



Oral History and Folklife Research, Inc.

AN INTERVIEW WITH DEQA DHALAC

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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SOUTH PORTLAND , ME

AUGUST 27, 2016

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Reviewed by Keith Ludden

KL: So, can you tell me what year you were born, is it alright if I ask that?

DD: Yes. Will that be on the recording or?

KL: Yes. I have turned on the recorder.

DD: Oh, I was born in the '60's, actually. [Laughter] Yes. I was born in 1966.

KL: Okay.

DD: But usually folks are more, in my country, what they do is there is no much of healthcare systems, so in the city we usually, or the government at the time, usually tried to record, if you will, the dates and all of those things. But then again there was a lot of discrepancy from saying that it could be wrong or right, but that's what I have in my birth certificate, yes.

KL: Where were you born?

DD: I was born in Somalia. Mogadishu actually. The capitol of Somalia.

KL: Okay. So, you were born in a large city?

DD: Yes, it was large city but then again at the time the healthcare system was not as, you know, '60's, imagine living in Africa. It was, I think at a time, that a lot of people were having their children in homes as midwives delivering the children, and some people were born in hospitals as well.

KL: Take for me a little walk through your neighborhood. What was your neighborhood like?

DD: I think for me it was the most happy times that I ever had in my life, growing up in Mogadishu, Somalia. Where you know everybody. Where everybody knows what other people. It was really amazing experience for me growing up. Have schools where I have all my friends there. Where sometimes I remember not taking a bus or a taxi or whatever, and I usually will walk because the people that you are going to meet on the streets, people that you know people that you want to say hi to. It was really really fun and happy time for me growing up in Somalia, yes. I talked to a lot of my friends here, I said, "I will never," how you say it, "Never," oh gosh, my words are now losing me in my mind. I will have another lifetime going back to that. If you know what I mean?

KL: I am not sure.

DD: What I am trying to say is that I will live that life again and again if there was no war, if there was no civil, you know, war going on in my country. Or a lot of people, you know, having

war problems and also those civil wars that's going on, if you will. If it was safe, I would not stay here let me put it that way. I would be going back to my country right away.

KL: What did the neighborhood look like?

DD: Just houses. Some are made of wood. I mean, again, you have level of social economics just like we have in here, you know. You have poor people. You have middle class folks and then you have rich people. So every neighborhood looks different than other neighborhoods but mine was middle class neighborhood. Where we had a lot of people make the same amount of money just like the United States. It was a great place, a great neighborhood to live in, yes.

KL: Tell me about the school you went to when you were a little girl.

DD: We had public schools just like in the United States and boys and girls all attend same. I remember my elementary, the beautiful thing about, I remember about public school is that people kids wore uniform no matter you rich or not. Everybody wears the uniform so you can see when children are wearing a white shirt and a blue skirt, girls blue skirt, boys blue pants they're elementary level; then when you see kids who are wearing brown khaki pants and orange shirt you know they in the middle school and when they wearing khaki pants and a white shirt you know they are in high school. That's another way of figuring out what level of schooling these children are. That was something that was really very motivational to me because whether you are rich or not you wear same clothing with the poor kids which was to me, fascinating, which was really good so everybody was the same at the time.

KL: Did you live with your parents and grandparents in a large family setting?

DD: Yes I lived with my parents with my mom and dad and we had a huge house and a lot of cousins that grew up with us. Our doors are always opened because in Somalia we have this homogeneous thing that any of your relatives can come to your house at any given time. I don't remember my house being empty growing up. Basically I remember my brothers getting kicked out of their rooms all the time when there are elderly people coming for the hospital because in the countryside there is not a lot of hospitals, so people come to get treatment for eyes or ears, you know, small things. If they need doctors they have to come to the big city, so I remember my brothers and cousins getting kicked out their rooms all the time for other people to sleep in their beds, yes. It was a huge family place and that's not only my family that is all Somalia that is how we are.

KL: What were your parents like?

DD: My father was, he passed away, my father was a well-educated man. He spoke four languages and he was really strong about education, so he put a lot of effort for me and my brothers and cousins to really learn, get a good education if you will. When you have public schools that everybody is going to, you cannot learn languages there. We had to go to private

schools. Private in Somalia private means, not the public schools, that's where you get all your education. But private means like when you are, when you want to learn another language.

So if you want to learn English you go to private school after you get off your public school, you know, if you know what I mean. So then we after that we also have to go to Koran school, so that we can learn also Koran for the Islam religion. So it's not a big school, it's like a small place that you go to and then you have a teacher who is teaching you the Koran bit by bit. Then you also have to go to this other school that you learn the language, but all your academic education you are getting from the public schools.

KL: Was education encouraged for girls and women?

DD: Well, again, it depends where you are coming from. If you are coming from parents who do not have education themselves, they may not see education a good source of time for girls. They might choose girls to stay home and do that. But if you are coming from a background of education then you will say no matter who they are, boys or girls, they go. From what I have seen growing up, I've seen a lot of my friends go into schools, so I don't think that there was any oppression for girls if you ask me, because there was a lot of girls who go to school. So maybe one or two or three or four more may not have the chance to go to school.

KL: What did you enjoy studying?

DD: Well again, in Somalia is in general what you learn. It's just you have certain classes just like here. If you at this level of, middle school, high school, whatever you are, there is a standard education that you are going to be learning. Physics, Chemistry, Arabic, and (Deen?) in which is the religion, which was also part of the curriculum in schools. You have to learn Arabic because that is the language of Koran, in Islam, because Somalia is a Muslim country. Math was a big thing also, and reading and writing. So it was just more like special things that you can learn. But for me mostly I was very fascinated about history, if you ask me, because my father introduced to us, at a young age, National Geographic Magazine. So you will see these pictures and these countries that I have never heard of, and that makes you ask more questions about, "Okay where's Kazakhstan?" As a young age you don't know where certain countries are like Seychelles or Madagascar or you know, those small islands. Well Madagascar isn't a small island, it's a big island, but there are small islands that you've never heard of. So history was always what I liked to learn the most.

KL: What period did you like the most?

DD: Period?

KL: What period of history?

DD: Oh, well, again I learned a lot of Genghis Khan back home. I learn a lot of the Somali history that we had. I don't know if you have ever heard of Mohammad Abdul Hassan? He was a man who fought against the British for the colonists when Somalia was colonized by the British. So Somalia itself was colonized by the British in the north, and in the south was colonized by the Italians, so in the 1800's Mohammad Abdul Hassan whose name in the western society was "Mad Mullah," fought against the British, and killed big generals. So that was very fascinating to me, and then also there was some writings and I'm not sure if this is correct or not, but I think it is correct, Somali was the first country that was fought with airplanes, because these guys were more like, you know Omar Al-Mukhtar, or Matari, he was another guy who also, from Libya, who also fought against Italians. I might not get his name right, he also had that fight similar than Mad Mula, Mohammad Abdul Hassan, in this case, yes, so maybe you might want to look him up.

KL: Europeans called him "Mad Mula?"

DD: The Somali one, yes.

KL: Okay.

DD: The Omar—either Sharif, I think, or Muftada, (TRANSCRIBERS NOTE: I THINK SHE IS REFERENCING OMAR MUKHTAR) I'm not sure of the name for the Libyan leader who fought against the Italians, Mussolini at the time.¹ There was a movie made out of that [and] Anthony Quinn, was an American actor played that role.² It was very fascinating to me.

KL: What was the title of the movie?

DD: Oh goodness, I don't know. I can look it up for you. [Laughter] I will look it up, but I don't remember. But it was that the Libyan leader fighting against the Italians, yes.

KL: Okay. Were there celebrations that you remember? Here in the United States we have things like Thanksgiving, the Fourth of July, things like that.

DD: Yes, I mean we had a lot of celebrations and one of the biggest celebrations is the Eid, which is a Muslim celebration, which comes twice [in] the year. So one is the Eid Al-Fitr, which is after we fast for thirty days, the Ramadan. So after that we have a big Eid, which is the celebration of the fasting for those thirty days, and we celebrate for two or three days and the kids really look forward to that.

¹ The narrator is referring to Omar Mukhtar

² *Lion of the Desert*, Falcon International Productions, 1981

The second Eid that we have is also when pilgrims go to Mecca, in Saudi Arabia, so that's always comes, falls down here, if I am not mistaken in October, should be, another one that we will have. That's another big celebration that we have, Muslim celebration, which is all across the world. Some African countries you will see people celebrating for Independence Day a lot, which is very important. We have two in Somalia. One is when the twenty-six— June 26 which the northern part of the country where get their own Independence Day from the British, we just talked about it before, and the other one is July first, which we get our independence from the Italians on the southern side of the country. So those are really two big things.

I remember also another celebration that was done a lot in my country which was when the president at the time Mohammed Said Barre took over the county in coup in 1969, that was October 21. So that was another, if you will, celebration that people had to participate about it. It shows the government and what they did to the country and the things they changed that they make it to county and the contributions that they did.

KL: So much of your growing up was in the late 1960's and early 1970's, is that right?

DD: Yes. So the name we talked about earlier about the Libyan leader was Omar Mukhtar, Omar Sharif is the Egyptian actor that I had it in my head the whole time. Yes

KL: Okay. What were the 70's like in Somalia?

DD: So in the 70's I was very very young at the time, I remember Somalia went to war with Ethiopia because Ethiopia was one of those countries that also never had colonized, if you will, because of the fact that they were, kind of, how to deal with the British or those governments who were colonizing the African countries back in the 1700's, 1600's, or 1800's, and so themselves wanted to divide the country itself, because Ethiopia, part of it is Ogadenia, which is part of Somalia, so we wanted that back. So Somalia wanted that part of that land in Ethiopia back and we went war with Ethiopia. So I remember a lot of those songs were made a lot of war songs, saying that, "Let's just do this," and, "Let's do that," and telling people, "We have to fight to free our brothers and sisters in Ogadenia. I remember a lot of that. Yes.

KL: And the 80's, what were they like?

DD: The 80's were just... it was nice. It was a lot of listening to music, American music, and Michael Jackson. Those things were really hip back in the 80's. I remember it was really good. Yes. It was a lot of music listening and things like that.

KL: You would have been a young woman back then.

DD: Yes. It was really very nice and very interesting like I said earlier, I wouldn't change anything in the world for living in Somalia. I cherished it and I, it's sad to see what's going on now, but then again comparing to those of us who left the country when it was really good and

remember the good about it, and then like large (amount of) Somali people who never had that chance, who never seen the good in Somalia. So sometimes it's good to give back and say, "Hey this is what Somalia looked like. This is Somalia how was it, you know, how free the country was." Women could do whatever they want. Women drove motorcycles. I remember seeing women with their traditional clothings and driving motorcycles, and cars. I remember the government saying that men and women are the same. Everybody is the same. So women work in the banking businesses, the airline businesses, having their own businesses. Again, Somalia was then and is I think until now, very entrepreneurial people. Somali is very entrepreneurial. So, we are just have that business mind in ourselves, so people do whatever they wanted, yes.

KL: How did you make the decision to leave Somalia and come to the United States?

DD: So, in the early nineties, what happened was there was a lot of folks who could not take any more of the oppression of the government, at the time. There was a lot, the government, I mean sometimes that's one of the things that I would not like. I don't like, I should say. African government and the way they deal with their citizens. There was a lot of oppression from tribal folks, so if you are from this tribe you would be killed if you tried to say something against the country, you would...

My father was one of those people. He went to jail left and right because he was against the government, or what they were doing. So I remember my father going to jail all the time because he would say whats in his mind, and then he would go to jail. They just put him—So, he was lucky at least he was not killed but, there are people who were not so lucky, because they got shot or they got killed and taken out of their homes in the middle of the night and you would never see them again. So those people who were against the government, who were tired of the way the government was treating their citizens, get together and wanted do a coup and take over the country.

So that started, I would say back in 1989-ish maybe, and the government was having curfews. Saying that at this time nobody can do this; at that time nobody can do this. So we knew there was something major that is going to happen, so I decided, well, my mom and my brothers and you know family decided for me to move out and just go somewhere safer because it didn't look like the country was going stand by itself anymore. Because we seen those rebels or folks were against the government, gaining more power, and that's how I decided to leave. Because we knew it wouldn't look good. So that's the decision when my parents, my mom actually, my father at the time passed away, made the decision and say, "Hey, just go."

Because history says that when people are being oppressed, and try to take over the country or whatever, a lot of women became victims of rape. of you know, getting the power. If you want to do—if you want to harm somebody, you just rape their women. So nobody wanted to see their young girls, who are very bright, and very well educated, to end up being anything like that. So my mom and my cousins were thinking about that a lot, they said, "Okay we want you just go, for us, we can handle it."

KL: You said your father had been jailed a number of times, what did he do for a living?

DD: So my father, my father started going to jail I think back in 1960. I was not even born at the time because I think the British government ruled in the northern side of the country and the Italian government ruled the southern side of the county. So people who train with the British did not want to train with the folks who trained with the Italians. So there was some sort of a clash with the military, at the time he was a young military man. They did not agree to the ideas that the Italian Somalia was giving it to the British Somalia at the time.

So there was a group of men that decided, just, let's just divide the country, and keep the North as a Somali land, which is what it is now Somaliland. Because I don't know if you know that story or not. That's where the whole idea came from in 1960. So they did that, but that coup did not succeed. They got caught, all of them. Some got killed. They had good lawyers. Some good people fight for them and they get off after a few years of jail. I'm not even sure how long. Soon as that time, when [the] Said Barre government took over, in 1969 with another coup, Said Barre had all those survivors of that first coup back in 1960—had eyes on those guys. Always, you know always watched out for what they say and how they say. Because in the back of his head, probably was thinking they might do another coup or whatever.

I remember one time I remember my father had a reunion with his friends, the ones that survived, and came to our house and cooked and have a good lunch, and my father got picked up that night for questioning. He was like, "We are old, we have blood pressures, and we have diabetes and all kinds of things, so we not planning on anything, we just having a get together, so just get over it." So, those kind of things. You cannot speak your mind if you were in Somalia at that time. You always if you say something that would be translated differently in the eyes in the government, so that's how he was targeted most of the time.

KL: Now was it the British government that was putting him in jail? Or someone else?

DD: Okay, so back in 1960's, although the country had their own prime minister and all of that but it still was Somali British at the time, because we got our Independence Day in 1960, right, so it was still sort of little—although we had our independence at the time, but it was not fully—the British did not fully leave the country. Although they give us our titles and our flag was hanging everywhere, but it still was a little bit of things they were still doing that is why they end up having the British lawyers. But the government at the time was Somali government.

KL: I see. Did you and your mother and your siblings all leave at the same time?

DD: No, it was just only me who left at first time, well my younger brother left. There was a scholarship in Russia that... Russia had a good relationship with Somalia for a very long time so they used to give a lot of scholarships. The countries that give scholarships were Egypt, Sudan, Russia, Italy, so he had a chance to get a scholarship to go to a college in Russia. So he left a

little bit before me and then I was second leaving, but the rest of them they ended up having the civil war so they experience all of that, war and the deaths and this so all of those unfortunate things.

KL: Tell me about the day you left.

DD: Yeah, so I— when I left, oh goodness! It was a really nice day, you know. I was very happy going and my visa was to Italy, and because we couldn't find another visa at the time, so that was the only visa that we had in hand, a father asked me to take one of his thirteen-year-old sons to his mother in Rome so I have a responsibility of a young person, so I was watching out for the young person the whole time, so it was very interesting day. It was a good day.

KL: So did you feel like you were going to come back soon or...?

DD: Nope, I didn't have that at because I knew it was not going to be Somalia the way I know it because we have seen a lot of things. I talked about it all year there was a lot of curfews that was done at night. nobody could go out so you can see that things are not going to be the same, if you will. So I didn't even think about it. It was not in my radar, ever going back, because I knew it's not going to be the same

KL: So you went first to Italy,

DD: Yes.

KL: And how long were you in Italy?

DD: I stayed there for I would say almost—Wow!— I don't know a few months maybe. Maybe six, I think. Then I went to London where my cousins stayed, for a long time. Then I traveled Toronto and stayed in Toronto for a while and asked for asylum there, and I granted I get asylum granted in Toronto, where I resided for almost two years. Stayed there and then I met my husband. We get married, and that's how I come to the United States.

KL: Your husband is from the U.S.?

DD: He was Somali, but he lived here for a while.

KL: Okay, and he was from Maine?

DD: No, no, no. In Atlanta, that's where my children were born, Atlanta, GA. Yes, where my son still thinks he is. He has that accent, southern accent. [Laughter] Yes.

KL: So tell me about your husband. How did you meet him?

DD: We knew each other back home. we belong to the same tribe. we knew each other and it just although we didn't have any interest in each other back home, but it just happened. I guess it's just that being alone and then you know somebody that you know and it happened it was a good union. Yes.

KL: Tell me about the day you landed in Toronto.

DD: I still I mean it was not different then the day I landed in Italy. It was just same and I had always I always had a goal to have more education, you know, have more you know understanding of the world that is new to me now that I don't know nothing about it. A lot of people were telling me that, once you get your papers and become a Canadian, or 87666whatever at the time, you can do anything that you want. So I have that focus in my head, "Okay you need to get a lawyer, you need to get asylum processed." So I was always focused on something. So I was not even thinking about that day that I am here. So I think it would have been different if someone was coming from a refugee camp, and lived in that refugee camp for a long time and just coming out and say, "Now I'm here in the United States, or here in Canada, or here in Germany, which is a better life." For me, was already coming from my country which was okay at the time when I left, so my focus was different than those folks who are coming from refugee camps if you will. So I was focused.

KL: And you went to Atlanta?

DD: Yes.

KL: And then to Maine, is that right?

DD: Yes. So I came to Atlanta and I'm thinking that I'm speaking English right, I was fluent in English, then the southern accent I could not understand what anybody was saying, so I had to ask my husband to translate what these people are saying, and I'm like, "What are they speaking, is this English?" He said, "Yes, they are speaking English." So I had to work there, work with southern accent people for a while, to pick up those, you know, words clearly, which I still some of the times I have to listen very carefully to understand it. Yes. It was a challenge.

KL: Did you feel accepted in Atlanta?

DD: Yes, because I mean I like the fact that there is a lot of African Americans in Atlanta, and you just blend in. You just look like everybody else, you know but except if you go to a county that are different than, you know, Atlanta DeKalb County, or you know Fulton County which have a lot of African Americans, but if you go to Cherokee county or Henry County or just far more in the south, then it's like more white, and folks who are not really accepting other people from other places. Yes.

KL: What brought you to Maine?

DD: When I was in Atlanta, I have three small children and always, like I said earlier, I was focused always on education, and I did not have a chance to do anything. When I was in Atlanta, all I have to do was work, and go to work, and take care of the kids, you know all of those things. But never had the chance to do what I really wanted to do; was going back to school. And my uncle who was also living in Atlanta, moved to Maine back in 2003, 2004, I'm not sure, 6and he said, "This is a good place for you to move, and if you want to go ahead and pursue education, and because there is no traffic." In Atlanta there is a lot of traffic, if you get out of your house at six o'clock in the morning, go to work, and do all of those things, it's guaranteed you're coming home at nine at night. So your whole day is just gone. Two or three hours in traffic, basically. So I said, "Ok, I will come and check it out, [see] what you're talking about" So I came here in early 2004 and I liked it. It was a small town, he lived in Lewiston. So I went to Lewiston. Small town, is no traffic. Everything is like here, but closer. I'm like, "Hmmmmmmm, I might like this place." So I talked to the kids and said, "Hey we need to move you guys." They had a hard time because you know you have big homes and big apartments and things like that in Atlanta and coming in here, which you know, apartments are very small and there is only one bathroom. Sometimes they were like, "I don't like it here. I want real home, want to go back to real home." But it was good. So I wish I could have come here longer, long time before I decided to, but yes.

KL: I remember about a decade ago.

DD: Right.

KL: There were some tension between the Somali community and the larger community in Lewiston. Did you feel accepted then?

DD: Well, I was not there at the time when the Mayor wrote that very famous letter. [Laughter] I was not there at the time, but I heard about it when I arrived. But at the time, from what I understand is that a lot of the community, the non-immigrant community and white Americans sided with the immigrants at the time and said, "You know, this is our home too and we welcome you." and I looked at it and saw the positive side of it were more than the negatives ones who were against the newcomers, the Somali, whether they are immigrants. So I looked into that and said, "Okay, the larger community wants us here." So I took it that way in a positive side of it.

KL: The climate here is quite a bit different than what you were used to in Somalia and Atlanta. How did you deal with that?

DD: Oh my god, it's cold here and every winter I complain about it. "I don't like the cold I hate this!" but still, I am still here. It doesn't make any sense, but I see that it's going to pass by, so I give it a four month, three months, and I just focus on that. "Okay, within three months it will be all gone, all of these things will go, will be melted away." But one of the funniest things

that I heard when I used to work for the city of Portland refugee services. So I have a lot of clients who were refugees and immigrants. So one of my clients said one day, "Deqa, the sun is up and bright but there is snow on the ground. It is not melting!" So that was really something to think about because in Africa the sun is extremely hot. It melts anything. "Why is not melting here? This is different!" "It is a different sun." [Laughter] I said, "This is not African sun, it's an American sun. It doesn't melt nothing." [Laughter] That was my answer but that was not a good answer, but. Yes, it's cold. It's cold in the winter.

KL: But you have managed to deal with it.

DD: I know. It's brutal. I'm thinking about it now you said it. It's not good. Now, I'm thinking about it. [Laughter] All of that snow and shuffling and cleaning the car, oooh yes. Yes, it's brutal.

KL: You said you went back to school?

DD: Yes. I had the chance to go back to school. I have a Master's now in practice, oh what is actually, it's been two years since I had that. Diploma in policy and practice, from the University of New Hampshire. And now I'm working on my second Masters for social work for University of New England. Which I will be a graduate next year. I'm very, very, very excited about that. In Maine we don't have enough, well, none I would say, we don't have, we don't have enough immigrant social workers in Portland and the greater Portland areas. There is a huge gap that needs to be filled when it comes to immigrant kids and social workers who are working with them now. I'm not saying that the social workers are bad, no absolutely they are great social workers that we have here, but a lot of the American social workers do not understand the cultural pieces that we have. Because of that I said, "Okay I need to do this. It will be very very helpful to society if you will, to fill that gap." Because everybody wants people to succeed, you know, to have a sustainable life. Good lives and healthy lives. So if you do not understand the person's culture, the traditions, the person's background, how can you provide that? So if you have, you know, immigrant social workers, we do understand that, and we can better serve our communities, you know, then other non-immigrant or non-African or immigrant or you know, whatever background that you are coming from. We can better serve our community, yes.

KL: What would you most like the larger community, the non-immigrant community, what would you most like them to understand about your culture?

DD: Well a lot of people understand by words, of what they learn or what they read. I would say talk to someone like me, or someone who is an elder who knows more than me, and just try to understand what you are trying to do for your students, or for your community members or for your constituents if you are a politician right? So the only thing that I am wanting to tell people is that have a conversation with us before you jump to conclusions and say, "Oh I read this from somewhere, and I know all about it." No, you don't. I had a conversation with someone one time and they were saying Africa as a county. Africa is not a country, it's a continent with over

fifty-three countries and we spoke over twenty-five hundred languages, or three thousand languages. So don't just say what you read. Talk to somebody who is from that culture or from that country that you are trying to learn about and they will more than happily teach you what you are trying to get educated about.

KL: So how many languages do you speak?

DD: Oh no. I speak Somali which is my birth language. I also speak English, as you can see this. I do understand Arabic if you speak it, but I speak a little bit of it. I'm not one hundred [percent], I am not even comfortable even saying two words in Arabic, but I do understand and I can read it because the Koran we have it in Arabic, so I can read that as well. I do also understand Italian because of the colonization that we had back home, although that is really very getting very thin, so yeah, but my fluency is Somali and English for now. Yes.

KL: I want to ask you about something and I hope I am not wandering into difficult areas here. But lately, we have been hearing a lot about Sharia, and it being expressed as a code of law. What is your understanding of Sharia?

DD: So I am not Islamic scholar, but the Sharia law is a law based on the Koran that a lot of countries are doing, some are not, whether they are Muslim country, if so, that country is a Muslim country. Some of them are doing, some of them are not. I sometimes really question people who are saying Muslims wants to do Sharia laws in our country. I mean, I don't think that any Muslim person wants to change a county that has been built for over five hundred years, six hundred years for their own policies and political laws and I don't think that anybody can change that because this is not a Muslim country. So it sometimes makes me think how will people even entertain that and say we don't want the Muslims here because they are bringing Sharia law here. So I mean, it is, it's mind boggling to me, even people thinking that. As a person, I'm thinking, when somebody says that, "I don't want the Muslims here because they are bringing a Sharia law," they just don't want the Muslim people here period. Because there is no way a Muslim people can change a country's laws just like that.

KL: I understand the word Sharia translates something like, "the path." Is that right?

DD: Now, that's Arabic, so if that's what you say it is, that's what it is. Like I said, I'm not fluent in Arabic.

KL: I am sorry.

DD: No, that's alright.

KL: So do you think you will return to Somalia at some point? Have you been back there?

DD: No, I haven't, and I don't know, it depends. There is still is killings that are—still, people who are bombing for nothing you know, so there is a lot of unrest. So, I don't know, I don't think so. Not yet. Unless I know it's all good. Yes.

KL: What do you think has been the best things about your life?

DD: I think that the best thing of my life is my children. I really cherish them a lot I try to teach them to give back to their communities, I just want them to learn as much as they can, to care for other people of which I could say, a lot of our American folks are not doing, teach them to be respectful to other people. I just want them to be good citizens you know just... I have two black boys, I always have that worry about police brutalities, and what's going on, so I am just always constantly telling them what to do what not to do if you are stopped, and you know, how to talk to people and connecting them as much as I can to the community, so they have their faces and know their faces and say, "Yeah I know this kid, is a good kid," and things like that.

KL: What do you tell them?

DD: Well I usually tell them, you know, if you are stopped by a police officer, please don't argue with them, just do as the say, and just listen to them and respect them, because they are the law and just do not think they are the bad guys. They are not the bad guys, they are just doing their job just cooperate, talk to them, and obey the law. That's your job. And as long as everybody is doing their part, things will be good and you can come home and police officer also go back to their families, safe.

KL: What have you most hope you have accomplished so far?

DD: Wow. I did my education, which is good that I accomplished. I give birth to three kids, that is another accomplishment, and they are good kids. I think I'm still, I have a lot that I need to give back to my community and to the world and especially right now when we see a lot of Islamophobia and you know a lot of bad things coming from our candidate now, Donald Trump.

So we have to, I say, um you know immigrant folks, tell our American friends and American brothers and sisters that we are here, we are here just like you, you came here a few hundred years ago just you know before us, we just came different times, and everybody wants to do the right thing you know hard work, and if you see immigrants we are even working harder than even your regular American folks who are here, and we are here to be—to raise our children. We are here to go to school. We are here to be a part of the community. You know we have so many different educators in school. We have business people who are getting up and just providing things to different people you know. The other day I went to the Somali store and there were a couple of white Americans and people there and it makes you proud, you know your American friends are coming to stores and just buying ethnic foods in different stores, that's something to be proud of but we have a lot of work to do. We have a lot of work to do.

I don't know if you have seen lately, the news what the Governor is doing, leaving messages like that to another lawmaker?³ I mean it's, I cannot even think of that. I cannot even wrap that around my head for him to say that he has a binder full of black people who are providing drugs to Maine but that doesn't mean the drug problems that we have here in Maine is gone, no.⁴ what he's telling us is that these black people are racially profiled. Stopped by the police whether they are good or bad they are going to get stopped but all of those white drug dealers are getting by and still providing drugs to our citizens here in Maine. So for him even saying that he has a binder full of black people, is racist. And he is fighting to present Drew [Gattine], I think was representative, a lawmaker, saying that, "he called me a racist." So we have a lot work to do, a lot of work to do and we have a lot of conversation that we need to have. More dialog, and more dialog, and more education. But I don't know how we going to do that, with our highest government person in our state is saying that. I don't know how can we do that. He is okay with it. So I think what people need to stand up and say no to this kind of bigotry and you know, racism.

KL: Is there anything that you want to point out to me that I am overlooking?

DD: I think you ask me too many questions, so no. [Laughter] That was a lot of questions, Keith. No, just you know, it's just a political climate that we have right now that is the scary thing. You know the people with the Islamophobia and the racism and black people getting killed in the country. It's heartbreaking. It's heartbreaking that comes to here in Maine and our governor is saying those things, it's just, it's heartbreaking. That tells you we have more work to do.

KL: What do you think most needs to be done?

DD: I think that the governor needs to be educated. Maybe he doesn't understand. And he's I think more dialog, instead of him doing the dialog and going to different places, I think that immigrant people and minority folks and African Americans have to go and just educate our people in the state. Because as you get north and north, people are really not understanding what immigrants are doing in the south of this state you know—southern Maine. In the north all they thinking about is, "Oh these people are getting welfare and some things like that."

The other day when we had that rally, somebody posted something saying that these immigrants get minivans, for free. [Laughter] It just, it gets to me all the time because I used to work for the city as a refugee case worker, and when this refugees came to this county and when they put their

³Dhalac refers to an incident in late August, 2016, a few days before this interview was conducted. LePage left a threatening voice mail message, including expletives for Democratic State Representative Drew Gattine. LePage accused Gattine of calling him a racist. See *New York Times*, August 26, 2016, "Profane Phone Message Has Gov Paul LePage in Hot Water Again."

⁴ See *Portland Press Herald*, September 26, 2016, "Lepage Said His 'Drug Dealer' Binder Was 90% black or Hispanic. It's Not Even Close."

feet this United States soil, they are already in debt, because if you are a family of eight, that agency that brought you over here, the Lutheran Ministries or the Catholic Charities, or whoever sponsor you to come here, and paid your airfare, at that time you have a debt of all of this airfare money. So [a] family of eight times 1000 something, they already in debt for over \$12,000.00 and they must pay for that. How can they get a free van? Is there anything free in the United States? You have to work very hard to be able to do anything and these immigrants are doing hard work. Women are losing their babies. Pregnant women working as housekeeping with those you know, bending and cleaning and all of that. We have so many women who are losing babies, you know, miscarriage, because they work so hard. They are working very hard to provide to their families, so it's really sometimes bothers me when I hear things like that, yes.

KL: You have been very generous with your time and I really appreciate this. It has been a wonderful conversation.

DD: Thank you. No problem. Thank you for coming.

KL: And I will get that air conditioner turned back on.

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