

## **My Heart Breaks when I witness Innocent Children paying the price for American Crimes**

by Rory Smith via jill - Truth-out *Sunday, Oct 25 2015, 1:21am*

international / prose / post

Shame on you America and shame on you WORLD for allowing the world's leading civilian killing nation, the USA, to get away with its crimes against HUMANITY.



Locked in containers on transport ships, shoehorned in undersized boats in the Mediterranean, strapped to the undersides of freight trucks and stuffed in the beds of pickup trucks, vast throngs of unaccompanied children from Afghanistan, Somalia, Syria, Eritrea, Morocco and other nations are undertaking one of the world's most perilous journeys to get to Sweden. Their aim? Securing a better future for themselves. This refugee current reflects the seemingly insoluble desperation and hopelessness so pervasive in many countries; it is an alarming trend and a portent of things to come.

The refugees' journeys end sometimes haphazardly or unintentionally in the various immigration centers of Sweden. They are known there as ensamkommande flyktingbarn (unaccompanied child refugees under the age of 18).

Sweden's Immigration Service estimates that 12,000 unaccompanied refugee children - 50 percent of whom are under the age of 16 - will arrive in Sweden by the end of the year. But particular numbers are hard to validate, and it is often assumed that this trend is severely underestimated.

"We don't know how many of these kids are living in Sweden unregistered and without papers," said Sara Hellsten, a Swedish social worker who manages one of the homes that shelter refugee children as they await the processing of their asylum petitions. "Many come to Sweden and then hide with contacts they might have because they are terrified of being sent back if they present themselves to the police or immigration."

Leaving everything behind - assuming they had anything left to leave - they set out alone on an unparalleled journey toward what they hope to be a better life. "If we had what we needed for a future in our own countries, why would we all be in Sweden?" asked one youth.

Many children seeking asylum elect Sweden as their final destination based on news stories they see

on TV in their home countries or on word of mouth, both of which may have hinted at Sweden's open immigration policies. Others end up in Sweden through fortuitous circumstances.

"I was in a refugee center in Germany with hundreds of other refugees," said Youssef Abdessamie, a Moroccan who left home when he was 14 and arrived in Sweden three years later. "I met some other refugees who told me about how Sweden was a better country than Germany, how I had a better chance of staying in Sweden than anywhere else."

Though the factors driving these children to set out alone to Sweden are myriad and depend very much upon their country of origin, there are some general trends. For Somali, Afghan and Syrian children, the reasons for their fleeing are similar. Years of war have flattened schools, hollowed out infrastructure and laid waste to their nations' economies. Many children have lost their entire families to bombing campaigns, militant groups, poverty, malnutrition and disease. Many youth are now under direct threat from these very same militant groups, whether al-Shabab, ISIS or whatever other unidentified splinter groups are operating in these areas.

For Eritreans, it is torture, kidnapping and various other forms of oppression enacted by one of the world's more autocratic regimes that pushes them to Europe. And for Moroccan children - the newest and fastest growing child refugee demographic arriving to Sweden - it isn't war but the oppressiveness of poverty that urges them onward. The impoverished small towns and blighted city areas of Morocco are home to throngs of parentless children whose only families are the friends they live with on the streets.

"It is hard to describe the feeling of fear and desperation there [in Morocco]," Abdessamie said. "You have to feel it. Life doesn't make any sense. Hopelessness is everywhere. You would kill yourself if you didn't have your friends."

All of the routes to Europe are equally nightmarish; they abound in instances of sadism that seem to substantiate the existence of some underlying evil in the cosmos. Take the typical journey from Somalia to Sweden, for example.

Those Somalis willing and able - having the financial recourse to cover what is thought to be a costly one-time fee - will approach smugglers operating in their region. Any business worth its salt, smuggling included, understands the concept of supply and demand. As such, smugglers can be found wherever there is strife, and as a consequence, desperation and the desire to get away. This includes Dadaab, the world's largest refugee camp, which lies in northern Kenya, just across the border from Somalia.

From Somalia, or these same camps, the first stop is always Khartoum, Sudan. The trip over seemingly endless stretches of barren and moon-like Saharan desert requires several days to a week, and is often undergone without food or water. Once in Khartoum, refugees are stowed away in one of what is a network of small rooms around the city, each holding upward of 80 other refugees.

Once locked into these rooms - effectively becoming prisoners to these smugglers - another travel fee is levied on them. They are then subjected to daily beatings, rape and torture until - with what few phone calls they are allowed between these sessions of brutality - they can convince their relatives to send the necessary money. This same practice, step for step, is repeated at every stopover en route to Europe.

"There was one case of a kid who had five family members left in one house back in Somalia," said Amiin Adbihafi, a Somali-Swede who works with newly arrived refugee children in Sweden. "Having

spent all his money on the initial fee, thinking it would cover the entire trip to Europe - as promised by the smugglers - he didn't have anything to pay the next fee. His family was forced to sell their house, essentially everything they had left in Somalia, in order to pay for the rest of the trip."

Assuming they get the requisite funding and survive any violence inflicted upon them, the child refugees are taken to Libya and hidden away in one of another series of apartment rooms scattered across the coast.

"In Libya, there are no rules. There was one girl who hadn't eaten for a long time; she was starving," Adbihafi said. "The smugglers said, 'We take you and do whatever we want with you and in return you get to eat.' They were referring to raping her, and of course, she didn't have a choice. She would've died had she not done what they wanted."

Rape is common along all of the routes to Europe. To pay the many unforeseen ancillary fees that are imposed on these youth during different legs of the trip, oftentimes both girls and boys are forced into working as indentured slaves. Selling their bodies and performing sexual favors are some of the more widespread forms of this slavery.

Those that can make the next payment are taken from these storerooms at night and packed onto boats - often so overcrowded that they capsize en route - and begin the forbidding trip across the Mediterranean. It is estimated that over 20,000 migrants have drowned over the last two decades, with nearly 3,000 having already drowned this year. Those that refuse to get on these vessels are beaten and oftentimes murdered.

"Many people watching or reading the news ask how they can take this risk. There is no choice, no election," said Harun Pasalic, a Bosnian-Swede working to help refugee youth acclimate to their new country. "There is no going back. They don't have a choice. They are forced on these boats, and if they did happen to escape, there is no way they could make it back alive to their countries."

Upon landing on the Italian coast, refugees are escorted to and cordoned off in one of the various understaffed, underequipped and overcrowded prison-like immigrant holding centers typical of Europe's Mediterranean countries. Within these compounds, they are met by the last line of smugglers, who - again assuming the refugees have the money - fashion them with fake passports and sometimes plane tickets directly to Sweden.

Others begin the overland route, which includes travel by trains, buses and trucks, and stays in nongovernment-operated refugee centers, as well as mosques and informal refugee camps. If and only if they make it to Sweden, which by land is becoming increasingly difficult, given Europe's reluctance to open its borders to refugees, these kids find the closest police station, and there they present themselves to be fingerprinted and have their asylum cases processed by Swedish Immigration.

"Any kid traveling alone from one of a variety of far-flung countries, enduring every imaginable form of brutality along the way, and then somehow making it to Sweden, should be congratulated and awarded with a prize; such is the mental fortitude, resilience and resourcefulness demanded by such a journey," said Hellsten, the Swedish social worker.

"If anything, this is a testament to their steadfast determination to create a better future for themselves and for Sweden," Hellsten added.

When asked if he had anything to say to anyone reading or listening, one child refugee answered:

"We want to help make this place a better country. We all speak at least three languages. Give us a chance. We are more than capable of doing this."

Understandably, after enduring a phantasmagorical array of traumatic encounters, refugee children arrive to Sweden in a variety of mental states, some better than others. "It took one kid a year and a half to get here from Somalia and along the way we was beaten, threatened and raped," Adbihafi said. "He has nightmares, suffers from PTSD, doesn't eat, doesn't sleep."

The wounds inflicted during this trip extend beyond just the mental ones. "Because rape is so common during their trip, and they are forced to live in an array of overcrowded and wholly unsanitary conditions, many youth, after finally arriving to Sweden, end up at our ward being told they have HIV or severe tuberculosis," said Maria Sjögren, a nurse who works at one of Gothenburg's infection clinics that treats many newly arrived youth.

And yet, for most, it isn't the mental or physical anguish of their trip, but the process ahead, a period of limbo they live through in Sweden as they await the final decision from Swedish Immigration - the executioner's song - which will decide if they can stay or if they will be sent back to their home countries, the entire journey for nothing.

Asked about being afraid of suffocating or being caught while locked inside a container full of vegetables as it crossed from Morocco to Spain aboard a cargo ship, Abdessamie responds, "There is no fear in the crossing. You are focused only on getting to Europe, to a better life. The only fear is being sent back, to your death."

Copyright applies.

<http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/33332-thousands-of-unaccompanied-refugee-children-travel-to-sweden>

---

Jungle Drum Prose/Poetry. <http://jungledrum.lingama.net/news/story-1947.html>