



We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled: Voices from Syria by Dr. Wendy Pearlman

About the Book

We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled: Voices from Syria tells the story of the Syrian uprising, war, and refugee crisis through interviews that Wendy Pearlman conducted from 2012 through 2016 with more than 300 displaced Syrians across the Middle East, Europe, and the United States. Following an introduction in which the author provides basic context, the book consists entirely of a curation of testimonies in Syrians' own words. Individual narratives of varying lengths are organized chronologically to reflect the key stages of the Syrian conflict, beginning with life under the authoritarian regimes of Hafez and Bashar al-Assad and then moving to describe the launch of nonviolent protests as a part of the 2011 Arab Spring, the government's subsequent crackdown, the escalation and militarization of a fragmented rebellion, civilians' everyday experiences under conditions of war, and the forced migration of millions of refugees. An accessible and deeply human entry point into one of worst humanitarian catastrophes of our times, the book both explains the Syrian conflict and conveys what it has been like for ordinary people to live it.

Suggested Opening Prayer: *Prayer for Peace in Syria*

God of Compassion,

Hear the cries of the people of Syria,
Bring healing to those suffering from the violence,
Bring comfort to those mourning the dead,
Strengthen Syria's neighbours in their care and welcome for refugees,
Convert the hearts of those who have taken up arms,
And protect those committed to peace.

God of Hope,

Inspire leaders to choose peace over violence and to seek reconciliation with enemies,
Inspire the Church around the world with compassion for the people of Syria,
And give us hope for a future of peace built on justice for all.

We ask this through Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace and Light of the World,

Amen.

Source: *Catholics Confront Global Poverty*

Discussion Questions

These are some suggested questions to get your discussion started. Some questions are from the publisher's reading guide.

- What do you learn about the origins of Syria as a state and the Assad regime as a regime? Did anything that you learned surprise you?
- What does Syria have in common with other countries in the Middle East? How has the history of Syria been shaped by developments in the larger Arab world?
- Many Syrians say that they were raised on the expression, “Don’t talk, the walls have ears.” What does that mean? What does it say about the relationship between state and society, relationships within society, and even individuals’ relationships to themselves?
- What drives people to participate in protest, despite significant risks?
- How do speakers describe the personal experience of participating in protest? Why do they experience protest in these ways? Have you ever participated in protests? How do their experiences match up with yours?
- What role does imprisonment play in the Syrian conflict?
- For civilians living through war, in what ways is war a kind of terror? In what ways do people become “normalized” to that terror?
- What are speakers’ views of ISIS?
- Why do millions of Syrians flee as refugees? Why do many refugees in the countries on Syria’s borders seek to migrate onward to Europe?
- What kinds of futures await refugee children?
- Yasmine discusses the concept of “homeland.” What does homeland mean to her? What does it seem to mean to other speakers?
- Has this book changed how you understand the refugee experience?
- What do you think about how these stories were told? How did the arrangement of the stories affect your experience of the book?

About the Author

Wendy Pearlman is the Martin and Patricia Koldyke Outstanding Teaching Associate Professor of Political Science at Northwestern University, where she specializes in the Middle East. She is the author of three books, *We Crossed A Bridge* and *It Trembled: Voices from Syria* (Custom House 2017), *Violence, Nonviolence, and the Palestinian National Movement* (Cambridge University Press, 2011) and *Occupied Voices: Stories of Everyday Life from the Second Intifada* (Nation Books, 2003), as well as dozens of essays, academic articles, or book chapters. Pearlman holds a BA from Brown University, an MA from Georgetown, and a PhD from Harvard. She speaks Arabic and has studied or conducted research in Spain, Germany, Morocco, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip.

Listen to Dr. Pearlman discuss *We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled* on EMM's Hometown podcast. You can also read the transcript.

Further Reading and Watching

Websites:

- Syria Direct, <http://syriadirect.org/>
- News Deeply, "Syria," <https://www.newsdeeply.com/syria>
- The Creative Memory of the Syrian Revolution, <https://creativememory.org/>
- Institute for War and Peace Reporting, "Syria Stories," <https://syriastories.net/>
- Qisetna "Talking Syria," <https://talkingsyria.com/>
- The Syrian Observer, <http://syrianobserver.com/EN/Home>
- Carnegie Endowment Middle East Center, "Syria in Crisis," <http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/>
- International Crisis Group, "Syria," <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/syria>
- The Atlantic Council, "Syria Source," <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource>
- Syria Sources in English, <https://syriasources.org/>

Books:

- Impossible Revolution by Yassin al-Haj Saleh
 - His contributions to AlJumhuriya.net
- Burning Country by Robin Yassin-Kassab
- Assad or We Burn the Country by Sam Dagher

Film:

- For Sama
- The Cave