In the alleys of Homs in western Syria, my camera looks for what is left of the city and struggles to find any remnants. On the sidewalk lies a stray cat that does not let out a sound. It drags its memories of destruction and hides behind one of the buildings reduced to rubble. The smell of war and the deafening silence of its aftermath pervade.

HOMS: The City
Homs was one of Syria’s most important industrial centers before the civil war. But in the spring of 2011, demonstrators took to the streets in many neighborhoods across the city demanding the change of a one-party regime that has been ruling Syria for more than four decades. Homs was dubbed by dissidents as the “Capital of the Revolution,” and became an opposition stronghold in the Syrian Civil War. After a series of escalations, violent clashes, blockades, and large-scale shelling, the regime consolidated its grip on most of the city in 2014. In September 2016, the remaining rebels and their families evacuated Al-Wa’er, the last neighborhood under rebel control in the city, resulting in a government takeover.
I roam the old district of the city trying to capture the massive destruction. In spite of limited attempts to restore the area, all signs of normal life are absent. While walking on the streets for hours, I encounter a handful of people, one of whom rides a bicycle, trying to navigate the rubble. In a square that witnessed the beginnings of the uprising against the Syrian regime, I stand up and look around. A clock tower catches my attention. But the clock is idle, perhaps to mourn the death and exodus of those who used to inhabit the surrounding neighborhoods.
Two women walking through an old, deserted market in central Homs. It was once the center of bustle and economic prosperity.
Another view of the rubble and destruction in Homs. A few residents were able to return, but the city was changed irrevocably.

A view of the front of an open shop in one of the least destroyed areas in the city. The text on the damaged door reads, “shop for sale or rent.”
Rubble and the remnants of a mannequin are all that remain of a market in Old Homs.
In most of the neighborhoods in Homs you can find the remnants of clothes, mattresses, photo frames, and other objects that residents left behind.

In this area in Old Homs, a tree remains amongst the concrete that was reduced to rubble during the shelling.
Only a mattress remains in the rubble. It may have belonged to a local rebel, a regime soldier who later entered the city, or a displaced resident.

A picture of Jurat Al Shayyah, one of the neighborhoods where the uprising began. The whole area was obliterated by shelling.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marwan Tahtah is a professional photographer who has been working for Lebanese newspapers for more than ten years. He has also worked on projects managed by the UNDP, Lebanese Red Cross, Goethe-Institut and many other organizations. Marwan’s work has been on display in many professional photography exhibitions in Beirut and Paris. In June 2016, he received a Master Diploma in Photography from the École Nationale Supérieure de la Photographie in Arles, France.