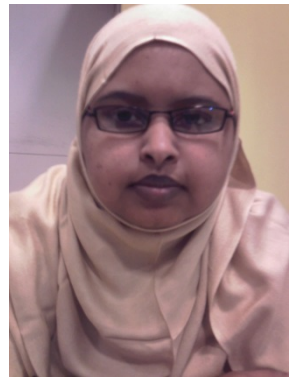


## ESOL VOICES: Student Spotlight

Yasmin Mussa

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Yasmin Mussa, 2014

*Yasmin is an ESOL student who has lived in the United States for three and a half years and was recently reunited with her husband. Yasmin plans to join the Laboratory Technician Program at MCC. In this harrowing essay, Yasmin writes about a friend's experience with female circumcision. Yasmin is from Somalia. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Somalia has the highest per capita percentage of female genital mutilation in the world, roughly 98%.*

### Between a Rock and a Hard Place

It was morning, and the new sun sparkled gold across the trees and buildings. Her mother had dressed Sahra up in a way different from her regular day. To her shock, she saw a table covered with a plastic sheet. It was the sign of circumcision.

Sahra said that she cried a lot and even tried to escape, but her aunt stopped her. Then, she was dragged to the operation table. Sahra's aunt, grandmother, and mother were all present at the scene. Her mother and her grandmother held her tightly against the table while the circumciser was performing the operation. Suddenly, her mother left as she couldn't bear the screams.

At the age of six, Sahra was circumcised at her home without anesthesia by a traditional female circumciser using a razor. Part of her body was cut and removed. She lost a lot of blood during the operation.

After the operation, her legs were strapped together with a

rope to avoid any opening of the stitches while walking. Her scary nightmare continued the next morning when she tried to pass urine. It could hardly come out and it burned terribly. The blood glued parts together and left nowhere for it to pass freely. It took her one month for her body to recover from the wound, but she never regained her mental strength.

When Sahra hit the age of puberty, she suffered another level of disappointment and pain. Her menstrual cycle was never regular. She developed pain and became groggy before every period. During the first two days of her period, she easily got angry at normal things or people. She also felt uncomfortable with good smelling substances or food. She remained moody like a pregnant woman for the whole week.

The side effects that Sahra sustained from this evil practice were not limited to the above problems. Within a few years, she started to complain about kidney

problems. She couldn't wear high heels, as this triggered kidney pain. Because of this, she never went to a wedding party. Her weight was also increasing drastically, and she became frustrated and upset with herself. Since Sahra was the eldest child of her parents, she had to do the housework, and this left her with no chance to exercise.

To make matters worse, whenever Sahra met a doctor, she never brought her problems to his attention because she was afraid. She only said, "If there was a button for time travel, I would have pressed it to undo the damage."

When Sahra got married, it was not a joyful night for her. After the wedding, she had to be taken to a hospital for surgery instead of to her sweet home. She started her first night of the honeymoon with an injury. Sahra spent three days in bed as a patient and she didn't enjoy any of her honeymoon; circumcision became a millstone around her neck.

At the time of labor, Sahra experienced the most horrifying moment of her life. She lost a lot of blood, and the baby took a longer time to come out. She was on the verge of maternal death and both she and the baby could have died. This simple tradition could have cost Sahra her life.

Sahra's bright future was handicapped by this barbaric tradition. They say "Old traditions die hard." Although it was unlikely she could have escaped living it in that environment, Sahra promised herself that she would never let

her daughters meet this fate.

Female genital mutilation (circumcision) is a strong yet controversial tradition in my country, Somalia. People believe it can help women maintain their virginity up to their marriage. Virginity is something highly respected in my society. When it comes to marriage, virginity is of great value to men. Sadly, this immoral tradition is still alive and practiced in most areas in Somalia.

Female genital mutilation is the most painful moment that most girls face at an early age. No one

forgets this suffering throughout their whole life.

The main motivation behind this horrific act is to undermine the girl's sensual feelings. Women who endure female genital mutilation feel the worst consequences at the time of marriage and during childbirth.

There are some NGOs which have launched campaigns to eradicate this awful practice; they conduct awareness programs for the intellectuals and parents. In the future, I'm planning to become involved in this war as a volunteer.



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*ESOL Voices a collection of stories written by ESOL students at Monroe Community College. This semester, we are highlighting students from African countries. Look for a new story in the Tribune each month. We hope you will find these stories interesting and inspiring.*

*Katie Leite & Pamela Fornieri, ESOL Program, October/November 2014*

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