

Somali Oral History Project

Interviewee(s): Abdulkhaliq Barbaar

Others present: Omar Osman

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Interviewer: Haden Griggs

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Transcribed by: Haden Griggs

Brief Description of Contents: An interview with Abdulkhaliq discussing his experiences in Somali, Ethiopia, Kenya, as well as his experiences coming to Nashville, then Salt Lake and his experiences there.

Reference: **HG:** Haden Griggs, **AB:** Abdulkhaliq Barbaar **OO:** Omar Osman

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: All right, it's September 9, 2019. I am here with Abdulkhaliq Barbaar, accompanied by Omar Osman. We're doing an interview at the [pauses] what is the name of this building?

AB: The Hartland Partnership Center.

HG: Hartland Partnership Center.

AB: Uh-huh.

HG: Thank you very much, Abdulkhaliq for meeting with me today.

AB: Uh-huh.

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

AB: Yes. Abdulkhaliq Barbaar. 1985.

HG: 1985. And, we talked about it a little bit when we met last time, but could you tell me a little more about what you do for work? And what you do volunteer here?

AB: All right. I work for the University of Utah and this building we are in, UNP. The department I work for is called University Neighborhood Partners. Short for UNP. And my position is partnership director. And I oversee all the partnership work that we do here.

HG: So, in detail, what does that entail for your day to day?

AB: So, we have three umbrella areas. We have education pathways, we have community leadership, and we have community capacity and well-being. And each of the areas have partnership managers. And what we do is—our long-term goal is to decrease systemic barriers to higher education, so that more people can be enrolled in higher education, and in order to do that, we have to address housing, employment, transportation, child care. So, this building focuses on those mental health help. This building focuses on that, and we support the partners to use the building. So that they support more residents.

[1:40]

HG: So, is that a lot of hands on, face to face work for you, or is it mostly administrative?

AB: fifty-fifty.

HG: fifty-fifty.

AB: Yeah.

HG: That's a good mix then. I— I'm not a huge fan of administrative, but—

AB: Yeah.

HG: So, when did you arrive in the United States?

AB: 1999.

HG: 1999.

AB: Yeah.

HG: And before that, where were you born, and where did you grow up?

AB: I was born in Somalia. I used to live in Mombasa, Kenya. I lived there for about seven years. Then I came to the US.

HG: How long were you in Somalia before you moved to Mombasa?

AB: Seven.

HG: Seven?

AB: Yeah.

HG: So, can you tell—maybe it will be easier if we take it in stages. What do you remember, growing up in Somalia, before you moved to Kenya? I know you were quite young, but—

AB: Yeah. I don't remember a lot, to be honest with you. All I remember is us fleeing Somalia. And the war starting. By the time I started knowing things, the war started, early 1991, and fleeing to Ethiopia, living in Ethiopia for a year. Then moving to Kenya. But I don't remember a lot about Somalia.

HG: I understand. What did your parents do? What part of Somalia did you live in?

[3:04]

AB: Baidoa, Somalia. It's about—

HG: Baidoa.

AB: —It's about a hundred and sixty miles away from Mogadishu.

HG: I've heard of that. They call it the City of Paradise, is that right? Or—

AB: Yep. Exactly.

HG: What did your parents do there for livelihood?

AB: My mom was a business woman and my dad was a politician.

HG: Okay.

AB: Yep.

HG: So, what led, I mean, the civil war, obviously, but what specifically led up to your family's decision to leave Somalia?

AB: Since my dad was a politician, we became a target for [pauses] killing. They wanted to kill my dad. And we had no option but to flee. And the best option was to go to Ethiopia first.

HG: What do you remember about that process, of leaving Baidoa, going to Ethiopia? You said you were about seven at the time, so I imagine it was—

AB: Uh-huh. I remember one day that we were sitting at my house, and we have front yard. And about five guys came here with guns. My dad, my grandma, my mom, we were all sitting in the front yard. It was in the evening. And, they came in—and just to make sure my dad was there. And they greeted my dad, “How are you? We just came to see you.” And they left. As soon as it got dark, my dad left as well, and my older brothers. Because he knew they were going to come back. And then, shortly, they came back around 10 PM, 10:30. Between 10 and 11. And, they harassed us. They started hitting my mom. Asking where he went, and my older brothers went. And she said she doesn't know. So, they say—they left, “If we come back here, we will kill you all.” And as soon as they left, and we left as well. We went to the neighbor's house. I remember being under a bed. And they were looking for us. And then the neighbor, this great lady, was telling them “we haven't seen them. We don't know where they are.” We were hiding under the bed. And she convinced them that we were not there. So, they left. And in the morning, when we all left, we went into the bushes. And after we decided to flee Somalia.

HG: Did your family, do you know if they knew these men or if they were—

[5:34]

AB: Uh-uh. No. My dad knew them, but not my mom, probably. Yeah.

HG: Okay. So, what was that trip like, if you remember, from Somalia to Ethiopia? You went on foot then? Is that right?

AB: No. We went on a bus.

HG: A bus.

AB: It was a bus and a pickup truck. A group were going and we just went with them. And, what I remember is there, from between Somalia, not the borders, but somewhere within Somalia there is road block. Called Jump over Hell. Nar ka bood. I don't know if you heard.

HG: One more time?

OO: Jump over—

AB: Jump over hell.

HG: Jump of a hell?

AB: Yeah, jump—Yeah. You know, like fifty percent chance of surviving.

HG: Oh! [nervous laugh]

AB: Yeah, so. Everyone has to get out of the car, and you have watch it, because there's landmines and there are rebels, wanted to rob you or kill you, or take your stuff. And we are lucky enough to survive and get to Ethiopia.

[6:39]

HG: Wow.

AB: Yeah.

HG: Where did you end up in Ethiopia?

AB: A city called, first, Weldiya, it's like the border of Somalia and Ethiopia, then we went to Negele. It's inside Ethiopia. We lived in the Negele for about four months. Then we went to Moyale. Moyale is the border of Kenya and Ethiopia. There is Moyale, Kenya and Moyale, Ethiopia. We stayed there for about a year. Then we went to Mombasa.

HG: Okay. So, I mean it was only a short time in Ethiopia, but what do you remember about Ethiopia? Maybe what was different from Somalia, what was it you noticed about where you were?

AB: Yeah. Mainly what I remember is lack of support. Lack of resources, lack of friends. Not knowing the language. Discrimination. All of that. But I don't remember a lot of it. It was blurry, a little bit. But it was a lot of day to day trying to survive.

HG: Were you guys in like a refugee camp or staying with—

AB: No. At the time there was no refugee camp yet. 'Cause it was—the war started 1991, I don't know the month.

OO: The exact—the war they noticed that start the small things is like 1990.

AB: Uh-huh. Yeah.

OO: Yeah, and then when they start serious, is like—

AB: ‘91.

OO: 1991.

AB: And we fled, two, three months after, like, to Ethiopia. And there were no refugee camps then.

HG: So, what led to your family’s decision to try for Kenya instead?

AB: More resources. In Mombasa they had one refugee camp at the time called Utange Somali. Then later on they had Utange Bravani and Utange Benadiri. So, we were told there are more resources if we go to Mombasa, Kenya.

[8:49]

HG: So, is that just a process of paperwork transfer, or did you guys have to make that journey on foot? Or bus? Or—

AB: So, we went—to get into Kenya, you have to sneak in, like—so we were children so we could walk in. No one would ask us for anything. But my older siblings and my aunt, they had to sneak in. And—

HG: How many of there were you, your family? Together.

AB: So, my mom, while we were in Ethiopia, Negele, my mom went back to Somalia, and my dad. And so I stayed with my aunt and my other siblings.

HG: What led to your parents to want to go back to Somalia? Or—to decide to, I mean, want not the right word, but—

AB: So, the plan was we will stay in Ethiopia. And they will go back first and the war will end, and we will go back. All of us.

HG: Okay.

AB: We didn’t think it would be long. So—

HG: did you just think it was going to be short term conflict?

AB: Short term. we would go back, and they went back to prepare our house, and the UN were coming in. I think, US and Australian were coming in as well. So, everybody thought it’s

about time to go back, but it didn't. So, when they went back to Somali, we went to Moyale. And then we got a, it's not a phone call, I don't know what it's called. Ta—

OO: It's the radio call.

AB: The radio call, yeah.

OO: Yeah.

AB: Saying, we can't go back, so the best option was to go Mombasa. So, we went with a truck and my older siblings and my aunt sneaked in. We met somewhere, and we all got on the truck. We went to Nairobi. It was a long journey. We went to Nairobi, stayed in Nairobi for about a week, I think. Then after that we went to Mombasa. Then Mombasa, we lived in a refugee camp.

[11:07]

HG: What was the name of that camp?

AB: Utange Somali.

HG: Otange Somali—

AB: Utange.

HG: Yeah, that's right, you said that. So, you spent about seven years in Kenya?

AB: Uh-huh.

HG: So, a good part of your childhood. What was it like in Kenya, compared to Ethiopia, Somalia? Just growing up there.

AB: Definitely better than Ethiopia. Mombasa, one thing that's good about Mombasa at the time, I don't know if it's true now, but there's a lot of mango trees, coconut trees. So, even if you don't have food at home, you can eat those, right?

OO: Yeah, because the Utange area is not the town of Mombasa.

AB: Uh-huh.

OO: It's the place they have like a farm.

AB: Uh-huh.

HG: Okay.

OO: So, when the government decide to help refugee there, they open the Utange first thing and then there was like a three camp.

AB: Uh-huh.

OO: One is Utange, another is—[unclear due to various speakers, perhaps Ifo],

AB: Utange Bravani, yeah, yeah.

OO: And then there's Barawa.

AB: Uh-huh.

OO: Yeah, it's all different.

AB: Yeah.

OO: different places.

HG: Okay.

[12:08]

AB: Yeah, so. There's a lot of mango trees, it's not as hot as Ethiopia. And if you're hungry, you just go find a mango, and—

HG: There's at least fruit available, huh?

AB: Yeah, fruit available. Yeah. And you get a ration card and you get food from the camp. And you have a hope that be resettled in a different country. So, it was way better.

HG: Were your parents able to join you in Mombasa?

AB: My dad was. But my mom didn't. When my mom went back in the beginning of '92, mid '92, I think, or beginning of '92, then I met her here in Utah in 2003.

HG: So, she went directly from Somalia to Utah?

AB: She went to Kenya, then Egypt, then to Utah.

HG: Okay. So, you didn't see her until you moved here then.

AB: Uh-huh. Yeah.

HG: So, that must have been pretty tough.

AB: Yeah, it was, yeah.

HG: So, was your family able to work? You said there's ration cards. Is there an opportunity for you to work while you were there? Or to go to school?

AB: I didn't go to school. I mainly went to the Quranic school.

HG: Okay.

AB: Where we learned Quran, but I didn't go to school in Kenya, because you need a resident's card called *kitambulisho*. If you don't have that, it's hard to go to school. So, we mainly went to Islamic school.

HG: Was that run by Somalis in the camp, or—

AB: In the camp yeah. In the camp yeah.

HG: [unintelligible] What's—I've heard a little bit a couple times now, that's focused on Quranic education?

AB: Quran.

HG: Arabic and the like?

AB: Not even Arabic—

HG: Not even Arabic—

AB: Just Quran.

HG: Just Quranic.

AB: Yeah. Uh-huh.

HG: Okay. Mainly religious?

AB: Uh-huh.

HG: So, I mean, there probably wasn't a lot of contrast for you, 'cause you were so young, but what was practicing your religion like in Kenya? 'Cause I understand—Somalia's almost 100% Muslim.

AB: Uh-huh.

HG: Kenya doesn't have as many?

AB: Uh-huh.

HG: Is that correct?

AB: Uh-huh.

HG: So—

AB: But, the ironic thing is, there are more mosques in Mombasa than Mogadishu.

HG: Really? [laughs]

AB: Yeah, at the time. [Haden laughs]. Yeah, 'cause every little town has a mosque. Right?
There are a lot of mosques. Actually, I don't know if it's true, but there are more Muslims in Mombasa than Christians, I think.

OO: Yeah—

AB: --or not.

OO: Yeah, it's like a coast area.

AB: Uh-huh.

OO: That have too many [a lot of] Muslim.

AB: Hmm.

OO: But now it look like it's almost 50/50 now.

AB: Yeah, okay.

HG: Okay.

OO: Because when Somali go there, it look like almost now, but they say percentage Muslims is 40%.

AB: Okay.

OO: Christian, like 60. But I'm not sure.

AB: Uh-huh.

OO: But, wherever you go Mombasa, it looks like a Muslim. Muslim city.

AB: Muslim city, yeah.

OO: Or like a state.

AB: Yeah.

OO: Yeah.

[15:09]

HG: Gotcha. Is it mostly Somalis then or do you have people from the Gulf—

OO: Yeah.

HG: --that have settled there as well?

AB: People from the gulf yeah. People from even Yemen, Oman. People from Tanzania.

OO: Yeah, Tanz—yeah.

HG: Okay, so pretty multicultural city.

AB: Uh-huh, yeah.

HG: So, were you mostly in the camp? Was it mostly Somalis as your community? Or did you have a—

AB: Mostly Somali—

HG: Or did you have a good chance for intermixing at the mosques, and those kinds of things?

AB: So, inside the camp is all Somalis.

HG: Right.

AB: But, outside of the camp, there is a tribe called—

OO: There's different types, no?

AB: Different types, yeah.

OO: So, it's like in Kenya, maybe they have almost—

AB: Uh-huh.

OO: thirty type.

AB: Yeah.

OO: Tribes, no?

HG: Wow.

AB: Wow.

OO: But you can call like a bantus, no?

HG: Okay.

OO: Because there's a people called Swahili.

HG: Uh-huh.

OO: Means Swahilis like a Sahil.

AB: Uh-huh.

HG: Yeah. Coast?

OO: Yeah, coast.

AB: Uh-huh.

OO: So, there's a people, like Arabs, so there's a people from Oman.

AB: Uh-huh.

OO: The people from Yemen. So, they have different. And then they come there, they married Bantus to have people.

AB: Uh-huh.

OO: They come this. Yeah.

HG: So, you got a mix of the Bantu—

OO: Yeah, yes, yes, yes.

AB: —Culture and the Arabic culture?

AB: Uh-huh.

OO: Yeah.

HG: Okay, so you have much chance for that, or did you spend most of your time in the camps?
Or were you in the cities?

AB: Most of my time in the camp.

HG: Okay. What did your Father—

AB: —There was a time that we lived outside the camp. But it was brief.

HG: Brief.

AB: Uh-huh.

HG: Why's that?

AB: Because there was a fight between the Somalis and one of the tribes, and there was a fire
inside the camp and it destroyed almost 80% of the camp.

HG: So, you guys moved out—

AB: Uh-huh.

HG:—and then when the camp was restored, you moved back in?

AB: Yeah, a little bit later. We—No, we moved into a different camp.

HG: Oh, different camp?

AB: Yeah.

HG: Oh, so that was just never.

AB: Uh-huh.

HG: Wow. So, better than Ethiopia, but still definitely not necessarily a warm welcome in
Kenya.

AB: No. [laughs]

HG: Okay, do you know, did your Father and your aunt, were they able to work while they were
there or—?

[17:07]

AB: No.

HG: No?

AB: No. Yeah [affirming the no].

HG: And you guys were there for seven years?

AB: Yeah, my oldest brother had a business, selling clothing, and we will go to...what's it called? Middle—

OO: Market.

AB: Yeah. He would go to Dubai, and bring stuff to Kenya to sell and that kind of business.

HG: Okay. Import/export?

AB: Uh-huh.

HG: He was able to work in that?

AB: Uh-huh.

HG: Okay. So, what was the process—it sounds like Kenya was definitely, always a temporary destination—

AB: Uh-huh.

HG: So, what was the process like of coming to the United States for your family? How did that happen, and, yeah.

AB: What I remember is, once you get a ration card, and then, it's just luck, whether that card would be...

OO: Selected?

AB: Selected. Right.

HG: Like a lottery then?

OO: Yeah.

HG: Kind of?

AB: It's not—I don't know how they decide it's just like, they—

OO: It's luck, It's lucky [Omar and Abdukahliq both speaking, recording unclear for a moment]

AB: —call you—anything.

OO: Yeah, it's lucky.

HG: Just luck?

AB: It's just luck.

OO: You know how if you go the camp, you need to register the name, and the family size. And then you say if your family is there or is not there. And then when they provide, like every two weeks, they provide food—

AB: Uh-huh.

OO: Most of them is like, corns, and flour.

HG: Grains?

OO: And then, yeah, then oil.

AB: Yeah.

OO: So, that things.

HG: Pretty basic.

AB: Uh-huh. Basic stuff, yeah. And—

HG: What was the gap like, between, like when you knew that you'd been picked to when you actually left? Was that a while, or was it pretty sudden?

AB: It was three years.

HG: Three years?

AB: Once—yeah. The first day we started the interview, 'til we came to the US was three years.

HG: Three years.

AB: Uh-huh.

[18:58]

HG: Okay, quite the process. So, you're fourteen, fifteen? Right then?

AB: Uh-huh.

HG: So, what was that transition like, coming from Kenya to the United States? Did you guys come straight to Salt Lake or did you go somewhere—

AB: No, I was resettled in Nashville, Tennessee.

HG: Nashville?

AB: Uh-huh.

HG: So, what was it like coming from Mombasa to Nashville, I've never been to Nashville {Haden and Abdulkhaliq laugh. Haden bumps the table loudly}. Sorry.

AB: Culture shock.

HG: Culture shock.

AB: 100% Culture shock. Yeah, it was culture shock, and didn't speak English [pauses]. Like, the first time, when I went to high school, the first I saw a girl and a boy holding hands, and kissing! [laughs, Haden laughs as well] Because, [Haden laughs], yeah.

HG: Different.

AB: Like, what are you doing! You know? You're not supposed to do that. Yeah, it was really culture shock. It was different. We struggled. Transportation. Lack of language. There was a time that we wanted to go back, 'cause it was so hard here.

HG: Really?

AB: The weather? Nothing, like—the food that you eat, you have to watch, like, you have to ask “does it have pork?” So, it was—

HG: Halal?

AB: Totally, culture shock.

HG: Were there any other Somali families in Nashville when you arrived?

AB: Yeah.

HG: Okay, so you had a bit of a support system, or—

[20:22]

AB: It's tough to have a support—we did, a little bit, but it's tough, because everyone is chasing their own living, right? So, it's very tough to have this support system that you had back home. Yeah.

HG: So, how long were you in Nashville?

AB: Until I graduated. When I came, they placed me in ninth grade. So, until I graduated from high school.

HG: Four year—

AB: And when I was junior, I heard my mom was coming to Utah. And, so I finished my high school there and then I joined my mom here.

HG: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit more about, I guess those years, high school years, of what it was like being a Muslim in Nashville?

AB: Uh-huh.

HG: And adjusting to the language and the culture there?

AB: Uh-huh. The high school I went to was 98% African-American.

HG: Okay.

AB: Two people from India, one white girl, and me. And there I was the only Muslim. And, so, it was tough. It was very tough. You're not sure what food you're eating. You're not getting the support you— [pauses], I deserved to get. I didn't fit in with the white people, and I didn't fit in with the African-Americans.

HG: African-Americans [said simultaneously with Abdulkhaliq].

AB: So, I was in the middle. During lunch time, I didn't know where to sit. I usually looked for that one white girl and two guys from India. But then, I always felt, outside of everything.

HG: Did your siblings attend the same school or—

AB: No. Some were older, and some were younger.

HG: Okay, so—

AB: One sibling that was one year older than me went to a different school.

HG: So, you were pretty much alone.

AB: Uh-huh.

HG: Wow. Sounds hard. So, when you came to Salt Lake, was that just you, or did your entire family come—

AB: Me and my nephew came to Salt Lake.

HG: Why did your mom end up in Salt Lake, and I guess you guys in Nashville? Is it just randomly selected or—

AB: Yeah. Sometimes they ask if you have any family.

HG: Okay.

AB: If you say, then they will just take to you wherever. My mom knew someone here. Actually, she knew Batar.

HG: Okay.

AB: And she said, “Batar lives in Salt Lake,” So, she was resettled in Salt Lake.

HG: Okay.

AB: Yeah.

[23:00]

HG: And you just wanted to be with her? Is there a reason the rest of your family didn’t come as well? Were they just settled in in Nashville, or did they—

AB: They got married and—right now actually, no one lives, except my sister, in Nashville, everyone else lives in Denver.

HG: Okay.

AB: Some here, some, all over.

HG: So, everybody kind of scattered- and you were just the right age to—

AB: Yeah.

HG: Okay. So, Yeah. Salt Lake. Did you—tell me about coming to Salt Lake? I guess that’s probably just as much of a culture shock from Nashville to here, I imagine. [laughs]
So—

AB: Yeah, definitely. But I was older, I was eighteen when I moved to Salt Lake.

HG: Knew English by then, and—

AB: Yeah. I knew how to speak English. My Mom was here, joining her. Actually, we used to live in these apartments [gestures to indicate some nearby apartments].

HG: Okay.

AB: And at the time, there are a lot of Somalis here. And later on, a lot of Somali-Bantus started moving here. I would say 80% of the people that lived here were people from refugee background. So, it felt like home. Way better than Nashville.

HG: Nashville [said simultaneously].

AB: I felt less discriminated here. I felt more welcomed here by the society. So, I felt home here, than Nashville.

HG: Okay.

AB: Yeah.

HG: And [pauses] sorry, I've just got some guideline questions I'm asking here. So, a little bit about the mosques here, I didn't appreciate this when I started, but I've realized, so there's Khadeeja mosque.

AB: Uh-huh.

HG: And there's Al-Noor. And Al-Madina, and Al-Huda. So, how did you end up at Al-Huda mosque, is that, I understand, where you spend most of your time?

[24:49]

AB: Uh-huh. I live close by there.

HG: Yeah.

AB: So, when I moved here in 2003. We only had two mosques. The one, Khadeeja, and Noor.

HG: Uh-huh.

AB: And, because, I practice, me personally, my preference of practicing religion is different than Khadeeja or Noor. Right? I practice differently, a little bit. Sometimes, we start fasting one day, and they will say, "No, tomorrow is not Ramadan, the next day is Ramadan." And, so, those kind of conflicts made some of the Somalis here, wanted to open their own mosque.

HG: So, is that like one of the, I only know a little bit, but one of the *madhhabs* [Islamic school of jurisprudence], is that it, or is it something else?

AB: That includes too, so—actually, exactly. There are four madhhabs, right?

HG: Uh-huh.

AB: Yeah, one of them, Somalis—majority of Somalis, Shafi'i. And masjid [mosque] Khadija, and masjid Al-noor, are managed by Pakistanis, and the majority of Pakistanis are Hanafi.

HG: Hanafis.

AB: And there are some different—there is no, between the two madhhabs there is not a lot of conflicts--

HG: Right, right.

AB: But the people follow them, there are some—

OO: There-

AB: conflicts. Yeah.

HG: Yeah, I understand it's not like conflict, it's just different interpretations of the--

AB: Exactly, exactly.

HG: --all of which are considered valid.

AB: And some people take it serious, those interpretations. Some people are like, "No, that's what our prophet said, let's just follow what the prophet said." So, because of that, we started our own mosque where we could hire our own Imam. When that happened, then masjid Madina, we and other Somalis opened the Masjid Madina because it's close to them. So, more mosques are opening up. And, because of my preference of the Imam there, right? Usually, Muslims follow the Imam, right? And the way their knowledge, how they learned it, the Islam, and how they practice it. So, I agree with that Imam, that's why I moved close to that Mosque.

[27:18]

HG: Okay, so were you part of—so you said it opened in two-thousand...

AB: eight. [said simultaneously with Haden]

HG: eight, is that right?

AB: Uh-huh.

HG: So, were you part of, like, helping found, or responsibilities in the mosque or did that—

AB: Uh-uh [no].

HG: —happen just kind of after?

AB: Yeah. Yep. There were some people that were involved but I was not involved at the time. But once it opened, and they found the Imam, then that's when I got involved.

HG: Okay. Awesome. Thanks, that's sometimes hard to ask 'Cause I don't know, it's—

AB: Uh-huh.

HG: —it's...I know a little bit, but sometimes I'm afraid I don't know enough to ask intelligent questions? [laughs]

AB: No, it's fine.

[27:59]

HG: So, let's see [pauses] I guess just a little more about living here in Utah, is Salt Lake, do you consider it your final destination, or do you plan on moving somewhere else in the future? Do you ever see yourself going back to Somalia, or have you been back, or?

AB: I haven't been back since I left. But my wife just came back about two weeks ago. And, she loved it. There is some fear that a suicide bombing or car bombing can happen anytime, any day. But, outside that, it's very peaceful.

HG: Right.

AB: So, I definitely see myself moving there one day. If not there, maybe Kenya. If not Kenya, somewhere in the Middle East 'cause I have a lot of family in the Middle East. So, I'm hoping this not my final destination.

HG: Okay.

AB: Yeah.

HG: Do you see yourself going anywhere else in the United States in the meantime, or—

AB: No, no. Within the US, this is my final destination.

HG: Final destination [said simultaneously with Abdulkhaliq].

AB: Yeah.

HG: So, did you meet your wife here in Utah?

AB: No, I met her in Bahrain.

HG: Bahrain.

AB: Yeah, in the Middle East. She grew up in Bahrain, and I went there in 2008, summer, 2008, we met, then we got married in 2009.

HG: Okay.

AB: And I sponsored her, and she came.

HG: Okay, so you've had a chance to travel, just not directly—

AB: Uh-huh.

HG: —back to Somalia.

AB: Yeah.

[29:24]

HG: Where was it she was visiting, if you don't mind me asking, in Somalia?

AB: Baidoa.

HG: Baidoa?

AB: Uh-huh.

HG: Okay.

AB: We came from the same—f [telephone rings]

HG: Aden told me a lot about Baidoa. It sounds like it's a really amazing place.

AB: [unclear], yeah, yeah, nah, Aden and Issah, you know, came from—you know, Issah, in Logan?

HG: Oh, yeah.

AB: Yeah, we came from the same city. Yeah.

HG: Okay. Cool. So, is there anything else you'd like to tell about your experiences here? Or your work you do here, or just anything that's popped in your head as we've had our interview here, or?

AB: Yeah, I think, it's, I don't know, I think you asked really good questions. Thank you. But the only thing I would add is, coming here as a teenager, middle school student, is very tough. And, in the US, there is, let me say in Salt Lake City, or Utah, there is a policy that when you arrive you are placed based on your age.

HG: Okay.

AB: Right? Students. If you come as a fifteen-year-old, and you haven't learned English at all, or you never went to school, you are still placed in ninth grade or tenth grade. It doesn't matter if you know how to write, doesn't matter if you know how to read, if you speak English. And, Kenya, you test. So, you will see a fifteen-year-old in fifth grade. It doesn't matter—

HG: 'Cause that's where they tested?

AB: —Yeah—where you placed. So, I think that policy, I could see that in middle school, that's fine if you're placed in—not in middle, in elementary school—if you're placed in by age—

HG: Right.

AB: But in high school, I think—

HG: A lot harder.

AB: —there should be a policy.

HG: How did you deal with that? So you mentioned you—ninth grade is where you started?

AB: Uh-huh.

HG: In Nashville.

AB: Yeah.

HG: And it sounded like, pretty unsupportive classmates.

AB: Uh-huh.

HG: And no language skills, So how did you—what did you do to be able to get through that?

[31:39]

AB: I basically focused on graduating. I didn't care about friends, I didn't care about social life. I just wanted to graduate. And I had a ESL teacher who was very supportive.

HG: Good.

AB: So, they guide me to graduate.

HG: Okay, so a lot of hard work—

AB: A lot of hard work, yeah.

HG: —and a couple supportive people.

AB: Uh-huh.

HG: Sorry, I didn't mean to cut you off. Did you have anything else you wanted to say about that policy, or—?

AB: Yeah, I think that policy, I think, we need to look at Utah, I mean, we need to look and see what is best for the students, not just for the policy or for the state, but what is best for the students, and can we increase more student graduating successfully. I think if we can do that, I think we will see a lot of increasing graduation and happy students, I think.

HG: That's really good.

AB: Uh-huh.

HG: Do you have an opportunity then to work with a lot of refugee youth with your job, and—

AB: Uh-huh.

HG: Stuff like that?

AB: Uh-huh, yeah. We have a youth center here that, we have youth voices, high school students, that we support and help them find scholarships, connect them to colleges, talk to their counselors at high school, talk to the teachers. Yeah. We do a lot of that.

HG: So, that's not just based then on your own experience, personally, but observations as well.

AB: Uh-huh. Yeah.

HG: Thank you.

AB: Welcome.

HG: Omar, do you have any questions to ask?

[33:14]

OO: I have another question ask, is how long take to bring your wife here? Process?

AB: It took—so, the day that we got married it was June 15, 1999, and she came her September 3, 2010. So, a year and two months.

HG: Wait, 2009?

AB: Yeah, 2009.

HG: Oh, you said 1999. I was, doing the math.

AB: Oh, sorry, sorry [all laugh].

HG: So, a year [bumps table loudly] oops, sorry.

OO: Yes, yeah.

AB: That's when I came to America. But, June 15, 2009, and she came September 3, 2010.

OO: Yeah.

AB: So, a year and something. But that is in the Middle East. But if it's Kenya, or Ethiopia, it's longer.

OO: Yeah.

AB: Yeah.

OO: So, they take different, for me, I was in German[y], I married Islam 2008, and then my wife was here, me I was in German. Then my wife come to German. And then the process for German take long, so we go to marry in Copenhagen, Denmark. 'Cause, I talk with my Attorney. They say, "better go Denmark." So, 2009, they process until 2011.

AB: Oh.

OO: I come here. So, it take three years.

AB: Oh.

HG: Yeah, it can be quite a process.

AB: Yeah. Yeah.

HG: I have a friend who married a woman from the Philippines, and the paperwork was a lot of back and forth and job, and that kind of stuff. So.

[34:38]

AB: Uh-huh. Yeah, some take very long, and some—but I was lucky.

OO: Yeah.

AB: Yeah. She came within a year.

OO: Yeah, *Inshallah* [god willing].

HG: Yeah, so, I guess one more question, looking over these. What did you and your family do, to deal with the challenges of coming to the United States? Did any of your family speak English when you came?

AB: Uh-uh [no].

HG: And was there a good refugee support system in Nashville, or were you just kind of dropped in and—

AB: Yeah, there's Lutheran Social Services, that, there are some Somalis work. And, usually, the interpreters are not, if they are not trained, they're not good interpreters, they will speak for you, instead of—

HG: Oh, yeah.

AB: —speaking—

HG: What you're actually saying?

AB: What you're actually saying. But we can't complain. I think at the end of the day, it was a lot better than living in a camp.

HG: Right, for sure.

AB: Yeah.

HG: So, a little bit of reliance on the help, and then just hard work. Awesome. And, I guess, do you stay in pretty good touch with the—what's the word? The community, the Somali community, both here and back home, or is it kind of—has your focus shifted to the community here since you've moved here? Or?

AB: So, my relatives I keep in touch. We have a WhatsApp group, that we always keep in touch—

HG: Good.

AB: Text each other, and leave a voice mail. I mean, record a voice message to each other. But here I, outside of my work, at the mosque, I keep in touch with people there.

HG: Okay, awesome.

AB: Uh-huh.

HG: I think that's about it for me, do you have anything else, Abdulkhaliq, or anything else you'd like to ask, Omar, before we?

[36:50]

OO: For me [laughs]

AB: Yeah.

OO: I have nothing to say. But—

AB: Uh-huh.

OO: —every time when I see for any refugee, on everyone has own story. Everyone have own, more tough than—

AB: Yeah.

OO: --than you, you know?

HG: Yeah.

AB: Uh-huh.

OO: So...

AB: Yeah. Some people had smooth, and some people, very tough. There are some people that stayed in the camp, for twenty years.

OO: Yeah.

AB: And, if you, for example, if you compare to the camp in Mombasa, to the camp in Dadaab, or Ifo, it's day and night, it's not even comparable. It's not comparable. The one in

Mombasa is shaded, a lot of trees. It's close to the city, you can go to the city there's a bus that comes every day that you can take and go to the city. But, the others like, nothing is close, there's no trees.

OO: Desert.

AB: Desert!

OO: Yeah, desert.

HG: Yeah, I've—

AB: Yeah, it's not comparable.

HG: Yeah, I've read a little bit about Dadaab.

AB: So, living in the Kakuma camp—

OO: Yes, is—

AB: is not—

OO: Desert.

AB: Yeah, it's desert.

OO: But, no, a little bit better.

AB: Uh-huh.

OO: When I go, the last one, it closed, 2000—I think it's 1998?

AB: Uh-huh.

OO: The Mombasa camp closing. People all camp, you need to go to Kakuma.

AB: Uh-huh.

OO: Was like, nothing.

AB: Yeah. [laughs] Nothing, desert.

[38:19]

OO: And the people there, these Turkana?

AB: Uh-huh.

OO: They walk naked. No clothe, no nothing.

AB: No clothing.

OO: But now? Is big city, Kakuma.

AB: Uh-huh. They have college, they have high school, they have.

HG: Wow.

AB: Yeah.

HG: Change—[unintelligible]. Awesome. Well, thank you so much, Abdulkhaliq—

OO: Thank you.

HG: For, meeting with us today.

AB: Yeah.

HG: Just to close off the recording, this is Haden Griggs, I've been here interviewing Abdulkhaliq Barbaar, with Omar Osman, assisting, and it's September 9th, 2019 at the [pauses] Hart—

AB: UNP Hartland Partnership Center.

HG: UNP Hartland Partnership Center. Awesome.