
“How did you come through?”

**STUDENT INTERVIEWS WITH MAINERS FROM
AROUND THE WORLD**



**A PUBLICATION BY THE 2015-2016 “EXPLORING INTERPRETATION CLASS” OF
PORTLAND HIGH SCHOOL IN PORTLAND, MAINE**

Dedication

*We dedicate this book to all of the people who leave their homelands in search of safety and opportunity.
May you find peace and security. May you be treated with respect and love.*

Preface

In her piece, Usira Ali (*Chapter 8*) asks her parents, “***How did you come through all those countries not knowing their languages?***” As they explain their experience to her, we get a glimpse into the type of journey so many of our neighbors have made to be here in Portland, Maine. Her question also reminds us of the universal human need to explain ourselves and be understood.

In the 2015-2016 school year, Portland High School’s first ever “Exploring Interpretation as a Career” class learned about work done by translators, interpreters, and cultural brokers. The students met with community experts. They role-played using professional interpretation techniques. They volunteered at school events. They shared their confusion about how to deal with the challenging situations they faced in their own daily lives when interpreting for their families and neighbors. As they learned about the standards, ethics, procedures, and best practices, the students often raised the issue of how much was “lost in translation” or not understood because it was so tied to culture. Nearly every discussion included questions about the role they should or could play in bridging not just language but cultural divides.

As the students grappled with these topics, our nation’s media coverage turned toward the terrorist attacks in Paris, the refugee crisis arising from Syria’s civil war, and our own presidential election. Each class period, we were faced with another story of involving the themes of human migration -- the push and pull of why people leave their countries and the responses from the people who already live in the places they where arrive.

As increasingly virulent “us” versus “them” language took hold in the debates about immigration policy, it seemed that much bigger questions loomed over us: How should nations and communities respond to people in need? Are we going to be stuck in the “melting pot” mentality where we expect people to lose themselves in order to become part of the American collective? How far does our society have to go before it can deal with newcomers in culturally competent and inclusive ways? How do we move beyond just tolerance and instead embrace and celebrate each other? This project was a way to touch upon some of these questions.

Inspired by the Maine Historical Society’s 2016 exhibit, *400 Years of New Mainers*, the book, *New Mainers: Portraits of Our Immigrant Neighbors*, and Kate Manahan’s *New Mainers Speak* community radio program, the students gathered and translated the stories of people from their community and their own families. Their goal was to humanize these Mainers - who are also immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers - and to present some of what is sometimes lost in translation.

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Karima

Maryam is about to take the leap into college life. Here she interviews her aunt, Karima. Her aunt explains what it was like to grow up in Iraq and have to teach herself how to read and write.



“Hope”(2016) by Maryam Abdullah

Karima

“I did not have a notebook. I used to write on the walls or in my closet.”

“Teaching myself how to read and write was a big challenge for me; I did not grow up in a very educational community.” My aunt Karima tells me this with the seriousness of a woman who wants me to carry on her mission.

I had been trying to study for my English exam in the kitchen as I was getting our Iraqi tea ready. We had a lot of visitors and our house was very loud. People from my mother’s family: uncle, aunts, and cousins had come to visit. I was in my own world trying to study when all of a sudden I heard a voice. My aunt, Karima came into the kitchen and told me that she’s very proud of me and wants me to complete my education to ensure my independence, and become a knowledgeable woman. Before she started telling me her story she brought me some food and drink. She said “اكلي زين” which means “Eat well, it will keep you healthy and strong to get better grades.”

As Karima started to tell me her story in Arabic, I was able to see what she had meant when she had talked to me in the past about education being a powerful weapon. “I did not want my children to be asking strangers for help with their homework, and I did not want them to end up having the same life I had. I struggled a lot in my life for not knowing how to read and write. [But I think] the power of knowing how to read and write was my destiny at the age of eighteen, although I was married and taking care of my two children.”

Life is not easy in Iraq and you have to work twice as hard. Obviously, that’s what Karima did. She grew up in Baghdad with her three sisters and five brothers. She told me, “I grew up being called stupid by my teachers and mother. Education wasn’t very important for women, and my mother never motivated me about school.” Even though Karima grew up thinking that education wasn’t important, she says, “As [I] reached a certain age, [I] started to realize the importance of knowing how to read and write.”

Karima got married at the age of fifteen, and she did not have a voice for herself. As Karima explains, “I still did not know how to read and write. I had my first child at the age of sixteen, then my second child a year after. Whenever I watched my sisters-in-law reading or writing for a school exam, I started regretting the day I abandoned school.” When Karima was around eighteen, she started teaching herself very small and easy words such as water, girl, book, and home. Karima exclaimed, “It was very hard to keep up with my kids

and my learning.” Karima had learned the letters when she was in first grade before leaving school.

Learning how to write was not easy. She learned how to write and read her sisters’ names. Then she moved on to learning her brothers’ names. Karima said, “I did not have a notebook. I used to write on the walls or in my closet.” She said with excitement, “I still remember waking up very early in the morning before the birds and the sun, so I could have time at the end of the day to learn new words and names.” Karima used to do the laundry, make breakfast, lunch, clean the house, and give her little boys a shower. Karima says with a deep, sad voice, “I would do all of this at the age of eighteen when I was not even supposed to be married; I should have been at school learning with all of the girls my age.” Karima said, “My reading had gotten a lot better but I was still at my kids’ level. I used to study with them while try to help them. My reading started to improve along with my kids.”

By the end of Karima’s forties, she had discovered that she was as good as any other adult, but she also discovered that she had cancer. She said, “Cancer taught me so many things. I realized the importance of life and death, and how cancer patients are dealing with pain. I realized how much I love my family, and how important to me it was to see them comfortable and happy in life.” Karima also mentioned that during that time was when she began to read the Qur’an. (The Qur’an is the holy book for Islam, and it’s considered one of the hardest writings to read in Arabic). Karima said, “I would read the Qur’an with a loud voice, and fix my mistakes by

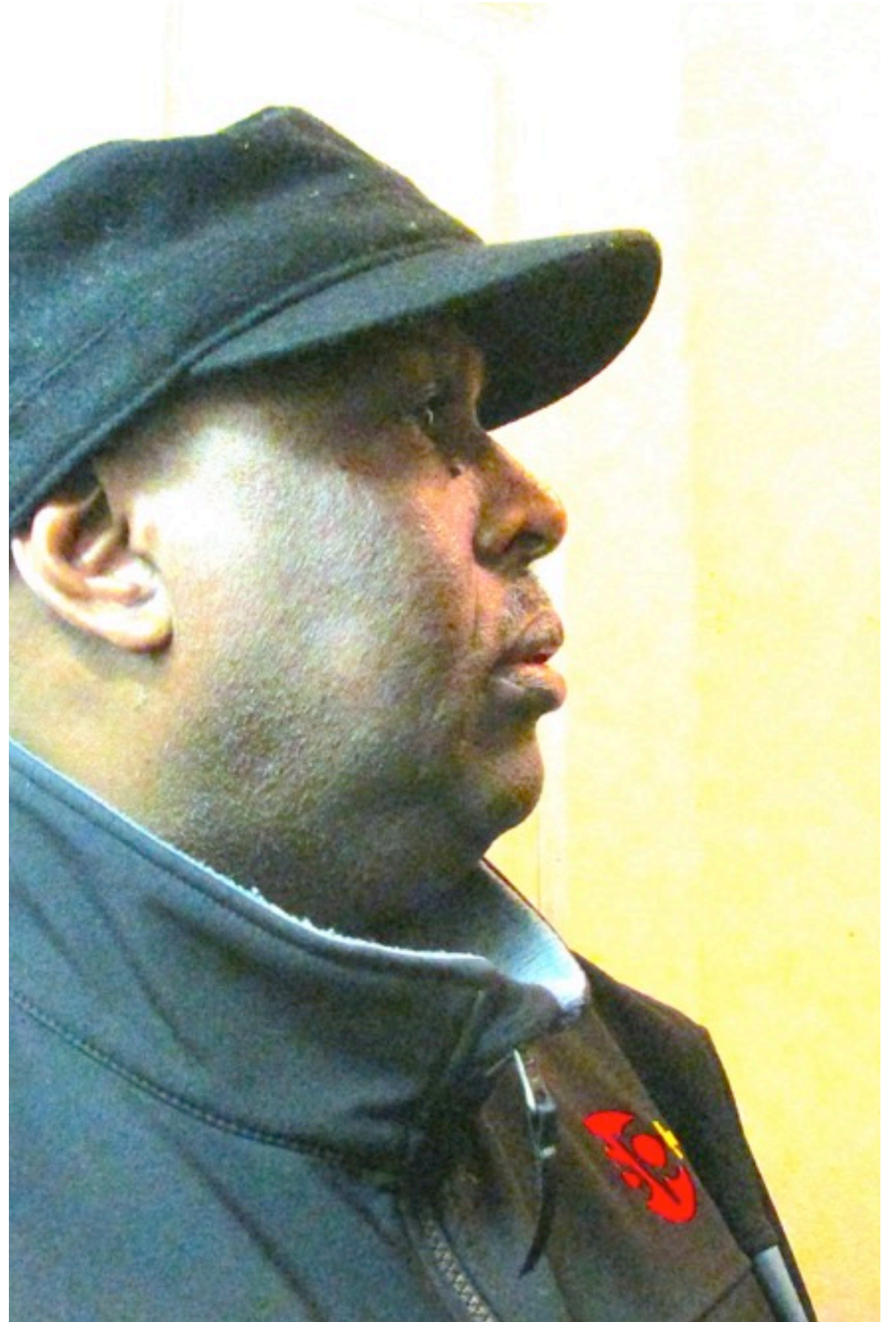
reading the same word ten times. That wasn’t the only reason why I would read my prayers out loud, my other reason was to comfort patients who were sharing the room with me.”

Karima came to the USA in 2013, when she couldn’t stand the pain of cancer anymore. She was done with chemotherapy in Iraq but she wasn’t fully cured from cancer. She came to the U.S. with her younger child. Karima said, “I came to America to get cured from cancer. And I realized it’s another chance not just to get cured from cancer, but to learn how to read and write in a different language.” Karima did not have the chance to go back to school in Iraq. Now, she is learning English, “English is a very hard language but I’m a good student at [Adult Ed.] I always raise my hand in class and pay attention to the teacher.”

Maryam Abdullah conducted and translated this interview from Arabic. Maryam was born in Baghdad, Iraq.

Abdulkadir

It is easy to see where Ahmed gets his determination to work long hours while attending school. Here he interviews his father about his journey to secure a safe life for himself and his family.



Abdulkadir

“Was I a new person entering Saudi Arabia or was I the same man? . . . Was I going to find what I came for?”

My father, Abdulkadir Muse, doesn't have a college education; he didn't get to go to college because a civil war started in Somalia. His education comes from where he's been and what he's seen throughout his life. He grew up in Somalia and when the civil war broke out, he had to leave the country for his safety, ended up in Saudi Arabia and eventually in the United States. My father always made sure that I understood that with an education. I was empowering myself to be a representative of the Somali community. However, for my entire life I've heard horrible things about my country. From the endless civil war and terrorist groups, to the “failed state” that it has become, Somalia is still a huge piece of who I am, and my father has taught me to work hard for your family.

My father's early life taught him many lessons he would need as he became a man during a time of upheaval in Somalia. He was born in Mogadishu in 1959, the middle child of two brothers. Growing up they all had to support each

other, and he learned the importance of family. He told me in Somali, “After [my brother] lost his job he couldn't find anything else, so he depended on me.”

When my father was about 20, the National Army took over the country and Siad Barre was the president. That's when my father knew things weren't going to be good for the future of Somalia and he left, because he couldn't support his family. He traveled north, entering Djibouti by car. As soon as he got there he headed for the sea and went north to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. He remembers a part of his story that he has never shared with me, “I lost a lot of money and it was very hard. I can't believe I had to leave the city that I was born in, that I had family in and I grew up in, and move to a place that I didn't know.” He planned on going for a few months, but little did he know a few months would turn into a decade in Saudi Arabia.

“As I entered Saudi Arabia, all that could go through my mind was what I had left behind. Was I a new person entering Saudi Arabia or was I the same man? Did the responsibility still stick with me? Did I still have to carry my family? Was I going to find what I came for?” His mother didn't even know if he was alive until he got to use a phone after six months.

He also learned to speak Arabic. He told me, “To get a check, you're gonna have to speak Arabic. So I learned.” He couldn't find a job at first, but then he found one in the capital city doing construction, and he moved up in the company. “I

used to work with many people from Bangladesh and Pakistan and one day one of the drivers who drove the crane died on the job, and they needed someone to cover it. They said ‘Who’s available?’, and I stepped up.” He sent back all of his money to support his family and his youngest brother’s education.

On April 7, 1988, his own father passed away and my father knew it was time to go back to Somalia. It was a wake up call for him and his family. “That day was the day I knew that money wasn’t worth missing my family. Was I going to risk my family life for some money? Our relationship for some money?” He remembers his homecoming vividly. “I thought of going home many times, but on that day I didn’t want to let them know I was coming. . . I wanted to walk from the airport to my house just to see the country again and what had changed. People thought I was lost. I walked home, and knocked on the door, and my brother opened the door and hugged me like he hadn’t seen me for decades. Which was true, but I loved them so much it was worth it.” The first thing he did was fix up and expand what they were living in. “The roof was leaking, so I built a new one.”

After civil war had taken Somalia, the man who had been gone from his home for almost a decade had to pack up his bags and flee again with his family. Moving to Kenya was tough for him and he had always heard bad things about the thefts and killing, but he had nothing to lose. “A man who has seen war can handle fighting.” After coming to Mombasa by boat he found a home near the port, where my whole family

was going to live. Traveling into the city of Mombasa and on the road to Kenya, he saw many things, “I saw a man selling his property for just a ride to Kenya - holding out the deed to his home for just a couple of shillings.”

After living in Mombasa for two years with few resources, my mother decided that this wasn’t going to be a very good life for us. My mother and I moved to America after being sponsored by my aunt. It was another eight years before my father and siblings followed. My father found it hard to find a job at first, “What am I going to do in America? I did business in Somalia and I did business in Kenya, but what do I do in America? I don’t even have degree.” His first job was on the packaging line at L.L. Bean, and then he put the DVDs in the envelopes for Netflix. Then he started at the Peace Market on Chestnut Street, the store that he now runs for another Somali-Mainer.

Living in Mogadishu and Saudi Arabia by himself my father learned to take every opportunity he had in order to take care of himself and his family. He had already experienced more than most people do in a lifetime, and his road turned him into an intellectual man and a man of action. He believed school was a tool where one could learn to make life more endurable, and if possible, attractive. He wanted an education that would relieve him of the hard times at home. “It didn’t come easy. It took time. It took effort.” He is a humble man and still works hard to support our family and the community.

I have started talking to my father more and more to learn about my role as a Somali-Mainer. I realize the potential that Somali-Americans have in the U.S., but it's complicated. Listening to him talk, I learned that what is most important to him is that our family and that our people use the chances that life in America offers. He said, "Our objective here in America is to work and to take advantage of the opportunities we get that we weren't provided with in our country and to use it to help our family and the other Somali-Mainers."

Ahmed Mohamed conducted and translated this interview from Somali. Ahmed was born in Mombasa, Kenya.

Rhon

Like Rhon, Jenny is a young person forging her new life in the United States on her own. She was inspired to interview her friend and to shed light on the experience of young people who arrive in Maine without the support of close family.



Rhon

“Inside of us we have the fear to be forgotten because we are placed in a new world where everything is different from home; the language, the culture, the skin color, the rules and laws...”

Looking for a better future and education pushed Rhon Bila, a 24-year-old young man, to leave his country for the United States. Rhon grew up in Kinshasa, the capitol of Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and had a childhood that was at first very wealthy and then full of sadness. He lost his father at the age of six and grew up mostly with his mother. Together, they traveled to different provinces of the DRC. Rhon’s story about his path to a new country shows us how a new beginning can be tough but holding on to our dreams can give us hope.

Two years ago, Rhon decided to travel to USA, the country he felt was the most powerful in the world. Once here he planned to pursue his studies in Communication. The youngest of his family, Rhon wanted to do everything he could to follow his goal even if it meant being separated from his

mom. Speaking to me in French, Rhon told me, “That was kind of hard to leave her behind me. She is my best friend. She was always there for me and she usually tells me I have to follow my dreams no matter what. So now I was about to leave this most beautiful woman who gave birth to me to follow my dream. Yes, it was hard, but deep down, I knew I would see her soon.” Rhon didn’t know the process to get his green card would take so long. However, the memory of his mom’s face is his motivation to succeed, to do better than what he could do yesterday. He is doing all this with a hope to see her again.

Since he arrived in USA, nothing has been the same as he had imagined it would be. Language was one of the most difficult struggles he had to face. He had no one to help him learn English and to figure out how to go to college; he didn't know where to start. Then one day he woke up and told himself, “Rhon, if you don't try it or do it on your own, no one will do it for you, so now get up.” He smiles as he tells me this memory. Rhon explains that an immigrant life is not that easy because we face double challenges. “Inside of us we have the fear to be forgotten because we are placed in a new world where everything is different from home; the language, the culture, the skin color, the rules and laws... And nobody other than an immigrant can understand that.” I see this as the worst part of his story - when no one can really understand him or other immigrants because of our language barriers.

Since he has been here, he has grown up, and he has learned to count on himself. “It is not like I had a choice. You live by yourself, you do everything by yourself in order to

survive because you will have a better future and be proud of yourself.” He has regained his courage. He found a way to go to college and this young man was determined to speak and be understood by others. Because of his wishes to be the best in video production he had to go out, learn by himself “with or without help from others.” Being a man who always wants to challenge himself, Rhon saw that as an opportunity to see what he was capable of. “I had to admit that in the beginning it was not easy but in this case endurance helped a lot.” Despite everything he has been through, this young man from DRC, has never given up on his dreams to go to college and have the best education he can.

Rhon also told me about his relationship with a girl he met here in U.S. and who he has fallen in love with. “A nice girl from my country, she has everything I was looking for in a girl. With her I'd like to spend my life and make her part of my goals.” Rhon said that this girl changed his life and filled the emptiness he had. They help build each other up, they understand each other in many ways; “Today, she is my best friend. When things go tough outside, sometimes it helps to know that there's someone who can help you because she understands me more than others do.”

For Rhon and many immigrants, the U.S. is their dream for a better future, a land where they find and forge themselves. It is a dream of holding someone's hand in the street without wondering where they are from or what their skin color is or what their religion might be. Although they left their countries, these men and women don't forget where they

came from, they keep and cherish the images of their homelands. “I just believe that everything will be fine; I have that voice inside me and this girl too, who reminds me of that.” These are the words and thoughts of an immigrant who's trying hard to make his way in a strange new world.

Jenny Kazadi conducted and translated this interview from French. Jenny was born in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo.

Hanen

Hanen decided she wanted to tell her own story. It is a story that seems like it might be told by any first-generation student navigating the process of applying to college in the U.S.. Since her college essay was a significant part of this process, she decided to include it here as well.



Hanen

“I could not ask my parents because they would have no answers - which was not easy for them either.”

I could have never imagined that I would have to go through such a rigorous process to simply get into college, but this is because I am the first person in my family to go. Neither of my parents went on to higher education, so they are not aware of the process for what I need to do to get into a good college. In Iraq, my father did not graduate from high school because he was drafted into the military for seven years. Here in the U.S, whenever I needed help with anything, I have had to ask someone from school. I could not ask my parents because they would have no answers - which was not easy for them either.

This was a hard year. As a senior, I applied to the schools that are well known to many American-born students, but I did not know much about them at all. The year before, I was not able to visit colleges because I did not know how or why I should. While trying to apply to colleges and handle my senior year workload, my family also needed my help. My

parents, like so many other immigrant parents, don't speak English as well as I do. As a result, they need my help with everything they do, and it seemed like this year, they required my help more than before.

On top of all of this, I learned that I also had to have extracurricular activities in my application and this was a requirement that looked like it would add more work to my already busy schedule. But as I started to join different programs, I used those programs as resources. Make It Happen, The Telling Room and the Portland Mentoring Alliance gave me different kinds of help. My mentor helped me look for colleges and she took me to college visits.

When I was touring a college campus, I did not see any seniors; they were mostly sophomores and juniors with their parents. At that moment I wondered if I had had that opportunity earlier in high school, would I have faced such difficulties now? I wished I could have enjoyed the luxury of just looking at each campus and studying the majors offered when I was younger, but I had to do it all in one year.

I also kept trying to face how I would pay for my education. My parents were always wondering if I will be able to afford to go to college. Unlike most American students, I cannot say, “It's ok; I can take loans,” because I know in my religion, borrowing is not permissible. This adds more anxiety to the problems of going to college and I didn't know how to put this into all my decision making.

My parents ask me. “So where are you heading? What do you want to be?” Sadly, I cannot answer because I honestly have only begun exploring my own interests; the future looks very blurry! My mentor, having connections with people who are educated in my interests, was able to take me to meet them and learn about the different majors. But now that I have gotten accepted to some colleges, and know more about what I would like to do, I don't know whether I will be able to go to where I want due to the tuition.

There are still more unknowns ahead of me. My parents are planning to move to Michigan this spring, which is very far from Boston where I might be going. During my dad's absence this year, it was difficult for me to work at my part-time job and get errands outside of the house done because I still had some papers for colleges and school. I got denied by several colleges during this time, but I didn't have the choice of giving up. If I do that, it would mean I would be setting the worst role model picture for my siblings and failing all the expectations from my parents.

Now I am unsure whether my family will be here when I decide where I am heading. When I am on stage at graduation with my cap and gown, all the parents will be watching except mine. This is supposed to be my conclusion, but I don't have a conclusion because I am still in the middle of deciding where I will go. I know that wherever I enroll, I will do the best that I can, but right now, that is my only certainty.

College Application Essay

Written by Hanen Mohammad

Every morning as I went to get bread from the baker, I waited in line watching kids go to school, smiling and laughing, pointing at their lunch boxes and talking about the classes they had together. I knew it was not only me who was watching other children go to school while I could not; probably other refugees like me in Turkey were also unable to attend school. I was grateful and truly happy for them. but knowing that they were learning how to read and write while I could not heightened my desire to learn.

I felt as if I was trying to send my dreams through the mail to the destination I wanted them to reach. I questioned, why not take it to my desired destination myself? As soon as I got home, I immediately started learning how to read and write (Arabic) using a tiny navy colored grammar book. My sister had borrowed the book from her boss and had to return it within a month. I would walk two miles everyday with my sister to her office in order to copy the instructions from the

grammar book. I remember it was difficult to differentiate between A and E. I would write Anne (mom) and Baba (dad) to help me learn how the letters sounded, especially when they were used often. At first it was hard to learn the alphabet but I had a list of words written on a piece of paper that included every letter in the alphabet to help me.

It is not simple to grow up in a community that was not in favor of women's education; as I used to ride my bike around my neighborhood in Iraq I would hear guys saying, "Let's see what comes of you; be a woman not a tomboy...learn housekeeping instead of going out and learning what a man should learn." Nor is it easy to be driven away from my home and family for choosing education over pure ignorance. I know what it feels like not being able to attend school despite the passion I had for learning. As a child I always took my sisters' notebooks and erased what was written there and traced the faded words to practice how to write beautifully. My sister used to bring chalk from school and teach me the Arabic alphabet using the water tanks on the roof of my house as a board.

Since I arrived in the United States, I have asked my parents to stretch my boundaries which took a lot of courage and perseverance. Arguing with parents is not acceptable in Islam; it's so scary to think of the audacity needed to tell my father I had made my own decision, I still cannot believe I did it. I was determined to gain more experience and open my mind, so I tried to persuade my father to allow me to participate in educational programs and camps. As a freshmen I asked my

dad to allow me to go to Seeds of Peace but he refused. I kept insisting until he let me go to a girls leadership camp. After that camp I told my father how it affected me, and he was pleased.

I left my home for education and I am not willing to return without reaching my goal with the utmost potential. All around the world, there are children who are not able to attend school. For three years, I was one of these children. One of the driving forces behind why I want to go to college is to find ways to help children like me. I cannot tolerate the feeling of being useless or having useless thoughts, and I know that college will expose me to more opportunities. Without furthering my education I will not have the ability to help children attend school, and this would be devastating.

Hanen Mohammad was born in Iraq. This spring, she has been accepted at the University of Southern Maine, University of Maine at Orono, University of Maine at Farmington, Wentworth Institute of Technology, Suffolk University, Hartford University, and Central Michigan University.

By the time this book is published, she will have had to make her choice.

Mahmoud

Hawo was thrilled to be able to sit down with Mahmoud in his office at Portland Public School's Multilingual Center. She walked away inspired and with a new interest in learning about her own culture.



Mahmoud

“Interpreters should interpret from the culture’s perspective, not just interpret what is being said.”

When your country falls apart, sometimes you have no choice but to start over. Mahmoud Hassan, a Somali interpreter for the Portland Public School district, fled from Mogadishu to Kismayo, moved from Kenya to Atlanta, and then finally settled in Maine. After I interviewed Mahmoud, I was struck by how positive he always seems to be. He has become an important part of Maine’s Somali community and is always looking out for everyone but especially for students. Mahmoud’s story shows us how becoming knowledgeable about languages and cultures can put you on a life path and career you’d never expect.

Mahmoud was young when he experienced the horror of war. He was born 1969 and grew up in Mogadishu, Somalia, with his parents, ten siblings and relatives. His family fled to Kismayo hoping to find a safe place to live. After a year, the war had reached them and they had to flee once more to a refugee camp in Kenya. “It was my first time living in place

where the dominant language and culture was not Somali.” Even though the majority spoke Somali, he still had to learn English and Swahili because the education system was in these languages. Using his minimal knowledge of English, Mahmoud taught elementary students and adults in an English Language Literacy class. Mahmoud would never have imagined before the war that he would be moving to a new country, learning a new language and culture, and that this would be the beginning of his path to being an interpreter.

After years living in Kenya, Mahmoud knew that there was no hope of going back home and his options were very limited in Kenya, so he decided to look for a third country to settle in. Some Somali refugees including some of his relatives were already settled in the U.S and they encouraged him to move here. After he left Kenya, he landed in Atlanta, Georgia but it wasn’t what he imagined it would be. “I was shocked about how big the airport and everything was. Everything was bigger and newer,” he said. The challenges he faced when he came to Atlanta were transportation and figuring out the American accent because it was different from his Kenyan-English accent. After living in Atlanta for five years, he moved to Maine because it hoped it would be easier to find a job.

As he adjusted to life and working in the U.S., he noticed the relationships of how people relate to each other - especially, males and females. Back in his home country it was considered unmanly for man to watch a woman do physical labor or carry heavy things. When he came to the U.S., he was fascinated to see women doing physical labor. “I had women

coworkers and I would always run to help pick up some stuff until finally one of the ladies said, ‘I am getting paid to do the same thing, you understand, sir?’ It was then I realized that this was different.” He learned how to live in this new place and accepted these new ways. He didn’t know it but this brought him closer to his ultimate career path.

After volunteering in his new community in Maine, Mahmoud used his knowledge of Somali, Arabic, Swahili, and English to find paid work as an interpreter and cultural broker. Mahmoud told me that being an interpreter is not about just interpreting a word for a word but about understanding the American and Somali cultures. “Interpreters should interpret from the culture’s perspective, not just interpret what is being said.”

When I asked him what Americans should know about his homeland, he said, “Somalis are resourceful people. They are hardy and resilient because they lived a nomadic lifestyle. They are gifted in language and poetry but they may not look gifted in English. Our language is full of proverbs and sayings. The Somali people say that they have a word for everything.”

Mahmoud sometimes worries about how young Somali Americans are not always using all the advantages they have in the U.S. “I think you have more opportunities than we had growing up. You have a stable place to live, you are not afraid of war coming to you. You have better schooling and a better health system. Take advantage of all of this and make yourself

more educated and much more capable individuals - and members of the community, and the country as well.”

By being open to new experiences, working hard to learn about different people, and serving his community, Mahmoud Hassan has made a new life here in Portland. We can learn from him that by getting to know how other peoples’ languages and cultures work, we can all become better able to understand each other. As a young Somali-American woman, I realize that I want to learn more about my own culture, and after interviewing Mahmoud, I want to start asking the questions.

Hawo Ahmed conducted and wrote this interview using both English and Somali. Hawo was born in Dhagahleey Refugee Camp in Kenya.

Dorcas

Although he is already an accomplished Arabic translator, Mohammed decided to tell the story of his friend, Dorcas, using their common language - English. Like Dorcas, Mohammad's own arrival and resettlement in the U.S. was outside of his control.



Dorcas

“Everything seemed to collapse at the same moment. That woman changed my whole impression of Canadian people.”

“We were supposed to spend a week long vacation in Tennessee. That’s what my parents told me and my younger sister,” recalls Dorcas Ngaliema as we sit together in the library. I wanted to interview Dorcas because we can connect about how we both had to leave our countries and couldn’t go back like we’d expected. Dorcas was born in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), but since she moved to South Africa as an baby, she has no memories of the DRC. After 16 years of living in South Africa, Dorcas found herself leaving her beloved friends and places in Cape Town, and facing the uncertainty of her future. As an 18-year-old girl, Dorcas has lived a life full of lessons on the importance of loyalty, family bonds, and freedom; teaching her that nothing ever stays except what’s inside one’s heart.

When war approached in the DRC, fleeing was the only option left for Dorcas and her family. After moving to South Africa, her parents went through a hard time securing a safe

environment and education for Dorcas and her sister. Dorcas’ parents suffered discrimination for a long while. “People would figure out that my parents weren’t from South Africa because of their heavy accents.” Her parents would get told to go back to DRC or that they didn’t belong to South Africa. They were struggling in life without telling the girls about any of the harassment they had to deal with on a daily basis.

Growing up in South Africa, Dorcas went to three different schools that she loved and made friends at, too. She developed the South African accent and adapted to the culture quickly. Moving to the U.S. was a struggle in itself. “We landed in New York City first. We then took the bus to Canada. My father thought that Canada was a better option at the time,” she said. It took the family 10 hours to get to their destination. Once they got off the bus, they had to wait in the bus station. “We were waiting for something, I didn’t really know what it was, but my father kept telling me that it’s not going to take too long.” After two days of sitting in a bus station, Dorcas started feeling terribly sick and hungry, “We could only eat pizza and I never liked pizza since I got out of South Africa, so I refused to eat anything,” Dorcas recalls.

After two long days of waiting, Dorcas and her family were not given good news, “A woman came out and was so mean to us, and told us that we couldn’t enter Canada because we don’t have a blood connection to somebody who already lives here.” This was a shocking and disappointing news for everyone. Everything seemed to collapse at the same moment. “That woman changed my whole impression of Canadian

people, I used to think that people are nice there.” The family had to take the bus back to New York City immediately.

While they were getting on the bus, Dorcas’ father found out that his bank account was not working. They were stuck. It was at that moment when the driver stepped in and told her father that they could get on the bus and pay later when they got to the U.S. Everyone was relieved and thanked the driver for his generosity. However, it didn’t end at that point. When they arrived in New York City at midnight after another long 10 hours, they couldn’t find any bank open at that time. “After seeing my dad so anxious, confused and hopeless, the driver told him to just forget about it and not pay at all. That gave me hope in life. Such a powerful moment,” she remembers.

Dorcas went to South Portland High School when she first came to Maine. She, like most of the newcomers to Maine, had to go through a hard time making new friends at school. Dorcas felt unwelcome in her first days, then after a few weeks she met her first friend, a girl from Jamaica. “After meeting my friend, Keresa, I started to feel more confident and started making more friends in school,” she recalls. After a short while, the family had to move to Portland, and so she had to change her school again to Portland High School. “At first I didn't really like PHS, everything looked old and giant, but then I made a lot of friends here, and that made a huge difference for me.”

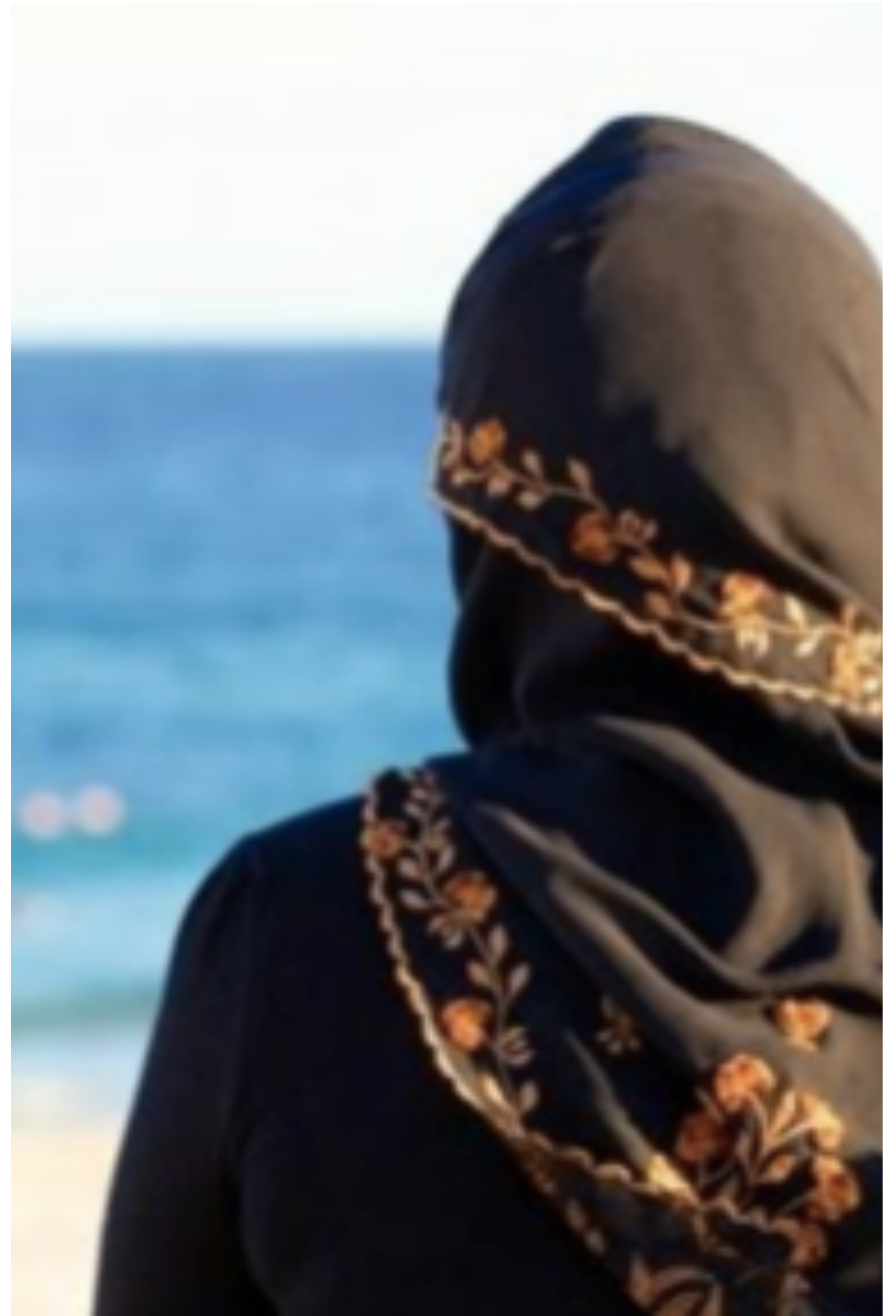
If it only takes one person to change one's impression about a whole country, then think about how many people have we met in our lives. How many people have we met that changed our lives, too? When I reflect on Dorca’s story, I see how being a welcoming person, open minded and loving is extremely important. In our schools, community and life in general, we need to be aware of the fact that how we treat each other can make huge impact on our lives.

When I first came to the U.S. three years ago, I couldn't understand any English, but what I could get a grasp of was body-language and the way people talked to me. I’ve met so many different people in my life, and I can tell you that I labeled the three ways I've been treated so far based on how people interacted with me. There are the helpful, the sweet, and the dangerous people. I walk around Portland breathing in hope that people like Dorcas and I will encounter more help and sweetness than danger.

Mohammed Albehadli conducted this interview. He was born in Karbala, Iraq.

Rana

Sarah received an unexpected phone call from Rana, a childhood friend. Here she recounts and translates their conversation about how life in Syria has changed and the tragedy and seemingly insurmountable challenge Rana now faces.



No photographs of Rana were available. Image credit: Al Arabiya English

Rana

For immigrants and refugees like us, when we know we must leave a place we love, we have to take a “leap of faith” as you say in English or as we say in Arabic, ثقة عمياء

It's very reassuring to finally be able to know that someone special is safe, even if it's over the phone. My childhood friend Rana, called me on March 16th, after getting my number from my other friends in Syria. We hadn't talked since I had left Syria in 2012 to come live in the U.S. Rana used to live in Aleppo, Syria, but now she has been living in a refugee camp for almost one year. She and the remaining members of her family are leaving the refugee camp in May to go to Europe. The reasons why Rana wants to move are to have a better life, go to school, live in a safe place, and to not lose anyone else in her family. As I listened to Rana tell me about the last five years of her life, I kept thinking how much

Syria has changed since I left and how now Syrians were going through so much of what we, Iraqis had gone through. For immigrants and refugees like us, when we know we must leave a place we love, we have to take a “leap of faith” as you say in English or as we say in Arabic, “ثقة عمياء”.

I wasn't thinking about the interview while I was talking to Rana, but during the one and a half hour heartfelt conversation about her life, I thought that everyone should know how hard people in Syria are living, and what makes them want to risk their life in hope of finding a better life. I asked Rana if I could write about her and what she had faced the last five years, and she agreed. After the end of the call, I sat in front of my iPad pretending that I was Rana and I tried to remember everything we talked about and translate it into English. Here's all of what I want people to know about Syrian refugees through Rana's story. (I put her story in italics and my thoughts are in regular type.) I started the conversation with the part where she made me smile and cry at the same time.

To make myself happy I usually laugh really loud, but if the laugh tactic, for some unknown reason, is not functioning. 'The balloon magic' always works. No matter how cold, or scared I am, when I start pretending that I'm blowing balloons, I regularly start laughing. After few minutes, I start pretending the 'balloon machine' stopped working. Then I ask my younger siblings for help. All they need to do is blow and everyone starts laughing.

My name is Rana, and before the war started in Syria, I had a normal life living with my family surrounded by friends. I was a high school student who had gotten accepted to one of the best colleges in Syria called Tishreen College. My country and my life changed radically when the war broke out. I watched relatives and friends leave Syria while I and many others stayed behind, fearing for our lives every day.

I remembered how my life changed when the war started in Iraq. I left all my friends and relatives without knowing that I would never see them again. I never imagined the same things would happen to Syrians. With all the news I hear everyday about Syria, the pictures and videos of the destroyed houses and people's blood all over the streets, it was still hard for me to believe until I heard what happened to Rana.

My mother is dead. She got shot one day on our way to school. I hated school afterwards because it reminded me of the death of my mother, and my backpack with all the books that were saturated with my mother's blood. The fate of my father is unclear.

My hand automatically covered my mouth. I breathed heavily. I remembered the stunningly gorgeous woman that used to call us for lunch when I went to their house to play with Rana. She had a big smile that made the world sigh with contentment. I wanted to get on a plane, fly to Syria and give Rana a hug, and tell her that she deserves to be happy, and have the opportunity to reach her goals.

My plan is to traverse an entire continent, in hope of finding a new life in Europe. I don't want to lose anymore of my family. At the same time, I don't want to leave my country. I don't know what to expect in other countries and how people will treat me.

I told her that I'm scared for her, but I know that she can get over this hard situation. Also I told her that she will miss a lot of things in Syria, but it's worth it to live a better life.

These thoughts scare me. I have heard stories about other Syrians who got lost or risked their lives at sea on their way to find refuge in Europe. Women, children, and men on overcrowded unseaworthy boats. On a journey of hope with an unknown destination and uncertain future.

But I know, I don't have a choice. I have to leave and follow the same road. I cannot understand, not even today, how I got myself into this situation. Before leaving on the journey, I wanted to convince myself that I could make it through and reach Europe safe. Me and the other refugees made tattoos on our hands using a pen, we wrote, 'I refuse to sink.' I want to declare my perseverance and strong will to get through the journey on May 5th, and to be lucky.

I haven't spoken to Rana since our talk and don't think I will before she leaves on her journey to Europe. With the strength and courage that she very clearly has, and the ambition to make a life for herself, I have no doubt that Rana

will be successful if she can make it to a place where she can be safe. Talking to Rana makes me think of how my life would have been if I hadn't left from Syria. I'm looking forward to getting a call from her telling me that she has reached Europe safely with her siblings. I'm really worried about her. I wish I could call her because I still have a lot of questions to ask. To make her dreams come true, she truly must have to take a “leap of faith” on her future.

Sarah Raouf compiled and translated Rana's story from their Arabic conversation. Sarah was born in Baghdad, Iraq.

Mako and Ahmed

Usira lights up with pride and love when you ask her to talk about her parents. “It was so hard to get them to smile for a picture!” She laughs. Unable to decide on whose story to tell, Usira interviewed them both about how they came to be here in Maine and what they hope for their children.



Mako and Ahmed

Although they've both had very little schooling, Mako Aden and Ahmed Abdullahi assume that all four of their children will be attending college. Growing up in Ethiopia and Somalia during times of famine and wars, they experienced so much loss and so Mako and Ahmed -- my parents -- learned to live on their own and support their families at very young ages. Although my mother dreamed of being a midwife and my father envisioned himself as an engineer, without education they have had to do any job that they could get. From the time they wake up for their morning prayers, until well after midnight when they get home from work and finally go to bed, they are completely focused on providing for the future of their children.

Growing up in Kismayo, Somalia as the second oldest of four children and with no father in his life, Ahmed was left with a single mother who worked alone to provide for them. After having a normal childhood, the Somali Civil War

marked as a turning point in his life. A young man at the start of the Civil War, the country Ahmed loved so dearly was now destroyed in front of his eyes. After this, every aspect of life became difficult. His younger brother was killed by the clan-based-military; one of 70 youth who had tried to escape for better lives. These young men were caught, a hole was dug, they were put in a hole and the armed clan military opened fire on them. This massacre became an event that many will never forget, not only Ahmed's family, but in Somalia as a whole.

The war changed the people, the environment, and the way Somalis interacted with each other on a daily basis. There was fear and hatred among the people of the different tribes, which forced many of the people to flee their country. People started to scatter to different parts of the world with no knowledge of what these new journeys might bring. As a roaming soul, looking for a place to rest, Ahmed left for his country for Ethiopia.

As I ask my father about his time and how he adjusted to the people in Ethiopia, he remembers and tells me in Somali, "I found them strange." Here he met people who spoke Somali, but in a way he never heard before. With a new culture to adapt to, he became a truck driver. I asked him about what he remembers from this time. "Garrow was the the most challenging food I had to eat in my life," Ahmed said with a nostalgic laugh about the experience. Garrow is a type of food made from sorghum which is popular in the Ethiopia and Djibouti area. With many other surprising situations,

Ahmed came to learn that not all Somali people have the same culture. After several years, he had adjusted to life in Ethiopia and had learned the language of Amharic and the dialect of Djibouti. While in Ethiopia, Ahmed also met Mako, my mother, and they fell in love.

As the fourth child of eight, Mako lost her parents at a young age. Losing her father at the age of ten, Mako had the void of a strong figure in her life. “I did not know what it meant, but we just cried with my mother,” she tells me in Somali. She explains that my grandfather was a rich man who used to bring clothes, shoes and household items from foreign countries, like Italy and China. He was killed by men who accused him of having too much money, when he refused to give it to them, they shot him to death. After my grandfather’s death, my grandmother became sick with shock and was too weak to help raise her children.

When my mother was 15, her mother died and at this point, she was now forced to grow up and live not as a girl, but as a woman. She became the main breadwinner for her 7 siblings. She never attended school, instead she worked to help her siblings. “Life was hard, but what to do?” After her father's death, she was taken to Djibouti by her aunt, and became a *sharshari*, a person who travels on trains between two countries selling clothes, shoes and other items which are used in households. To do this work she had to learn several languages. She learned it by selling items to her customers. As she describes her constantly moving lifestyle from this time, she remembers, “I was on the train until my marriage.”

After my parents got married, my mother no longer had to work. She is not one to express her emotions very openly but when she tells me, “*Waxan helay qoof i cawiyo*” (“I found a helper.”), I see the sense of relief in her face. With the marriage, she was now a housewife and the work days of being a *sharshari*, with all its dangers, were behind her.

“We sought a better life,” my mother reminds me. However, by the time they had their fourth child, my father, like many truck drivers, was facing attacks and threats on his life. At one point, he was shot in his leg. We left and moved to Somalia but then my father moved on to find work. South Africa became the destination in which life would get better. My father and my brother went ahead in the journey, leaving my mother and the rest of us. My father was so worried about my mother having to travel and survive with three children. “I could not imagine what she went through,” he tells me. It was hard enough for a man with one child, but for a woman this journey was seen as something incredible. Even so, my father and brother were put in jail along the way because they had no official papers. In the corrupt system, they were able to get out.

When I asked them, how did you come through all those countries not knowing their languages? They tell me, “We had to gesture, or use our body as a tool of communication”. With hundreds of languages spoken in Africa, with multiple dialects, there was no other way to communicate or defend themselves. Thieves and others who sought to take advantage of migrants and refugees were a constant problem, but the

police were actually the biggest trouble because they were the ones who demanded money - which was the same in any language for everyone.

After all the struggles, we were reunited in South Africa as a family again and lived there for about eight years. My siblings and I grew, my parents found jobs and this became a place very much like home. Although they were able to make a better living compared to in Ethiopia, South Africa was a place where one never expected to operate a business in peace. South Africa has twelve official languages, some easier than others, and some impossible to learn. Afrikaans is the most spoken language in Cape Town, the province in which we lived. Being in a minority group and the most hated, Somali shop owners had to do what they could to stay safe. “We had our own business,” my mom tells me. It was very easy to make money, but very difficult to be safe in the process. “They could give you a 10 rand bill, and say they gave a hundred.” There was no one to go to for help if a customer wanted to cheat you or hurt you.

For us, America, England, and Europe were the safest places any immigrant could think of to go. The U.N., which operated in Cape Town, helped struggling refugees, as the native South Africans were killing them by the dozen. Remembering this time, my parents tell me, “We were not safe, we feared the kids would get hurt and we would be killed in the shop.” Riots could go off any time in the town and in the rage against the government, the refugees had to pay the price. The U.N.’s process for resettlement in another country

was long; hundreds of questions and tests had to be done, but after four years, our application was accepted and we were brought to America on March 17, 2012.

“America was not surprising at all,” says my mother, a woman who has endured events which would need a lifetime to erase. Compared to what she had been through, coming to the U.S. was easy. Thinking of her journeys before, she says, “Snakes, rapists, thieves, police, bicycles, gates, borders, never ending nights, sunshine with no relief, a journey only Allah could help with.” Other women who had been on the journey to South Africa with us were not so lucky and were abducted or raped and some have not ever been found. But some parts of the transition to living here were unexpected. “It's not easy to make business here,” Ahmed says. A businessman, he found out that licenses and long processes were needed here in the U.S., this is not something he had needed in South Africa. “Everything is calculated.”

My father, Ahmed's day starts at 6am when he arrives at “It'll Be Pizza Company” to begin making and shipping pizza dough and ends when he finishes driving his last fare from the airport in his taxi around 2am. For my mother, Mako, the day also starts at 6am when she sends us to school and goes to work. She comes home later to make dinner for all of us and get us to Dugsi, the Islamic school. At 9 or 10 at night she sits down to study her homework from her Adult Education English classes and do her Koran reading. For us, their children, our jobs are to study hard. Next year, my brother, Abass, will be the first of us to graduate from high school in

the United States. And then each year, one of us children will be graduating. My parents are going to have four years of high school graduations to attend and four years of college graduations to attend. They will get to see what they didn't have the chance to do themselves, but it will also be an eight year process showing them that all of their hard work has paid off.

Usira Ali conducted and translated this interview from Somali. She was born in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia.

Negina, Farhia & Theodette

They come from three different parts of the world, speak different languages and often view the world very differently. Here three young women from Afghanistan, Somalia, and Rwanda share their thoughts about something they all have in common: how they will face their future as women in the U.S.



Negina, Farhia & Theodette

Q: When you think about how your life would be if you had stayed in the country where you were born, what are the first things that come to mind?

Farhia: *“Back in my country girls would get married and be stay home with no education of any kind. Back home I was always taught that a woman who stays home with her kids is the happiest person you will ever see. That could be true but not everyone knows everything.”*

Negina: *“I was born in Afghanistan and lived there for only two years, before I moved to Russia. I spent most of my life*

there. The only thing I know is that Afghanistan is way different than it is now. From what I see on the TV and Internet, I can't see that I would've had a good life there.”

Theodette: *“The first thing that comes to my mind is that I think that if I stayed in Rwanda I would not be able to finish my studies successfully or have the opportunities or go to college and get a good job to help my family. I also think I would have lost all my family.”*

Q: How have your hopes and dreams changed over time as you've gotten older? What has made them change?

Farhia: *“I have always dreamed of becoming a nurse even when I was in Kenya. But one thing that was different was that I never went to school and I never thought I would ever go to one. But that all changed when I came to U.S.”*

Negina: *“I understand that things I want are hard to get, and I have to work hard to achieve my goals, which I definitely will.”*

Theodette: *“My dreams and hopes changed after my father was murdered in Rwanda. That is really when I started to see the reality of this world, how cruel people can be. Now that I am older, I see everything differently. Life cannot be as you imagined and that no one would help you if you do not help yourself first. I am determined to do everything I can to lead a successful career and life.”*

Q: How do you think your life as a woman will be different because you live in the U.S.?

Farhia: *“My life is already different because now I’m going to school and I will be graduating and going off to college soon. When I was in Kenya most of the girls my age didn’t go to school. Some of us were the oldest of a family and had no chance of going to school. For me, I was one of these girls that were the oldest so I went to Dugsi (the religious school) and went home to take care of my younger siblings.”*

Negina: *“I grew up in Rostov-on-Don (simply ‘Rostov’ to locals). It was really different from Maine, it was a urban city with completely different people and setting. If I stayed in my home country of Russia, my life would have been different. I would have known the language and culture, and it would be so much easier for me to do everything!*

Unfortunately, I had to leave, but I’m still thankful to life I have here because I know that there are some people in the world that don’t even have a house or food.”

Theodette: *“I think that my life here in the U.S. as a woman will be good and I will have the privilege to decide things on my own. Also, here I will have lot of freedom as a woman to not stay at home all day but rather to pursue my career and my ambitions. I am grateful for the existence of the U.S. because if not for this country, I would not know the feeling of freedom and pursuing my passions.”*

Q: What are some of the things that you think people in the U.S. should understand about women from where you were born?

Farhia: *“I think that some people don’t understand Somali women - they see our hijabs and assume that we are being forced to wear it. I want people to understand that when we wear a scarf or hijab it is because it is part of our culture and not just a religious rule. Some women wear it differently than others. But a hijab is all the same as long as it covers your head and shoulders. Some people don’t see that having our heads covered is actually a pleasure and most of us can’t do anything without it. But for some others that don’t wear the hijab, they might think that it is annoying or uncomfortable. But that is the feeling that those who wear it never get.”*

Negina: *“They should know that women from Afghanistan have gone through a lot. There are some people who have no respect for women. They treat them like animals and in some parts of the country, women are not allowed to go to school or work. People in the U.S. may think Afghan women are people who wear a scarf and want nothing but to get married and have kids. It is a myth because Afghan women are the strongest women with the best ambitions. They have so many dreams and goals for themselves but unfortunately many of them are not able to achieve them because of the people in power.”*

Theodette: *“I think that people in the U.S. should understand first our values, cultures, and if possible put themselves in our place for a minute. Think about where we are standing and why we do things in certain different ways. I think that this does not only come from me but many of the women who are here from different countries and cultures would share the same opinion.”*

Q: Who are your role models and the women you look up to now?

Farhia: *“My mother is my role model and the woman I look up to because she has everything that I want in life when I get older. My mother has kids, work, and she is always ready to help the ones in need. I want that in my future too.”*

Negina: *“My one and only role model is my mom and I always look up to her. Role models for other young immigrant girls should be people who are knowledgeable and who have open minds.”*

Theodette: *“My role models and the women that I look up to now are two women who are most important to me. My mentor in high school for four years and my aunt who lives in France. I respect and look up to them for their wisdom and their great advice that has helped me thus far. They have helped me to become who I am today: strong and independent.”*

Q: How do you think you will balance the pressures of work and family life as you become an adult?

Farhia: *“I try not to put so much of pressure on myself but I know that as long as I have my family and friends I will always have their support. I think someone who has love and support can get far in their future. But the most important thing for me is that I keep believing in myself.”*

Negina: *“I don't think I'll have a huge family when I become an adult. I'll have a good education and career and then I'm going to think about a family. Now, my siblings and my education are the most important things in my life because they are what revolve around me and will be in my life in the future.”*

Theodette: *“Work and my family life are both important to me and things that I cannot give up. So, I think that if I give each one a place in my life, I will be able to withstand that pressure and hopefully have my family support me through my career.”*

Q: What advice do you have for young girls from your cultural background who are growing up here?

Farhia: *“One piece of advice I have for them is to keep their culture and to not lose or forget their native language. Most girls who are my age have lost a lot of their culture and*

language. I would say to stick to who you were before you came to the U.S, because that is the real you. Change is inevitable but choose the right type of change.”

Negina: “I would like to tell them to be patient and try their hardest to achieve their goals.”

Theodette: “Some advice that I would have for these young girls is to continue to be yourself and do not change for anyone to like you or accept you. I would tell them that when you see an opportunity you should grab it while you can. They should work hard for your future, for yourself and for those who you left behind or those who died for you so, that wherever they may be they will watch you and be proud of you.”

Q: You are all about to graduate from high school in the U.S. When you think about your futures, what are you most looking forward to?

Farhia: “I’m looking forward to going onto college for a 4 to 6 year plan and study nursing. I hope to have my dream job and build a family.”

Negina: “I’m looking forward to be a successful person and do whatever I want to do. I’m going to be graduating from high school and go to college. I will be majoring in international relations and I hope to work with UN one day. I am very excited to start a new chapter of my life next year.”

Theodette: “I am looking forward to the start of another phase of my life and that is to get my college degree and work my way through the society and be successful in my career. I want to hold my head up and show my mom, everyone and especially myself, that I can accomplish all of my goals and dreams.”

The Myths and Realities of Immigration

As we worked on this project, the political rhetoric about immigration policy and the role of new Americans was becoming particularly heated. In some cases, the myths were merely uninformed and in other cases they were dangerously hateful and fear-mongering. In an effort to correct some of this misinformation, student, Jessie Wright researched some of the top myths we have heard.



New U.S. citizens taking the Oath of Allegiance at a naturalization ceremony at Lyman Moore Middle School. Photo credit: Portland Press Herald

Myths and Realities: Immigrants, Refugees, and Asylum Seekers

Myth #1:

Most immigrants are here illegally and illegal immigration is increasing.

Reality:

In 2013, of the 41 million foreign-born people living in the U.S., 30 million were naturalized citizens, permanent residents, or legal residents.

Of the approximately 11 million undocumented immigrants, 40% of them had entered the U.S. with documentation but had let their visas expire. According to the Pew Research Center, the population of undocumented immigrants has decreased and leveled off in the last five years

Myth #2:

Immigrants take away good jobs and lower the wages for native born American workers. They are bad for the economy.

Reality:

Approximately 96% of working age migrants in the U.S. work in sectors that most native-born Americans avoid. Studies have shown that foreign-born workers have no effect on lowering wages.

Having a large group of workers with fewer legal rights or without the resources to fight for their rights has meant that many industries (and the overall economy) have benefited and even relied on undocumented workers. In Maine, between 2006 and 2010, there were 2,711 new immigrant business owners which helped create new jobs and bring in tax revenue.

Myth #3:

Immigrants bring crime and terrorists use the refugee system to infiltrate our country.

Reality:

Immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than native-born Americans. The vast majority of U.S. residents linked to terror since 2002 are U.S. citizens.

It would make no sense for a terrorist to use the refugee system to enter the U.S. Applicants must pass through a series of highly rigorous background checks through multiple government agencies and many are rejected. According to the U.N. Refugee Agency, only about 1% of the world's refugees are actually permanently resettled.

Myth #4:

Undocumented immigrants don't pay taxes and use benefits meant for native-born Americans.

Reality:

Undocumented immigrants paid an estimated \$10.6 billion to state and local taxes in 2010. They contribute more in payroll taxes than they will ever consume in public benefits. They do not qualify for welfare, food stamps, or Medicaid.

Most economists agree that by providing schooling and education to the children of undocumented immigrants, our system is making an investment for the future when these children become workers and taxpayers. Additionally, all immigrants will add a net of \$611 billion to the Social Security system over the next 75 years. They are keeping the Social Security Trust Fund solvent and cutting off immigration would increase the size of the Social Security deficit by 31 percent over 50 years.

Myth #5:

Today's immigrants aren't willing to "wait in line" to become citizens or learn English like past waves of Americans' ancestors did.

Reality:

Prior to WWII, most immigrants and refugees did not require documentation. Many immigrants of earlier generations would not have qualified for entry under today's laws. 75% of immigrants speak English within 10 years of arrival and demand among immigrants for English language instruction far exceeds what is available.

There are only four categories for eligibility to become a legal resident of the U.S.: 1) Through a close family member who is a legal resident. 2) Through an employer or special skill. 3) Through a special lottery of special visas. 4) Through a special category or protected group of people (e.g. refugees or political asylees.)

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Glossary of terms:

Immigrant: a person who comes to live permanently in a foreign country

Refugee: a person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster

Asylum seeker: a person who has left their home country as a political refugee and is seeking protection from another

Naturalized citizen: an immigrant who has lawfully become the citizen of another country

Undocumented immigrant: a foreign born person who entered a country without inspection or stayed beyond expiration of a visa or green card

Please note: The term “illegal alien” is offensive and outdated and is typically used by biased sources intended to promote anti-immigrant ideas and agendas.

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