

Synopsis :

PARADISE LOST

« Flee from war in Syria to reach the Iraqi Kurdistan... »

Photographic essay by
Frédéric Mery Poplimont
2013

For three years now war has raged in Syria. From North to South, East to West, no one has escaped unscathed. And this conflict seems to drag on with no end in sight.

In a swamp filled with troops loyal to Bachar el-Assad, fighting against the Free Syrian Army, or amongst the cortège of Islamic or Kurdish militia, further confusing a situation which appears to have escaped the Western powers a long time ago. There is in-fighting amongst those of the same camp, there are gangland killings across entire regions where some dream of one day setting up an Islamic state with the help of certain elements of the government.

At one stage, a Franco-American intervention seemed likely when the famous “red line”, as defined by the American President Barack Obama, was crossed, when chemical weapons were used against the Syrian population in a Damascus suburb.

Tension rose a notch, diplomatic exchanges intensified, but after a few days of this diplomatic ballet, all parties retracted to their initial positions, satisfied with the guarantees promised by the regime.

“No-one cares about the Syrian people” I hear repeated over and over, in alley upon alley from one refugee camp to the next. Almost 1.5 million Syrians have fled their country for Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, or even Iraq and independent Kurdistan.

The independent Republic of Kurdistan seemed liked a promised land to many migrants, due as much to its proximity as to the Kurdish identity that it shares with the people of North-eastern Syria. Massoud Barzani’s regime welcomed its Syrian Kurdish brothers and gave the hope of a new life in more favourable conditions. There are as many as 250.000 of them here or elsewhere. On a single day in August 2013, almost 18.000 refugees crossed the border, taking the government and aid agencies by surprise.

For many of them, just like the situation in their native land, their own situation is showing few positive signs with little hope of improvement. Talking with them, one realises that they do not all have the same reason to stay; some fear for their lives due the continuing fighting, while others hold the hope of a better life here.

A common point of all wars is to destroy the economies of the countries that they affect. Three years ago, some of these people had only limited perspectives. Today, they have no hope at all.

In such difficult conditions, one hears the term “Paradise Lost” time and again. And so, in small groups, they are starting to turn back. There were nearly 500 of them at the beginning of October, sleeping rough in order to surrender their resident’s permit or refugee certificate to the authorities, before heading home, sometimes barefoot.,

They are all faced with the same dilemma: stay or return, while the fighting is getting worse with no end in sight ?