
In Syria, Romenzi used his camera to expose the events there to a worldwide audience. While in Syria, he spent most of his time in al-Qusair, a city in the western part of the country which belongs to Homs Province. Romenzi’s photographs of al-Qusair depict daily life as well as the effects of the ongoing fighting. His images capture the impact of the violence on individuals and families, whether fighters or civilians.

In the midst of the fighting, Romenzi had to learn about the techniques and weapons being used. He had to balance his desire to take interesting pictures with the need to stay safe, and his photographs offer proof of his success in that effort. For instance, his pictures of the fighting in al-Qusair demonstrate the utter brutality of the violence and capture the reactions of people in extreme situations. Romenzi believes that people reveal themselves completely under such conditions: devoid of masks or facades. His observations indeed correspond with his photography, both of which testify to the fact that there is nothing “clean” in war, no recognizable difference between good and bad, right or wrong.

Romenzi discovered that the Free Syrian Army has a complex relationship with photography. Many in the FSA refused to reveal their faces for fear that they might be recognized and their families arrested—or worse. Others recognized that Romenzi played an important role in exposing the events in al-Qusair to the outside world but feared giving the impression that they were participating actively in the violence. Journalists were often admonished to portray the FSA and the Syrian people as victims.
In Syria, Romenzi saw more death than in Egypt and Libya. As his images indicate, shells fired from mortars and tanks do not discriminate between FSA soldiers and Syrian civilians; anyone could be injured or killed at any moment. The pictures he took during his two days in Homs not only reveal the extent of the violence, but also the paucity of resources and skilled individuals needed to cope with the violence.

After two days of heavy bombardment, Romenzi—like his activist and FSA hosts—was barely able to leave the media center. He decided things had become too dangerous when he finished photographing the hospital and the refugees huddled in a basement for safety. With help, Romenzi managed to flee Homs and return to al-Qusair.

Romenzi's photographs explain that the photographer's experience in Syria was important on a personal as well as a professional level. The time he spent in al-Qusair and Homs filled him—for the first time—with a sense of duty to the people and to the place. He felt a need to do something. While his photographs are often urgent and focused on moments of pain and despair, they also note that despite the insanity of the violence, life somehow continues.

In his photographs, Alessio Romenzi demonstrates the emotional connection he has with the subjects in those pictures. More to the point, the emotions expressed in the body of Romenzi's work make it clear that this collection of images is far more than just another example of photojournalism.

(9) Passages in italics are extracts from an interview of Alessio Romenzi by Monika Borgmann, June 2012.