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THE PRESENT, PAST, AND FUTURE OF REFUGEE PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS: CAMPS, COMPREHENSIVE PLANS, AND CYBER-COMMUNITIES

*T. Alexander Aleinikoff**

Let me begin with an “overture”—an introduction to the stories I will discuss today:

First: Guled and Maryam. Guled left Somalia as a young adult, arriving in the Dadaab refugee camps in 2010. He was soon joined by his wife, Maryam. They were part of a massive movement of Somali refugees who fled drought and violence in their homeland, and joined more than a quarter of a million refugees who had been living in Dadaab for years. Guled and Maryam have had two children born in the camp. More than five years after arrival, they remain in Dadaab, imagining return to Mogadishu, resettlement in Europe or the United States, or a dangerous trip aided by smugglers through Northern Africa and across the Mediterranean.

Second: Jack Toan. Jack Toan fled Vietnam from Hanoi in 1979, as Vietnamese authorities were cracking down on middle class ethnic Chinese. Under the U.S. resettlement program, he—with his parents and brother—settled initially in South Carolina. Eventually, the family moved to Orange County, California, home to the largest Vietnamese community (outside Vietnam). Jack lives there today with his wife—a Mexican immigrant—and four children.

Third: civil society. Of the more than one million Syrian refugees who took to the sea and land routes to come to Europe, many arrived in Hungary (before the Hungarian government took measures to shut them out). Scores of Austrians organized, via social media, carpools that brought the refugees from Budapest to Vienna.

Fourth: the Eritrean diaspora. Although the exact size of the Eritrean diaspora is not known, it is estimated to be at least one million. Many Eritreans

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left their home country during the conflict with Ethiopia in 1998–2000; many more have left since, as the Eritrean government has become more authoritarian and repressive. Eritreans are recognized as refugees in countries of asylum around the world. Eritrean refugees and migrants actively participate on a number of websites that report news from home and create space for political discussion not possible in their home country.

A world with twenty million refugees and more than sixty million persons overall displaced by violence and conflict tells many stories—stories of death and despair, but also of resolve and resilience, of families separated, children no longer in school, and girls forced into early marriages, but also of communities re-forming and of lives re-starting. Governments adopt policies both of welcome and deterrence; civil society donates clothes and medicines, but also spawns populist opposition to refugees; gangs smuggle and traffic to make tens of millions of dollars from desperate refugees, even as they leave them adrift in unseaworthy boats after selling them phony life preservers that absorb water and produce death by drowning.

In this lecture, I cannot tell all these stories, nor can I offer conceptual or practical solutions to all the issues they bring forth. Rather, I will focus on three sets of stories and use them to describe the kinds of responses available to governments and the international community. As I relate these stories, I will offer some comments on better ways of protecting and assisting the millions of human beings who have been forced from their homes in recent years.

So we return to Dadaab, Kenya. I have learned the story of Guled and Maryam from Ben Rawlence’s penetrating and insightful study of the refugee camp, *City of Thorns*.¹ Dadaab, in Northeastern Kenya, is the largest refugee camp in the world, home to more than 350,000 refugees (it is, in fact, the third largest city in Kenya). The vast majority of refugees in Dadaab are Somalis. Some fled more than twenty years ago, some more recently. The United Nations (U.N.) High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that there are 10,000 refugees in Dadaab who were born to persons born in the camp.

Dadaab is a complex and complicated environment. A local town has grown up around it. The camp has many Kenyan-Somali residents—and it is said to be place of Al-Shabaab recruitment. It is also the site of episodic, brutal

¹ BEN RAWLENCE, *CITY OF THORNS: NINE LIVES IN THE WORLD’S LARGEST REFUGEE CAMP* (2016).

Kenyan security operations. Nearly all of the Somali girls in Dadaab are victims of Female Genital Mutilation.

Dadaab is a community, with marriages and births and deaths; but it is a place more of longing than belonging. According to Rawlence, the residents of Dadaab have created a word: *buufis*—a longing for return, for resettlement, a desire to be elsewhere.

Here is Guled's story. He grew up in Mogadishu, was orphaned as an adolescent, and witnessed the Ethiopian invasion and withdrawal from Somalia as well as the rise of al-Shabaab. "Guled," writes Rawlence, "was a normal kid with a strong sister and an affection for music and Manchester United football club." While in school, Guled took a job driving a mini-bus, which took him across conflict lines. At a young age, he married Maryam, who he had met in the displaced persons camp both were living in. In October 2010, masked and armed men entered his classroom; he, along with five others and a teacher, were taken. The boys were forced to be members of the Al-Shabaab police, ensuring shops closed during prayer times and enforcing rules of dress and behavior.

Guled managed to escape a few months later and made his way to Dadaab, arriving in December 2010. He was registered by UNHCR and was given a food ration card. He sold some of the first food he received to go to a phone shop and call Maryam. "Overcome and emotional, [and] . . . with an optimism unrooted in experience," writes Rawlence, Guled recounted to Maryam "all the benefits of the camp in an effort to persuade her to join him," including safety, food, housing, healthcare, education, "and even the chance of resettlement to America." Maryam, who was pregnant, decided she would come. "Without any idea what she was asking of him in a refugee camp full of people forbidden to work and reliant on international handouts to eat, Maryam told Guled to send money so she could come." Guled got a job as a porter, but could not make enough money. Maryam then found her own way to Dadaab, arriving in January 2011. She was part of a great flow of refugees caused by drought and conflict in Somalia. A "famine" was finally declared by the United Nations in July 2011.

It was a tough time in Dadaab. The mass arrivals lead to chaos and confusion. As residents struggled, the outside world intruded: two Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) doctors were kidnapped and taken to Somalia for ransom (they were released more than one year later) and international aid agencies—for a time—withdraw. Following other acts of violence in Kenya

that the government attributed to al-Shabaab, Kenya invaded Somalia. This produced violent repercussions in Dadaab: improvised explosive devices went off and Kenyan police responded with harsh and repressive tactics aimed at ridding the camp of suspected Shabaab infiltrators.

Throughout all this time, Guled and Maryam struggled. Guled—Rawlence reports—was “hooked on football” and not earning much money; Maryam grew discontented and dreamt of home. She told Guled she was going home. He said he could not return because his life would be at risk. He took up work at a stand selling khat.

One day, Guled received a call from a friend who had left Dadaab. With the aid of smugglers, the friend had entered Sudan, travelled through Darfur to Libya, and then by boat to Italy. His friend told him to come, and Guled started to think hard about traveling north. This route, he knew, was dangerous and expensive, and his travel would be dependent on traffickers.

More violence erupted in Kenya and Dadaab. A terrorist attack at the upscale Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi killed more than sixty people. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack and the government used this as a reason to take further actions against refugees (claiming some of the terrorists who planned the attack had been harbored in the camps). In Dadaab, there was an event that became known as Westgate Two—shootings at a cinema, where refugee boys and men watch football matches. The attackers were known, but no one was willing to identify them for fear of reprisal.

To reduce the tension in Kenya, UNHCR, Kenya, and Somalia signed a “Tripartite Agreement” to support voluntary returns. The agreement allowed the government to say that refugees would be returning (even if the military campaign in Somalia was stalling).

Maryam returned to Dadaab, in part to take advantage of medical care in the camp to remove a tumor from her ear. She became pregnant again and gave birth. But the family had few resources and was malnourished. Guled could not return to Mogadishu, and while he continued to think of migrating to Europe, he did not have the money to afford the trip. Rawlence reports Guled’s thinking: “It was a risky and expensive thing to do but it at least had the virtue of action; it was something, a decision, an honourable effort, even if he died trying: a kind of kamikaze mission, a noble suicide.” Guled confided to Rawlence in December 2014 (four years after arriving in Dadaab): “The life we are in today, it is better for me to die in the Sahara or in the sea.” The

situation convinced Maryam that she needed to return again to Mogadishu, and Guled resolved to head to Europe if she did.

Rawlence returned in May 2015 for his last visit to Dadaab, where, at a restaurant in Dadaab town, he met the refugees whose lives he had described. Guled refused to eat, saying how could he eat when his family had not eaten that day. He cut the interview short. “The last I saw of him,” reports Rawlence, “he was walking down the dusty road of Dadaab, the watchtowers of the UN compound looming behind barbed wire, a plastic bag with two roast chicken legs in one hand.”

Now, Rawlence has other stories of Dadaab refugees: some become teachers in the camp, a youth leader starts an NGO to help returning refugees, a family is resettled in another country. But Guled and Maryam’s story is the paradigmatic Dadaab story.

At one time, advocates called their situation the “warehousing of refugees.” The phrase is not much in use today, but the idea is the same. In many places in the world, refugees are restricted to camps, where there is no formal economy, little schooling beyond cursory primary school, significant gender-based violence, and little hope of return or resettlement. UNHCR calls this “care and maintenance”—a way of doing business that has now become a pejorative term. It was adopted when it was thought that solutions were just around the corner; it is now a way of doing business that produces dependency and despondency.

Of course, most refugees today do not in fact live in camps. But their lives outside of camps are often not much better. Most are denied the right to work, and access to school and medical services are frequently quite limited. Many refugees find work in the “informal sector,” but there, without the protection of labor laws or eligibility for social benefits, they are exploitable and exploited. Whether in camps or villages or urban settings, refugees in countries of first asylum typically suffer what I have called a “second exile.”

Now, I want to contrast Guled and Maryam’s story with Jack Toan’s. Here, I am relying on a transcript that is part of an oral history project established at the University of California, Irvine (UCI)—which is “next door” to Little Saigon, the largest community of Vietnamese outside of Vietnam.

Jack was born in Hanoi in 1970. His family was part of the middle-class ethnic Chinese community—his father worked as a machinist and his mother in a plastic press factory. After the end of the war, the Vietnamese government

began to harass ethnic Chinese, and in 1979 Jack and his family fled Vietnam by boat—as more than 800,000 Vietnamese would do between 1975 and 1995. Jack told the UCI interviewer:

I remember my parents woke me up in the middle of the night and we left . . . As a kid, it was . . . an adventure. My parents tried to protect us from the hardship of it . . . Maybe it's a memory block, but I don't remember most of the trauma. But . . . hearing my parents recount it, it was a tough time for my brother, and my mom was constantly seasick.

He said that there were seventy people on the boat and spent sixty days at sea; and he remembers “eating a lot of sweet potato,” which he reports is “still a favorite food of mine.”

Jack recalled a particular incident, which occurred after the ship was damaged, risked sinking, and landed on an island to seek repairs:

[W]hile we were docked on the island . . . I remember laying there looking at the stars . . . and kind of hearing my dad talking about the dreams we were headed to in America and we were trying to get to a better life and I just remember very clearly laying there looking at the stars on the island my dad saying you know when you're older you're going to go to college and get an engineering degree . . .

Eventually, Jack and his family were placed in a refugee camp in Hong Kong. He has no bad memories of camp, and he reports being taught basic English words like “car, apple, yes and no.” After six months, Jack and his family left the Hong Kong camp for the United States, sponsored by Church World Service (CWS).

Jack Toan's oral history relates but one of hundreds of thousands of stories of the “boat people.” Many drowned at sea, others fell victim to pirates and traffickers, but most made it to safety in countries bordering Vietnam or across wide expanses of ocean. In 1979, international action—led by UNHCR—produced significant resettlement from camps and also established an “orderly departure program” directly from Vietnam. The boat flow receded for a while but returned in the mid-1980s to high levels. The international community (the United States and UNHCR) responded with the 1989 Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA), again committing to large-scale resettlement but this time also calling for screening of arrivals, and return for those who did not qualify under the Geneva Convention's definition of refugee. Unlike the earlier program—which presumptively treated all arriving “boat people” as refugees and eligible

for resettlement—the CPA sanctioned a screening process. Persons not “screened in” as refugees were subject to return to Vietnam, and some forced repatriation from Hong Kong to Vietnam occurred as the CPA wound down.

While these international events were occurring, Jack Toan was growing up in a small town in South Carolina. He learned how it all happened in a conversation he had many years later with the pastor of the sponsoring church (the Bethel Presbyterian Church):

[H]e [the pastor] said he saw a news clip . . . that was on the plight of these refugees and he felt compelled to do something and so he went to his small congregation in his little town of 3 to 4,000 people in the middle of South Carolina and said this is something we need to do.

Jack’s family had initially been slated to go to a congregation in Texas, but when that resettlement fell through, CWS matched the family with the request it had received from the South Carolina congregation. They moved into a house next to the church but had no immediate neighbors and woods behind, which Jack found scary. He reported some difficulty in acculturation:

None of us spoke English[;] “yes, apple, no, car” were the words I knew and if anyone would talk to me, it was all gibberish and I would say “yes” or “no.” For the longest time I did that.

. . . .

You know I got called a wetback when I was in school there at the time[;] I was like what’s a wetback? . . . My brother and I were the only Vietnamese-Chinese kids that were around and our hair was different. I had that bold [sic] haircut that my dad had given us at home because we don’t go to a barber. And I think as kids, the way we dress, immigrant, got all the hand me downs and of course we were in South Carolina so we were wearing cowboy shorts and boots and stuff so it was just Asian cowboys. It just made it look even weirder. And whenever we played cowboys and Indian[s] I was always the Indian.

Jack’s father did not want his sons to participate in sports; he wanted them to focus on academics.

We [Jack and his brother] were both in the top of our class, straight A’s all the time and so in the eighties we were into the revenge of the nerds stereotype . . . very academically focused, good at chess And of course everyone expected me to be Bruce Lee and know karate and kung fu It was just growing up with a lot of stereotypes. But you know on the other hand there was a lot of really

nice people too it was just the sign of the times. One interesting thing is that Pastor Stevenson recently recounted to me which I didn't know was when they decided to sponsor [] families they informed the community around us, around the church . . . because they knew there would be problems. There was actually a group that didn't want us there. So what he said was . . . "I don't think you guys knew this but the congregation took turns patrolling your house in the neighborhood when you guys first came because it was an isolated home so they were patrolling to make sure we didn't have any problems from racist groups that were there."

The Toans left South Carolina in 1987 for Southern California, with its large Vietnamese community (there, Jack reports, he was made fun of because of his southern accent). It was a time of some drifting for Jack. He entered college, but the sudden death of his brother of cancer had a big impact on him. His grades dropped and he gave up on the idea of medical school. He eventually got an MBA, and landed a job in the community development department of Wells Fargo. Currently, he manages Wells Fargo's charitable giving to the Orange County community.

Jack's wife Marybell is a Mexican immigrant. After they had a child, they moved in with Jack's parents. The family sold their house and together (Jack and his parents) bought a larger one. At the time of his interview for the oral history project in August 2012, Jack and his wife were expecting their fourth child. Jack reports that a three-generation, multi-cultural household is not without its tensions.

Near the end of the interview, Jack relates why he wanted to work with the oral history project:

[I]t is a preservation of a story of a generation. For me I grew up American trying not to be Asian when I was in South Carolina. But realizing when I age now and being a father, imagining what my dad must've gone through and he's a pretty conservative guy, he doesn't take a lot of risks. To take the risk of taking his family and escaping the country in the middle of the night and risk their whole entire family on this trip to the dream of opportunity in this other country. As a father now that [I] think about it it's a very hard decision to make and I think a lot of us immigrant families who escaped from war whether its from Vietnam, Africa or whatever else they are escaping from, refugees those are risks and if you have kids it's a very difficult decision to make to leave our home So I want my kids to have the opportunity to have a piece of that with them or at least recorded somewhere or be able to do the research. [M]y great

great grandchildren one day will have that connection back and say we had that connection to Vietnam we had that connection to China in this way.

From 1975 to 1995, more than one million (*one million!*) Southeast Asian refugees were welcomed in the United States. (I will ask later why there has been no proposal of a CPA for the one million Somali refugees [including those in Dadaab]—or the four million Syrian refugees.)

It is Jack's story—not Guled and Maryam's—that describes how the international refugee regime is supposed to work: dangerous flight, short time in camp, solution: return or resettlement and a new life. Some difficulty in rebuilding one's life and, if resettled, adapting to a new country is to be expected. But many resettlement countries have programs to help refugees find jobs, receive medical care, and learn a new language. With the second and third generation, the refugee story becomes the immigrant story—a far cry from the “second exile” of Dadaab.

Now, I want to bring these remarks fully into the 21st century—to consider how technology and civil society are changing the flight, travel, and lives of refugees. Jack and his family, of course, had no GPS to guide their boat, no texting or social media to keep up with family and friends. To some extent, Guled has access to the new technology: mobile phones are not uncommon in Dadaab (even if it is difficult to find the electricity to charge them), and he is able, through various means, to follow his favorite football team playing on continents he can only dream of.

In many refugee camps and hosting states, technology is changing the delivery of assistance. Distance learning via the Internet is increasingly available; Facebook announced last year that it would bring connectivity to the Nyarugusu camp and surrounding area in Tanzania; a 3D printer in the Za'atri camp in Jordan can manufacture prosthetic limbs; there is solar lighting in dozens of camps and solar-powered water pumps.

It is in the recent movement of one million refugees to Europe that we have seen the new technology come to the fore. Mobile technology is readily available to Syrian refugees, and is used to plan travel, check weather reports, communicate with family (and smugglers), and avoid border closures and border police. Technology has also facilitated new roles for civil society organizations—from rescue at sea, sorting out responsibilities of NGOs at places of arrival, arranging transportation within Europe, finding refugees places to stay (a Facebook page in Iceland generated a list of 10,000 families

volunteering to sponsor and house Syrian refugees) and work (LinkedIn has created a platform to connect refugees with skills with employers in countries of resettlement).

A recent study conducted for UNHCR finds that more than ninety percent of refugees today are located in areas with Internet coverage, although actual connectivity is low given the cost of devices and service plans. Refugees are intensely interested in news from home and abroad—which is hardly surprising, given that life as a refugee is “life in-between.”

What I want to suggest is that through new technology and new media, refugees are beginning to foster new forms of community. For some time, scholars have been studying what are now labeled “digital diaspora”—groups of migrants and exiles outside their home country linked online. This would constitute a third form of community—not Guled and Maryam’s camp community, or the communities that Jack Toan joined in South Carolina and Southern California, both of which are physical communities. Rather, we are witnessing the creation by refugees of transnational virtual communities. These communities—like all communities—serve a variety of functions: providing members with news from home, creating a space for political discussions (a space that may not have existed in the home country), maintaining cultural links (holidays, stories, recipes, music).

These kinds of functions are discussed in detail in Victoria Bernal’s recent book on the Eritrean diaspora, called *Nation as Network*.² As mentioned, the Eritrean diaspora is a mixed group. Many members left before or during the war with Ethiopia. Many more have now gone into exile due to repressive government policies that control the press and, most importantly, conscript young men into the army and other forms of public service—which can sometimes last for years in a kind of involuntary servitude to the state. Hence, a large component of recent flows out of Eritrea are young men of conscription age.

Bernal describes three websites—one largely directed at the earlier flow, and two with the more anti-government stance of the later flow. These are vibrant sites, which provide, as Bernal notes, the possibility of many voices not controlled by the state, alternate narratives of politics and culture, and contestation among them. Where political communication within Eritrea is in service of the nation, on the websites it is “flatter”: “empower[ing] ordinary

² VICTORIA BERNAL, *NATION AS NETWORK: DIASPORA, CYBERSPACE, AND CITIZENSHIP* (2014).

people” with a focus on “Eritrean to Eritrean communication.” They thus create

[A] virtual platform/forum where Eritreans anywhere can connect and communicate in an Eritrean context that is defined by the Eritrean participants themselves (posters and readers) rather than by the nation or its leaders. This . . . is not a virtual Eritrea . . . but an expression and recognition of Eritreanness as something distinct from the nation, [the President and the ruling party] . . . [T]his constitutes a profound re-envisioning of the nation.

One site, Awate (according to Bernal, named after Hamid Idris Awate, a Muslim Eritrean reputed to have been “one of the first Eritreans to take up the armed struggle for freedom from Ethiopian rule”), uses the subtitle of “Fearless News, Opinion, Analysis On Eritrea And Beyond;” and includes a call to action slogan of “Inform, Inspire, Embolden. Reconcile!” I recently visited the Awate site—the Awate community—and to do so, I did not require the armed guards that accompanied me in the Dadaab camp nor did I have to face the traffic of Southern California.

On Awate, there is news from home, international news relevant to Eritrea, many non-political discussions, and a good deal of commentary on political events inside and outside Eritrea—much of it quite critical of the current regime. For example, a March 1, 2016 post is entitled “A Rudderless and Decrepit EU Courts a Tyrannical Regime.”³ It offers a scathing attack on a cooperation agreement signed by the European Union and Eritrea to provide \$200 million in development aid over the next five years. The writer calls the deal a betrayal of EU human rights ideals done to help stem the flow of Eritrean refugees to Europe. And he asserts that “[t]he [Eritrean] regime and its supporters see the aid package as a major political victory over their opponents and as a step toward breaking out of their international isolation.” But he concludes that “the EU’s . . . move to engage the regime can hardly render the latter any less illegitimate or inhumane than it really is. A fight continues to be waged to have . . . accountability established for the regime’s documented human rights violations.”

Another post advocates for the empowerment of Eritrean women. The writer instructs his Eritrean readers:

³ Yohannes Zerai, *A Rudderless and Decrepit EU Courts A Tyrannical Regime*, AWATE.COM (Mar. 1, 2016), <http://awate.com/a-rudderless-and-decrepit-eu-courts-a-tyrannical-regime>.

As some women have done with some success in the diaspora, [you should] create an all-encompassing grassroots organization that advocates on behalf of Eritrean women, an organization that is not beholden to the National Union of Eritrean Women, a group that is partly responsible for the present predicament of Eritrean women: an organization that is subservient to PFDJ [People's Front for Democracy and Justice] . . . [ruling party]. The grassroots organization must focus solely on empowering women in different areas, history, documenting the bravery of those women who participated in the armed struggle as early as the 1960s. The goals of the grassroots . . . organization should be to inspire a new generation of girls who will carry the baton and the torch that Eritrean women carried and that is on the verge of being extinguished by PFDJ and its lackeys.⁴

The posts demonstrate one of Bernal's central points: that "[t]he diaspora websites . . . turn[] the nation inside out, since the political activities crucial to Eritrea's political development as a society could not take place within the country but [are] lead by the diaspora outside it on the internet."⁵

The Eritrean story, of course, is not unique. One can find Internet sites for many other diaspora and refugee populations that embody virtual communities of exiles. I have visited blogs and pages for Somali, Afghan, Syrian, Tibetan, and Uyghur communities. To be sure, members of diasporas had found ways of keeping up with each other before the arrival of the Internet. But surely the ability to communicate and connect has expanded greatly. The Internet is low-cost and available nearly everywhere; it can provide anonymity and is non-hierarchical and non-coercive.

Deterritorialized cyber-communities are neither here (home or camp) nor there (country of resettlement). They are political and cultural spaces, ones that offer strength and support to others in similar situations around the world, maintaining dreams of home and also fostering visions of the future. As Jennifer Brinkerhoff writes in her book, *Digital Diaspora*: "Through the Internet, geographically dispersed diasporans can connect and bond, providing

⁴ Semere Andom, *The Eritrean Woman: Reverie of an Emancipated Eritrean Man*, AWATE.COM (Mar 8, 2016), <http://awate.com/the-eritrean-woman-reverie-of-an-emancipated-eritrean-man/>.

⁵ Note the problem of government trolls, stalking, and use of counterfeit identities. Maeve Shearlaw, *Eritrea Unleashes its Troll Patrol*, MAIL & GUARDIAN (Aug. 23, 2015), <http://mg.co.za/article/2015-08-23-eritrean-unleashes-its-troll-patrol>.

to each other a quality of benefit—a sense of shared understanding—no one else could possibly provide.”⁶

My comments here are tentative. I would hypothesize that these sites produce a different kind of “refugee consciousness” than that found in camps and countries of resettlement—but the scope and content of that consciousness need specification. To what extent do virtual communities impede or support integration in resettlement countries—Do they prepare refugees for return or make return less likely? Do online sites create new power dimensions, along political, ethnic, gendered lines? These kinds of questions, I would submit, would benefit from further scholarly attention and research.

* * *

The story of Guled and Maryam depicts the past and present of refugee protection. It is a story far too typical of the situation facing most of the world’s refugees: that of long-term displacement. For all the focus on emergencies, to my mind the most serious problem facing the international refugee regime are these situations of the “second exile.” New ways of doing business, new policies, and significant structural innovations are necessary if we are to make progress on this.

Jack Toan’s narrative represents the past and—one hopes—the future. The Southeast Asian CPA was of a time and place, but the idea of the world coming together with a commitment to a joint and comprehensive response again must be pursued. In March of 2016, UNHCR convened a meeting and set a goal of resettling ten percent of Syrian refugees (about 450,000). That goal was not met. Instead, the collective action we saw was the EU-Turkey deal to return asylum-seekers to Turkey. What is needed is serious consideration of a CPA for Syrian Refugees.

All of these efforts at reform will be aided by harnessing the energy of civil society and the benefits of connectivity—here we can look to the future. Lives in transit, in camps, and in countries of resettlement will be materially advanced. Technology can empower refugees to forge their own ways forward, possibly forging a new kind of transnational consciousness—one that provides support to those in exile and also a foundation for rebuilding a nation if conflicts end and return becomes possible.

⁶ JENNIFER M. BRINKERHOFF, *DIGITAL DIASPORAS: IDENTITY AND TRANSNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT* 47 (2009).

One can, then, look with both despair and hope at the worlds that refugees inhabit. But let me end on the more hopeful side with the words with which Jack Toan ended his oral history:

[I]t was a small group/congregation of people that didn't know this family and they were going to help and reach across the world and say we're going to help you guys and we were a beneficiary of that and . . . of the kindness and support that they gave us. . . . Because they spent time taking care of us in summer and putting us in programs and my brother learned piano and I learned art and all these extra things that we probably would not have the opportunity to do, they just kind of dropped us here and they gave us all of that and they taught us the importance of hard work and how to get ahead in America, but always giving back. Now I have an opportunity from my job, and I know it's that little bit of helping hand that can elevate a family and an individual towards greater success and I'm just glad that I can be a part of the circle of life.