

Migrant Storytelling in the 21st Century:
Creating Understanding, Empathy, Community, and Perspective for Migrants and Audiences
Alike

Alia Davis
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I. Introduction

100 million. 100 million people no longer sleep in their beds, cook in their kitchens, or frequent their favorite coffee shops. 27.1 million people are sleeping in tents, fighting for food, waiting in limbo.¹ 53.2 million people are displaced in their own home country, a stranger to a place they know so well.² 4.6 million people are waiting to be safely placed and processed while seeking asylum from life threatening forces.³ Millions more scattered across the globe in various stages of the refugee experience. 100 million forced displacements as of May 2022.⁴ 100 million different stories to tell.

The power of storytelling is best explained by Viet Thanh Nguyen's introduction to *The Displaced*. In the introduction to this collection of short stories and essays by refugee writers, Nguyen articulates the purgatorial existence of refugees. "Invisible and hypervisible," he says, "refugees are ignored and forgotten by those who are not refugees until they turn into a menace. Refugees... are unseen until they are seen everywhere."⁵ When someone is displaced, they immediately become part of a number or statistic. They are another mouth to feed, person to house, or refugee to be sent home. They are no longer judged by their character or value to society, they are simply seen as a refugee.

Today, there are approximately 100 million displaced people globally.⁶ A number that large feels insurmountable to refugee advocates and all consuming to the refugees themselves. Becoming a displaced person is to become 1 of 100 million. Their autonomy is handed over to

¹ UNHCR. "Refugee Statistics | USA for UNHCR." Unrefugees.org. 2022.

www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/statistics/

² UNHCR.

³ UNHCR.

⁴ UNHCR.

⁵ Viet Thanh Nguyen. 2018. *The Displaced: Refugee Writers on Refugee Lives*. Cork Abrams Ann Arbor, Michigan Proquest.

⁶ UNHCR.

the UN, host countries, and refugee camps. Allowing refugees to separate themselves from that number through acts of individual storytelling has been linked to access to social services, civic engagement, and community building activities.⁷

Individualized storytelling functions to benefit the storyteller, the audience with which the story resonates, and outsiders who seek to learn from these stories. The benefits of storytelling include the creation of a community for refugee groups in host countries, access to social services, the development of knowledge of migrant rights, and individual empowerment.⁸ Through storytelling, and the various mediums through which storytelling occurs, a refugee may hold the power to create a long lasting community in their place of resettlement while simultaneously creating tangible changes for the lives of refugees globally.

This paper will be structured in three main sections. The first section will analyze literature and peer reviewed sources written on the topic of the effects of migrant storytelling. The following section will be the presentation and analysis of five different examples of individualized storytelling through five different mediums: 1) an episode from the documentary series *Immigration Nation*, 2) a short story from *The Displaced*, 3) a podcast episode titled *Abdi and the Golden Ticket*, 4) a piece of profile journalism from *National Geographic*, and 5) a social media campaign from the Human Rights Campaign. The final section will discuss the tangible impacts of storytelling and the change that has occurred when migrants have been given the opportunity to use their voices. In the end, the positive effects of migrant storytelling will be clearly laid out and understood to be a crucial aspect of refugee rights.

⁷ Jeffrey Oktavianius and Wan-Ying Lin. "Community Storytelling Networks and Empowerment for Migrant Domestic Workers: A Communication Infrastructure Approach." *International Journal of Communication*. No. 16. (2022): 5162-5183.

⁸ Jeffrey Oktavianius and Wan-Ying Lin.

The aim of this research paper is to analyze media sources and academic literature to answer the following questions:

1. What importance and impact can storytelling have on both migrants and audiences alike?
2. How can we best measure the impacts of storytelling on migrant communities?

I. Literature Review

Migrants Using their Voices for Good

The extensive literature on this topic, both quantitative and qualitative, serve to affirm the benefits of storytelling for migrant communities. Research conducted by Jeffry Oktavianus and Wan-Ying Lin at the City University of Hong Kong used quantitative methods to understand the benefits storytelling had on Indonesian migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong. Migrant domestic workers (MDWs) “are sojourners who stay abroad for a certain period and return to the homeland afterward.”⁹ As such, they are often perceived as temporary guests in a host country, both by themselves and their host population. Because of this perception, MDWs “have insufficient protection from the state in various aspects, including job security, rights to citizenship and unionization, or even access to health services.”¹⁰

This systematic approach to understanding the relationship between storytelling and empowerment concluded that community storytelling networks have created avenues for Indonesian MDWs in Hong Kong to find and utilize social services and increased civic engagement in host countries.¹¹ The study also concludes that social and mainstream media are key agents in the creation of storytelling networks as, “workers attended to their mobile phones to perform various activities, such as browsing the Internet or receiving and making calls and

⁹ Jeffrey Oktavianus and Wan-Ying Lin.

¹⁰ Jeffrey Oktavianus and Wan-Ying Lin.

¹¹ Jeffrey Oktavianus and Wan-Ying Lin.

sending messages,” and as such, “were able to gain social support, which subsequently alleviated their stress.”¹² This data and the gathering of quantitative information was done via survey.

Workers were asked to rate various experiences on point scales. These numbers were later used to formulate the impact of community storytelling networks.

Other works focused on specific issues related to migration and used digital storytelling to encourage migrants to share their experiences as a form of healing within their communities. In a journal entry compiled by Susan McDonough and Erminia Colucci, barriers to a successful resettlement were identified as, “communication barriers, worrying about family and friends, feeling homesick, financial problems and lack of employment opportunities.”¹³ Also discussed was the common feeling of isolation and the loss of contact with community support systems. The authors concluded that the combination of these barriers and social isolation leads to a mental health crisis within migrant and refugee communities. Digital storytelling (DST), a method pioneered by “Lambert and Atchley in California in the 1990s,” has been used “internationally to explore... undocumented migrants... and young newly arrived migrants and refugees.”

Digital storytelling is described as a participant created visual methodology “used in community development and health research.”¹⁴ The article discusses the creation and development of the ‘Finding our way’ project, which was created to give migrants and refugees who were struggling with their mental health the opportunity to tell their stories. Participants, when interviewed three years after the end of the project, reported feeling better upon creating and completing their presentations of their stories. One subject claimed to have felt relieved to be

¹² Jeffrey Oktavianus and Wan-Ying Lin.

¹³ Colucci, Erminia and Susan McDonough. “People of immigrant and refugee background sharing experiences of mental health recovery: reflections and recommendations on using digital storytelling.” *Sage Journals*. January 19, 2019. Online.

¹⁴ Colucci, Erminia and Susan McDonough.

in a space, for the first time, where they did not feel judged or awkward for describing their struggles.

Limitations of Literature

Refugees and migrants have expressed concerns over the collected information presented above and their participation in that data. Many migrants expressed concerns over sharing their stories in academic settings. They explained that telling their stories and reliving their trauma was not easy, and was compounded by the burden of listening to others' stories.¹⁵ While they never felt exploited for their participation, it certainly added to some level of their mental struggles related to migration. While there is extensive research on storytelling and its impacts, there is little research on the impacts of various forms of modern storytelling and the ways in which storytelling can create results for individuals and for large groups of people. Storytelling can occur on a variety of different platforms and the intersecting nature of platforms today makes impact difficult to measure. This paper aims to discuss various forms of storytelling and dissect the ways in which it can affect people inside and outside of migrant communities. This paper aims to fill in the gaps of the research by selecting works that allow migrants to tell stories for their own healing process and without the agenda of academics or researchers acting as a stressor on the storytelling experience.

II. Research Methodology

After careful evaluation of multiple media examples of migrant storytelling, these five pieces were selected because they met a series of criteria necessary for the purposes of this research paper. Firstly, they discuss migration through a specific lens. None of these sources attempt to do a full sweep of the migration crisis, but rather, tell a small piece of the story to better understand the full issue. Secondly, they show a variety of different regions and people for

¹⁵ Colucci, Erminia and Susan McDonough.

which the refugee crisis is impactful. From communities in Latin and Central America to children in Thailand, these sources demonstrate that there is no one type of migrant and, thus, the refugee experience is a highly individualized one. Finally, these sources are verifiable by refugee communities as exemplary of their truths. This is because all of these stories are told by migrants, not by journalists or authors creating narratives around their experiences.

III. Storytelling in Action

Immigration Nation

Immigration Nation is a six part series that follows the lives of individual asylum seekers and their experiences with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). This Netflix documentary series is told through the testimonies of individuals, but through the lens of the Trump Administration's restrictions on immigration. The core of "Episode 5: The Right Way," followed the story of Berta and Deborah as they navigated different aspects of the US immigration system.

Berta, a grandmother from Mexico, arrived at the border with her granddaughter after a gang had made threats to their lives and announced their intention of marrying Berta's 13 year old granddaughter. With a daughter residing in Houston, Texas, the only option Berta saw for the safety of herself and her family was to flee. After her granddaughter had been released from the detention center after two months and reunited with her mother in Houston, Berta was held at the ICE detention center for 17 months before finally being deported.

"Try to do it the right way. That's always the best way. That way you don't have to keep on looking behind your back."¹⁶ Those opposed to immigration can be heard echoing this exact sentiment throughout the duration of this episode. They claim that people can come to the US,

¹⁶ Immigration Nation. 2020 "The Right Way." Netflix. 62 minutes, August 3. <https://www.netflix.com/watch/81001619?trackId=14170286>

but they must do it the right way. Berta did it the right way. Not only did she present herself to the authorities and claim asylum, but she passed the four tests identified by Joe, the Officer in Charge at El Paso Detention Center where Berta was held.

The first factor Joe considers when determining whether or not someone is allowed out of the center is their identity. He questions if this person is, in fact, who they say they are and if they are here for the reasons they claim to have arrived. According to Berta's lawyer, "her identity is not questionable."¹⁷ He shifts through files in his desk saying, "here's her birth certificate. Here's her passport. Here's her national ID."¹⁸ The second question for all US border arrivals is: do they have a US support system? Berta's lawyer answers, "she has a daughter in Houston who has been living there for many years."¹⁹ Next, Joe asks if this asylum seeker is a flight risk and if they will disappear upon release. Berta's lawyer says no, she won't because "she has a fixed address, she's got bills to prove that it's a fixed address."²⁰ Finally, the system, represented by Joe, asks if this refugee is a threat to the community. In answer, the camera pans across Berta and her barely five-foot stature. She looks heartbroken and downtrodden. She is no threat.

Berta's lawyer believes that the only reason, then, that she has been held for so long is because "ICE is using people like Berta as a deterrent... 'Don't come. Don't ask for asylum. Because you're gonna be held for this long."²¹ Berta has effectively become a martyr for a cause she doesn't believe in. This is policy affecting individual lives, and Berta is just one of thousands.

¹⁷ Immigration Nation.

¹⁸ Immigration Nation.

¹⁹ Immigration Nation.

²⁰ Immigration Nation.

²¹ Immigration Nation.

The documentary then shifts to Deborah's story. Deborah Jane is a Ugandan mother of four young children. When the father of her children commissioned an attack on Deborah, she fled the country covered in acid burns and fearful for her family's safety. Her children were not permitted to come with her and were left to fend for themselves in Nairobi, Kenya. Through Deborah's story, viewers see what Deborah describes as "the worst punishment."²² After 5 years of separation from her children, Deborah found herself falling on a last resort: flying to Nairobi and requesting her children's case be expedited in person. While Deborah was successful, and nine months later she was reunited with her children, a voiceover reminded viewers that while this was a joyous moment and success, there are tens of thousands of cases just like Deborah's. It is impossible to consider this a win when the system failed her and she was forced to take matters into her own hands.

Reviewers, both the general public and media outlets, continue to rave about this documentary series. From *Vanity Fair* to *The Boston Globe*, this series received coverage on a variety of verticals and impressed on every single one of them. Buzzwords for this docu series include: "purposeful,"²³ "effective,"²⁴ and "necessary."²⁵ One independent viewer captured the essence and purpose of this series in their review on Rotten Tomatoes: "It puts names and faces to people that the White House has tried to turn into an anonymous brown blur."²⁶ These reviews

²² Immigration Nation.

²³ Aguilar, Carlos. "Netflix's 'Immigration Nation' Exposes the Horrors of Ice & Reaffirms the Need for Its Abolishment [Review]." *The Playlist*, 4 Aug. 2020, <https://theplaylist.net/immigration-nation-review-netflix-20200804/>.

²⁴ Molumby, Deirdre. "Netflix Review: 'Immigration Nation' Proves Harrowing, Insightful and Challenging." *Entertainment.ie*, 4 Aug. 2020, <https://entertainment.ie/tv/tv-reviews/immigration-nation-review-netflix-459356/>.

²⁵ Peters, Micah. "'Immigration Nation' Is a Difficult, but Necessary, Viewing Experience." *The Ringer*, The Ringer, 5 Aug. 2020, <https://www.theringer.com/movies/2020/8/5/21355368/immigration-nation-netflix-ice-documentary>.

²⁶ Murray, Steve. "September Streaming: 'Immigration Nation' Unsettles, plus a Look at Lyricist Ashman." *ARTS ATL*, 4 Sept. 2020, <https://www.artsatl.org/september-streaming-the-unsettling-immigration-nation-and-other-new-offerings/>.

are measures of impact for this series. Beyond the magazine and media attention this series has received, it has opened doors in terms of accessibility of the public to the issue of the US immigration system. The availability of this series to the public, its raving reviews, and the means by which it achieved its goal allowed this storytelling to be effective in creating awareness for migrants at the US southern border.

Referred to by Time Magazine as “the most important TV show you’ll see in 2020,”²⁷ this documentary functions as a perfect example of individual storytelling in action. It allows time and space for individuals to share their personal experiences, but reminds viewers of the fact that these are just single stories of thousands. Berta is not the only elderly woman in El Paso Detention Center, Deborah is not the only mother an ocean away from her children. The large statistic is thus made more impactful by the deep understanding of an individual experience. *Immigration Nation* uses one not to represent all, but to create a deeper sense of connection to all.

The Displaced

The Displaced is a short essay and story collection edited and compiled by Viet Thanh Nguyen. The contributors to this book are all refugee writers who reflect on their experiences, share their stories, and are free to express creativity in their storytelling. While the majority of these stories are autobiographical, one piece, “Refugee Children: Yang Warriors,” by Kao Kalia Yang is a fictionalized account of Laotian children living and fighting for their lives in a Thai refugee camp. While readers are following a band of young children as they train for unseen enemies and elect leaders, the story is littered with metaphors for what it means to be a child

²⁷ Berman, Judy. “Netflix’s ‘Immigration Nation’ Is 2020’s Most Important Show.” *Time*, Time, 29 July 2020, <https://time.com/5872474/immigration-nation-review-netflix/>.

refugee and serves to capture the imagination of a child while enduring and processing great hardships.

When the group of young warriors elect a leader, they choose a young boy they call Master Me. In the story, “the children said they chose him as their leader not because he was the oldest, or the biggest, or the smartest, but because he cared the most.”²⁸ The children chose Master Me because they wanted someone who they knew would not leave a single one of them behind. This allegorical message conveys the need within refugee children to grasp onto someone or something they can count on. The trauma of leaving one’s home compounded with the torment of living in a refugee camp is evident in the children’s desire for a human lifeboat. The ability to lean on someone is something that these children lack, and Master Me represents that desire. When parents and guardians in the camp ask the children what they are training for, they essentially shrug their shoulders and reply, “it [is] better to be trained and ready than to be caught unaware and die unremarkably.”²⁹ The fear of an unremarkable death and being caught unaware is another response that seemingly stems from the trauma of fleeing their home country.

Further, when discussing their training, the narrator mentions that mental focus was a large aspect of their regimen. The author writes, “in the end, the victor was the person who had the greatest focus and fortitude, the one who could concentrate the longest in position.”³⁰ This is a clear metaphor for the waiting game that occurs in refugee camps. The sad reality is that less than 1% of refugees are successfully relocated each year.³¹ The only winners in a refugee camp are those who have mastered the art of waiting.

²⁸ The Displaced.

²⁹ The Displaced.

³⁰ The Displaced.

³¹ <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/resettlement.html>

This story shows readers that impactful storytelling can occur on a variety of different levels, and migrants possess the creativity and ability to communicate their struggles with joy and creativity. This story proves that, while the narrative surrounding the refugee crisis is resoundingly one of doom and gloom, migrants hold the power to take control of the rhetoric surrounding their lives. Words matter and the way refugees are able to articulate their own experiences are central to the change they can create for themselves. As put by the young narrator of “Refugee Children: Yang Warriors,”: “I knew we were survivors. I had not imagined us as warriors.”³²

Not only did this short story collection achieve the impact caused by media attention, but it also provided a variety of forms of storytelling to maximize the ways in which it might touch readers. Yang’s fictional account, while a compelling form of storytelling, was not the only way in which writers were able to share their stories in this collection. From autobiographical accounts of migration to vignettes from life post-resettlement, these writers did not hold back in recognizing the importance of sharing their stories. In his introduction, Nguyen takes care to point out that “literature changes the world of readers and writers, but literature does not change the world until people get out of their chairs, go out in the world, and do something to transform the conditions of which the literature speaks.”³³ It is important to note that while storytelling is important, it must not end there. Sharing stories should spark action, but words alone cannot create change for migrant communities. Nguyen understands that the impact of his collection must not be measured by copies sold, but rather by positive change created because of this inspired storytelling.

Abdi and the Golden Ticket

³² The Displaced.

³³ The Displaced.

Every year, hundreds of thousands of people crowd internet cafes and hunch over computers to apply for the Diversity Visa Lottery. Each year, anywhere from 8-15 million people apply, but only a little over 100,000 people win. This lottery supposedly fast tracks migrants on the path to a US visa and eventual migration, but the reality of this lottery is a series of bureaucratic and social obstacles that result in only half of these “winners” receiving a visa. In “Abdi and the Golden Ticket”, a podcast episode from *This American Life*, BBC reporter Leo Hornak follows Abdi Nor, winner of the Diversity Visa Lottery, as he fights to overcome these struggles and more.

“I’m looking for a life. And to get that, I’ll keep trying to the death.”³⁴ Abdi Nor, a Somali refugee living in Kenya, always pictured himself as an American. His situation became unique when he won the lottery, but before he found out he was on the fast track to a visa, Abdi was looking at alternative options, including illegal and life threatening passage on a boat. He was one of millions of refugees praying for passage to America. This lottery ticket was simply permission to begin the pursuit of the life he always wanted for himself.

The podcast episode documents over a year of obstacles as told by Abdi himself. As a refugee living in a violent police state, Abdi described the constant fear and violence he was subjected to as a targeted group. In order to collect the necessary documents for his interview, Abdi was required to get a “certificate of good conduct” from his local police station - the same station that continually threatened his life. He collected all the necessary documents and finally attended his interview, but was ultimately denied a visa because of a missing signature on a school document. Abdi, still determined and energized for his own cause, got the signature and reapplied, but never heard back from the embassy. When Leo Hornak stepped in and called the

³⁴ Leo Hornak, interview with Abdi Nor, *This American Life*, podcast audio, July 3, 2015. <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/560/abdi-and-the-golden-ticket>

US embassy to inquire about Abdi's re-application, they were quick to process and complete it, finally granting him his right to a visa. Abdi's future rested on the scales of an imbalanced bureaucracy, made right only by the correction and attention of a journalist and storyteller.

In Abdi's case, the importance of individualized storytelling resulted in individual results. Abdi's story, and the sharing of that story, did not change the future of any other migrants, nor did it solve the systemic problems at hand. However, by telling his story and sharing his voice with the world, Abdi's individual journey was changed for the better. Abdi's personal story created personal change for his own cause. While not every single refugee will be lucky enough to receive the opportunity to tell their story on this scale, it is important to note that those who are able to are often rewarded for their bravery.

Social Media Campaign

Social media today is an increasingly integrative industry. Posts created for YouTube appear on Instagram Reels and TikTok. To post on one platform is to reach audiences on multiple mediums. The Human Rights Campaign has worked, using this methodology, to create impact with their fight for LGBTQ migrant youth. Winner of the 3rd Annual Shorty Social Good Awards, this campaign "launched unprecedented efforts to capture the stories of LGBTQ Dreamers, refugees and asylum seekers."³⁵ This campaign is a series of stories about migration and issues as a result of migration as told by LGBTQ migrants. The Human Rights Campaign, "traveled across the country to create a video series that shared the deeply moving personal stories of LGBTQ Dreamers."³⁶ A large aspect of this campaign was in support of the Dreamers, who are "people who were brought into the U.S. without documentation as children."³⁷ This

³⁵ "HRC's Fight to Protect LGBTQ Immigrants - the Shorty Awards." *The Shorty Awards - Honoring the Best of Social Media*, <https://shortyawards.com/3rd-socialgood/human-rights-campaign-marketing>.

³⁶ "HRC's Fight to Protect LGBTQ Immigrants - the Shorty Awards."

³⁷ "What Is the DREAM Act and Who Are the Dreamers?" *ADL*, 15 May 2017, <https://www.adl.org/resources/lesson-plan/what-dream-act-and-who-are-dreamers>.

campaign featured Dreamer, Mo, who recounts his experience upon learning that his status was endangered under Trump's immigration reforms.

The reality of DACA policies under the Trump Administration meant deportation for many young people who had lived in the United States for their entire lives. Mo says in the video, "I live here, my entire life is here. I have a future planned out in my head... I honestly don't know what I'd do. I don't know what value, per se, my education would have. I don't know anyone in Mexico. Going back would really mean just me arriving without any kind of plan. So, it's terrifying."³⁸ Mo is able to put a face and a name to the harsh realities behind immigration policy. By sharing his story, audiences see that politics have personal and life altering implications for vulnerable populations.

Another storyteller for this video campaign was Paul Harrison. Paul, a United States citizen, was engaged to a man from Western Iran, a region of the world where there is, "no gay culture, no gay life. It's punishable by death"³⁹ When the couple reunited outside of Iran, all Paul and his partner wanted to do was kiss, hold hands, and be a couple in public. After years of dating long distance and with the stress of oppressive gay laws in Iran, Paul decided to propose to his partner and immigrate him to the United States. Unfortunately for the couple, the proposal and subsequent immigration were put on hold by the Trump Administration's Muslim Ban. "With one signature on a piece of paper," said Paul, "our lives completely changed."⁴⁰ As his partner's travel date rapidly approached, Paul realized his visa would likely not be approved. "I just want to get him here and I just want to keep him safe," Paul says as the video closes and viewers learn he has gone overseas to help his partner find another way to the United States.

³⁸ Human Rights Campaign. "It's Terrifying: LGBTQ DREAMer on Deportation," YouTube video, 1:29. 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XUai7TlZqho>

³⁹ "Same-Sex Couple Finally Marry after Trump Travel Ban." *Human Rights Campaign*, <https://www.hrc.org/news/same-sex-couple-finally-marry-after-trump-travel-ban>.

⁴⁰ "Same-Sex Couple Finally Marry after Trump Travel Ban."

These video vignettes have been viewed over 1.2 million times across various platforms, “reaching over 6 million people and receiving more than 50,000 engagements. Additionally, this campaign has encouraged media sources, like *Huffpost* and *NewNowNext*, to write stories on their spotlighted individuals, like Mo. The videos can also be attributed for the 10,000 constituent calls to members of Congress asking for reform on the issue of migration.⁴¹ The impact of these stories has created a community support network for these vulnerable individuals and resulted in actionable steps by the public.

Profile Journalism

In the wake of the “largest external displacement crisis in Latin America’s recent history,”⁴² Venezuelan refugees flee their country’s ongoing political and economic crises to nearby Latin American nations. A popular destination for these refugees is Lima, Peru. National Geographic writer, Julett Pineda, and photographer, Daniela Rivera Antera, collaborated on a piece titled, “Fleeing violence in Venezuela, women migrants face callous indifference.” Their collection of information and personal testimonies about the realities of migrating within Latin America created new voices to shine through in the story of migration.

Over the course of six months, Rivera photographed the lives of eight Venezuelan women who fled their home country with the hope of a better future in Peru. Through the course of her journey in detailing the experiences of these women, Rivera began to understand that, “they shared not only nationality, gender, and a history of violent encounters, but also a feeling of *añoranza* — deep sorrow for the absence, deprivation, or loss of someone or something loved.”⁴³

Migrant communities have created words to describe the feeling of having your life ripped apart

⁴¹ “HRC’s Fight to Protect LGBTQ Immigrants - the Shorty Awards.”

⁴² Pineda, Julett. “Fleeing Violence in Venezuela, Women Migrants Face Callous Indifference.” *History*, National Geographic, 19 May 2022, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/fleeing-violence-in-venezuela-women-migrants-face-callous-indifference>.

⁴³ Pineda, Julett.

by political, social, or violent conflicts in a home region. The application of *añoranza* is best understood by audiences through the photographs included in this piece.

An image of Rosa Marín, one of the subjects of this piece, creating a peephole with her fingers to zero in on a view she calls, “[her] little Caracas.”⁴⁴ Rosa’s longing is a prominent theme throughout the entirety of this piece. She fled Venezuela at the age of 27 with the longing to find peace and stability in Lima. She longs for the feeling of safety and welcoming neighbors, but comes to realize she will never be able to find that in Peru. Harassment and xenophobia follow her wherever she goes.

Another image includes a journal entry by refugee mother, Yenifer. There is a photo of her child lying in bed and drinking from a bottle next to a journal entry by Yenifer. In the journal, Yenifer writes about the fear she had while giving birth to her child. She was afraid because she did not want to transfer HIV to her child during birth as her mother had done to her. This was a result of medical negligence, and she was nervous that her journey as a pregnant refugee might influence her child’s health. Luckily, the baby was born HIV negative.

The profile piece tells a story of creating spaces in a foreign place. These women worked together to share their experiences and have shoulders to lean on in the midst of *añoranza*.

“These women miss their families, their homes, having normal conversations with people, the warmth of the Caribbean,” said Rivera of the women she grew so close with during this process,

“These tiny spaces they have built are their core and act as a protective shell.”⁴⁵ The creation of this story proved the necessity of creating storytelling networks within refugee communities.

These women, through their network, knew what spaces in Lima were safe to walk through,

⁴⁴ Pineda, Julett.

⁴⁵ Pineda, Julett.

where they were able to seek employment, and were able to find home and comfort in an increasingly hostile environment.

IV. Whoever saves a life, saves the world.

Storytelling has proven to create support and social service networks for migrants in a variety of communities. Research, in the forms of both quantitative and qualitative data, have shown that individual refugees have only benefited from creating their own forms of storytelling, but have also made tangible impacts on refugee communities by stepping forward and sharing their experiences with the global community.

Immigration Nation and HCR's Fight to LGBTQ Protect Migrants created noise in the global community by presenting presidential policy as life or death realities for immigrants. These mediums resulted in the creation of a more empathetic host population within the United States, and media attention for those in need of a platform for immigration reform. *The Displaced* in and of itself became a project for refugee writers to collaborate and share stories, but the publishing of "Refugee Children: Yang Warriors" broke barriers in terms of the scope on which migrant storytelling can occur. It can be filled with joy and wonder and simultaneously demonstrate the pain and agony of the refugee experience. Migrant stories can be just as diverse and complex as migrants themselves. Abdi's story shows the full experience, beginning to end, of a refugee's resettlement journey. Even when given the "Golden Ticket," the road to resettlement is shown to be a confusing, harrowing, and difficult journey. Finally, profile journalism works to highlight the individual stories in an integrative and compelling way. The ability to peek into the window of an immigrant's life changes the way audiences understand what it means to pack up and leave home.

Individuals sharing their experiences result in benefits in the creation of support networks, access to social services, the healing of mental illnesses caused by migration, and in creating more empathetic and helpful host populations. All prior research indicates that individual storytelling is an effective path to migrant empowerment. The negative effects of becoming a part of a large, daunting statistic that is the refugee crisis are insurmountable for individuals faced with statelessness. To give individuals the opportunity to once again feel like a single, contributive, powerful member of society allows them to begin to work to rebuild their own lives and, potentially, help in the rebuilding of others.

Countless members of host communities have consumed media related to the migrant experience. US citizens, since partaking in these media forms, have donated to refugee causes, called Congress members, and worked in their local communities to serve migrants. Understanding is the foundation of change. Without empathy, hosts cannot and will not welcome or provide aid to refugees in their areas. These media forms are crucial in the creation of empathy. 100 million people have stories to share just like the ones compiled here. Ahead of these faceless individuals are countless hurdles and hardships on their journey to a right to a safe space. Thanks to the brave migrants who have stepped forward to share their stories, refugees today are entering into a world with a little more empathy, a few more resources, and networks of people working to make sure their stories are heard.