

SWEDISH EXILE

Hopes & Dreams

BY CELINE SMITH

During a project in Damascus, covering Iraqi refugees stranded in Syria, it was apparent that most of them hoped for resettlement.

Mehyar, an Iraqi Palestinian, was resettled from Syria to Forshaga; a remote town in Warmland, Sweden. I visited him to understand the complexities behind the resettlement.

Sweden's seemingly utopian social system attracts refugees from many countries. Most refugees are deeply scarred by their experience in their home countries; resettlement represents an enormous challenge – being moved so far from surroundings familiar to them.

The outcome of the project is a series of portraits of Mehyar and other refugees I met in Forshaga, such as Htoo and Noella. 

All photos by Celine Smith



HTOO

“When I was in Thailand at least I was someone, I was a nurse. Here, I feel like I’m nobody.”

I met Htoo in Forshaga. She is a Karen, one of the minorities based in Burma, also known as Myanmar. Her mother left Htoo and her sister with their father to join the Karen Liberation Army. Following persecution, many Karen people have fled to Thailand. Htoo and her family soon joined them and settled in a UNHCR camp on the border separating the two countries. Htoo and her mother worked hard to support her sister’s education.



NOELLA

“La vie c’est compliquée. Il faut commencer a zero. La verité a propos de l’immigration est que personne ne dit toute la verité.”

“Life is complicated, you have to start from a scratch. The truth about immigration - nobody tells the whole truth.”

Noella is Burundiese and talks about the future Sweden holds for her daughters, not the past in Burundi . Her two girls are aged 14 and 16, both speak English and Swedish fluently. Noella, on the other hand, struggles to find her place in the small town of Forshaga.