

THEY ARE HUMAN

Thoughts on the Syrian refugee crisis

Pavitra Krishnamani

Four million eight hundred thousand eighty-seven refugees have been displaced from Syria—mothers, children, elders, and fathers took what they could of their life in a Syria that will only exist in their memories for the foreseeable future and fled from the war-torn country we have grown accustomed to seeing in the news. What will it take for us to see them as human?

The same news anchor who tells us about a boy found frozen from shock in Aleppo, pulled out the rubble of his former home in the epicenter of Syrian airstrikes, later reminds us that we, as a country, may turn him away because of his religion. Because that very boy, if given a second chance in our country, may become a poison that spreads radical ideology within our borders. Because that boy, staring blankly ahead in the back of an ambulance may cause, in this country, the disaster he witnessed that day. That boy.

I am not convinced that we fear that boy. You see, we know that boy. Rather, it is the unknown we fear—the 4,800,086 others whose stories we have not heard and whose pictures we have not seen. Instead, we hear a narrative about these people carefully constructed to suit the agendas of those behind the microphone.

We are never told about the



Uber driver in Washington, D.C., who yearns to go back home to a Syria he remembers as a thriving marketplace—to a country where he remembers being welcomed into his neighbors' homes and never having to leave without a bite to eat. We are never told he used to earn his livelihood as a pilot and we never hear of his dismay that he will never, in his lifetime, be allowed to do so again because of where he is from. We are never told about his gratitude to the United States for the opportunity to raise his six children in a country where they will not have to fear being kidnapped or killed.

Instead, we are told of people who have absolutely nothing in common with him. The story of a man from New York City who

was never a refugee, but who killed an atrocious number of innocent people in an Orlando nightclub is conflated with that of the former Syrian pilot who is thankful that he is able to build a new life for his six American children. It is completely illogical.

When we look closer, we see that refugees resettling in our nation are subject to the most scrutiny of any group looking to enter the United States. They are vetted by the FBI, the DHS, the State Department, the National Counterterrorism Center, and the vast majority of those admitted are women, children, the elderly and the sick.

Most of these people have not had access to anything more than basic health infrastructure in years. They enter our nation

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with chronic illnesses that have been ignored and psychological concerns from the turmoil of war. And, in the toxic environment of hate speech that has pervaded the political landscape of our nation today, it is easy for them to face discrimination and feel isolated, further exacerbating their psychological concerns and eroding the feeling of hope with which they immigrated to the U.S.

It is up to us to stop perpetuating the stereotypes that surround these individuals. As health care providers and

citizens, it is important for us to separate fact from fiction by reading about these individuals' journeys and educating ourselves on the challenges they have faced.

Before we refuse them access to our country, we ought to know who we would be turning away. The reality is that we would be ignoring people who have lost everything in a fight they never desired. We would be turning away children who want to grow up and become physicians to help the people they saw injured in their

hometowns during this time of strife. 4,800,087 people have been displaced from Syria. What will it take for us to see them as human? ●

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