



Feature: The Forced Migration Edition

CAPA has just concluded the Forced Migration, Displacement, and Education Speaker Series. This series is a product of the work CAPA began in creating the Consortium on Forced Migration, Displacement and Education, which includes Bard, Sarah Lawrence, and Vassar. The consortium is committed to creating egalitarian models of education and solidarity in order to address the refugee crisis. With this goal in mind, CAPA has hosted three speakers whose perspectives give insight into the pressing issue of forced migration.

The first talk was titled The ABCs of Immigration. It was a workshop given by a Brooke Mead, a representative from the Berkshire Immigrant Center (BIC) located in Massachusetts. The BIC is dedicated to advocating for refugees and immigrants in their county, as Pittsfield, MA has seen an influx of new residents who have been forced to migrate from their home countries. The BIC helps over 800 individuals from

over 70 countries each year, and is located in one of the most diverse counties in Massachusetts. Mead elaborated on the complexities of immigration law and dispelled some common myths that pervade the topic. In fact, out of 11 million individuals who are “out of status”—or without legal status to remain in the country—40 percent have a visa that expired. These individuals came into the country legally, and due to a variety of reasons, including the difficulty of navigating immigration law, their visas have expired. Mead believes that the only fix is comprehensive immigration reform.



The second event featured two academics from Turkey: E. Ahmet Tonak, and Burcu Yasemin Seyben, who signed a peace petition and were forced into exile as a result. Their talk, "The Peace Petition and the Academic Purge in Turkey," discussed the harassment they faced as a result of their decision to sign the peace petition. This divisive petition opposed state violence inflicted on the Kurdish population of Turkey, which has resulted in the deaths of many civilians, including many women and children. Government officials condemned the signatories of the petition, claiming they had caused riots across Turkey. Some signatories were searched, interrogated, fired, or exiled. Seyben was summoned back to Turkey from a conference in order to be interrogated. Tonak fled in order to protect his spouse and young child. Both have sought refuge in the U.S. with the help of the Institute of International Education's Scholar Rescue Fund, which provides institutions for academics who are not safe to teach in their home countries.

The final talk in the series, titled "Dignity, Compassion, and Action," featured Georgetown freshman Saria Samakie. Samakie was kidnapped by the Syrian government and underwent brutal interrogation. After leaving Syria, he settled in Jordan where he created a nonprofit which provides education to urban refugees. Samakie's talk was organized in collaboration with senior, Rumana Mehdi, who

describes her thoughts on the talk below.

[Read Public Policy Forum @ CAPA Summaries here](#)



Student Spotlight: Rumana Mehdi Discusses Speaker Sari Samakie

In times of hardship and crisis, it is hard to evoke feelings of empathy and compassion. It is harder still to think about forgiveness. Few people learn the value of dignity and human life and respect it even when they are close to death and hope is all that they have. Sari Samakie is one of those people. Growing up in Syria during the civil war, Sari endured multiple kidnappings and death threats. Now a freshman at Georgetown University, Sari says this torturous experience taught him the importance of respecting culture, traditions, family values, and integrity.

His talk at Bennington, titled “Dignity, Compassion and Action,” allowed attendees to hear a first-hand account of the civil war and how it impacted the people who lived through it. Perhaps the most important thing that I took away from this talk was how small actions of kindness can make a huge difference in people’s lives. As peace builders and conflict resolvers, we tend to think of grand gestures in order to save people’s lives. However, Sari taught us that in times like these, it is important to respect culture and traditions. He refused to be rude to his kidnapper, tolerated his beatings, respected the man because the aggressor was older than him. Sari refused to run away, because that would mean that he would die as a fugitive. To him, that was unacceptable. Not only was Sari able to overcome these difficulties, he was able to establish himself as a role model.

Another important aspect of Sari's talk was his emphasis on the need for education. He was admitted into King's Academy in Madaba, Jordan where he finished high school. While he acknowledged that he was lucky to make his way back into academics, there are millions of children in refugee camps, waiting to gain access to education. Sari's NGO, [Fikra 3al Mashi](#), focuses on creating a sustainable curriculum for urban Syrian refugees in Jordan. The talk also made me realize what a privilege education is and how lucky we all are to have access to educational institutions.



Talking Shop: Field Work Terms in CAPA this Winter

[Haley House:](#) Kelsey Broadfield will be working at Haley House, a community-driven organization that aims to address the structures of social inequality affecting residents in the South End of Boston. Haley House aims to create radical pathways toward economic independence through four main channels: direct services, affordable housing, urban farming programs, and transitional employment opportunities. Kelsey will be living with Haley House's long-term, live-in community; assisting with the soup kitchen, elder meals, and "pay what you can" community dinners; and working with the Haley House administration.

[Lumina Foundation:](#) Bennington College has received a grant from the Lumina Foundation to research work integrated learning in higher education (i.e. FWT, federal work study, volunteering). Robert Ransick and Debbie Warnock will be joined by Mareme Dieng, Eve Mefferd, and Lily Withington to research how to make these opportunities more accessible and effective in preparing students for work.

[Syrian Smile Makers Team:](#) Ahmad Yassir will be traveling to South Turkey to work with the

Syrian Smile Makers Team, a humanitarian organization run by a coalition of Syrian groups that organize workshops for Syrian refugees in the region. These workshops help refugees become established in Turkey. The organization also runs a number of schools for Syrian refugees. Ahmad will be working with one such school to design a course that combines peace building, public action, history, arts, and culture to engage Syrian youth and encourage them to continue their education. He will also attend UN meetings on humanitarian issues and education.

The Prado Day Center: Molly Forgaard will be working for the The Prado Day Center through the Community Action Partnership of San Luis Obispo. The Prado Day Center is a refuge for homeless people that provides free meals, laundry, and classes. It also provides overnight emergency shelter when the temperature drops.

Bernie Sanders: Elizabeth Fox will be working for Vermont Senator, Bernie Sanders, in Washington, DC this Field Work Term. She will serve as an assistant to the Senator and his staff, working with constituents and in the Senate

World Relief: Kayla Nicholls will be working in Seattle, WA with World Relief, an organization that helps resettle refugees. They help refugees gain employment, find housing, learn English, work with immigration and legal services, and generally adjust to living in the United States. She will work as a cultural companion to share meals, practice English, and help out with practical advice about American life while developing a mutual friendship with the refugees.



The CAPA Newsletter is a student-run project with the mission of developing the CAPA community.

We want to share the amazing work that our friends and coworkers are producing. Each issue will include features on students and faculty members with inspiring projects, CAPA classes tackling important issues, and upcoming events and opportunities.

We want your feedback! If you have any suggestions to make this newsletter something that's truly beneficial to you [let us know](#).

EM '20 and KN '20

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