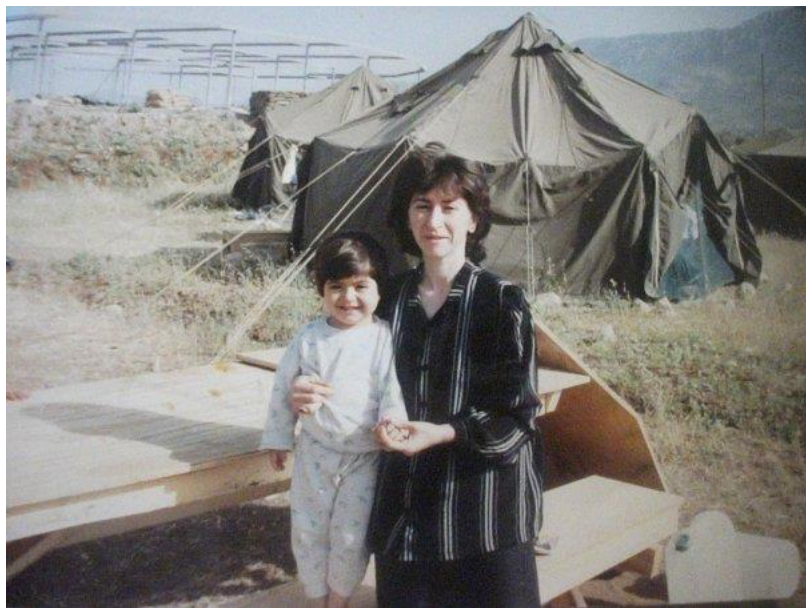


I was born in the Kurdish region of Iraq to a family who were prominent in the Kurdish resistance against Saddam Hussein. As a result, my early childhood was spent seeing my dad in secret. During the Gulf war, we fled to Iran, while my father and grandfather remained in Iraq to fight with the Kurdish resistance. Sadly my 9-month-old little brother died before we reached Iran. After a few months, we returned to Iraq to find my father and lived on an MSF refugee camp for some time. The Kurdistan region subsequently fought and secured independence from Saddam and we lived relatively free lives but were still a target (because of my family's prominence in the resistance) so had to take precautions, for example, a bodyguard would drive me to school daily.

In 1996 Saddam tried to regain control of the Kurdish region and it became unsafe once again for us to remain, so my mother, siblings and I fled to Syria. My dad remained in Kurdistan to continue with the resistance. In Syria, we lived as asylum seekers and were granted refugee status and allocated the UK as our new home.

We arrived in the UK in July 1998. At the airport, we were greeted by a lady and a translator who sat my mother and us down to go through paperwork; they offered us a small tray of tea and biscuits. I will never forget that small act of kindness – we were made to feel welcome and this became our home. My father joined us a few years later.



*Bnar and her mother in the MSF refugee camp*

Since then, my Mother has stressed the importance of working hard, making the most of every opportunity and giving back to this country and its people, who gave us a new home. I spent the next year learning English to pass my 11+ and it was worth the hard work because I loved my secondary school. I decided to pursue medicine at a young age in order to work for the NHS. I decided to pursue academia while at Cardiff University medical school, while involved in some epidemiological research and loved the challenging nature and environment of working with like-minded academics. As a GW4-CAT fellow, I have the wonderful opportunity, support and time to train as a scientist and use this as a foundation, on which I can build my future career.