaking, as "refugees" (De Andrés, Nos-Aldás, and García-Matilla 2016, 33), but rather as "migrants" who request asylum (González Enríquez 2015, 4) and who may or may not receive it. In this regard it should not be forgotten that the border, the frontier, and the cross-border are related to material or physical space with controlled access of people, commodities, goods and services (Haesbaert 2013, 18). On the other hand, the meaning of the border is linked to the history of the individual himself or the group to which he has belonged. Thus it is not only having crossed, but having imagined before and after, without forgetting that the border constitutes a temporal and geographical marker during the refuge since it now embodies survival. But once it has been crossed, and even if in another country, the displaced person retains his fear and, as time goes by, the hope of returning to his place of origin surfaces (Gabanes García 2014, 201).

Instead, when there is a massive movement of refugees, States reintroduce controls at the internal borders (as happened, for example, with the Syrian refugees in Turkey or with the crisis over the European Schengen agreement), and they perceive it as a "real problem" politically, economically, socially and culturally, especially for affected localities close to the conflict zone. This means that the border-limit does not coincide with the border-control location, and that it is necessary to alter the conception, functions and components of the territorial base of this border, as established by the international society of globalization (Del Valle Gálvez 2016, 763–75). Furthermore, "the global transcends the exclusive framework of the nation-state and, at the same time, partially inhabits the territories and national institutions" (Sassen 2003, 11, trans.).

Thus it can happen that a border region or space is transformed into a cross-border one, basically because of the interaction produced by people who move around in their constant and continuous crossings. Likewise, by the deployment of a series of social practices that have that territory as a reference and resource. Consequently, through cross-border cooperation, borders—just like the concept of refugee—end up being something under construction, mobile and elastic, which leaves behind their vision of a permanent and static site (Tapia Ladinoa 2017).

The tension between the local and the global, the national and the international in the issue of refugees in transit across the border, makes the matter truly complex and full of contradictions. On the one hand, this is so because refugee movements are anarchic (Portes and Bôrôtzc 1999, 32), i.e. they do not seem to have a global political control, insofar as they develop in globalization without politics, without world society and world citizenship (Beck 2002, 32 ff.). What would be required, therefore, in the refugee question, is the emergence and rooting of global politics (Bauman 2004a, 31), a fundamental change in governance for globalization to work (Stiglitz 2003, 282), and a global ethic (Safranski 2004, 58; Bauman 2004a, 28). But this is extremely complicated to



achieve, since, although there are international organizations that directly or indirectly watch over refugee issues—the OHCHR (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights), HRC (Human Rights Council), UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development)—(Lopez-Jacoiste 2015, 152), we still do not have a properly global policy. On the other hand, the refugee issue is not fully globalized at the legal level either, since refugees have been structurally excluded from the sphere of political rights and, consequently, from the formation of the democratic consensus of the rule of law. This means that national and international law has not found a balance that favors refugees and, in short, that they find themselves, like immigrants, outside democracy and political recognition (Portes and Bôrôtz 1999, 167).

On the other hand, refugees also evidence the paradox that globalization continues to be marked by "borderization" (Arango 2003, 10), to the extent that nation-states continue to ardently defend their territories, i.e., that they are closed political entities within an open world system (Malgesini 1998, 33; Portes et al. 1998, 69). In this regard, not only are borders diminishing, but new artificial dividing walls are being erected to prevent the passage of refugees, as in the case of the Turkish border itself, where the government has built a concrete wall, as will be seen later.

#### The Syrian Civil War between 2011 and 2015

The causes of Syria's civil war are multiple, as religious, ethnic, and economic factors are added to the decades of repression (Ghotme, Garzón, and Ortiz 2015, 17), although its beginning came immediately after the popular uprisings of the Arab Spring of 2011. The demonstrators against the corrupt system and the lack of freedom are fiercely repressed, with arbitrary arrests and violence by the authoritarian Syrian regime and its elites, who try to preserve their ethnic and financial interests and privileges (Ramírez Díaz 2011, 171–77). Well, soon after, the first focus of armed resistance appears in Homs, Hama and Idlib, and later spread to Damascus and Aleppo. Thus began a "slow march toward civil war" and the disintegration of the country into opposing sides, as seen in the map (Figure 1).

In 2014 two important events for the course of the war emerge: the irruption of the Islamic State (IS) and the formation of an international coalition that bombs Syrian territory to combat it. Since then a "war of exhaustion" has taken hold, since the IS first gained ground and later lost it; the El Asad regime has recovered territory, reinforcing somewhat its legitimacy and position; the heterogeneous opposition has been atomized and fragmented, and the Kurdish enclave has gained a certain autonomy due to the effectiveness of the *peshmergas*, which have become a key actor in the conflict (Álvarez-Ossorio 2015, 2–11; Busby 1995).

However, this combat is not only civilian, since it also obeys an international logic. The rebels have received support, in money and arms, from Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United States, and the Syrian regime from Russia, Iran and

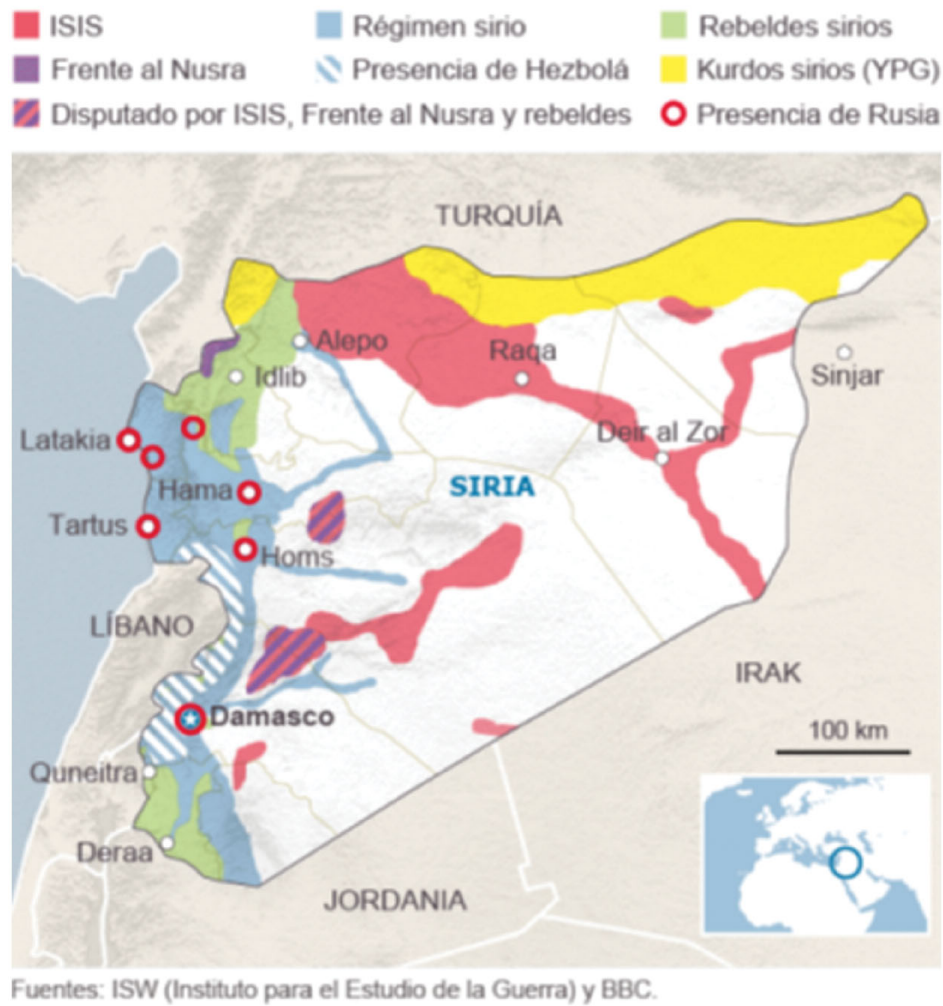


Figure 1 Map of the contemporary Middle East (Shmite, Pérez, and Nin 2017, 105).

Hezbollah. This is due to a series of alliances and conflicting interests between different states and, although ideologies and sectarianism play an important role, so too do economic, strategic and political interests (Ghotme, Garzón, and Ortiz 2015, 13, 18 and 27; Ghotme and García Sicard 2016).

As a result, the Syrian civil war has become a classic example of "war by proxy", in which different regional and global powers defend their interests through third parties. They do so in such a way that there is a risk that this "confrontation of the humiliated, irritated and offended" will end up imposing passion on reason (Calvo Albero 2016, 1–7). In any case, the traditional ethnic, religious, tribal, and generational fractures in Syria<sup>4</sup> have intensified and have generated<sup>5</sup> an endless spiral of violence with confrontations, kidnappings, and lynching between the Sunni and Alaouite communities. The result has been a genuine ethnic cleansing and a whole series of massive displacements of the civilian population (Arteaga 2012, 1–7), both within the country and in neighboring states, mainly Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey.

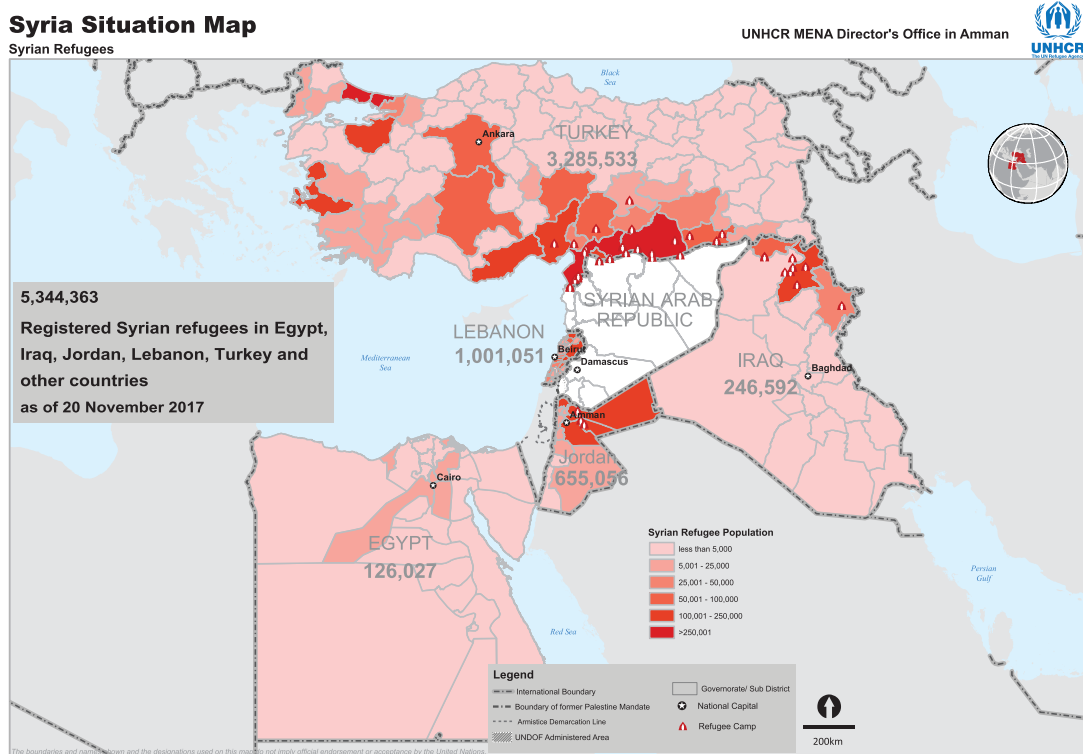


Figure 2 Situation of Syrian Refugees in Turkey, 2015. (Shmite, Pérez, and Non, 2017, 107.)

Indeed, after the fifth year of war, in 2015, there were already 4,180,631 people residing in refugee camps in neighboring countries (Shmite, Pérez, and Nin 2017, 107), of whom 1,104,000 were in Turkey (Figure 2): 220,000 were housed in camps and, of the remaining 880,000, only 60 percent are registered with the authorities; the rest remaining in the cities, mainly in Istanbul (Ramírez and Ortega 2016, 338). But, as can be seen in the map above, according to the UNHCR, Turkey already had 3,285,533 Syrian refugees, on November 20, 2017, while, in May 2019, the number rose to 5,626,497, according to the Turkish government and UNHCR sources.<sup>6</sup>

This enormous number of displaced persons and the calamitous circumstances that accompany them explain why this issue represents a true humanitarian catastrophe and involves multiple and complex problems (Anani 2013, 75–76; Aranki and Kalis 2014, 17–18; Zetter and Ruaudel 2014, 6–10; Leah et al. 2014, 42–43; Carreras and Forga 2015, 46–47; López-Jacoiste 2015, 86; Ramírez and Ortega 2016, 313). The fact is that refugees are persons of such extreme fragility, defenselessness, and lack of protection that they become, as we had anticipated in the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological bases, human beings without guaranteed rights. In this sense, many of the refugees are either considered "illegal" or have a limited legal status, which restricts their movements for fear of being arrested, detained, or deported or reduces their ability to access basic services.

We must also take into account the fact that, in a region that already hosts millions of Palestinian and Iraqi refugees, the magnitude of the crisis in Syria

greatly increases the pressure on the resources and capacities of neighboring countries and the international humanitarian system, which sees its contributions diminished.

### The Transit of Syrian Refugees across the Mined Turkish Border

As far as Turkey is concerned, in the first wave of refugees (2011), the government opened its borders (Ghotme and García Sicard 2016) and made an "open door" policy, while the Turkish population considered the refugees as their "guests" (*misafirler*). But they were not "refugees," which means that their guest status deprives them of rights in Turkey and that the state can deport them at any time (Özden 2013, 5; Gürhanl 2014, 2; Koca 2015, 209). Besides, after the latest events, with protests and xenophobic behavior against Syrian refugees, the hospitality of the people, in 2015, is already on the verge of exhaustion, or even resentment.<sup>7</sup> In parallel, the government has changed its long-standing foreign policy aimed at creating, consolidating, and developing an international environment based on stability, cooperation, non-dependence, national sovereignty, respect for international law, and economic growth. After the Arab revolts in spring, Turkey ceased to be a mediator and became a revisionist actor and "restorer of order" (Ramírez and Ortega 2016, 314–40).

Undoubtedly this change has been influenced by outbreaks of violence in the refugee camps, the constant exchanges of fire at the border, as well as the reported tensions between refugees and the local populations (in Hatay, for example). These factors led the Turkish government to establish a buffer zone inside Syria to prevent aircraft from overflying and bombing it. Finally, there is also the Kurdish problem, reactivated in the summer of 2012, since one of Turkey's priorities is to prevent the emergence of a Kurdish national entity in Syria and neighboring countries (Busby 1995). All this has led it to build a three-meter-high wall on the border with Syria (Figure 3), in Nusaybin, near Qamishliya, where Kurds, rebels and Arab tribes often come into conflict. Turkey also directed their troops to the interior of the country (Meneses 2013–14, 132; Álvarez-Ossorio 2013, 91; Ghotme, Garzón, and Ortiz 2015, 21; Ghotme and García Sicard 2016). Furthermore, the Government has set up a refugee camp in Kilis, in the middle of the highway that links this city with Aleppo, so that transport and communication between the two countries have been interrupted by it (Figure 4).

It can be concluded then that Turkey, by prioritizing the maintenance of internal order, the defense of threats from fundamentalist groups, and containment of the Kurds, has gone from conceiving the Syrians as victims to considering them as a "problem", even as "enemies" (Koca 2016). Moreover, it has come to privilege security issues over humanitarian ones (Ghotme and García Sicard 2016).

In any case, Turkey has become the second-largest recipient of refugees (*ibid.*) and this is not free of cost, as its border with Syria is 910 km long (Figure 5). This border is for the most part mountainous terrain where smuggling has been a traditional basis of subsistence, but 22 refugee camps have





Figure 3 The wall along the Turkish-Syrian border. (Photo © the author).

been established there (up to 2015), with their neighborhoods, streets, squares and social services. In them displaced persons are guaranteed a house, a bed, social services and an NFC card—but never money—to buy a minimum of basic products (Álvarez-Ossorio 2013, 86; Carreras and Forga 2015, 46; Ramírez and Ortega 2016, 339; Calvo Albero 2016, 5).

The border (Figures 3 and 5) also remains a point of exchange for arms, movement of combatants, and humanitarian aid; the refugee camps there, in turn, serve as training camps or for recruiting militias. Thus it is understood that the expansion of the conflict along the border has deteriorated the conditions of the refugees and has transformed them into factors of power (Ghotme and García Sicard 2016).

There is finally the problem of the mines. Refugees who do not have a valid passport, the vast majority, find it very difficult to cross the border legally and so enter via irregular sites, crossing minefields, being exposed to occasional fire from border guards and thus risking their lives (Ozden 2013, 5; Gürhanl 2014, 2). Not to mention that they are very vulnerable because of their lack of knowledge of the area and the types of contamination it contains; because they have little or no contact with more informed local communities (Yemen 2020, 2); because they do not know where the mines, which are invisible, are; because they cannot see the warning signs when they travel at night; and, in



Figure 4 Kilis refugee camp, in the middle of the highway. (Photo © the author).



Figure 5 Detailed map of settlements in northern Syria.

short, because mines can be just about anywhere they travel, on roads, trails, forests, deserts and agricultural land (Gözübenli 2018, 9–12).

Indeed, Turkey in 2015 promoted a national campaign, the "Mine-Free Turkey Initiative," in which it implemented an education plan and a survey of



survivors in four major refugee camps in Iraq and Syria (Yemen 2020, 4). It is also true that, across the border in Syria, several organizations, including “Dan Church Aid and HI”, are carrying out clearance work in Kobani to reduce the risks faced by returnees. But in any case the number of mine victims is high and the problem has not been fully addressed.

### Crossing the Mined Border

After describing the objectives, the theoretical and methodological bases, and synthesizing the context of the Syrian Civil War in which the Syrian refugees move along the Turkish border, we move on to analyze Kemal's photos through the hermeneutic method, concretized in the visual framing.

In [Figure 6](#), we see what could be a family of three members walking through an olive field, in a triangular arrangement: the mother, dressed in black, goes in front; the girl follows her at a certain distance; and, the father, walks on the left side of the girl but not close to her. Thus the three protagonists are separated from each other and have their backs to the photographer—who is located at a slightly higher position than that of the refugees, probably on a hill, and for this reason his image is taken from a slight “high angle,” with the spectators walking in the opposite direction from him. The girl moves in the same line as her mother but is at the same height as her father, who carries two small packages.

The three characters, whose faces we do not see, walk upright, with firm step, although not precipitous. Actually, Kemal Vural shoots at high speed, in a way that transforms the image into something static, although the characters are actually walking: it is as if he wanted to freeze that moment of transit, or wanted to fuse them with the land from which they seem to be fleeing. Moreover, their shadows, tilted to the right, indicate that the sun lies to the east, in the position of their departure, early in the morning; the same orientation marks the tree that is to the left, in front of the man.

Above their heads is a beautiful blue sky, from which it follows that instead of hiding they travel in broad daylight,<sup>8</sup> which benefits the photojournalist with a wide depth of field that focuses on a larger amount of image, achieved by an aperture that allows plenty of light into the camera. And they do this among cared-for, not abandoned, cultivated olive trees producing good fruit. These trees are lined up on both sides of the “path” that the family walks on, and grow in a brown, stony, dry land.

The image suggests a peaceful agricultural environment in which birds or cicadas may sing and in which this family might feel safe. In this sense it is not a photograph of war, but one of hasty flight from conflict. The few belongings the father carries lead one to think this, since he has hardly been able to bring along anything for the trip, probably because they have had to leave quickly, just wearing what they have. Or perhaps, because they thought they would return, that the departure was temporary.<sup>9</sup> However, when the three of them turn their backs on us, when they are going in the opposite direction to the place from which they came, without even stopping to look back, it seems



Figure 6 *On the road to the West (i).*

that, for the moment, a return is not likely. On the other hand, the distance between them indicates that they are protecting the girl, while the mother leads their advance, and her daughter follows faithfully and carefully, without deviating from the route. This reveals that the mother is, in the middle of the day, marking the way through a place where there are mines,<sup>10</sup> while her black dress, totally covering her body, seems to turn her into another shadow on the road, into a being without a body, into a dark spot despite all the light.

In any case, we cannot but reflect on the dignity of people who take an uncertain path full of risks, trying to escape from even greater dangers, to

survive the night out of which they come—doing so with an upright stance, like that of the very trees that line their journey.

In [Figure 7](#), in the foreground and positioned right in the center of the frame we see a car on the side of a road where no other vehicle is passing and where no sign indicates where this place or country is. Nonetheless the wide depth of field and the wide-angle of view allow one to see both the car and the road on both sides of it and, behind it, a vague but well-focused landscape. The car is old, almost succumbing to the weight of its pile of stuff, as if it were carrying all its owners' belongings.

There is a woman who can be seen inside through the window and who has a bit of dress trapped in the door, a sign that she got in hastily. The photojournalist has taken the picture very close to the car, using a wide-angle lens (35 mm and 50 mm) typical in journalistic photography, and allowing one to capture a larger space in a short distance, while the powerful luminosity would indicate the use of a very high diaphragm. On the other hand, he has kept the sun behind his body, but the star in front of the vehicle does not seem very high, as suggested by the shadow of another woman's head, on the road's shoulder, as if she had gone to relieve herself or stretch her legs. In any case, it seems that the photographer wanted to emphasize the vehicle's capacity to transport property rather than people—not furniture, but rather portable items such as clothes, blankets, a small gas cylinder for cooking, water bottles, a wheeled cart to move things ...

It seems, then, a mobile home, or better, a tent-car, a car with an old and worn out engine that has to stop from time to time to rest and that moves with difficulty. The average speed used by the photojournalist, between 1/60 and 1/125, seems to confirm that he wants to freeze the image so that it has no strong dynamism. We should note that this is on a non-road, in a non-



*Figure 7 On the road to the West (ii).*



country, driving from one place to another looking for a safe place to drop its load and set up precarious housing, an unstable and transitory home. Besides, a man must do it alone, for he is not accompanied by any other vehicle nor by any person. The anonymous and invisible occupants are moved without knowing very well where to, until when it will unload its vast weight and without their having secured a home in which to settle down and become socially visible.

Figure 8, with a composition centered on the subjects and on the land where they are at this moment, is taken with a wide-angle of vision and with a normal lens, between 35 mm and 50 mm, the usual one used in reportage. On the left of the image the characters are crowded together, while on the right there is more empty land, with some plastic, so that the photojournalist seems to be contrasting the full and the empty, the territory and its inhabitants, and perhaps also the before and the after. More specifically, in this daytime photo, with its landscape format and cropped panorama, the simplest one, we see in the foreground a group of people in front of some metal fences who are resting under the slight shadow of a bush—the only vegetation in an arid land from which, scattered around, there also "sprout" plastic bags. In the group two men are looking at the target. The first one, who is in front of everything, has a frozen smile, while the second, in his red sweater despite the strong sunlight, keeps watch, his scrutinizing eyes and half-open mouth look as if he wanted to ask some inconvenient question or express his dismay. From behind his head, another one appears with a face expressing bewilderment. All these men are serious. The only two who are standing are contemplating what is going on behind this fence; one of them holds tightly a bottle of water, essential in what has been an exhausting and hot journey.

The average speed—1/125—with which the photo was shot, once again seems to freeze the image, as if the passersby were still, like an indelible part of the earth on which they stand. In front of this low metal fence there is a small strip of land where another person is standing—a soldier who has his back to the refugees, with his gun on the ground as he talks on a walkie-talkie. Behind him, two other men have just crossed the other fence. Finally, in the



Figure 8 *On the road to the West (iii)*.

open space beyond the latter fence, we can see a car, a truck, and another group of people and, behind them, the same stony ground that makes up the foreground. There is another group of people who have not yet crossed the fences. One of them, in front of the truck, has a worried look, almost anguished; he is neither moving forward nor backward, but to one side.

Therefore, in this image, suggestive of emotions, various universal expressions are suggested: anguish, concern, seriousness, a frozen smile, tiredness, despair, bitterness, rage, and helplessness. The photography is horizontal, not only to show a natural landscape but also to represent the psychic consequences of the atrocious experience these people have lived. The shot indicates, on the other hand, that the characters are not far from the point of viewing, as if the photographer wanted to show a general panorama that does not prevent a certain closeness and empathy with what is happening there. Furthermore, the game of multiple glances that the characters perform, forward, backward, and to the side, encourages viewers not to lose the detail but to contemplate what is happening from various viewpoints. Above all, the photo documents those people who are on this side of the border and those who are still beyond it.

Also, the panoramic plane is shown very appropriately for an extraordinary event in the life of these Syrian refugees at the Turkish border, while it seems everyday and very real. Thus the photographer manages to increase the empathy of viewers about something that happens in a land that is, at the same time, strange and close; and to place, in the right dimension, a regional event that is transmuted, in this way, to become universal. Without forgetting that it is a dry land from which only the waste products of those who pass through it manage to fertilize, as they try to find a tree that offers better shade, a better future than the one they have left behind. Finally, as evidenced by the passive attitude of the soldier, the photo reveals that the Turkish government, in this first moment of the entry of refugees into the country, turned a blind eye and let the persecuted people pass through.<sup>11</sup>

In [Figure 9](#) Kemal Vural holds his camera in a low shot, from a higher level, to show a group of eight men in civilian clothes who are walking along a solitary path through a winding terrain of gentle mountain slopes with olive trees. One of the men is in the lead while the others follow on the zigzagging path. They form a perfect semicircle in which each person follows the previous one after a certain distance, very measured, except that the last two who are talking to each other. Three of the refugees have bundles on their heads or in their hands.

The order and geometry of the march contrast significantly with the chaos that has been left behind, definitely giving the photo an aura of security that is, however, fictitious, since the mines are invisible<sup>12</sup> and men do not know where they are. Is it for this reason that people do not stray from the path but follow a regularly trodden pattern? Otherwise their few belongings indicate, once more, that without any prevention they have had to flee in haste with whatever they are wearing. Finally, there is the risk of their route, not only because it does not follow a straight line but also because passersby, even if they know where they are going, cannot foresee the phases of their journey in



Figure 9 *On the road to the West (iv)*.

detail: one cannot see beyond the slopes, not to mention that the photograph's frame limits the field of vision formed by the walkers and the terrain over which they move, thus not showing what is before or after it; as if the photographer were reflecting, with his image, about the uncertain origin and destiny of these travelers. The curve formed by the men forces viewers to follow them visually while, on the other hand, they are part of a more dynamic composition than in the previous images discussed—although the speed of the photojournalist's shot, between 1/125 and 1/250, achieves the effect of making the refugees seem still, as if he only wanted to fix the moment, a transitory one, in which they find themselves.

Moreover, the Mediterranean beauty of the olive trees and the clean luminosity of the day also help one to contemplate the disturbing paradox in this moment of transit. If, on the one hand, there is no drama or spectacle in the image, on the other hand, it allows us to illuminate, using a normal 50 mm lens (a high light speed), and a wide depth of field, for those who might wish to see and empathize with the suffering of others, the tense reality latent in the uncertain trajectory of these people.

In [Figure 10](#) we see, in the foreground, a brownish dirt road with marked tracks of vehicles that have passed by, but at this moment no person, car or animal is to be seen on it. This path directs one's view to what is behind the curve formed by the roadway, and to the right, in the middle of all this landscape, although somewhat far away, we see seven men carrying bundles who not only fail to follow the road but move away from it, as they are heading perpendicularly toward a group of olive trees. Again, these people seem to be frozen by the photojournalist, as if they were more static and, moreover, he





Figure 10 *On the road to the West (v).*

places them and the dirt road in the center of the composition. In the background of the image we can see some white houses and, behind them, the flattened silhouette, "tamed" by the sun. This probably occurs in the middle of the day, as indicated by the depth of field and the closed aperture with which the photo was taken, along with the wind and the rain of a mountain.

Where are these people going? Not toward the city, not toward the mountain from which they probably came, nor toward another town or city, but toward the fields. Are they afraid of the villagers, are they hiding from other men, are they looking to rest under the olive trees, or for the security that they promise, a universal and Arab mark of peacefulness?

The contrast between these last two photographs (Figures 9, 10) shows that the Syrian refugees, in their desperate flight, had to face complex challenges and decide, often at random and unexpectedly, upon their routes and their survival strategies. At times men decided to continue their march along established paths, while at other times they avoided them. Thus some were able to survive but others not, some stayed in neighboring countries (Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon) while others slogged on toward Europe. Among all of them, some ended their transit in the refugee camps waiting for a new life, but others ended up with good or else precarious jobs, either in the center or on the margins of sundry cities.

The next two photographs record two successive moments of the same event. The first one happens some time before and (Figure 11), during it, we see a small group of people, somewhat unfocused, who have just crossed the wire behind them. One of them looks back and they all start running. It is



Figure 11 *On the road to the West (vi).*

possible that the photo, with a centered framing, was taken with a telephoto lens of between 90 mm and 150 mm, at a high light speed of about 1/1000, a setting good for capturing people in motion in everyday situations such as this one. In addition, the diaphragm must have been closed and with a wide depth of field, allowing us to make out the olive field on a very bright day, although the shadows would indicate that the actual time is dawn or dusk.

The next image (Figure 12) occurs immediately afterwards. The displaced have made some progress across the space they are in. Once again their wandering takes place in broad daylight, probably in the middle of the day, recorded by the photojournalist by shooting at a higher light speed than in the previous images, around 1/250 and with the depth of field, also useful to capture the hurried movement of the refugees. And in front of them we observe a ramshackle car with no license plate that has, on the hood, an abandoned bundle, some "leftovers" (as the photographer says in one of his exhibitions) from a previous crossing of that border.

The framing and composition of the photograph are not as centered as in Figure 11, so this one seems somewhat more chaotic and dynamic. In fact, the girl wearing a veil and a maroon coat on the left of the image runs off diagonally in a different direction from the rest of the group, as if she didn't know where to go; which is reinforced by the bright color of her attire, contrasted with the black of the other people. If we concentrate on the face of the young man who is right behind the car, he is serious, worried, and through his half-open mouth we can sense rhythmic breathing, an effect of the speed of his movement.





Figure 12 *On the road to the West (vii).*

It is striking that the intensely brown clayey soil through which these refugees run is the same as that beyond the fence separating the same natural landscape into two different political realities, which emphasizes the artificiality of that separating fence. But it should not be hidden that this boundary marks the border between war and peace, between origin and destiny, between the past and the future and, in short, between the life and death of these people brought to their limits. The protagonists of this tale, driven by the horror they have experienced, by the fear that is embedded in their bodies and by the desire to survive, cross at full speed the tenuous line that separates each of those antagonistic poles. Moreover, the photo generates a metaphor of the no-man's-land and of nothing that this frontier implies, as evidenced by the abandoned car with no license plate and no sign of belonging to any country known to the fleeing people.

Figure 13 expresses similar intentionality and ideas on the part of the photojournalist. In it, on the abandoned ground, on the beautiful land of an intense brown full of vegetable remnants, of a vital trajectory of survival, two sandals of teenage girls of vivid colors (one pink and the other violet); that on the right has some hearts drawn on it. Otherwise the two sandals, of the same size, lie on the ground at a little distance from each other and are pointed toward opposite directions, upwards, one, and downwards, the other.

The photo is framed symmetrically, so that there is an identical distance between the two slippers, arranged on both sides of the central axis of the composition and with a shadow, slightly elongated, indicating that the light is from midday. Besides, it is taken at a high angle, so the photojournalist has placed, the footwear in the foreground and the soil on which the shoes lie.



Figure 13 *On the road to the West (viii)*.

This, sprinkled with dry vegetables, could indicate that they are on a cereal field, but also suggest, by its intense earthy color, the symbol of the blood spilled on the land? Meanwhile, the contrasting directions of the sandals would express the antagonistic paths of these two teenage girls—or perhaps of the same one? Where do they come from and where did their owners go, and which path did they take, to the north or the south, the east or the west? The drawn hearts and the pink color of one of the sandals would also indicate that their wearer could be a dreamy, perhaps romantic child. Where did their fantasies end, after the blood spilled and the horrors they suffered? Does surviving, in these conditions, mean irremediably abandoning innocent fantasies, even losing one's shoes? Doesn't every refugee leave behind his or her childhood, the true and only homeland?<sup>13</sup>

Another image (Figure 14) is also a centered and symmetrical composition and, like the previous one, has an artificial setting created by the photojournalist as a "still life." We can see dark brown earth, dry and barren and full of small shadows, on both sides of the frame, perhaps a sign that the photo is taken inside the walls of a house, as these are the ones that cast shadows on the edges. Well, on this soil we can also see a little girl's pink slipper and, next to it, a clean yellow teddy bear, of the same size; between the two, linking them, there is a small bit of tile—a sign of the possible destruction of housing—the only urban trace in the photo. The two children's objects are arranged by Kemal Vural in opposite directions: the slipper is facing upwards, the teddy bear downwards. In addition, the perspective is again in a high angle, which brings these everyday objects and the earth closer to the observers—the





Figure 14 *On the road to the West (ix)*.

photojournalist insists, again and again in his photos, on the central value of the earth, on its materiality, its color, and its texture. The two items look new, which, added to the fact that the shoe has its laces tied, indicates that they were still in use and have probably just been lost or abandoned. Therefore the intentionality of the photojournalist seems to be directed toward the dissociation that the girl has had to suffer, insofar as the orientation of the shoe, which allows her to walk, contrasts with that of the teddy bear, an object imbued with affection that reminds one of games, home (reinforced by the presence of the tile next to it) school and friends, all absent. We could imagine, as Kemal Vural has done, in contemplating this image, that this little girl has been forced to leave behind her universe of games and enter the inhospitable paths of strangers. At the same time, she has had to abandon, perhaps forever, the place where she was born and whence she came, and the place where suddenly she lost her shoes and her toy.

Consequently, can't we think that her childhood has turned upside down because of the imperious and precipitate need to move on? But where to? We do not know, but we do know what she has left on the way her tender and innocent childhood.

## CONCLUSIONS

Following the theoretical and methodological bases set out in the Introduction to this article, I have carried out a content analysis of Kemal Vural's photographs from the visual framework, in combination with insights from comprehensive sociology, visual sociology, and concepts related to the realm of photography. This has allowed me to interrelate the three levels of reality—the world, objects and people; the photograph and the intention of the photojournalist—and to develop three steps: (1) describing the rationality of the image, (2) unveiling its "inner meaning," and (3) contextualizing these photographs socially and culturally in the Syrian Civil

War and on the Turkish border. The ultimate aim has been to reveal the subjective intentionality of the photojournalist and find how his images have become social documents.

Specifically, the content analysis of Kemal Vural's photographs has uncovered his ideology, his personal commitment to the refugees, evidenced both in the way he has constructed his images and in the very risk to his life in crossing the minefields to portray them. His photos are a clear exemplar of contemporaneity, while at the same time they are privileged witnesses, historical objects, insofar as without them the spectators—the whole world, in fact—would have no documented visual record of the transit of the protagonists through minefields. Therefore, Kemal's photographs constitute an index of the social reality of Syrian refugees, while at the same time helping to construct this social reality. Not to mention that, due to their emotional charge, the photos humanize these individuals as suffering and struggling beings, and so enable the viewers' empathy.

In this regard, certain final inferences may be drawn.

I

In relation to the way the refugees cross the border, the photojournalist frames and composes centrally or off-center, symmetrically or asymmetrically, whatever he links to the order or chaos of the situation. Thus, the first, forming geometric figures: the triangle that makes up the family who walk among mines (Figure 6), or the semicircle that the walkers form, following the serpentine, stable line of their path (Figure 9). At other times, on the contrary, their escape is chaotic or precipitous, as in the images (Figures 10 and 12) in which the displaced persons flee from the roads and enter fields, possibly because these are considered safer. In one photograph (Figure 8), on the other hand, the crossing of the border seems to have been calmer, less dramatic, as not in vain the soldier guarding the passage turns a blind eye and even turns his back on the refugees.

The dangers that lie in wait for the displaced are evident from the photographs and not only because the roads they travel are full of mines (Figures 6, 9 and 10), but also because they show the inclemency of the weather (Figure 9) and the exhausting days under the sun and on arid land (Figures 8, 11 and 12).

The mood and emotions that accompany people on their journey or their stay in the refugee camps are varied, to the extent that Kemal's images constitute a representative survey of human expressions: anguish, frozen smile, bitterness, anger, and helplessness (Figure 8); or worry and seriousness (Figures 8 and 12). However, these emotions are not displayed in this set of photos through a close-up of faces, but rather joined to the emotions of other refugees and integrated within the general context of the situation and, therefore, within the framework of photographic compositions that inescapably associate the bodies of the refugees with each other and the refugees with the landscape, the land and the border. Consequently, although there is no doubt that these are



human, even universal, emotions, Kemal Vural relates them more to the "social type" that he constructs, that of refugees in transit, rather than to specific individuals.

## II

As for the objects left behind in border territories, they mark the rapid abandonment of the place (Figures 11 and 12), the destruction of a home (Figure 14), or all that has been left behind—childhood, home, games, school, friends, and dreams (Figures 13 and 14). The few belongings that displaced people carry point to the urgency of their flight (Figures 6, 8, 10, 11 and 12).

## III

The transit of refugees builds and simultaneously deconstructs the border between Turkey and Syria. It is erected because the Turkish government has reinforced its control of this border with barbed wire, watchtowers and a military presence (Figures 8, 11 and 12), by building a wall in the mountains, and by constructing a refugee camp in the middle of a highway. But at the same time this *limex* has been deconstructed, physically and symbolically. Physically, because the "borders" have become more "mobile" (Szary and Giraut 2015) and have dispersed "a little bit everywhere" (Balibar 2004, 125), while they have become more digital, cultural or social (Koca 2015, 211). This is due to the free passage of thousands of refugees at least during the early stage—but also due to the influx of Turkish troops into Syrian territory and the conversion of the refugee camps into training grounds for rebels and for the passage of weapons.

And symbolically, because the territories where the displaced persons portrayed by Kemal pass through or stay temporarily sometimes become obscure or indeterminate. This is what happens in the non-specification of the country in which they find themselves, as illustrated by the car with no license plates abandoned by refugees (Figures 11 and 12), or the vehicle stopped in the middle of a road with no signs (Figure 7). Furthermore, in other photos the photojournalist points out that the land and fields on either side of the border are the same, without any differences, and that the border is therefore artificial (Figures 8, 11 and 12). Without forgetting that historically this land was also united by common customs and traditions, by smuggling, conflicts, mines, and pain. A century ago it was all part of the Ottoman Empire, after all.

In short, the recreated and deconstructed Turkish–Syrian border has ended up being a space-flow and, in the end, a transnational territory due to a regional war with its global reach. Thus it has become another example of the difficulty of escaping the effects of globalization, although it has a low profile, since it does not seem to control the refugee phenomenon, protect their rights or, in short, grant them adequate citizenship status.

## Coda

In conclusion we can define the persons being portrayed as refugees, as displaced persons in transit across a flowing border that, through its "liquidity," has not been fully defined and that, conversely, extends without precise limit into the interior of the host country. Refugees are therefore lost and have metamorphosed, like the spaces that shelter them, into liquid beings, without bodies. They have also been transformed into border people whose lives have yet to take shape, have not yet been defined, have not yet been delimited between an origin that determines them and a destiny that could make them freer.

This explains, in our opinion, why the photographer makes the refugees the physical and symbolic center of his images, taking them out of the margin in the representation and consciously placing them at the center of his composition. At the same time, he links them deeply to the earth, insisting time and again on their value, even if it is a dry and uncultivated earth, barren or clayey. It is not without reason that some the refugees represented are sitting on the ground (Figure 8), as if they patiently wait for something from it, or as if they see themselves as one of its fruits. No wonder that the photojournalist frequently freezes the image, makes it static, even at the moment when refugees are moving or running, as if he really did not want them to walk, as if he wanted to paralyze them or prevent them from leaving the land that has been theirs for centuries. Those who walk on its surface do it, fundamentally, for earthy and not urban territories (Figures 6, 9, 10, 12, 13 and 14). Perhaps the only solid guarantee they have left is that they are still alive and that is possibly the only hope upon which to build their future.

Finally, of all the refugees, the women at the borders portrayed by the photojournalist are undoubtedly seen by him to be conspicuous victims. This is the case, for example, with the mother who probably opens the roads to protect from the mines, together with the father, her little girl (Figure 6). And what takes place with the girls who, by virtue of the war, have had their childhood, their games, their school, their friends and their dreams stolen (Figures 13 and 14)?

Ultimately, Kemal's analyzed photographs are based on reality and represent it. They are halfway between reality and the ideological fiction of their author, between the social document and an artistic work. But in any case they make us think, and a great deal, about human beings who, in a limited situation, seem to have their identity, their corporeality, and their very humanity disintegrating. And yet we believe that they do so with the dignity of those who seek to survive and who nurture the hope that one day they will be able to change their situation.

## NOTES

1. Cf. <https://culturalfoundation.squarespace.com/library/featured-people-jon-davis-and-kemal-vural-tarlan> (accessed 26 May 2019); and <https://themuseum.ca/events/moving-borders-crossings-left-overs-hospitality/> (accessed 26 May 2019)

2. Cf. <https://themuseum.ca/events/moving-borders-crossings-left-overs-hospitality/> (accessed 26 May 2019).
3. Cf. <http://www.syriaintransit.com> (accessed 26 May 2019), <https://www.tandemforculture.org/stories/syria-in-transit/> (accessed 26 May 2019); and <http://undercurrents.nl/2018/06/07/the-invisible-borders/> (accessed 26 May 2019).
4. Some 90 percent of the Syrian population is Arab, the rest being Kurds, Armenians and other minorities. As for the religious groups, the Sunnis account for 74 percent, Christians for 10 percent, the Alawites for 11.13 percent, which, together with the Druze, make up 16 percent (Ghotme, Garzón, and Ortiz 2015, 17). For a brief anthropological sketch of Syria prior to the civil war, see Stanford (2001); also Busby (1995) and Rassam (1995).
5. By 2017, more than 250,000 people had died in the war (Shmite, Pérez, and Nin 2017, 95).
6. Cf. [https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria#\\_ga=2.27017022.2071480297.1559153966-1328237785.1558008538](https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria#_ga=2.27017022.2071480297.1559153966-1328237785.1558008538) (accessed 29 May 2019).
7. This is something that happens, for example, in Lebanon and Jordan, where, as in Turkey, after the first generous and hospitable receptions, tensions arose between the host communities and the refugees (Dahi 2014, 11).
8. It is also quite common for refugees to travel alone at night and for months at a time (Yıldız 2015, 36). That makes this daytime photography very significant. Their slow pace would indicate, on the other hand, that they have been walking for some time.
9. Some of the wounded crossing the border are members of the Syrian Free Army who claim that, as soon as they recover, they will return to Syria to fight. Civilians also express a desire to return to their homes, and none have expressed a desire to remain in Turkey in the future (Özden 2013, 4).
10. Kemal has confirmed that this family walks through the minefields. He did it himself to get the photos, at obvious mortal risk.
11. It was common for soldiers to turn a blind eye at unofficial border crossings, at least in the initial wave of refugees (Yıldız 2015, 36).
12. The photographer has confirmed that they are passing through a minefield.
13. A famous phrase of the poet Rainer Maria Rilke.

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