JoLLE@UGA®
JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE & LITERACY EDUCATION

"Stories that are worth sharing": Insights from Middle Eastern Refugee Migration Stories through an Inquiry into Narrative

Jennifer C. Mann

Abstract: This inquiry into narrative explores the often-silenced migration narratives of three refugee students from Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq. It is centered around two particular wonderings based in a critical literacy framework. First, what tenets of critical literacy seem most prominent in the narratives of refugee students from the Middle East? Second, what critical understanding of their migration experience do refugee students bring to the classroom? The conceptualized framework is understood as *The Centrality of Experience in Critical Literacy*, wherein experience is central and valuable. This study applies the framework using stories as the source from which to better understand how individuals make sense of their worlds. Through a five-phase analysis, which included: free coding, literature derived coding, analysis of time and sequence, narrative pattern coding, and analysis of language, I find rich understandings of 1) the political, non-neutral nature of the world, 2) a fight for access to knowledge, and 3) a hope for envisioned future possibilities as the students seek belonging, refuge, and dreams, reclaiming the power of their own narratives. This inquiry into narrative additionally contributes the three stories and two audio recordings as a cultural data set, which can be used in the classroom.

Keywords: critical literacy, migration, narrative, storytelling, refugee

Jennifer C. Mann is currently a doctoral candidate in the Teacher Education and Learning Sciences program at NC State specializing in Literacy and English Language Arts Education. Her research interests include critical literacy, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and the social emotional well-being of marginalized students. She has spent 15 years as an educator. Her recent publications include *Language Arts*, *Urban Education*, *Oregon English Journal*, and *Fringes*.

Introduction

As a humanitarian crisis of epic proportions is unfolding within and around Afghanistan, it is ever more pertinent that educators properly attend to the unique needs of students from refugee backgrounds in their classrooms. Upward of 30 million Afghans experience widespread starvation, face tremendous oppression and brutality, and clamor for a mass exodus (United Nations News Global Perspective Human stories, 2022). The neighboring countries and developed nations around the world, including the United States, are seeing massive increases in refugee resettlement (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2021). Teachers who have not been accustomed to teaching refugee students are now having to figure out how best to do so (Newcomer et al., 2020).

Often in schools, the experiential knowledge of students from refugee backgrounds is overlooked and replaced with basic literacy concepts (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Lau, 2012; Locke & Cleary, 2011) that withhold opportunities to critically engage with texts (Morrell, 2007). Those from refugee backgrounds face ongoing discrimination, exclusion, and othering in schools and are silenced, and in turn, further silence themselves (Çelebi et al., 2017; Hoff & Armstrong, 2021; Sierk, 2016; Subedi & Maleku, 2021). Their educational experiences have been marred by these discriminatory actions and deficit perspectives (Daniel & Zybina, 2019; Mann & Lee, 2022; Roxas & Roy, 2012). And yet, students from refugee backgrounds have powerful experiential insight and deserve to have their words heard and amplified as they engage in meaningful reading, writing, and sharing.

The increase in students from refugee backgrounds in classrooms coupled with deficit perspectives that silence them makes research into their experiential knowledge and assets of great importance. For these reasons, I engage in this inquiry into Middle Eastern refugee students' migration narratives. Personal and collective stories reveal people's understandings of the world and impact the way in which they create, interact with, and understand texts, thus playing a central role in critical literacy (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Janks, 2013, 2014; Luke, 2014). There is increasingly more research on the value and importance of enacting critical literacy with students from refugee backgrounds, but such research is largely theoretical in nature (Alford, 2014, 2021; Lau, 2015). This study seeks to contribute to two important aspects of scholarship—the personal and the practical. This study contributes personal insights into the critical perspectives already possessed by some Middle Eastern refugee students. It also provides practical applications for the enacting of critical literacy with refugee students via pedagogical implementation using the resources provided through this study.

In this study, I use the literacy methodology of *inquiry into narrative* to examine and interpret elements and insights within stories of lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1995). Inquiry into narrative concerns itself with research puzzles and wonderings rather than concrete research questions (Clandinin, 2013). This study is centered around two particular wonderings related to critical literacy:

Figure 1

Centrality of Experience in Critical Literacy

What tenets of critical literacy seem most prominent in the narratives of refugee students from the Middle East? And what critical understanding of their migration experience do they already bring to the classroom? This inquiry article illuminates the critical literacy concepts grappled with by Middle Eastern refugee students and challenges educators to enact critical literacy with refugee students in their classrooms.

Relevant Frameworks & Literature

I envision *critical literacy*, *storytelling*, and *experience* in a framework conceptualized by three concentric circles (see Figure 1). Critical literacy is the outer circle, providing the vessel for the enactment of critical pedagogies, which I argue in this paper is optimally expressed as stories. Thus, storytelling is a significant embodiment of critical literacy, where life experiences are permitted to count as valuable capital and reveals experience as wealth. Since lived experience is central and valuable to critical literacy, it is important to center experience, particularly as it is told in stories. Through the examination of experience, one can garner insight into the perspectives, values, and ideas that others hold. In the forthcoming sections, I will explore my understanding of *critical literacy as foundation, storytelling as revelation, and experience as wealth* as they relate to the conceptualized framework (The Centrality of Experience in Critical Literacy) and research wonderings.

Critical Literacy as Foundation

At the core of critical literacy is the acknowledgement that in order to read the word, one must also read the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Reading does not simply involve "decoding the written word or language; rather, it is preceded by and intertwined with knowledge of the world" (Freire & Macedo,1987, p. 29). Each person's individual and collective experiences impact their understanding of the world and by extension, their understanding of the word (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Janks, 2013, 2014; Luke, 2014). Thus, those from refugee backgrounds necessarily and inherently read the word and the world in a different manner than those who have not had such experiences. Critical literacy deals specifically with reading the word and world in relation to power, identity, difference, and access to knowledge, skills, tools and resources (Janks, 2013) through the recognition of the political, non-neutral nature of the world (Comber, 2015; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Janks, 2013, 2014). The political nature includes both the global, governmental politics and the "everyday life" micro-politics people encounter (Janks, 2014). Students whose lives have been greatly impacted by lack of access to resources and the repercussions of complex and fraught political decisions are going to read and interpret power differentials differently than their peers who have not experienced these occurrences. Furthermore, critical literacy involves seeing the patterns and complexities of the world, naming those structures and ideas, envisioning possibilities, and seeking to reshape the inequitable facets that negatively impact the communities which have been marginalized by these societal inequities (Comber, 2015; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Janks, 2013; Luke, 2014).

Due to the grave injustices of poverty, the acquisition of education is not sufficient to equalize educational opportunities for already marginalized students (Comber, 2015; Janks, 2014; McLaren, 2015). Inherent within critical literacy, however, is the possibility to empower people towards action for the sake of change (Comber, 2015; Janks, 2013). It is for this reason that those among us who have been so marginalized be offered an opportunity at education which has the potential to liberate and elevate (Freire & Macedo, 1987). It is through the pedagogical implementation of critical literacy that such

opportunity exists, particularly for those from refugee backgrounds.

The use of critical literacy with refugee and immigrant students has shifted over the decades. Critical literacy with English language learners, including refugees, initially came into use in the 1990s with a linguistic focus on the use of language as a tool to analyze power and resources (Wallace, 1992, 1995, 1999). The use of linguistics opened further to also include attention to grammar, thus employing grammar to critically analyze texts (Janks, 1999). The 2000s began a broader approach which explored the use of critical literacy within countercultural spaces with refugee and immigrant students (Lewison et al., 2002). Additionally, discerning the meaning of text developed into a focus on the deconstructions of texts (Janks, 2000; Luke 2000). The 2010s took deconstruction to the next level with an emphasis on text redesign (Janks, 2010; Lau, 2012). At the same time, multilingualism and translanguaging were being promoted as assets (Lau et al., 2016). The most recent focus of critical literacy with refugee and immigrant students highlights multimodality of text and critical digital literacy with a heavy emphasis on design and creation with critical digital literacy (Alford 2021; Pandya, 2019). There is increasingly more research being done on the value of critical literacy instruction and enactment with refugee and immigrant students (Alford, 2014, 2021; Lau, 2015), but far less research on the critical understandings they already possess.

In response to an influx of refugee students at one Quebec school, a study was conducted to explore a participatory action research project where the English Language Arts and Second Language teachers focused on refugee students' experiences in an effort to promote an understanding of personal and sociopolitical circumstances of forced migration through embodied critical literacy (Lau, 2020). The students engaged in a one-year study into issues that those from refugee backgrounds contend with, through discussing stories of migration while engaging in visual arts to enhance understanding through critical reflections. Students responded positively to the multisensory approaches to critical literacy, which provided an aesthetic experience that fostered reflexivity and civic empathy. The study highlights the affordances of critical literacy with and about refugee students, reinforcing how critical literacy engagement allows students to be affected and to affect others through the power of stories.

"The enactment of critical literacy, which invites the telling and listening of stories, has profound potential both individually and collectively. Narratives, testimonios, vignettes, naming, stories, and counterstories are all central to the work of critical literacy."

Storytelling as Revelation

The enactment of critical literacy, which invites the telling and listening of stories, has profound potential both individually and collectively (Enciso, 2011; Lau, 2020). Narratives, testimonios, vignettes, naming, stories, and counterstories are all central to the work of critical literacy (Campano, 2007; Campano et al., 2016; Jimenez, 2020; Nieto, 2017; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Storytelling uniquely positions students as co-constructors of knowledge and sense-makers of life (Campano, 2007; Jimenez, 2020). In her study, Jimenez (2020) found that through apprenticing students into a "language of validity, legitimacy, dignity, and value" (p. 801) around their personal narratives, they became empowered and took initiative in sharing stories which revealed deep understandings of themselves and the world.

Table 1

Foundational Tenets of Critical Literacy

Critical Literacy Tenet
Naming and renaming the world
Poverty as a result of injustice
Literacy as power
The political, non-neutral nature of the world
Inequality and differential access
Acting upon the world
Hope for the future
Conditions of possibility
Seeking to reshape inequitable facets
A fight for liberation

Similarly, Campano (2007) found that through providing students with multiple opportunities to share their experiences, they began to independently and collectively process what they learned, gaining some degree of control over their past as they made sense of their experiences. Their stories reflect "readings of the world that are embedded in collective history and group experience" (Campano, 2007, p. 60). As students from refugee backgrounds share their stories "their subjective experiences become a vehicle through which to better understand a shared world" (Campano, et al., 2016, p. 50). Thus, storytelling is a personal and powerful means of expressing one's reading of the world (critical literacy), as perceived through one's independent and collective experience.

Experience as Wealth

Through marginalization, oppression, and persecution, refugee communities have acquired unique insight into the world; they have paid a very steep price for the acquisition of such capital. Capital encompasses the social assets of a person, including cultural knowledge and how it translates to power (McLaren, 2015). Although deficit perspectives of refugees exist in the media and public perception, those from refugee backgrounds possess multiple forms of capital, including aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, resistant, and migration capital, which together are considered community cultural wealth (Jimenez, 2020; Yosso, 2005). Cultural capital is "accumulated, like a deposit in the bank, but *cultural wealth* [emphasis added] is meant to be shared" (Yosso, 2006, p. 77), making an important distinction between the individual nature of capital and the communal nature of wealth. In Jimenez (2020), she found that incorporating community cultural wealth and family histories as counterstorytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) allowed migration experiences to become a form of capital, whereby communities countered deficit narratives and were enriched through the telling of their stories. Possessing community cultural wealth enriches the entirety of one's community. Wealth is gained through experiences of migration, and it is important that those from refugee backgrounds are given the time and space to share their experiences and for those who are not from refugee backgrounds to gain insight into the experiences of those who are.

Methodology

I used the methodology of inquiry into narrative in order to highlight stories as an enactment of critical literacy and a significant source from which to uncover the capital of experience. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) describe inquiry into narrative as a method for using stories as the data to derive theory similar to grounded theory analysis (Montero & Washington, 2021). Through studying personal stories, inquiry into narrative presents us with an opportunity to understand people's lived, told, and written experiences and to study "human lives conceived as a way of honoring lived experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding" (Clandinin, 2016, p. 17). Inquiry into narrative

concerns itself with stories told and seeks to better understand how individuals understand their worlds (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Narrative research can offer voice to traditionally silenced perspectives and is therefore a "socially just research methodology" (Montero & Washington, 2021, p. 300). Inquiry into narrative, for numerous reasons, is therefore a fitting research methodology for this study into the experience and understandings of Middle Eastern refugee students as understood through their written stories.

Context and Data Collection

For this inquiry into narrative, I analyzed three written migration narratives. In 2021, I put out a call through a local nonprofit serving families from refugee backgrounds. The call asked for refugee migration narratives written by young adults; I did not ask for the stories to contain any specific topics. I engaged in purposeful sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and due to the rising instability in the Middle East and the influx of Middle Eastern refugees to the United States, I selected three stories written by students from Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq. Two of the narratives were composed in 2021, and the third was written four years prior. The three migration stories were written either during the high school or college years of each student, all of whom are current college students in the state of North Carolina. Additionally, the three students lived in the same urban apartment complex and were former high school students of mine. It is deeply personal and vulnerable to share one's story and doing so shows a great degree of trust. It takes even more trust when someone is asking to not just read or hear but analyze one's personal story. It is therefore not surprising that students with whom I have an established relationship are the ones who answered the call I issued for such personal stories. Their narratives all contain self-selected pseudonyms and are included with minor edits only to punctuation, verb use, and an occasional insertion of a preposition or an article for greater ease of readability. I have chosen to leave the content and word choice of the narratives in their beautiful, authentic forms. The narratives in their entirety are included in the appendix.

"It is deeply personal and vulnerable to share one's story and doing so shows a great degree of trust. It takes even more trust when someone is asking to not just read or hear but analyze one's personal story."

Analysis of the Data

The three narratives underwent a five-phase analysis, each conducted by hand using multiple printed copies of the narratives and several colors of highlighter and pen. The first phase of coding involved freely coding for general concepts of critical literacy. During the second phase, the concepts were developed and categorized based upon a literature review of foundational tenets of critical literacy (Miles et al., 2020) (See table 1.) At the end of the second phase of coding, I tabulated the instances of each critical literacy tenet in order to narrow my focus to the three most prevalent codes, which were found to be 1) the political, non-neutral nature of the world; 2) access to knowledge, and 3) hope for the future. I additionally revised the wording of the codes to more accurately reflect the ideas contained within the narratives. For example, I changed inequality and differential access to access to knowledge to more precisely name what I saw (See table 2). My third phase of coding concerned itself with the narrative elements of time and sequence (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Specifically, I analyzed the allocated time spent dealing with issues related to

Table 2

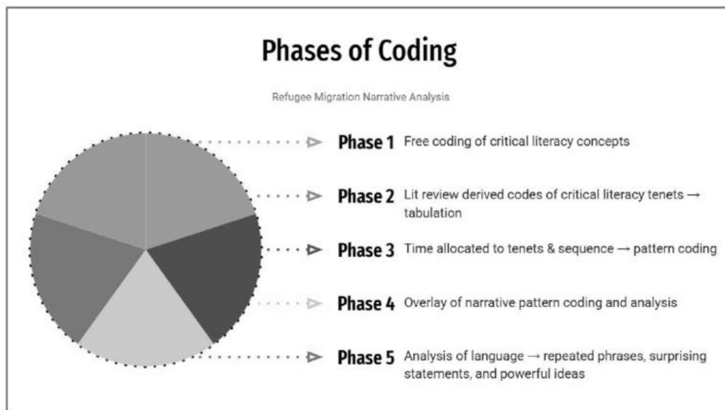
Coding Table: Most Prevalent Tenets of Critical Literacy

Narrative	**Critical literacy tenets (codes) & example excerpts**		
Pseudonym, Age & Countries of Migration	**The political, non-neutral nature of the world**	**Access to knowledge**	**Hope for the future**
Lale, age 26 (Afghanistan → Pakistan → Iran → Turkey → US)	"No matter how much I would force myself to fit in, at the end of the day I was still an immigrant in a foreign country who was forced out of her own country."	"In Iran, migrants were not welcomed and I was not accepted to school which made me want to go to school even more."	"I know that like many other immigrants who are forced to flee their country I had a rough beginning but those obstacles brought me to a country that allows me to turn my dreams into reality."
Hariri, age 21 (Syria→ Jordan→ US)	"My country's condition has been very dangerous. It killed demonstrators who demanded freedoms, there was no independence for the Syrian people."	"It was a difficult life for my family and my education, no food, and dangerous people around us."	"We were welcomed by the American government to seek refuge in the U.S."
Alex, age 22 (Iraq → US)	"When I asked my mom, 'Mom, where is my dad?' she told me, 'He went to our relatives' because she was very terrified to let anyone know he was working with the Americans."	"None of the kids knew English. My dad started to teach me English beginning in 2005. But it was a secret. We did not tell others we are learning English."	"I heard before that anyone who has a dream in America can make it come true. Now I live there, I live in that place. I live in the land of the dreams."

each of the three most prevalent critical literacy tenets, since significant time devoted to an issue indicates an importance attached to it. I also analyzed the order and placement of particular critical literacy tenets in the individual narratives. For example, I asked such questions as: How much of the narrative was spent addressing matters relating to each tenet? How did they begin and end their narratives? What did they mostly focus on? During this process, I engaged in pattern coding in order to gain a better understanding of the "bigger picture" (Miles et al., 2020). During this process, I drew a rough visual representation via multiple-colored lines to emphasize the length of the individual sentences,

Figure 2

Phases of Coding



representing the order and amount of time in which they spent discussing each tenet. A fourth phase of analysis occurred in which I overlaid all of the visual representations of each individual narrative in order to look for overarching patterns across all three. I engaged in a fifth and final phase of inquiry into narrative analysis, which relied on dissecting the specific language within each narrative. During this phase I identified repeated phrases, surprising statements or words, and powerful ideas in order to help identify significant moments within the narratives (Montero & Washington, 2021). (See Figure 2 for an overview of the phases of coding.)

Positionality

This study is important to me because I have a deeply invested personal and professional commitment to the community from which the students in this study come. I know Lale, Hariri, Alex, and their families well because I was their English teacher during differing academic school years between 2013 and 2017. I was an English teacher for 14 years, during which time most of my students were newly arriving refugee and immigrant students in an urban public school in North Carolina. I not only taught these students during school, but also volunteered as a tutor for a community-based organization which served their community. I spent a significant amount of time outside of school investing in the lives of my students and their families. Despite my commitment to serving students from refugee backgrounds, I myself am not from a refugee background. I am a white, monolingual, English speaking American woman from rural Southern Virginia. I grew up in an impoverished community and am a first-generation college student who does not identify with many of these students' experiences, but I seek to understand them more fully.

A great degree of vulnerability and honesty is needed to both share and examine migration narratives. I understand the weighty responsibility and opportunity that my former students have entrusted to me by sharing their stories, and so it is with care that I approach their narratives and this study. I seek to embody a humanizing approach to research, which started first with the questions of *why me?* and *why this?* (Patel, 2016). In answering *why me*, I look at my own path. Although I left the K-12 classroom in the Fall of 2020 to begin my research journey as a PhD student, I made a genuine promise to my students to make education better for them and their families. I also promised to bring them along in whatever ways possible. In asking for narratives, I am able to bring their migration stories into a space in which they can be seen and meaningfully shared as a source of knowledge. I am currently the one who serves as the connection between these young people and a world of research, and I am strategically positioned to help shed light on issues that they contend with. Through ethical research practices which center student voices and involve a high degree of collaboration, I seek to uplift these students and also maintain their dignity and handle their "data" with care (Paris, 2011). I am therefore committed to not reducing these students' personal migration narratives down, but rather reading, rereading, and analyzing them in all their beauty and complexity and include them in the appendix for others to read, explore, analyze, and appreciate.

Individual Insights

Storytelling is a powerful means of conveying both experience and knowledge; critical literacy invites inquiry which is largely mediated by our own experiences. As such, I cannot simply read, analyze, and draw universal truths from these refugee migration narratives apart from an acknowledgement of my own biases and perceptions. Rather, I can share what it is I see based upon my analysis, using the conceptualized framework, as observed through the lens of my own understanding. Furthermore, inquiry into narrative as a methodology does not seek to provide answers in the form of findings, but rather integrates the contextualized stories as insights which provide nuanced understanding into lived experiences (Montero & Washington, 2021). Below, I organize the insights by first presenting aspects of each of the three narratives as they contend with the three prominent tenets of critical literacy 1) the political, non-neutral nature of the world; 2) access to knowledge, and 3) hope for the future. Then, I present my synthesis of collective insights through an application of the conceptualized framework of the centrality and power of experience in critical literacy.

"I cannot simply read, analyze, and draw universal truths from these refugee migration narratives apart from an acknowledgement of my own biases and perceptions. Rather, I can share what it is I see based upon my analysis, using the conceptualized framework, as observed through the lens of my own understanding."

Lale: A Story of Seeking Belonging

Lale was born in Afghanistan in 1995, during the height of the Afghan civil war. In reflecting on her experience, Lale wrote:

> Ever since I was born I was forced to move multiple times due to safety reasons. My country has been in war since I was born, making it difficult for me to belong anywhere. Every time I was forced to move, I had to start everything over and learn a new language and adapt to a new culture.

Large portions of Lale's childhood and adolescence have been impacted by the political nature of life and her forced relocations propelled by the non-neutral nature of the world and a search for belonging. Her repetition of "since I was born" signals the tremendous magnitude to which war and forced relocation have impacted her life. Traveling first to Pakistan, then failing to find safety there, Lale's family was forced to seek new refuge. Attempting to make a life in Iran didn't work either, as the "discrimination and inequalities" forced her family to "take an unsafe path which included walking at nights and hiding during the days through mountains" in order to try again to find safety. They found some safety and acceptance, but still great hardship in Turkey. Lale wrote, "In Turkey I felt welcomed. Even though I had to sit and sleep on cardboard for a while, it still didn't bother me because I was happy for being treated equally and with respect." The financial hardships of forced migration weighed heavily upon Lale and her family, but she still found solace in not experiencing discrimination in this new country. Powerful politics drove them from one place to another, as they sought safety and belonging.

It was also a fight for access to knowledge that drove Lale and her family from one country to another. Corrupt politics fed widespread discrimination and

withholding of education. From the introduction to conclusion, her narrative spoke to the personal ways in which education was withheld from her and her subsequent fight to access it. While living in Iran, Lale longed for an education, but “migrants were not welcomed,” and Lale was denied “basic human rights,” including access to education. She wrote that this experience “made me want to go to school even more.” She used the inequities she faced as catalysts in her pursuit for education. In the conclusion of her narrative, she wrote, “Knowing that I was denied education during my childhood motivated me to work hard.” With determination, access to education, and teacher support, Lale seized and is still seizing the opportunities of higher education in the United States, which she feels “would have been denied” in her previous countries.

It is, therefore, with hope for envisioned future possibilities that Lale looks ahead. She concluded her migration narrative with these words:

> After eight years of living in the US, I am now a citizen who feels belonged and not like an outsider. Knowing that I have equal rights makes me feel encouraged. I know that like many other immigrants who are forced to flee their country I had a rough beginning but those obstacles brought me to a country that allows me to turn my dreams into reality.

That belonging which was absent since birth, came to be found in the freedom, opportunity, and education that she experiences in the United States.

Hariri: A Story of Seeking Refuge

Hariri’s narrative similarly opens in a surprising and striking way which also speaks to his marking of time. Despite being born in 2001, he wrote, “My life story starts in 2011 as the civil war begins in my country.” He feels his story only began once there was political upheaval, as though his story before that time lacked the level of significance it later gained through the civil war. Four times he labeled his country as “dangerous” in his opening lines, and he repeatedly wrote that the Syrian regime killed people, including people he knew and loved. His perspective in his narrative was driven by his family’s need for refuge as a result of the implications of the political, non-neutral nature of his world. Nearly the entirety of his story detailed the corrupt politics of the Syrian regime and the personal impact it had on him and his family.

The influence of the Syrian regime impacted Hariri’s access to education. His narrative is bookended with inequitable access to knowledge. In the beginning, he wrote that while in Syria, “It was a difficult life for my family and my education, no food, and dangerous people around us.” When Hariri expounds upon “a difficult life,” he mentions education ahead of food and safety, signifying the significance of the role it plays in his life. Later in his narrative, he directly ties education to life improvement. Once they made the life-threatening journey out of Syria, to a Jordanian refugee camp, and then into Jordan, he started “going to school and our lives are getting better” through the restoration of educational opportunities. Those opportunities, however, were met not with refuge, but with “bigotry from the people of Jordan.” Hariri was treated like an outsider.

It wasn’t until Hariri and his family arrived in the United States that they felt some level of acceptance. He closed his narrative with a bit of hope for the future. He wrote, “We were welcomed by the American government to seek refuge in the U.S.” His use of “welcomed” and “refuge” speak to that which was lacking in both Syria and Jordan. but stress what he longed for: belonging and safety.

Alex: A Story of Seeking Dreams

Like Hariri's narrative, Alex's story begins also with the political and personal impact of terrorism. Dreaming of a better future for his children, Alex's father secretly supported the US Army, and subsequently put his family at great risk by doing so. Alex wrote, "Because of this [ISIS's pursuit of his father], we left our town [in Iraq], my family and my relatives, my school, everything." Nearly three fourths of Alex's story describes the political, non-neutral nature of the world in which he lived. Alex wrote, not only of the political events, but also of the deeply personal impact those events had on him. He wrote using intimate relational language [emphasis added in subsequent quotes]: "The situation was *dangerous* for *my mom* and *me*;" "a *crazy* story happened to *me*;" "In 2014, exactly on February 14, the day of love, there was *no love* because ISIS entered *my* city;" "*my father* was *very fearful*." Politics and particularly terrorism, drove Alex and his family from their country and everyone and everything they knew and loved.

"Critical literacy not only involves seeing the complexities of the world, naming structures and ideas, but also taking action towards envisioning possibilities, and seeking to reshape the inequitable facets."

Due to extremist politics, Alex had to covertly access the knowledge he sought because it was a strictly prohibited type of knowledge—that of the English language. Alex wrote:

> My dad started to teach me English beginning in 2005. But it was a secret. We did not tell others we are learning English. Too many people hated Americans. But my dad, he loved America and he secretly wanted to help America.

Through an act of subversion to the Islamic State, Alex and his father fought for the knowledge they dreamt of obtaining. The potential power of literacy altered the course of life for Alex's family. His father sought to read, write, and speak English as a means to attempt to reclaim his country from the hands of terrorists.

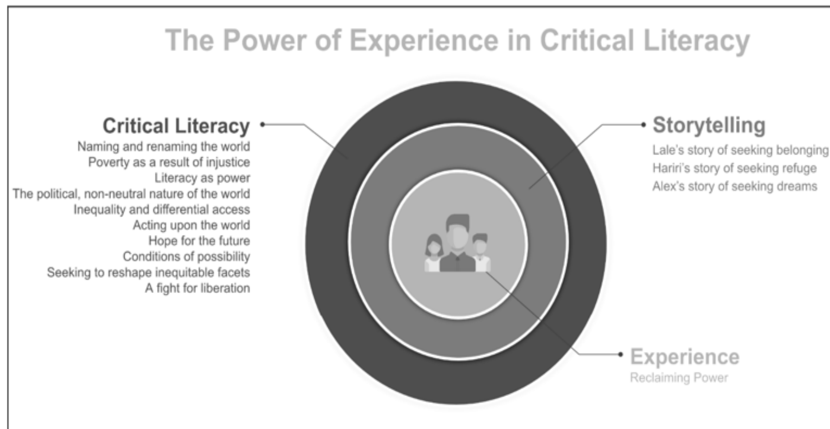
When Alex and his family could no longer safely stay within Iraq, they were given refuge in the United States. It was here that Alex crafted new visions for his future. He concluded his narrative with hope in the envisioned possibilities the United States offered him through these words: "I heard before that anyone who has a dream in America can make it come true. Now I live there, I live in that place. I live in the land of the dreams."

Collective Insights

These experiences of seeking are, in the words of Lale, "stories that are worth sharing." They provide tremendous insight into their own lives. For these three Middle Eastern students from refugee backgrounds, an understanding of the world as political and non-neutral was inescapable. They all lived lives which were crafted by geopolitical occurrences and in which politics loomed large over their past and casts a shadow into their present. Critical literacy is "built on exploring personal, sociopolitical, economic and intellectual border identities" and "grounded in the ethical imperative to examine the contradictions in society between the meaning of *freedom*, the demands of social justice, the obligations of citizenship and the *structured silence* that permeates *incidences of suffering in everyday life*" (Bishop, 2014, p. 52, emphasis added). Accordingly, these students from refugee

Figure 3

The Power of Experience in Critical Literacy



backgrounds contended with and examined the realities and implications which stem from the extensively political, non-neutral nature of their lived experiences. Furthermore, rather than yield to the "structured silence" (Bishop, 2014), they spoke out and told their stories, putting the onus where it belongs, thus pushing back against societal expectations of silence and seizing greater control over their own narratives (See Figure 3).

Collectively, their narratives speak to how their understanding of access to knowledge moved beyond mere understanding and into a *fight for* access to knowledge, bringing into play a vital component of critical literacy: action sought to rectify injustices (Bishop, 2014). Lale, Hariri, and Alex narrated an experience which resulted in a struggle to gain access to education as a basic human right which they and their families insisted upon and ultimately obtained.

The experiences of Lale, Hariri, and Alex in their fight for education directly impacts their individual perspectives on education and their personal participation in it. Critical literacy concerns itself with not only access but power (Janks, 2000). It is through domination that access can be denied and through which oppression and silencing occurs. As seen through the ways in which they each place responsibility and blame where it is due, all three of these young people expressed a perceptive awareness of the role of power. It is, therefore, significant to note that in narrating their own story, they exercised power over what gets told and in which way, thereby reclaiming the power of their own narratives. Critical literacy not only involves seeing the complexities of the world, naming structures and ideas, but also taking action towards envisioning possibilities, and seeking to reshape the inequitable facets (Bishop, 2014; Comber, 2015; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Janks, 2013; Luke, 2014). All three students concluded their own narratives with a hope for envisioned future possibilities. They dared to seek despite the brokenness and inequity which shaped their experiences.

These envisioned possibilities were all rooted in their hope of the perceived equitable and equalizing education American schooling can provide. Critical literacy embodies a view of the future as holding great potential through reshaping in order to achieve greater equity and opportunity (Luke, 2014). If Lale, Hariri, and Alex believe that there is power for their future prospects via an education in the United States, then we as educators must commit to making these envisioned futures into realities through instruction that is in fact more equitable and potentially equalizing, despite the inadequacy of past reality. More equitable instruction is grounded in critical literacy pedagogies, rooted in students' capacity to act upon an unjust world, and built upon the bedrock of the critical literacy tenets with which these young people already possess (Alford, 2014, 2021; Comber, 2015; Janks, 2000).

Discussion

This inquiry into narrative provides not often explored, but significant insights into the criticality with which Middle Eastern refugee students see the

world through their rich understandings of 1) the political, non-neutral nature of the world, 2) a fight for access to knowledge, and 3) a hope for envisioned future possibilities as seekers of belonging, refuge, and dreams. The value of critical literacy enacted with refugee students is well established, as is the power of storytelling for marginalized students (Alford, 2021; Campano, 2007; Campano et al., 2016; Enciso, 2011; Jimenez, 2020; Lau et al., 2016; Lewison et al., 2002; Nieto, 2017; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). It is important for educators moving forward to harness the power inherent within their refugee students' experiential insights through a multitude of opportunities to tell their stories, and to introduce students who are not from refugee backgrounds to the experiences of those who are.

To this effort of narrative exploration, creation, and inquiry, this study contributes the three written narratives (and two accompanying audio recordings) contained within the appendix as a cultural data set (Enciso, 2011; Lee, 2007). Cultural data sets, particularly those comprised of students' stories, can be used for academic literary study in both future research and the K-12 classroom (Enciso, 2011). My participants and I hope teachers will embrace and incorporate these narratives as a form of mentor texts and sources of rich experiential knowledge. Some suggestions for use are: supplemental texts to pair with other classroom literature (e.g. *Persepolis*, *Enrique's Journey, A Long Way Gone*), personal narrative inquiry projects, launching points for Youth Participatory Action Research, and source documents for global engagement projects.

These stories told personally, yet collectively become a critical literacy text from which educators can provide windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors (Bishop, 1990) for their students. With more than 80 million people forcibly displaced, it is ever more important to highlight the experiences of those from refugee backgrounds (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Global Trends Report, 2020). Allowing students to be co-constructors of knowledge and sense-makers of life through writing themselves into the curriculum and making room for their stories and engagement of inquiries has a transformational and lasting impact (Campano, 2007; Enciso, 2011; Jimenez, 2020; Jocson & Cooks, 2011). Using students' stories helps to build an affirming, community cultural wealth mindset, and amplifies and honors, not silences, often marginalized and minimized voices (Mann & Lee, 2022).

As long as such grave disparities exist in this world, critical literacy will be essential, particularly for marginalized students, and especially refugees (Alford, 2021; Janks, 2013, 2014). As these students seek belonging, refuge, dreams, and reclamation of power, we as educators, have the opportunity to engage with our students in critical reading, writing, researching, and storytelling so that we might all participate in shaping a more just world.

References

Alford, J.H. (2021). *Critical Literacy with Adolescent English Language Learners: Exploring Policy and Practice in Global Contexts.* New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis.

Alford, J.H. (2014). "Well, hang on, they're actually much better than that!: Disrupting dominant discourses of deficit about English language learners in senior high school English. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique, 13*(3), 71-88.

Bishop, E. (2014). Critical literacy: Bringing theory to praxis. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing, 30*(1). 51-63.

Bishop, R. (1990). Mirrors, Windows and Sliding Glass Doors. *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom, 6*(3), ix-xi.

Campano, G. (2007). *Immigrant Students and Literacy: Reading, Writing, and Remembering.* Teachers College Press. New York.

Campano, G., Ghiso, M.P., Rusoja, A., Player, G.D., & Schwab, E.R. (2016). "Education without boundaries": Literacy pedagogies and human rights. *Language Arts, 94*(1), 43-53.

Çelebi, E., Verkuyten, M., & Bagci, S. C. (2017). Ethnic identification, discrimination, and mental and physical health among Syrian refugees: The moderating role of identity needs. *European Journal of Social Psychology (47)*, 832– 843. doi: 10.1002/ejsp.2299

Clandinin, D.J. (2013). *Engaging in Narrative Inquiry.* New York. Francis & Taylor.

Clandinin, D.J. (2016). Engaging in Narrative Inquiry—Developing Qualitative Inquiry (Vol. 9). New York: Routledge.

Clandinin, D.J., & Connelly, F.M. (1994). Personal experience methods. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research methods* (pp. 413-27), California: Sage.

Comber, B. (2015). Critical Literacy and Social Justice. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 58*(5) p. 362-367.

Connelly, F.M., & Clandinin, D.J. (2006). Narrative inquiry. In J. Green, G. Camilli, & P. Elmore (Eds.), *Handbook of complementary methods in education research* (3rd ed.) (pp. 477-87). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design. Choosing Among Five Approaches.* 4th ed. Washington, DC: Sage.

Daniel, S. M., & Zybina, M. (2018;2019). Correction to: Resettled refugee teens' perspectives: Identifying a need to centralize youths' "Funds of strategies" in future efforts to enact culturally responsive pedagogy. *The Urban Review, 51*(3), 369-369. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-018-0489-2

Darling-Hammond, L. (2010). *The Flat World and Education: How America's Commitment to Equity will Determine our Future.* Teachers College Press. New York.

Enciso, P. (2011). Storytelling in critical literacy pedagogy: Removing the walls between immigrant and non-immigrant youth. *English Teaching : Practice and Critique, 10*(1), 21-40.

Freire, P., & Macedo, D. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the word and the world*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey Publishers.

Hoff, M.A. & Armstrong, S.L. (2021). The Language-Literacy Ripple Effect on College-Goingness for a Refugee-Background Student, *Literacy Research and Instruction*. doi: 10.1080/19388071.2021.1921890

Janks, H. (1999). Critical Language Awareness Journals and Student Identities. *Language Awareness. 8*(2), 111-122. doi: 10.1080/09658419908667122

Janks, H. (2000). Domination, Access, Diversity and Design: A synthesis for critical literacy education. *Educational Review, 52*(2), 175-186.

Janks, H. (2013). Critical literacy in teaching and research. *Education Inquiry 4*(2) p. 225–242.

Janks, H. (2014). The importance of critical literacy. In J. Pandya & J. Ávila. *Moving Critical Literacies Forward.* (pp. 32-44). Routledge.

Jimenez, R. M. (2020). Community Cultural Wealth Pedagogies: Cultivating Autoethnographic Counternarratives and Migration Capital. *American Educational Research Journal, 57*(2), 775-807, doi: 10.3102/0002831219866148

Jocson, K., & Cooks, J. (2011). Writing as a Site of Struggle: Popular Culture, Empowerment, and Politics of (In)Visibility. In V. Kinloch (Ed). *Urban Literacies: Critical Perspectives on Language, Learning, and Community. Language & Literacy Series,* (pp. 145-159). Teachers College Press.

Lau, S. (2012). Reconceptualizing critical literacy teaching in ESL classrooms. *The Reading Teacher, 65(5)*, 325-329.

Lau, S. (2015). Relationality and emotionality: Toward a reflexive ethic in critical teaching. *Critical Literacy: Theories and Practices, 9*(2), 85-102.

Lau, S., Juby-Smith, B., & Desbiens, I. (2016). Translanguaging for Transgressive Praxis: Promoting Critical Literacy in a MultiAge Bilingual Classroom. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies. 14*. 1-29. doi: 10.1080/15427587.2016.1242371

Lau, S. (2020).Translanguaging as transmediation: Embodied critical literacy engagements in a French-English bilingual classroom. *Australian Journal of Applied Linguistics, (3).* 42-59.

Lee, C. (2007). *Culture, literacy, and learning: Taking bloom in the midst of the whirlwind.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Lewison, M., Flint, A.S., & Sluys, K. (2002). Taking on critical literacy: The journey of newcomers and novices. *Language Arts. 79*. 382-392.

Locke, T., & Cleary, A. (2011). Critical literacy as an approach to literary study in the multicultural high-school classroom. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique, 10*(1), 119-139.

Luke, A. (2000). Critical literacy in Australia: A matter of context and standpoint. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 43*(5), 448-461.

Luke, A. (2014). Defining critical literacy. In J. Pandya & J. Ávila. *Moving Critical Literacies Forward.* (pp. 19-31). Routledge.

Mann, J.C., & Lee, C.C. (in press). "They just go by making their own hate story": Interrogating stereotypes with refugee students in community-based spaces". *Language Arts.*

McLaren, P. (2015). *Life in schools 6th edition: An introduction to critical pedagogy in the foundations of education*. New York: Longman, p. 119-192.

Miles, M.B., Huberman, A.M., & Saldana, J. (2020). *Qualitative data analysis: a methods sourcebook* (4th ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Montero, M.K., & Washington, R.D. (2021). Narrative approaches: exploring the phenomenon and/or method. In M.H. Mallette & N.K. Duke (Eds.). *Literacy Research Methodologies* (3rd ed) (pp. 291-312). New York, NY: Guilford.

Morrell, E. (2007). *Critical literacy and Urban youth: Pedagogies of access, dissent, and liberation.* New York: Routledge.

Newcomer, S.N., Ardasheva, Y., Morrison, J.A., Ernst-Slavit, G., Morrison, S.J., Carbonneau, K.J., & Lightner, L.K. (2020). “Whoa… Welcome to America!”: Supporting Refugee Background Students’ Socioemotional Well-Being, English Language Development, and Content Area Learning. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education.* doi: 10.1080/02568543.2020.1734697

Nieto, S. (2017). Becoming sociocultural mediators: What all educators can learn from bilingual and ESL teachers. *Issues in Teacher Education, 26*(2), 129-141.

Pandya, J. (2019). *Exploring critical digital literacy practices: Everyday video in a dual language context.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Paris, D. (2011). ‘A friend who understand fully’: notes on humanizing research in a multiethnic youth community. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education 24*(2), 137-149.

Patel, L. (2016). *Decolonizing educational research: From ownership to answerability.* New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Polkinghorne, D.E. (1995). Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education. 8*(1), 5-23.

Roxas, K., & Roy, L. (2012). "That's how we roll": A case study of a recently arrived refugee student in an urban high school. *The Urban Review, 44*(4), 468-486, doi: 10.1007/s11256-012-0203-8

Sierk, J. (2016). Religious literacy in the new Latino diaspora: Combating the "othering" of Muslim refugee students in Nebraska. *Journal of Inquiry and Action in Education, 7*(1), 1.

Solórzano, D., & Yosso, T. (2002). Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 8(1),* 23-44.

Subedi, B., & Maleku, A. (2021). Bhutanese–Nepali Young Women’s Experiences with Racism Inside and Outside of Schools. *Educational Studies, (57)*2, 142-165, doi: 10.1080/00131946.2021.1878176

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2021). Figures at a glance. https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2020). Global Trends Report. https://www.unhcr.org/flagship-reports/globaltrends/

United Nations News Global perspective Human stories (2022, Jan 11). Afghanistan: UN launches largest single country aid appeal ever. https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/01/1109492

Wallace, C. (1992). Critical language awareness in the EFL classroom. In N. Fairclough (Ed.). *Critical Language Awareness* (pp. 59-92). London, UK: Longman.

Wallace, C. (1995). Reading with a suspicious eye: Critical reading in the foreign language classroom. In G. Cook, & B. Seidlhofer (Eds.). *Principle and practice in applied linguistics* (pp. 335-347). Oxford, UK: Oxford University.

Wallace, C. (1999). Critical language awareness: Key principles for a course in critical reading. *Language Awareness, 8*(2), 98-110.

Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 8*(1), 69-91. https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332052000341006

Yosso, T. J. (2006). Critical race counterstories along the Chicana/Chicano educational pipeline. New York, NY: Routledge.

Appendix

"Coming to America"

By: Lale

Everyone's life is full of stories that are worth sharing. Everyone has a story to tell and no one can describe and tell it better than the person who experienced that life. Ever since I was born I was forced to move multiple times due to safety reasons. My country has been in war since I was born, making it difficult for me to belong anywhere. Every time I was forced to move, I had to start everything over and learn a new language and adapt to a new culture. I had not experienced stability and proper education until I moved to the United States.

I was born in Afghanistan in 1995, during a crucial wartime. My family migrated to Pakistan for a safe life. After living there for about 5 years, I had to move to Iran because Pakistan was not safe anymore. In Iran, migrants were not welcomed and I was not accepted to school which made me want to go to school even more. In Iran my family members and I could not walk freely due to the fear of deportation. Immigrants almost had no basic human rights in Iran. They were forced to work at jobs which Iranians themselves would be ashamed to do for a wage that was less than the minimum wage. These discrimination and inequalities made my family decide to move again to another country illegally and take an unsafe path which included walking at nights and hiding during the days through mountains.

After one week of walking, starvation and the fear of getting caught we arrived to a country that accepted immigrants which was Turkey. In Turkey I felt welcomed. Even though I had to sit and sleep on cardboard for a while it still didn't bother me because I was happy for being treated equally and with respect. I was enrolled to school by the government and we were treated like every other human being. It took me a while to get used to Turkey because I had left every one of my friends in Iran and I had to start over again. In school I struggled greatly because of the language barrier. Even though I learned the language and adapted to the culture I still felt left out. While everyone else looked similar I was the only one that looked different. No matter how much I would force myself to fit in, at the end of the day I was still an immigrant in a foreign country who was forced out of her own country.

After a while of living in Turkey my mom found out that qualified immigrants could get accepted to United States. We enrolled into United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which would allow us to move to the United States once we presented our family's situation and our purpose to go to the United States. It would take several years before we were sponsored to the United States.

After living in Turkey for seven years our case moved forward and we were sponsored to the United States. I was just beginning to get used to Turkey when we had to move again. Moving to America had the most impact on me because it happened during my teenage years. I had reset my life back to square one. But I knew this time it was going to be different because I knew I was here to stay and did not have to move again. Upon my arrival to US, I did not feel like I was the only one that appeared different which made me feel welcomed. I was immediately enrolled in school with very limited English. I felt like I was behind from other students but I knew that I had equal opportunities and rights as my classmates which was a relief. I had to translate my homework into either Turkish or Persian because I was struggling with English.

United States was a completely different country than the previous countries I had to immigrate. The lifestyle and the culture were very challenging but I was ready to overcome all the obstacles because I knew this was my life now. In school I met students who were in similar situation. All of my teachers were very encouraging. My teachers helped me throughout my high school years and even until now. One of my high school teachers is someone who I can turn to for help anytime, even now so many years later. Without her high school would have been very challenging for me.

I successfully graduated high school and am studying in college right now. Knowing that I was denied education during my childhood motivated me to work hard towards my degree. United States provided me opportunities that would have been denied to me if I was anywhere else. After eight years of living in the US, I am now a citizen who feels belonged and not like an outsider. Knowing that I have equal rights makes me feel encouraged. I know that like many other immigrants who are forced to flee their country I had a rough beginning but those obstacles brought me to a country that allows me to turn my dreams into reality.

“Civil War”

By: Hariri

My name is Hariri. I am 20 years old from Syria. My life story starts in 2011 as the civil war begins in my country. It was a difficult life for my family and my education, no food, and dangerous people around us There was a very dangerous Syrian regime. It killed ordinary people for no reason, Many Syrian people have been killed, and people I know, and love have been killed. My country's condition has been very dangerous. It killed demonstrators who demanded freedoms, there was no independence for the Syrian people. They were still persecuted by the government, and it was a criminal dictatorship.

The situation was very dangerous in Syria, so my father wanted to go to Jordan. At that time, my mom was pregnant and the border was closed, so we walked to Jordan. It was very terrifying to walk in the night and fear of the Syrian army, the crisis was dire, and my mother was pregnant. Thank God, we were able to cross the border without any problems. The Jordanian Army has received us. It was really cold, and my mother was pregnant, and we were put in camps.

We could not bear the camp, so we left and went to Amman, the capital. We rented an apartment and I had to work to support my dad and my mum, so I was 12 years old at the time.

I start going to school and our lives are getting better.

There was some sort of bigotry from the people of Jordan, but few of them they called me a refugee, which made me sad.

We were welcomed by the American government to seek refuge in the U.S.

This is my true story, and that is it.

“On the Border of Freedom”

By: Alex

My name is Alex. I’m from the Middle East, specifically Iraq. There is where my story starts. I was born in December 3 the year of 2000, in a village. After 6 years, I started my school in the primary school. I was very smart and got all As. When I was 6 years old I was the only one in my town who knew all the English alphabet. None of the kids knew English. My dad started to teach me English beginning in 2005. But it was a secret. We did not tell others we are learning English. Too many people hated Americans. But my dad, he loved America and he secretly wanted to help America.

In 2007 my dad went away and started to work with the U.S. Army. No one knew about my father and his work with the U.S. Army. The U.S. Army was in my country because they were trying to make Iraq free from the Baath regime and the situation was very wicked, too. There was a lot of killing and bombs which were dangerous for us. The situation was dangerous for my mom and me, but she didn’t tell anyone about that because my country was unsafe. When I asked my mom, “Mom, where is my dad?” she told me, “He went to our relative” because she was very terrified to let anyone know he was working with the Americans.

Then when the U.S. Army went outside of Iraq, the Iraqi government started to fix everything that was wrong. They started to pay more money for the people, but Iraq was still dangerous until that moment. In 2011, the situation started to be better and more safe. In 2012, my father tried to apply to IOM. IOM means International Organization for Migration that helps the people who worked with the U.S. Army; it gave them a chance to come to the U.S. We applied to that in 2012. It took a few years before we came to the U.S., but before we came a crazy story happened to me.

In 2013 we heard about ISIS, or the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. ISIS is a group of people who they think the Islamic religion is killing the people who are from a different religion or the Shiite Muslims or th eSunni who were fighting them or who worked with the U.S. Army. In 2014, this terrorists came inside Iraq. They started in Al-Anbar then they expanded to Mosul, Deale, Salah-Alden. I was living in Salah-Alden. In 2014, exactly on February 14, the day of love, there was no love because ISIS entered my city. In that time my father was very fearful. The terrorist group started to fire all the government positions in my city. When they came in at first, they weren’t looking for my father. But after a month, they started to look for him. Because of this, we left our town, my family and my relatives, my school, everything. We traveled by car to Erbil my relatives and I rented one very small house that held six families. There was one bathroom in the house. It was very hard for us. We stayed in Erbil about 3 months. The three-month physical conditions were extremely harsh.

After two days we arrived in Baghdad but these two days were the hardest moments in my life. We crossed rivers, lakes, and deserts. The army was in the area when we arrived in Baghdad. We waited a week over there and we moved to Basra, south Iraq, because we head over there is more safe and the people are so nice. In the past we had heard the people in Basra are the nicest people in Iraq. We went to Basra by the train. That was my first time I was inside a train. It was fun for me. We lived in Basra, home of the Shiite people for seven months. We were Sunni, but the people were very nice to us. They helped us with money and food.

After seven months in Basra, the IOM called us. They said “We are IOM. We are calling you to tell you that you have a Medical examination in September 2, 2015.” My father cried from the happiness. We were very happy in that moment. We went to do the medical examination and two days after the medical examination, they called us and said “ On September 29, 2015, you have a date of travel.” We went to all our relatives to tell them we will go to U.S.A. on September 29!

We arrived at the airport at 5 o’clock. We flew from Iraq to Jordan, from Jordan to Germany then from Germany to the United States in New Jersey. From there we then flew to Raleigh, North Carolina.

And now I’m in U.S.A with my family. America the place of freedom, the place that everyone hopes to come study. I heard before that anyone who has a dream in America can make it come true. Now I live there, I live in that place. I live in the land of the dreams.