

## Somali Oral History Project

**Interviewee(s):** Ali Mohammed (Almoh) Bahaji

**Others present:**

**Place of Interview:** Yellow Cab Offices, Salt Lake City, UT

**Date of Interview:** August 3rd, 2019

**Language:** English

**Interviewer:** Haden Griggs

**Recordist:** Same

**Photographer:** Same

**Recording Equipment:** Tascam

**Transcription Equipment:** Express Scribe

**Transcribed by:** Haden Griggs

**Brief Description of Contents:** An interview with Ali discussing his experiences in Somali, coming to the United States and his business in Utah, as well as some general thoughts about Somali and America.

**Reference:** **HG:** Haden Griggs, **AB:** Ali Bahaji

**NOTE:** False starts, pauses, or transitions in dialogue such as “*uh*” and starts and stops in conversations are not included in transcript. All additions and added information to transcript are noted with brackets.

### TAPE TRANSCRIPTION

[00:01]

**HG:** That looks like it’s working, okay. So, it is August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2019. I am here with Ali Mohammed Bahaji—

**AB:** Almoh, yeah. Ali Mohammed Bahaji.

**HG:** —at his Yellow Cab company. And thank you so much again, Mr. Bahaji.

**AB:** And thank you too.

**HG:** Just for the recording could you please tell me your full name and your birth year?

**AB:** My name is Ali Mohammed Bahaji and, 1960.

**HG:** 1960. Could you tell me a little bit, and we were just talking about it, before we started but could you tell me a little bit about your job here and what you do for work?

**AB:** Yeah, I work Yellow Cab and I come refugee, country, USA in 1996. June. And, after that I work at another company, it's called [unclear] and one year and a half, and after that I make the decision to become taxi driver. I start for taxi driver, many years. Seventeen years. And I've been dreaming and I become owner/operator of many cars. And I've been dreaming to buy this company one day. And my dream is coming true three years ago. And I own, and I'm happy with the company.

[1:13]

**HG:** Congratulations, that's a wonderful accomplishment.

**AB:** Yeah.

**HG:** So, could you tell me a little bit about where you grew up and what that area was like?

**AB:** In back home?

**HG:** uh-huh.

**AB:** Somalia, Mogadishu.

**HG:** Mogadishu?

**AB:** Yes.

**HG:** Can you tell me a little bit about Mogadishu when you were younger there?

**AB:** Yeah, it's been nice place before civil war. After civil war, everything is going out. And we moved to Kenya. And I become refugee. I got lucky. And I married my wife in Salt Lake City and that time I have one boy. Single father. Yeah.

**HG:** So, can you tell me a little about your family, are they all here with you? You mentioned some were back home, or—

**AB:** We having some sister and brothers in the USA. Another different place, everybody move from over there. And I meeting my wife, wonderful Zahra in Salt Lake City. And we married, others—almost twenty years now. Twenty-two. Yeah. She did a good job for me. I'm happy. What she did it.

**HG:** Twenty-two years.

**AB:** Yeah.

**HG:** That's a long time. Congratulations on that. So, you mentioned the civil war, but can you tell me. What led to you leaving Somalia, going to Kenya? How was that process...

[2:24]

**AB:** Because it's been everybody running. Yeah. Everybody coming on the where you wanted to go, because, it's been very tough life. And, one day, I got to go with my brother, live Kenya, and he said, "sent for your ticket. Come into Kenya." And I come Kenya. And I stay couple of years. After that, I got sponsor, from refugee. IOM, and I come Salt Lake City. Straight.

**HG:** Directly to Salt Lake?

**AB:** Direct Salt Lake City.

**HG:** So, how long were you in Kenya?

**AB:** Kenya, couple of years.

**HG:** Couple of years.

**AB:** Yeah, couple of years. And I been before. I come many times.

**HG:** What did you do in Mogadishu for work or [unintelligible]--

**AB:** Family's been business. My dad. Yeah, our life is business. Our ground transportation. Small buses, like that one. I've been driving that time.

**HG:** Okay. [pauses]. Can you tell me a little about that process of coming to the United States? So, you mentioned sponsorship, but what was that like making that adjustment from—

**AB:** No, because it's been refugee. And, everybody got it, the opportunity to come to United State for refugee.

**HG:** Uh-huh.

**AB:** IOM, has been sponsor at that time, and Catholic in Salt Lake City. My sponsor has been Catholic. And Batar is my case worker first time, that time.

**HG:** That's cool.

**AB:** Yeah. And he did a good job for me. And we very close friend, and we come same place back home.

[4:00]

**HG:** So, what was that transition like, was it strange to come to the United States or the weather, or anything like that that was an adjustment? Or—

**AB:** Uh? Well, yeah. A little bit it's tough. Yeah. After I come over there. I lost my apartment, I come myself. Almost I come shelter.

**HG:** Oh.

**AB:** Yeah. Before I don't marry my wife. It's been tough. I have job and I don't have place to live. And I been two days in a shelter. Salt Lake City. [Ali laughs briefly]

**HG:** That is tough.

**AB:** Yeah.

**HG:** What were you doing for work at that time?

**AB:** I work in a school district.

**HG:** School district.

**AB:** Yeah.

**HG:** Okay.

**AB:** Yeah. I been working school district to help people, for mental people. For to get together some X-ray machine parts. I work two years. It's been nice to me, the people. And after that I come to drive Yellow Cab. And I left Yellow Cab, I left Ute Cab. I drive Ute Cab one year. After that, I come back.

**HG:** So, a lot of time spent taxi driving.

**AB:** Yeah. Taxi driving.

**HG:** So, you did driving in Somalia as well, you said?

**AB:** No. Somalia, my dad has vans.

**HG:** Okay.

**AB:** I drive help. Everybody Somalia, you can drive car.

**HG:** Uh-huh.

**AB:** Yeah, doesn't matter. It's no process for taxi, or that kind. Yeah.

**[5:13]**

**HG:** Gotcha. So, what did you do to—hold on, let me back up. Just processing your story here. It sounds like you had some real difficulties coming here. Two days in a homeless shelter. I imagine it was an adjustment to come to a new country, so, what did you do to be able to help you to come to where you are today, to meet those challenges?

**AB:** Because I been challenged a lot of thing and after that I got a job in the school district. I work. And I have money. And nobody you can rent for you, because, nobody know you. It's very tough to rent any apartment. I tried to rent many apartment, because first my apartment it's been Catholic. And I moved without note. And my history, everywhere I go, if I tell him I moved to that apartment, he can call the person and nobody rent for me. I billed a couple of months out. After that, I make the decision, I met roommate and I stayed with friends, and I work, I make good money. Finally, I got my wife. We met, she been refugee too. In the Catholic.

**HG:** Is she from Somalia as well?

**AB:** Somalia, yeah.

**HG:** So, you guys were able to get together?

**AB:** Yeah.

**[6:30]**

**HG:** So, how long have you lived in the Salt Lake area? You said you came directly to—

**AB:** Direct to Salt Lake City, 1996. June. After that I'm around, sometimes South Salt Lake, Salt Lake, now West Valley last seventeen years. At our own home.

**HG:** So, mostly around the Salt Lake area then?

**AB:** Yeah.

**HG:** So, do you ever see yourself moving anywhere else in the future?

**AB:** No. I don't think so. I try a lot of different place. It's my favorite, Utah.

**HG:** Where else have you tried?

**AB:** I tried Minnesota, [unclear, possibly Seattle], Dallas. I don't like it.

**HG:** That is all over. [laughs]

**AB:** Yeah. I've been different, in like Indiana, Kentucky. I visit, because I been looking for place to stay. And I been, in, out, in, out, in, out. Finally, I come back, and I try to open a store, restaurant. If you been before, Daisy Market, Sharazad. Sharazad restaurant. We can go one day. It's big restaurant. I try to open, I've been on for five years. It's no good. And I open another store, its name is Juba African Market. I been tough. Finally, I say, "better to stay in the ground transportation." Yeah.

[7:58]

**HG:** Makes sense.

**AB:** And I have now employee. And I have hundred driver. I'm excited. Yeah.

**HG:** That is exciting.

**AB:** Yeah. My kids growing. Everybody's good. No complaint.

**HG:** That sounds really—

**AB:** We say *alhamdulillah* [praise to God]. God—

**HG:** Alhamdulillah.

**AB:** Yeah.

**HG:** So, do you stay in pretty good touch with the Somali community here in Utah?

**AB:** Yes.

**HG:** Involved.

**AB:** Yes. Yeah.

**HG:** How about back home, are you—

**AB:** Yeah. Back home it's been, because, back home is nobody interest that thing. Everybody's together. Yeah. It's not anything separate. If we become friend you can live my home. I

can stay your home. We don't have difficult to come everybody. We eat each other's—if I go, today for example, I have haircut. I meet one of my friend, we used to drive taxi together. And he say, "let me pay." No. I say, "let me pay." I pay. Because that one is our culture. If you come to meet me in restaurant, I'm in first. I pay. Most, we do it that way. Yeah. Or Starbucks, we don't have to you to pay. Who is first come, he can pay, if he has it. Money. That time he spoke it.

**HG:** That's good to know.

**AB:** Yeah.

**HG:** So, how do you stay in contact with people in Somalia now, are you—

**AB:** So—

**HG:** —calling regularly or—?

**[9:19]**

**AB:** Yeah. Sometime, because it's technology now. Whatsapp, Facebook, a lot of things. It's easy. Before, it's been tough. Now it's easy to communication everybody. You open your phone, you can see your friend many years. Yeah, it's not very, yeah. Before you mail mail in an envelope all that kind of fax. It's nothing. Now you can put in a little bit in word, and right away.

**HG:** Yeah, it's pretty amazing, how—

**AB:** amazing, yeah.

**HG:** —much easier it is to stay in touch with everybody. So, one of the things I'm studying is the experience of religion. Understanding Islam. So, can you tell me a little bit, if it was an adjustment, or what it was like to move here as a Muslim in Utah, compared to living in Somalia? Was that a adjustment?

**[10:06]**

**AB:** No. Because, religion—I love my religion. And I support my religion, and best religion, what I believe. Yeah. And I believe my God, and my messenger, Mohammed. Yeah. And it's not have any issue in Salt Lake City. Back home, I'm, today, better in the United States, Muslim. Back home, you have difficult right now, because civil war. Yeah. Some people, you can shoot you about religion this time back home. Or some people you say, "Oh, you're praying the wrong way." Maybe he can shoot you. In America I can pray where I wanted. I can go which mosque I wanted. I can say what I wanted to talk. If something doesn't bother, bad thing. Yeah. If I have right to talk, I can talk what I want. Back home, little bit it's tough. Yeah.

**HG:** So, It's harder back home, actually, huh?

**AB:** Yeah.

**HG:** How about Kenya, can you tell me a little bit about your time in Kenya, what it was like to stay there?

**AB:** Yeah. Kenya, you can't stay, because, if you speak in a very well, and it's still corrupt. Yeah. If some place in corrupt it's difficult. It's not, like, in the USA if you go any office, anything, you have right, you can get it. In Kenya, until you pay something.

**HG:** Sounds difficult.

**AB:** Yeah. Or you have to got it, somebody closer for you, he make you in easy. Yeah. In America, any paper I wanted, if I have right to get that paper, I can get it. No matter. Yeah.

**HG:** So, can you tell me [pauses], your experiences, I mean, that's something a lot of people don't go through. And students who are going to be learning from these experiences. Would you say—how would you say your experience coming to the United States affected how you decided to pursue your future going forward. Does that make sense, what I'm asking? Like—

[12:08]

**AB:** Yeah, because, my kids now, is USA citizen, everybody's born in Salt Lake City. I born back home, and my kids from Utah. It's two different change. Yeah. My kids, if I say, in back home, he doesn't believe. He say, "I'm from USA." What his answer. And I'm glad, because, my grandfather, he come from Yemen, originally in Somalia. Many years ago. Two hundred years, I think so. And my dad he born—I born in Somalia after that. We come in the United—we change now. Maybe we stay longer. Yeah. My kids, everybody. Maybe he got kids and stay. I don't know what area. Maybe change to West Valley to another state or another city, we don't know. Yeah.

**HG:** Wonderful. Definitely [pauses], I guess forward thinking, looking to the future that way. Great potential. So, is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your experiences that we haven't covered? What it was like to come here or what it was like before the civil war or?

**AB:** No. No.

**HG:** Okay. Awesome. Well, thank you, so much for your time.

**AB:** Thank you too.

**HG:** Mr. Bahaji, I appreciate it. Yeah, I guess we can talk a little about this afterwards, but I'll sign off. So, this is Haden Griggs. I've been here with Ali Bahaji on August 3<sup>rd</sup>, and have had a great interview.



