Music, Identity Formation, and Mission Among Displaced Syrians

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TH502: THEOLOGY IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT | DR. STANLEY JOHN

ABSTRACT: We show that the contemporary crisis of displacement for Syrians is also a crisis of identity in which music plays a formational role and poses a missional opportunity for the Church. A survey of recent Syrian history reveals deficits in common identity factors for displaced Syrians. We evaluate the role of music as both a reflection of and a formational actor on displaced Syrians' identities. A theological analysis shows the Psalms and Christ are exemplars of music among the displaced in their identity formation. We conclude with four responses of the church towards displaced Syrians.

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Introduction

In this paper I will show that the contemporary crisis of displacement for Syrians is also a crisis of identity in which music plays a uniquely formational role for the displaced and poses a missional opportunity for the church. We will frame a discussion of Syrian identity by a survey of recent Syrian history, and we will evaluate the experience of displaced Syrians as their displacement affects aspects of their identity. Then we will evaluate the role of music as both a reflection of and a formational actor on displaced Syrians' identities. We will offer a theological discussion of music and migration that supports this thesis. Coupled with anecdotal evidence and scholarly studies, we will finally carry this argument to its conclusion about appropriate missional responses the church can have towards displaced Syrians to see their identities supported, their needs met holistically, and to see them welcomed into the family of God in Christ.

Identity Formation

Since the focus of this study is on music as a contributing factor to identity, we will begin by framing the process of identity formation. By a classic sociological definition, "identity is formed in the 'interaction' between self and society."[1] Hall and Du Gay describe cultural identities as "those aspects of our identities which arise from our 'belonging' to distinctive ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious and, above all, national cultures."[2] Individuals nuance this identity on

[1] Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay, eds., *Questions of Cultural Identity* (Vancouver: Crane Resource Centre, 2006), 276.
[2] Hall and Du Gay, 274.

a personal level where they compose their sense of "the real me," thus composing an "inside" and "outside" identity complex that "is formed and modified in a continuous dialogue with the cultural worlds 'outside' and the identities which they offer."[3] In other words, individuals "suture" their identities into the social structures in which they find themselves.[4] But refugees are uprooted from social structures, often one after another, as they flee homelands and move into new places. Thus, Hall's and Du Gay's following conception of identity is important in discussions of refugees: "The fully unified, completed, secure and coherent identity is a fantasy" because identity is ever shifting within a framework of innumerable factors that are less biological than they are circumstantial.[5] From this starting point that recognizes identity as *process* more than position, one can both recognize and appreciate the identity formation or, perhaps, *re*-formation, of displaced individuals. Nonetheless, to discuss Syrians' identity formation outside their homeland as refugees, one must explore some identifying aspects common to Syrians in Syria.

Syrian Identity Crises

What does it mean to be Syrian? Questions of identity are complex even in the most stable of environments. But Syria is and has been anything but stable. We will begin our exploration with the most definable of Syrian characteristics: geography. Yet even here, as Middle Eastern geography expert Fabrice Balanche asserts, "Syria's borders are under external control… The Syrian army controls only 15% of the country's international land borders; the rest are divided between foreign actors."[6] While it is an ancient land in the story of human civilization, in modern history it became a sovereign nation in 1946 after two decades under

[3] Ibid., 276.
[4] Ibid., 276.
[5] Ibid., 277.
[6] Fabrice Balanche, "The Assad Regime Has Failed to Restore Full Sovereignty Over Syria," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, February 10, 2021, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/assad-regime-has-failed-restore-full-sovereignty-over-syria.

French rule following World War I and, before that, centuries of Ottoman rule. The borders that exist today were only defined in 1946 and "had no correspondence to pre-[Syrian independence] war realities."[7] In addition, various border conflicts have raged, such as the ongoing tug-of-war with Israel for the Golan Heights region.

Demographically speaking, Syria is not so precise either. 50% of the population is Arab, followed by Alawites (15%), Kurds (10%), Levantine peoples (10%), and various other Turks, Aramean-Syriacs, Assyrians, Armenians, Circassians, [8] and Palestinians who fled to Syria from their territories' conflicts in the 1980s and '90s.[9] Syria's median age is quite young at 23.5 (cf. 38.5 in USA)[10] and, interestingly, Syria has the highest growth rate in the world at 5.32%.[11] The youthfulness of the population brings its own renaissance often expressed in the arts. While the simple majority in-country are Arab, minority groups have a strong presence and, as we will see below, have various national agendas and social statuses. In short, it is an eclectic country.

Syria's multiple religious identities are rooted in antiquity. As one of the oldest civilized regions in the world, Levantine Syria is known as the "Noble Land" because half of the world's people belong to a religion that came from or through it (i.e., Judaism, Christianity, Islam).[12] Mohammed Habash, a Parliament member, head of the Islamic Studies Center and Muslim sheikh, states: "More than 90% of Syrians believe in God…[and] at least 50% of Syrians believe religion must play a role in our political life."[13] Yet "religion was never used as an instrument for

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[7] Leïla Vignal, "The Changing Borders and Borderlands of Syria in a Time of Conflict," *International Affairs* 93:4 (2017), 812, https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/ia/INTA93_4_03_Vignal.pdf.
[8] "Syria," *CIA World Factbook*, https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/syria/#people-and-society.
[9] Rashid Khalidi, "Emerging Identities from the Current Refugee Crisis," *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 22:2 (Spring/Summer 2016), 218. http://bjwa.brown.edu/22-2/emerging-identities-from-the-current-refugee-crisis/.
[10] *CIA World Factbook*, https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/syria/#people-and-society; https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/united-states/#people-and-society.
[11] *CIA World Factbook*, https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/population-growth-rate/country-comparison/.
[12] Robin Wright, *Dreams and Shadows: The Future of the Middle East* (NY: Penguin, 2008), 240.
[13] Wright, 241.

coloring people's identity or for separating communities."[14] Ironically, many consider Syria to be the most secular state in the Arab world, and its constitution guarantees religious freedom excepting only the president, who must be Muslim.[15] Overall in Syria, 87% are Muslim (74% are Sunni; a combined 13% are Alawi, Ismaili, or Shia), 10% are Christian, and 3% are Druze or others.[16]

Suffice it to say that pinning down a precise, collective "Syrian identity" is hardly feasible. In Mikhael's words: "The region is a mosaic, not a monolith."[17] Danahar reports: "It was always hard to say what being Syrian actually meant… There was nothing about Syria that united the people within its borders… Of all the people [in the Arab lands] looking for an identity, the Syrians were the most lost."[18] Issam, from Aleppo, describes Syria's social situation when the war began:

> We weren't educated about the different people in the country, so there wasn't real integration. Arabs didn't know about Kurdish culture. Arabs and Kurds knew nothing about Turkmens…[The same for Syriacs, Assyrians, Druze…] We were all just groups of strangers. A country of closed communities, held together by force.[19]

We are not proposing so far that Syrians displaced from their country have *no* established sense of identity but, rather, that many of the integral aspects on which a national or shared sense of identity might be founded were not strongly in place leading up to Syria's "Arab Spring" in 2011. Nonetheless, until then, "people lived side by side in peace. They enjoyed security and relative freedom."[20] That would all change in March 2011.

The Displaced's Story

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[14] Mary Mikhael, "The Syrian War and the Christians of the Middle East," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 39:2 (April 2015), 69, https://www.globalministries.org/the_syrian_war_and_the_christians_of_the_middle_east/.
[15] Mikhael, 69; cf. Wright, 240.
[16] *CIA World Factbook*, https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/syria/#people-and-society.
[17] Mikhael, 69.
[18] Paul Danahar, *The New Middle East: The Arab World After the Arab Spring* (NY: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), 374, 384, 387.
[19] Wendy Pearlman, *We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled* (NY: Harper Collins, 2017), 7.
[20] Mikhael, 69.

Twentieth-century Syria was a fractured society. The state's leadership had been so volatile that between its independence in 1946 and 1970, it went through twenty governments in coup after coup, with eleven presidents and four distinct constitutions.[21] Hinnebusch observes that "Syria's conflict has deep roots in a national identity crisis" because, with so many contenders for control, "individuals could have multiple identities" depending on the political expediency of their selection.[22] Against this milieu, the secular Ba'ath party took over in a coup in 1963. "Ba'ath" means "resurrection" or "renaissance," and, fittingly, the party blends "socialism and intense nationalism with determination to achieve broader Arab unity"[23] that purports to transcend cultural differences.[24] In 1970, military general Hafez al Assad rose to presidency in the party through ruthless intimidation and promises of a Pan-Arab mission, an identifying factor that endures today.[25] Hafez's son, Bashar, took office after his father's death in 2000. In his inaugural address, Bashar spoke loftily about democratic ideals such as accepting the position of others and avoiding selfishness because "democracy is our duty towards others before it becomes a right for us."[26] The people responded with overwhelming support of the new Assad, who had been educated in the West and, seemingly, brought democratic agendas to the forefront. Such idealism fanned into flame the zeal of the former Assad's opponents, and sociopolitical movements pushed hard for quick and broad reforms. Bashar found them to push too hard, though, and, feeling threatened with yet another coup in Syria's long tradition of coups,

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[21] Wright, 219.
[22] Raymond Hinnebusch, "Modern Syrian Politics," *History Compass* 6:1 (2008), 263-4, DOI: 10.1111/j.1478-0542.2007.00487.x.
[23] Wright, 220.
[24] Danahar, 388.
[25] Hinnebusch, 264-5. There he writes: "A Syrian identity wholly distinct from Arabism has not emerged, with the content of Syrian identity remaining Arab, and the regime continuing to see its legitimacy as contingent on being seen to represent Arab causes, whether the Palestine issue or opposition to the US invasion of Iraq."
[26] "President Bashar al-Assad: Inaugural Address," https://al-bab.com/documents-section/president-bashar-al-assad-inaugural-address. Bashar's strategy is better described as "modernizing authoritarianism" by Volker Perthes in his "Syria under Bashar al-Asad: Modernization and the Limits of Change," *Adelphi Papers* (London: Oxford University Press for IISS, 2004).

the new president pushed back. As people shed light on the corruption in Assad's nepotistic government, arrests and threats increased. Protestors and their family members were harassed, arrested, tortured and killed, just as the former Assad had done.[27] (One Syrian refugee familiar to this author recounted how two of her uncles had gone boating in 1996 and only one returned, terrified but silent. He later confessed that the government had taken his brother and threatened to kill his family if he ever spoke of it. The kidnapped brother was never seen or heard from again.)[28]

Factors besides politics catalyzed the tumultuous times that led up to the beginning of Syria's recent civil war in 2011. The worst drought in 900 years caused one million farmers to abandon their land for work in the cities. Also, skyrocketing youth unemployment and food prices were exacerbated by Bashar's cutting of state subsidies for those in rural areas. Parents married off young daughters to keep them from sex trafficking. The lower and middle classes suffered more and more as Bashar "forsook the poor for the rich."[29] He has built up a regime of political cronies from his fellow minority Alawites so that they depend on him, adding to his power even more, for as goes Bashar so goes the Alawites' fate.[30] All of this amassing aggression at the grassroots level spiked on March 18, 2011 when Bashar's regime arrested and tortured fifteen schoolchildren who had graffitied "down with the regime" (in Arabic) in the city of Dara'a. The children's parents took to the streets in irate protest. Regime troops, called *shabiha* ("ghosts") fired on the crowds, killing some, and returned to do the same at the victim's funerals later on. More protests led to increasingly horrific retaliation from Bashar's regime. In April, the regime tortured, killed, and mutilated the body of thirteen-year-old protestor Hamza al-

[27] Wright, 226.
[28] Interview with Syrian refugee Yara Saif (age 25; from Damascus, now residing in Michigan), April 18, 2021.
[29] Deborah Campbell, *A Disappearance in Damascus: Friendship and Survival in the Shadow of War* (NY: Picador, 2016), 314-319.
[30] Danahar, 373, 401.

Khatib, a resident of Dara'a.[31] Dara'a would become the hotbed of protests and, as such, Bashar made an example of the city to all who would oppose his regime. Tanks and planes bombarded the city for days. They did the same to other protesting cities.

But the rebels equal Bashar's atrocities as both sides retaliate and contend for territorial control, all the while fueled by the region's honor/shame culture. All sides deliver body parts to the families of murdered opponents as threats. Women and girls are raped. Essential goods are pillaged. The unthinkable has become commonplace.[32] Syria has been dismantling itself from the inside. As recently as April 12, 2021, international investigations confirmed that Bashar's regime used chemical weapons on its own citizens at least four times in "acts that imposed deliberate and unconscionable suffering on Syrian victims."[33] The Syrian government is implicated in the disappearances of over 100,000 citizens including some foreigners.[34] As the regime laid siege to cities like Aleppo and reduced whole sections to rubble, rebels turned against their own neighbors and stole food in their fight for survival.[35] Citizens commonly burn plastic bottles to heat their soups of grass, leaves, bark, and anything else they can find.[36] By 2012, the war, worsened by the four-year drought, brought 30% of Syrians below the poverty line and 11% below subsistence levels.[37] By the end of 2015, 12.1 million Syrians needed access to absolute necessities like water and sanitation.[38] The UN Refugee Agency declared in 2016: "Syria is the

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[31] James L. Gelvin, *The Arab Uprisings: What Everyone Needs to Know* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 106.
[32] Robert F. Worth, *A Rage for Order: The Middle East in Turmoil, from Tahrir Square to ISIS* (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016), 67-68, 90ff.
[33] Ned Price, "OPCW Charges Syrian Regime with Chemical Weapons Attack," *US Department of State,* April 14, 2021, https://www.state.gov/opcw-charges-syrian-regime-with-chemical-weapons-attack/.
[34] "Syria Travel Advisory," *US Department of State,* April 21, 2021, https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/syria-travel-advisory.html.
[35] Danahar, 404.
[36] Aeham Ahmad, *The Pianist from Syria: A Memoir* (NY: Atria Books, 2017), 81; Delphine Minoui, *The Book Collectors: A Band of Syrian Rebels and the Stories That Carried Them Through a War* (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020), 123.
[37] Gelvin, 108.
[38] "Art, Music and Poverty in Syria: A Country in Crisis Reclaims Its Homeland," *Borgen Magazine,* June 8, 2018, https://www.borgenmagazine.com/art-music-and-poverty-in-syria-how-a-country-in-crisis-is-reclaiming-its-homeland/.

biggest humanitarian and refugee crisis of our time."[39] To date, 6.6 million Syrians out of a 2011 population of 21 million are refugees living outside of Syria (all but a million in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt) and another 6.7 million are displaced within Syria.[40] Important distinctions are made between displacement statuses (i.e., "refugee" vs. "internally displaced" vs. "asylum seeker," etc.[41]), but in this paper, we will try to account for the identity crises common to Syrians displaced outside of Syria.

Syria's social fabric has also been eroded. According to Ahmed, a Syrian journalist, the hopes of former protestors have been dashed and people's fealty to causes and groups has been compromised by failed efforts, betrayals, and intolerable threats.[42] Syrians' trust for each other is broken as one of their sayings conveys: "between you and I, there's always a spy."[43] Iliyas, from rural Hama, recalls, "Syria had the appearance of being a stable country. But…it wasn't real stability. It was a state of terror. Every citizen in Syria was terrified."[44] The revolution has led to multiple factions claiming territorial sovereignty in continuous king-of-the-mountain feuds.[45] There are so many factions warring in the country, including several Islamic extremist groups (e.g., ISIS, al Qaeda, Muslim Brotherhood, etc.) that have migrated from surrounding nations, that there is a severe deficit of common vision for the country among the government's rebels.

[39] "Syria conflict at 5 years: the biggest refugee and displacement crisis of our time demands a huge surge in solidarity," *United Nations*, March 15, 2016, https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/press/2016/3/56e6e3249/syria-conflict-5-years-biggest-refugee-displacement-crisis-time-demands.html.

[40] "Syria Refugee Crisis Explained," *United Nations*, https://www.unrefugees.org/news/syria-refugee-crisis-explained/, accessed April 19, 2021.

[41] World Relief clarifies the differences: "*Refugee*: an individual who has fled his or her country of origin because of a credible fear of persecution on account of their race, religion, political opinion, national origin, or social group. *Internally Displaced Person*: a person who has fled his or her home but stays within the boundaries of their country. *Asylum Seekers*: a person who flees their country for the same reasons as a refugee but does not prequalify their claim. Instead, they file a claim for asylum after they arrive in their destination country. *Migrants*: those who leave their country due to poverty, natural disaster, general violence, or opportunity. *Undocumented Immigrants*: those who live in another country without legal authorization. Immigrants: inclusive of all of the above. ("A Church Leader's Tool Kit to the Syrian Refugee Crisis" (Winter 2015-2016), 11, https://worldrelief.org/church-leaders-toolkit/.)

[42] Danahar, 375.

[43] Ahmad, 117.

[44] Pearlman, 13.

[45] Vignal, 810.

Another Syrian phrase summarizes the disjointed situation: "You peel the onion and you keep finding more heads" (i.e., there are many leaders but no *one* leader).[46] Thus, what was once a fractured state is, to some, an *irreparably* fractured state. In light of this, while about 70% of refugees hope to return to Syria one day, almost 90% are not planning to any time soon.[47]

Much has been written on Syria's ongoing struggles because much has been suffered, not the least of which relates to the sense of identity for millions of Syrians. One Syrian refugee mused, "We were fed a pride in our name. When we said, 'I'm Syrian,' it carried a certain respect and pride."[48] But that pride has been eroded or eradicated as Syrians face the traumas inside Syria and then, as they enter other countries, they experience the prejudices and demeaning environments outside Syria. One Syrian woman quipped:

> We're basically the living dead. Sometimes I joke…that someone should gather all of us Syrians in one place and kill us so we can be done with this whole thing already. Then we'll all go to heaven and leave Bashar al-Assad to rule over an empty country.[49]

The Syrian crisis is not merely a refugee crisis, it is an identity crisis rooted in decades of instability that has grown into a life-and-death struggle for human and national survival disseminated in the souls of millions of Syrians around the world. Yalda, from a refugee camp in Lebanon, reflected on life in Syria: "We woke up every morning glad we were alive, and went to sleep every night knowing we might not wake up in the morning. There are so many ways to die in Syria now."[50] Many refugees carry survivor's guilt. Aeham Ahmad, the famous "Syrian pianist" who played his piano in the streets of Syria amidst the violence that claimed the life of a twelve-year-old girl as she sang beside him, grieves: "I would have to be reborn a hundred times

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[46] Danahar, 376; Gelvin, 112; Hinnebusch, 265.
[47] "Sixth Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees' Perceptions and Intentions on Return to Syria," *UNHCR*, March 26, 2021, https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/85739.
[48] Pearlman, 157.
[49] Pearlman, 206.
[50] Neil Gaiman, *The View from the Cheap Seats* (NY: Harper Collins, 2016), 492.

before my guilt was paid off. I am condemned to live always with this guilt."[51] Ahlam, a refugee who lives with her two daughters in Chicago, reflects: "Why did I live?… I feel I'm not alive."[52] Yara, a young woman who fled the country as a teenager, reflected in an interview with this writer that she felt ashamed of her national identity when she left Syria. "I hated myself," she recalls. Dina Nayeri and her family escaped to Syria from Palestine in the 1990s only to escape Syria after the 2011 war broke out. She gives insight into the psyche of many a refugee:

> For two decades, our escape defined me. It dominated my personality and compelled my every decision. I relived it time and again… Our story was a sacred thread woven into my identity… If the rational mind is a clean road, ours had potholes, pockets of paranoia and fear… A tortured mind, terror of a wasted future, is what enables you to abandon home… Our shame has helped create a cynical, sedated world wherein being a fully realized human is the privilege of [others]… Refugees resign themselves to deep-tissue change from the day their feet touch new soil.[53]

These reflections are troubling to say the least. But we must say more, for we have not disclosed that which, though under fire during the Syrians' crises, can also provide a language- or a lyric- for the reformation of the displaced one's identity. We now look to how music relates to a Syrian's identity; how it both shapes and reflects back that identity.

Music in Syrian Identity

Music has unique power as a vehicle for both therapeutic reflection and catalytic change according to ethnomusicologists. Because "music becomes an arena for creating and expressing group identity, bonding social groups and establishing emotional connections between people," Kasinitz and Martiniello believe that "music is an increasingly important social space for the creation of identity."[54] Schramm observed that, through the playing of cultural music, the refugee's "identity was reinforced in a culturally blended expression" that still retains one's

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[51] Ahmad, 200.
[52] Campbell, 311.
[53] Dina Nayeri, *The Ungrateful Refugee*: *What Immigrants Never Tell You* (NY: Catapult, 2019), 7-9, 321-2.
[54] Philip Kasinitz and Marco Martiniello, "Music, Migration and the City," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42:6 (2019), 862, DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2019.1567930.

"constant identity."[55] While the "expression system" (i.e., instrumentation, style, etc.) of music predictably changes as refugees interact with new cultures, the "content system" (i.e., words and their cultural meaning as they convey a shared identity) is preserved.[56] The refugee experience has dramatically demonstrated that people in the quest to retain and reform their identities typically adapt their tradition to new expressions so that the core of those expressions- their cultural meanings and identity-born elements- are not lost.[57] More recently, Lidskog has catalogued the multifaceted ways music importantly shapes identity formation among diaspora peoples.[58] He cites findings that show how music can

> cross boundaries between social identities and shape new ones[;] allow people to understand themselves, form and maintain social groups, engage in emotional communication, and mobilize for political purposes[;] and have significant impacts on social interaction, group identity, and the construction of social meaning.[59]

In these ways, music is an important factor in identity formation for anyone, especially those struggling with displacement and its preceding traumas. It gives the displaced "a space for confronting the discomforts of diaspora as it converges with racism, discrimination, violence and inequality," and for recalibrating in new settings and new identities.[60] Leading ethnomusicologist Tim Rice summarizes predominant theories of music's relation to identity, stating first that theories of social identity claim *essentialist* (unchangeable factors like ethnicity, race, class, and gender) or *constructivist* (changeable) bases.[61] Without discrediting the essentialist component, Rice's fieldwork evinces that "people inhabit a world that is 'fragmented' and

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[55] Adelaida Reyes Schramm, "Tradition in the Guise of Innovation: Music among a Refugee Population," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 18 (1986), 97, http://www.jstor.com/stable/768522.
[56] Schramm (1986), 98.
[57] Adelaida Reyes Schramm, "Music and Tradition: From Native to Adopted Land through the Refugee Experience," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 21(1989), 25, DOI: 10.2307/767766.
[58] Rolf Lidskog, "The Role of Music in Ethnic Identity Formation in Diaspora: a Research Review," *International Social Science Journal* 66 (2016), 23-38. https://doi.org/10.1111/issj.12091.
[59] Lidskog, 23.
[60] Tina K. Ramnarine, "Musical Performance in the Diaspora: Introduction," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 16:1 (2007), 5, DOI: 10.1080/17411910701276310.
[61] Timothy Rice, "Reflections on Music and Identity in Ethnomusicology," *Musicology* 7 (2007), 24.

'deterritorialized'… and that life 'routes' are becoming as or more important than 'roots.'[62] He finds that music holds a special "suturing" power (borrowing Hall's and Du Gay's language) to bring together both constructivist and essentialist factors in identity.[63] Stone concurs that music dynamically blends people's historical, individual, social and cultural identities.[64] Rice concludes that music contributes to identity construction in four ways: it "gives symbolic **shape** to a pre-existing or emergent identity"; it contributes a "**feel**" to identity; it provides **shared experiences** by which a community both forms and reflects on its identity; and music carries the **liminal** aspects of one's experience into one's identity.[65] Since Rice's conclusion clearly echoes and synthesizes the findings of other scholars, we will use his four ways to analyze how music has impacted identity formation in displaced Syrians.

First, music "gives symbolic shape to a pre-existing or emergent identity." Rice is referring to the ways a song's characteristics (length, rhythm, melody, etc.) all help interpret its message as a composite of both essentialist and constructivist identity components.[66] Just the sound of certain forms of music elicits a message of identity the way a brass band reminds Americans of patriotic notions, or organ music elicits Christian ideology. For example, the various groups contending for control in Syria use music to reinforce their different agendas and identities. ISIS forbids nearly all music and tries to ban it outright, destroying instruments and musicians alike, as Aeham Ahmad witnessed when ISIS members burned his piano.[67] However, ISIS does use the traditional tambourine-only style of Arabic music, called *nasheed*, to inspire its fighters and promote the agenda of restoring Syria to "the glorious past of Islam." In fact,

[62] Rice, 19-20.
[63] Ibid., 21-24.
[64] Ruth M. Stone, *Theory for Ethnomusicology* (NY: Routledge, 2008), 182.
[65] Rice, 34-35.
[66] Ibid., 35.
[67] After a sniper (probably from the regime, but possibly lSIS) killed 12-year-old Zeinab as she sang next to Ahmad while he played piano in the streets, ISIS caught up with Ahmad again and burned his piano in front of him (Ahmad, *The Pianist*, 196, 220).

"*nasheeds* are so common among both Shia and Sunni Islamist groups engaged in the war that they can be thought of as the soundtrack to the Syrian Civil War."[68] Assad's regime uses both new and old music to legitimize its control and conspicuously announce: "Align with us because we are who Syria was, is, and will be." State television broadcasts concerts of celebrities like Ziad Rahbani as he sings the praises of the president,[69] as well as traditional music reminiscent of Syria's heritage.[70] Fully "aware of the role of music as a tool to disseminate ideology," the Kurds, a people without a nation-state, promote their identity and agendas for Syria through music, especially pop music like rap and rock produced by followers and even militants themselves.[71] Hezbollah, a Shi'ite Muslim organization with a strong presence in Syria and known ally of Assad, has also "put music at the forefront of identity formation," though they follow more traditional styles because of their religiously stricter (Muslim) views.[72] In Syria's revolution, music has become both a weapon and an ally. Different factions use music as weapons against their enemies and propaganda for their sympathizers. The rebels recount the 2011 murder of the singer who wrote and led protesting crowds in one of the songs of the revolution, *Yalla Erhal Ya Bashar* ("Come On, Bashar, Leave"), and then was found dead in a river with his vocal cords cut out.[73] The young revolution is a grassroots movement and, despite being leaderless, they rally to songs of liberation and styles (typically Western) that represent it. For example, Syrian Monzer Darwish's documentary, *Metal Is War,* "surveys the groups and fans making their own noise [i.e. heavy metal music] against the guns [for] there is often no

[68] Agah Hazir, "Music in the Syrian Civil War," *LSE Middle East Center Blog,* September 4, 2019, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2019/09/04/music-in-the-syrian-civil-war/.
[69] Ahmad, 107.
[70] Jonathan Holt Shannon, *Among the Jasmine Trees: Music and Modernity in Contemporary Syria* (United Kingdom: Wesleyan University Press, 2006), 26.
[71] Hazir, "Music in the Syrian Civil War"
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.

distance between the battlefield and the site of artistic creation."[74] Young revolutionaries have also taken up hip hop to convey messages of a democratic, free Syria. Aeham Ahmad, "the Pianist of Syria," who became famous through social media for playing his piano and singing in the bombed-out streets of Yarmouk, recalls how songs of the revolution needed to change in their style (and lyrics) as Syrians became more desperate.[75]

Rice's second way that music affects identity comes into play here: it contributes a "feel" to identity. This way differs some from the "shape" of music the way emotions differ from ideas. Certainly there is interaction between the two, but whereas music's shape conveys statements about the song and the identity piece(s) to which it refers, music's *feel* is far more ineffable and emotive- more sensory even- by virtue of this aspect's being less cognitively based. As Aldous Huxley keenly observed, "After silence, that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music."[76] For instance, Boswall and Al Akash report the huge impact Syrian music has on its refugees "as an important element of [their] emotional survival…both in sustaining a sense of national identity and in expressing and channeling shared emotions and feelings."[77] The scholars found that many female Syrian refugees have formed a new daily ritual of listening to Syrian songs on their cell phones. The ritual mirrors their religious prayers and takes precedence over any indulgences the women might afford. One woman even smuggled out revolutionary songs on a SIM card hidden in her bra. Boswall and Al Akash observe:

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[74] Robin Yassin-Kassab, "The sound and the fury: how Syria's rappers, rockers and writers fought back," *The Guardian*, November 26, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/nov/26/how-hip-hop-and-heavy-metal-are-waging-war-in-syria.
[75] Ahmad, 170, 183.
[76] Jenny Skidmore, "From Discord to Harmony: How Canadian Music Educators Can Support Young Syrian Refugees Through Culturally Responsive Teaching," *Canadian Music Educator* 57:3 (Spring 2016), 9, https://search.proquest.com/openview/1ef7aadfc3ba526d57d1fe534dd8b004/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=9510.
[77] Karen Boswall and Ruba Al Akash, "Listening, Resistance and Mobile Phone Playlists: Musical Listening Practices of Syrian Women Living as Refugees in Northern Jordan," *Social Dynamics* 43:2 (2017), 167-8, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02533952.2017.1368437.

> The songs in these phones played an essential role in their self-expression, the formation and reformation of their identity and their continued connection with their country, those they have left behind, and with God.[78]

Music therapists working with Syrian refugees find that "students can use instruments to 'orchestrate' a variety of emotions" and, consequently, develop higher self-esteem while also developing musical skills.[79] Researchers have found that countless Syrian refugee children, like most young trauma victims, cannot name or explain their emotions, but music therapy increases their ability and desire to converse. The refugees "started learning how to express their feelings and gain insight into their inner world…and the tenderness found in music…helps children achieve relaxation."[80] Songs such as playground jingles have a way of carrying the good feelings along with good memories for those struggling through the crisis of identity common to refugees.[81] Yara revealed that in her first years after arriving in the US as a Syrian refugee, she felt shame about her identity because of her teenage peers' harassment. Yet, she would listen to Arabic music in her bedroom and it would make her feel Syrian- a feeling she liked and retained into her adulthood now as a proud Syrian American.

Third, music provides shared experiences by which a community both forms and reflects on its identity. The first two ways music has an impact on identity can tend to be more personal, but here we note music's powerful collective effect on identity formation. Writes Vanderbilt: "Singing is social glue; it holds people together. Other than sex and food, there are few things besides music to which humans are so compulsively drawn."[82] Music blurs the boundaries between cultural insiders and outsiders because of its magnetic pull on the human psyche based

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[78] Boswall and Al Akash, 172-3.
[79] Skidmore, 10.
[80] Vartan Agopian, "Using Music in the Classroom to Help Syrian Refugees Deal with Post-War Trauma," *International Journal of Educational and Pedagogical Sciences* 12:3 (2018), 370, http://approaches.gr/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Volume-12-2-2020.pdf.
[81] Agopian, 372.
[82] Tom Vanderbilt, *Beginners*: *The Joy and Transformative Power of Lifelong Learning* (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2021), 119.

on affinity, if the sounds are familiar, and curiosity, if they are not.[83] Thus, it can help build bridges between displaced migrants and their new neighbors. "Music can become a means of communication and dialogue between different groups to build some form of shared local citizenship."[84] What makes music so powerful as an identity forming vehicle is its enduring, transportable nature. Songs "do not carry their authorship heavily and they belong, in a very real sense, to the community of victims."[85] And this community knows a solidarity between those displaced from Syria and those they left behind. Biddle observes, "Some of the ways Syrian refugees use song is suggestive of that same desire we see in victims of the Holocaust to refuse the discontinuities of displacement, and to maintain an ongoing intimate relation with the emotional world of 'home.'"[86] Displaced Syrian women listening to songs from Syria on their cell phones confess listening to the songs "all the time" because "it made us feel part of the struggle still."[87] Boswall and Al Akash comment:

> By listening to the songs every evening, they become, like ritual prayers, critical instruments in a teleological program of self-formation, ensuring the listeners never forget the suffering of others, never feel complacent about their own relative comfort, and actively seek ways to access the pain felt by their brethren.[88]

When they hear or perform the songs they carry from Syria, displaced Syrians vicariously step back into relationships with those no longer with them who strongly contributed to their social identity, and they forge stronger relationships with the Syrians- and, potentially, non-Syrians- among whom they live in their displacement. (We will return to this unifying potential of music later in our remarks about music's missiological implications among displaced Syrians.)

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[83] Kasinitz and Martiniello, 858-62.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ian Biddle, "Why We Should Listen to the Music of the Holocaust – and that of Syrian Refugees," *The Conversation*, January 26, 2016, https://theconversation.com/why-we-should-listen-to-the-music-of-the-holocaust-and-that-of-syrian-refugees-53702.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Boswall and Al Akash, 175.
[88] Ibid., 177.

Fourth, music elevates and carries the liminal or relegated aspects of one's experiences into one's identity. Simply put, music can make important that which others deem unimportant but the individual still finds important, and music captures the meaning in one's journey between places (e.g. between Syria and Turkey, or from Syria to a resettlement camp and then to Germany, etc.). These little things that music takes up into one's identity could be idiosyncratic details of one's habits or experiences in Syria. Aeham Ahmad recalls the importance of song lyrics that describe little girls waiting in line for food as they starved to death, or children carrying heavy water containers every day, because people identified themselves and each other in the song's story.[89] Displaced Syrians pour over the inspiring but forlorn songs of the revolution from teen pop stars like Omran Al-bukaai and his song, "Refugee," which has garnered more than 6.1 million views on YouTube. He laments:

> We run away from this life / Who is a refugee who knows about me / A refugee and the tent is killing me… / Once drowned and once burnt / And if I complain, everyone will wrong me / Syria was Syria / And everyone talks about it / What injustice is he [Bashar] doing in it? / It destroys and kills us.[90]

Young Syrian star, Faia Younan, croons a love song for her country in "Love Your Hands," which has 9.5 million YouTube views to date:

> Your eyes are my big dream / a dream as big as tired people's dreams / as big as the goodness of my country / Your hands wave to the people returning home / and carry bread to the hungry ones /
> I love your hands, but more and more I love my country / You will be mine if you love homelands like I do / I will be yours if my people get back home / There my wedding will be, where my heart carries me / and I die for you, die for you, when you're ready to die for my country… / And me, I love you so that we together could step on cannons / and the streets get over-crowded with kids /
> and when the morning arises from the ashes / I will die for you, I will die for you / and I might cheat on you with my country.[91]

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[89] Ahmad, 187, 192.
[90] Omran Al-bukaai, "Refugee," *YouTube*, July 16, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bx4RWo35No8 (translation by https://lyricstranslate.com/en/lajee-laji.html).
[91] Faia Younan, "Love Your Hands," *YouTube*, June 4, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DfQXrwV3w8 (translation by https://lyricstranslate.com/en/ohebbou-yadayka-%D8%A3%D8%AD%D8%A8%D9%8F-%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%83%D9%8E-i-love-your-hands.html).

Samih Shuqeir's popular song, *Ya Heif* ("Oh Shame"), captures the regime's horrific assault on the children and crowds in Dara'a and the ensuing uprisings in 2011. Shuqeir mourns:

> Oh alas, how shameful / A hail of heavy bullets falling on the unarmed people's heads / And children, the age of young flowers being arrested / How can that be? Alas, this is happening in Dara'a, dear mother / The youngsters heard that freedom was at their door, mother / And they went out to greet it / They saw the guns, but, oh mother, they thought / These are our brothers They will not shoot us / But they shot us mother, with live bullets / We were killed by our brother's hand.[92]

Songs like these and so many more that originate in Syria call to the refugees as they listen any way they can. Indeed, amid the carnage of war with no end in sight, and having fled by foot, automobile and boat, Syrians "are reclaiming their identity and culture through artistic expression" and using music to "hold on to the country they will always call home."[93] Through song, displaced Syrians are rebuilding crumbled identities and salvaging what it means to them to be Syrian.

Let us summarize the argument for our thesis so far. Syrians do not have a stable identity at least as far as it relates to their national identity. War disturbed that even more. Music is uniquely capable of handling those instabilities as both a commentary on the struggle and a catalyst for identity formation, doing so according to Rice's four ways. Next, we will pursue a theological rationale for music's interfacing with displaced persons to see that the historic Christian church has joined music to the experience of migration from its nascency.

Music and Migrants in Scripture

From first to last, Scripture includes song as a vehicle for right theology and practice as man relates to God, self, and the world (cf. the creation song of Gen 1 and the heavenly song of Rev 19). One can survey numerous passages that pertain to displaced people, but more specifically, Scripture sets a precedent for music in the identity formation of displaced people.

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[92] Boswall and Al Akash, 177.
[93] "Art, Music and Poverty in Syria," *Borgen Magazine.*

Israel serves as the OT's prototypical displaced people, beginning with Abraham being called away from his homeland (Gen 12) and spanning to the Israelite exiles returning to their ruined homeland (Ezra-Nehemiah). The Psalter recounts songs that carried Israel out of Egypt and through the wilderness (Ps 90 is presumed to be written by Moses; cf. Ex 15:1-21; Num 21:14-18, 27-30), songs that its leaders wrote under the duress of attack and escape (Ps 3; 7; 10; 16-18; 27; 34; 52-59; etc.), and songs that accompanied Israelites' journeys to worship despite persecution and trauma (i.e., the Songs of Ascent in Ps 120-134). Moses compels the people to see his sermonic song (Dt 31:19-32:43) as not mere words but as the center of their identity, their "very life" (Dt 32:47).

In particular, the Psalms have a unique way of identifying with the experiences of displaced Syrians because of the songs' lament genre. One Syrian pastor preached to 200 internally displaced refugees in Syria using Ps 142 as his text because the refugees could easily identify with David as he wrote the song. The pastor says, "The book of Psalms is a Bible in itself. In this book we find all kinds of Psalms that express emotions that represent all situations of life."[94] Matt Paschal, a director in Budapest with Unite World Mission (a ministry to diaspora peoples) notes that "Eastern religion has more ability to deal with suffering. The West sucks at lamenting. Easterners are totally fine leaving the question of suffering open-ended and not tying a bow on it like Westerners."[95] Indeed, suffering is included so greatly in the identity of displaced Syrians that the content of their spirituality and theology *must* include it. Dan Hutton, an Alliance worker in Lebanon, remarks on the efficacy of using Psalms in Arab worship music because they contain a strong form of grief. "Arabic music even sounds sad," Hutton says. "It is engaged with longing and grief. There is an angst in Arab music, and you feel that angst in

[94] "The Psalms Comfort Homs Refugees," *Open Doors*, July 18, 2012, https://www.opendoorsusa.org/take-action/pray/the-psalms-comfort-homs-refugees/.
[95] Interview with Matt Paschal, April 23, 2021.

[refugee] society in how they long for their homeland in this anticipated but unfulfilled sense."[96] Hence, the Psalms are uniquely voiced to incorporate the experiences of displaced Syrians in their national, relational, physical, emotional, and theological upheaval.

Coincidentally, two more specific contextual intersections make the Psalms- the music of the Bible- uniquely pertinent in discussions of displaced Syrians. First, the Psalms are respected among Muslims, who make up the majority of Syrians. Missiologists have noted the Psalms' efficacy at building conversational and intertextual bridges between Muslims and Christians via the Quran and the Bible.[97] In surahs 4:163 and 17:55, the Quran affirms David's authorship of Psalms (called *Zabur*) under God's inspiration, and it even quotes Ps 37:29 in surah 21:105. In fact, ninth and tenth century Arab Muslim apologists used the Psalms (especially Ps 149) to defend the Quran and prophet Muhammed.[98] The oral nature of the Psalms is akin to the Quran that was first given as an oral recitation and is prescribed to remain so according to hadith of Muhammed (e.g., "He who does not recite the Qur'an melodiously is not one of us").[99] Sarwar argues: "The poetic nature of Psalms is equal to the Qur'an as a prayer book, lectionary, and hymnal all rolled into one. It is an invaluable resource for engaging the ritual and spiritual practices of Islam."[100] Others note also a mystic aspect to the Psalms that is engaging to Middle Easterners.[101] In other words, the Psalms share a linguistic, religious, and experiential context known to nearly all Syrians, making the ancient lyrical Scriptures missiologically relevant and helpful to Syrians' identity formation as they can process their experiences through the ancient text.

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[96] Interview with Dan and Miriam Hutton, April 13, 2021.
[97] Yousaf Sadiq, "The Book of Psalms as Bridge-Building between Christians and Muslims," *Evangelical Quarterly* 90:4 (October 2019), 304-5.
[98] Sadiq, 306.
[99] Eric Sarwar, "Missional Singing of the Psalms in Islamic Contexts," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 44:2 (2020), 167.
[100] Sarwar, 169.
[101] Sadiq, 315.

Secondly, the Psalms as displaced Israel's source of confessional theology and emotive spirituality have ancient roots in the Syrian Church, which is also the patriarch of the global Church. Indeed, the birthplace of the title "Christian" is in ancient Syrian Antioch (Ac 11:26) and other famous sites, such as Damascus (Paul's conversion in Ac 9) are waypoints in the story of the early church. Mary Mikhael, the Syrian-born president of the Near East School of Theology in Beirut, observes: "It is legitimate to refer to Syria as the cradle of Christianity."[102] The Syriac Orthodox Church, which boasts that its "foundations can be traced back to the very dawn of Christianity,"[103] has included the Psalms in its liturgy from the beginning. Ephrem the Syrian (306-373 AD) boldly innovated the church's sacred music and incorporated Psalms into his many songs that are still sung in the Syriac Orthodox Church. "The Psalter played an enormous role in the history of the Syriac-speaking churches" as almost all of the manuscripts used to compile the critical edition of the Peshitta (the Syriac Bible) are Psalters.[104] This is not a point to overemphasize, however, since Syriac Orthodox churches retain their sub-culture through their liturgy in a way that makes it difficult for outsiders- be they Syrian or not- to assimilate and, thus, incorporate into a reforming identity. Still, in the search for foundations in identity formation, it must not be ignored that some of the oldest spiritual and musical expressions are rooted in Syria. Reclaiming them in one's identity by Christian rebirth could be said to make one *more* Syrian.

Ps 142 serves as an example of the identity formation for displaced people so prevalent in the Psalms. David, from his hiding spot in a cave, pleads for God's mercy (v.1). He brings complaints to Him (v.2) similar to the way Syrians voiced their complaints to their leaders early

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[102] Mikhael, 69.
[103] "General History," *Syrian Orthodox Church*, https://syrianorthodoxchurch.org/general-history/, accessed April 10, 2021.
[104]Harry F. Van Rooy, "The Psalms in Early Syriac Tradition," in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, ed. Patrick D. Miller and Peter W. Flint (Brill, 2004), 537, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047414797_026.

in Assad's rule. But Syrians' complaints backfired and they were persecuted for speaking up (v.6). They were thrown in prison (v.7) and brought very low (v.6). They feel ignored by those to whom they cried for help, as if "none takes notice of [them]…no one cares for [their] soul" (v.4). Syrians overwhelmingly feel that the rest of the world ignored them in their plight, at least in the first years of the war.[105] Syrians know the exhaustion and fear of escaping and traveling from one's home to unknown places and feeling trapped (v.3). Theirs is typically the plight of the poor, those with no portion among the supplies of resources, those feeling like the walking dead and, so, their cry can echo David's: "I cry to you, O Lord; I say, 'You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living'" (v.5). While Ps 142 gives many touchpoints for displaced Syrians, Ps 22 points to One who is the ultimate suffering and displaced migrant: Jesus.

Jesus knows suffering greater than that which any human has known. On the cross, Jesus used the words of Ps 22 to express his agony. The early church apparently accepted that Ps 22 is prophetically connected to Christ's Passion, for all four Gospel writers include quotations and allusions to the psalm (Mtt 27:46; Mk 15:34; Lk 23:34; Jn 19:24).[106] This Davidic song frames Jesus' crucifixion scene. Jesus, like the psalmist David, experienced spiritual (22:1), relational (22:1, 6), emotional (22:1-2), physical (22:14-17), and social (22:6, 16-18) suffering. But Christ's suffering is of unparalleled proportions when we interpret it through the lens of the NT vision of Jesus, who became sin's punishment for humanity (2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pe 2:24) and so He suffered more greatly than anyone. Heb 2:9-12 teaches that Jesus "tasted death for everyone" and was "made perfect through what he suffered." Yet, Jesus *sings* God's praise as a result (Heb 2:12, quoting Ps 22:22), thus situating Himself securely and unashamedly in His identity as God's Son (Heb 2:9, 12; Php 2:9-11). His Passion began with song after the Last Supper (Mtt

[105] Danahar, 392; Pearlman, 166.
[106] Esther M. Menn, "No Ordinary Lament: Relecture and the Identity of the Distressed in Psalm 22," *The Harvard Theological Review* 93:4 (October 2000), 302, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.1510162&site=eds-live.

26:30; Mk 14:26) and ended with song in death on the cross (Mtt 27:46-50). Jesus is the ultimate sufferer who brought music into His suffering as a way of framing his identity by it and sharing His identity with others.

Finally, Jesus is the ultimate migrant who left heaven to make his home on earth (Jn 1:14), leaving his privileged status to become a lowly servant (Php 2:5-8) among people who rejected Him and cast Him out (Jn 1:11) so that He became a wanderer (Lk 9:58), a "refugee," who was more welcome among society's outsiders than He was its insiders (Mtt 11:19). Similarly, the message that Christians are "aliens and foreigners" (1 Pe 2:11) is not uniquely a NT description. A survey of Scripture's key characters reveals that God's people have often been migrants, people on the move between cultures and places, but under God's direction and redemptive intervention in their travels.[107] God has a track record of using placed and displaced people to reach others both near and far from them. Thus, migration is part of God's plan for redemptive history. It fits to call this pattern "migration as mission." Historically, God's people have been the migrants and those who welcome migrants. Pohl writes, "The early church was quite mobile… The expansion of the church depended on hospitality and on believers who were willing to make a place in their homes for strangers."[108] Something about *un*settling makes one long for settlement, which restates the "rest" motif in Heb 4:1-11 promised to those in Christ. Because Christ makes His home in them, Christians are both temporarily home*less* on earth (1 Pe 2:11) and securely homeward bound (Eph 2:6). This means Christians should have the most involvement with the displaced, both by being migrational themselves (Mtt 28:19; Ac 1:8) and by loving migrants (Ro 15:7). Here we come to the capstone of our argument: discovering how the church can minister to displaced Syrians through music in their identity formation.

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[107] See my unpublished paper, "Migrants and Mission" from CS502, ATS, December 5, 2020.

[108] Christine D. Pohl, "Biblical Issues in Mission and Migration," *Missiology: An International Review* 31:1 (January 2003), 8.

The Church as Musician in Displaced Syrians' Identity Formation

Pope Francis recently produced an encyclical that outlines four responses the church must take towards migrants and refugees. He says the church must welcome, protect, promote, and integrate the displaced.[109] Let us observe and commend the use of music in these four responses among displaced Syrians. First, by "**welcoming**" migrants, Pope Francis endorses the church's involvement in "offering broader options for migrants and refugees to enter destination countries safely and legally."[110] Music has been a helpful catalyst in this regard. Popular Christian artist Audrey Assad (the daughter of a Syrian refugee under the first Assad regime in the 1970s) has promoted the cause of refugees' resettlement through her music. She urges political petitioning, since the US has dramatically reduced the numbers of refugees allowed into the country (in sharp contrast to the rising numbers of refugees in the world from crises like Syria's[111]), and volunteering at resettlement agencies.[112] She recognizes the power of music for the displaced, saying, "Your heart can receive messages of love, acceptance and forgiveness...more quickly when music is involved." The church's posture towards refugees has not been one of welcome, though, when it comes to practice. Pastors admit that their churches "are more likely to fear refugees as they are to help them," and the same pastors "are four times more likely to say Christians should care for refugees than to say their church is [actually] helping refugees

[109] "Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 104th World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2018: Welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating migrants and refugees," *The Vatican*, January 14, 2018, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20170815_world-migrants-day-2018.html.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Jens Krogstad, "Key Facts about Refugees to the US," *Pew Research Center*, October 7, 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/10/07/key-facts-about-refugees-to-the-u-s/.
[112] Kristen Daniels, "Audrey Assad Serves as a Musician and an Advocate for Refugees," *National Catholic Reporter*, April 7, 2017, https://www.ncronline.org/news/media/audrey-assad-serves-musician-and-advocate-refugees.

overseas."[113] There is much room for improvement in the church's welcoming displaced Syrians as Christ welcomed us (Rom 15:7).

Secondly, Pope Francis urges the church to **protect** the rights and dignity of the displaced. To this end, scholars have noted the efficacy of music therapy for refugees both in their identity formation and their overall recovery from the traumas of war and displacement. In fact, research with refugees involved in music therapy reveals that music is "the essential vehicle for conveying inexplicable messages to the depths of the human psyche, thus ameliorating the experience of trauma and emotional turmoil."[114] Music gives dignity to the displaced and can even play a rescuing role as Syrian refugee Mariela Shaker attests. "Music saved my life… [It] is a universal language and through music we can communicate, advocate, inspire and express what otherwise is so difficult to be understood through words."[115] In the very least, churches can follow the example of Zoodochos Pigi monastery in Samos, Greece. The Orthodox nuns there treat the escaping Syrians, meet their immediate needs, and help them on their way.[116] Resurrection Church in Lebanon has also met Syrian refugees with welcome and protection by providing food vouchers, counseling programs for adults, and education classes for children so that now the congregation is 70% refugees![117] These examples inspire action through music or *any* way a church can imagine to protect displaced people.

Pope Francis' third response develops this theme further: the church can use music to **promote** identity formation for displaced Syrians. This means that churches "empower [them] to

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[113] "Churches Twice as Likely to Fear Refugees Than to Help Them," *Lifeway Research*, February 29, 2016, https://lifewayresearch.com/2016/02/29/churches-twice-as-likely-to-fear-refugees-than-to-help-them/.
[114] Bernard Austin Kigunda Muriithi, "Music as the Medicine of Trauma among Refugees in Arizona," *Voices* 20:2 (July 2020), 9-10.
[115] Mariela Shaker, "Music Saved My Life," *UNHCR*, https://www.unrefugees.org/news/music-saved-my-life/, accessed April 15, 2021.
[116] Paul Jeffrey, "Room at the Inn?: Syrian Refugees Hope for Hospitality," *The Christian Century* 132:25 (December 2015), 12–13. search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a6h&AN=ATLAiB8W160629001322&site=eds-live.
[117] Jane Sutton-Redner, "Love Breaks through in Lebanon," *World Vision*, February 8, 2019, https://www.worldvision.org/christian-faith-news-stories/love-lebanon-churches.

achieve their potential as human beings, in all the dimensions which constitute the humanity intended by the Creator."[118] This begins with dropping the label "refugee"- a title many refugees feel ashamed of- and using "newcomer" or "friend" instead.[119] Churches can resource the arts and music creation among refugees as they work out hybridized forms of music and reformed identity expressions. Certainly we hold that one's truest, most secure identity is found in Christ alone as we belong to His family (Eph 4:13; Jn 1:12). But we recognize that Christ's incarnation reveals the need to contextualize this message in the language of culture, which is so well expressed through music. Therefore, the more the church resources and promotes artistry among refugees, the more it fosters the creation of an environment into which the gospel can be expressed, an environment where, as one Syrian said, one can "dream, hope, love…enjoy music…and find the space to be me."[120] This could be done by hosting Syrian concerts, such as those put on by the Syrian Expat Philharmonic Orchestra, which has many Syrian refugee musicians.[121] Groups like this play a small part in fighting to end the fight in Syria whilst providing environments for displaced Syrians to work out and express their identity through song.[122] Most displaced Syrians cannot bring their instruments with them when they flee Syria, but they deeply desire to play, particularly cultural instruments like the *oud*.[123] Churches interested in promoting displaced Syrians can provide access to instruments and even offer lessons by hiring Syrian musicians.

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[118] Pope Francis encyclical.
[119] Pearlman, 161.
[120] Pearlman, 170.
[121] Muhammad Darwish, "Syrian Expat Philharmonic Orchestra Unites Musicians Who Fled War to Europe," *CNN*, November 21, 2016, https://www.cnn.com/2016/11/20/asia/syrian-orchestra-ime.
[122] Khatereh Eghdamian, "Religious Identity and Experiences of Displacement: An Examination into the Discursive Representations of Syrian Refugees and Their Effects on Religious Minorities Living in Jordan," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 30:3 (September 2017), 458.
[123] Noted by Dan Hutton in our interview.

Finally, the church must **integrate** Syrians into the life of the family of God. This is the fullest expression of identity formation that Paul celebrates as the culmination of the gospel when different people come together in unity in Christ (Php 2:1-4; Gal 3:28). Of course, those outside of a trusting relationship with Jesus can still enter relationships with Christian fellowships. Indeed, this *must* take place if the church is to incarnate the gospel (1 Cor 9:19-23; 2 Cor 5:20). Ethnodoxological studies show the importance of integrating cultural music in the church's worship, for "cross-cultural worship builds bridges that embody shared identity in Christ."[124] Hunt argues "that the only viable music for unreached peoples is their own."[125] Some churches with diaspora attenders have begun to integrate ethnodoxological practices by "back-translating" worship songs from their diaspora members. Paschal comments on the impact this practice has as, instead of translating Western songs into the diaspora's language, they translate the diaspora's songs into the host country's language, thereby primarily retaining the diaspora's identity in their song even as it becomes the church's song.[126] This is the direction true integration takes us. These four responses also pattern the pathway to form a new identity in Christ. One is welcomed into the association of believers through hospitality and friendship. Her needs are met and she finds protection in a fellowship and environment that treats her and her culture with dignity. Her identity and well-being are promoted and she is shown the inestimable worth she has to God through Christ, who put her needs above His (Php 2:5-8). Finally, she is integrated through new birth into the family of God where dividing walls are broken, cultural differences are celebrated, and unity in the shared identity of being "in Christ" secures a place for all those Christ rescues.

Conclusion

[124] Brian Schrag, "Creating Local Arts Together: Seven Steps for Facilitating Arts in Community," *Mission Frontiers*, September 1, 2014, http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/creating-local-arts-together.
[125] T.W. Hunt, *Music in Missions: Discipling Through Music* (1987; repr. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 113.
[126] Interview with Matt Paschal. See https://songs2serve.eu/ for examples.

We have shown how important music is in the identity formation of displaced Syrians and how the church has biblical and historical precedents to love and support them through music. Although nationally Syria is broken and divided, spiritually it is a nation whose people are eternally loved by God, who knows what it means to be displaced, to suffer, and to lament. Studies continue to reveal the efficacy of using music in assisting displaced people, but scholars have also begun to note the *lack* of exploration of the connection between music and identity formation.[127] Further study is encouraged and will undoubtedly be pursued in the fields of ethnomusicology, ethnodoxology, and missiology. May our exploration here inspire such curiosity in the way a stirring song inspires even more music. Also, missiologists might investigate the theological implications and missional applications of resourcing displaced Muslims to use their culture's music to write sacred music for the worship of Allah. Where is "the line" between meeting felt needs through music and enabling one to pursue paths away from Jesus? Perhaps Dina Nayeri's story can shed some light here as it wraps up our discussion. Nayeri recalls how she was invited to, and attended, a church retreat years after she came to the US as a refugee. She was welcomed into the youth group and, "after years of daily calibrations" by which she wrestled with her identity, she came to another identity crisis. On the retreat, she enjoyed the songs the youth sang enthusiastically and the group's warm welcome. When one of the leaders approached her and validated her worth and identity, she was deeply moved. She writes, "Here was someone who wasn't pretending to want me around. What a thing, to be loved by a stranger."[128] That is the message of Christ, except *we* are the strangers that are loved by Him who knows each one by name and is the refuge for the refugee, the safe place for the displaced, the Father and King who makes the nationally orphaned- the "people of nowhere"[129]- sons and

[127] So noted by Timothy Rice (2007:18), V. Agopian (2018:369), et al.
[128] Nayeri, 324.
[129] The title of a National Geographic documentary about Syrian refugees, *YouTube*, March 24, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hiujzFNgHcE.

daughters in His everlasting family. Syrians, Iranians, Sudanese, Venezuelans, Afghans, Burmese… the 26 million people who are displaced from their homes, all long for home.[130] The church *must* respond, and doing so musically is not only practical, but deeply meaningful for diaspora peoples in their identity formation. May the church take up the song of the displaced and carry its melody near and far. It's time for the church to make music.

[130] "The World's Refugees in Numbers," *Amnesty International*, https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants/global-refugee-crisis-statistics-and-facts/#:~:text=In%202019%2C%20more%20than%20two,hosted%20by%20126%20countries%20worldwide, accessed April 22, 2021.

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