



INTERNATIONAL VOICES at Black Hawk College

OUR SIDE OF THE STORY



SPRING 2022

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Nina De Bisschop

Koku Afetse



I am Koku Afetse, and I come from Lomé, Togo. I am 21 years old and live in Davenport. Now, I am studying ESL at Black Hawk College. I have two brothers and one sister, and I am the last of my family. I moved to the US last year. Later I want to become a software engineer because I really like the technology field. I was always fascinated by computers and how things work. I love spending my free time playing video games or soccer. My hope is to finish my degree as a software engineer and I will do everything to achieve that.

The Yam Festival in the South of Togo

One of the most interesting aspects of the Togolese culture is the annual traditional festival held in most parts of the country. The south of Togo, precisely Kloto region, is where the Yam Festival is celebrated. The Yam Festival is one of the greatest cultural treasures of the people and above all an important time in their culture. This festival has an origin, several objectives and a way to be celebrated.

First, according to oral tradition, a hunter by chance discovered a yam in the forest during a terrible period of famine. After he boiled it with spices, he ate it. The yam saved him from starvation and death. After a while, people noticed that they could cultivate yams. It was how the cultivation of the yam started. The Ewe people from Notse brought the cultivation of yams to Kloto, and afterwards it became part of the Kloto culture. The cultivation of the yam is not a smooth job because it requires a lot of attention, and the cultivation lasts twelve months.

Secondly, the yam festival signifies a lot to these people. Before the D-day of the celebration, traditional priests conduct ceremonies for the gods of the earth and ask for abundance by offering sheep and sometimes oxen. The young people of the village clean the public square, and the whole village is decorated. The reasons for this feast are numerous. It is a way of praying to the gods of the ancestors by thanking for the harvest and asking for abundance in the next year. It is a way to foster unity through forgiveness and reconciliation. Culturally, it is a tradition that we try to preserve in this locality by organizing this party. This festival also attracts tourists and highlights the other cultural characteristics of this area of the country, such as folk dances, clothes, and others.

Finally, there is the day of the feast when all the inhabitants are invited to the public square. First, the chiefs of this locality come and then give a speech announcing the beginning of the festivities. They are followed by the priests, who will bless the crowd and say prayers again.

The party most often begins with dance competitions between the different villages. Then everyone exhibits his most beautiful harvest. It is time to name the largest yam grower in the entire area. At noon, a large lunch is organized, for which people prepare *foufou*, the staple food of southern Togo followed by *sodabi*, a local drink from the south of Togo. In the evening, the ceremony is closed by intense dancing where masked people enter a different state, and spirits can be felt. This dance is performed with traditional masks worn by special people.

In conclusion, this is a festival rich in emotion, a contribution to the union, and above all a part of the identity of these people. It is a unique, colorful, and rich time of pleasure, and I am inviting you to go and discover this special and unique event.

Traditional dances are part of our cultures and an integral part of cultural heritage. In the south of Togo, more precisely in the Ewe country where I come from, there is a dance called *Akpèssè*. I will try to show the origin of this dance, describe it and explain on what occasion it is performed. *Akpèssè* is a traditional dance in southern Togo. It comes from Ghana, a neighboring country, located west of Togo. This traditional dance in southern Togo is mainly performed in three localities: Kloto, Agou and Kpélé. But, nowadays, this dance is widespread all around the country. Children, young people, women, men, this dance is performed by all categories of people without any distinction. This dance is characterized by dance steps, instruments and the clothing of the dancers. Indeed, *Akpèssè* is performed to the rhythms of tam-tams. It requires the use of several tom-toms, whether small, medium or large. But sometimes, a small drum can also do the trick if it is only a small ceremony. The dance steps of *Akpèssè* require intense movements of the whole body and are performed in a large circle. The use of white handkerchiefs is an important detail among *Akpèssè* dancers. We turn it just right, and the whole thing often makes a beautiful ensemble to see. In addition, *Akpèssè* is often used to convey awareness messages through choreographies. It occurs during happy events (like weddings, birthdays, etc.) or even unfortunate events (like funerals). It is often an opportunity to come together to share sadness or joy. Finally, it is a great heritage for us and is therefore a treasure for us. In addition to being pretty to see, this dance characterizes our villages and is also a means of conveying messages. So, I invite everyone one day to visit and participate in this wonderful dance.

Flor Calderon



My name is Flor Daniela Calderon. I was born in Queretaro, Mexico. I am 18 years old. This is my second semester at Black Hawk College. I have been in the United States. For five years. I hope to find a job where I can help people. My dream is to get married and buy a house with enough space. I am an only child. I love traveling. I try to never give up on my goals.

Education in Mexico

I was born in Queretaro in the south of Mexico. I was in middle school when I came here. I had family already here that helped us with our transition to life in the U.S. However, after being in school in the United States for a few years, I noticed some differences between Mexican and American schools. The level of school, classes, uniform, and recess are some of them. It is hard to get used to all these changes.

First, the levels of school are different. To get a good enough job in the U.S., you must finish high school like in Mexico, but the process of getting there is different. In Mexico, you must go to kinder garden (0-6 years), primary school (6-11 years), secondary/high school (12-15 years). In the United States, we have elementary school (5-10 years), middle school (11-13 years), and high school (14-17 years). It was hard for me since I had already started high school in Mexico and came here to be in 8th grade in middle school having to repeat the same classes in a new language and with a different history. My parents encouraged me to learn English by using an app on my computer to help me translate. Also, in Mexico you only go to high school for three years and graduate at 15, but here in the U.S., it is four years, and you graduate at 17 or 18, so I was confused because I was almost finished with high school in Mexico but then had to do several more years of school here.

Second, the schedule is not the same. In Mexico, you usually have seven classes every day with a recess. Some schools use a schedule that is for every day and will be the same hours all the time, and others have a different schedule every day. In the United States, the schedule is the same every day. The difference between this is that in Mexico every single time you have a class, the teacher goes to your classroom, and you never get mixed with other classes. In the U.S., you must go to the teacher's classroom. It is something that takes time to get used to it. For me, the first year was confusing since I had to get out of each class, search for

the other classes, and have new people in every class.

Third, the way students dress for school is different. In Mexico, in every school, no matter if it is a public or private school, you will need to use a uniform. On specific days, you will have to use your PE uniform, and since there are no changing rooms, you will have to come with it. In the United States, most schools do not have uniforms. They may have PE uniforms, and you have to bring it and put it in a locker to change from your normal clothes. When I came to the U.S., it was difficult since I did not have a lot of clothes and had to choose what to wear. Also, I had to put my PE uniform in my backpack or locker to change every day. Sometimes, I forgot about the uniform and ended up losing points. So, I prefer how they did it in Mexico, where depending on the day you could have a different uniform and not change many times.

Finally, the recess in U.S. schools differs from recess in Mexico. We used to have an open space where you could sit and play any sport. Food is not free, so you must buy your own or bring it from home, and here there is just a cafeteria where you grab food and sit until you finish your food and have to go to class again. This is the most important aspect the United States schools made me miss about Mexico because you could walk in every hallway, outside, and near other classrooms and play sports with a lot of people if you did not want to eat, and in the United States, there is a cafeteria where you only can be there so you don't disturb people that are in some other classrooms.

In summary, it took me years to get used to the different levels of school, the schedule, the way we dress, and the recess. After coming to college, I saw the differences between the two countries again, and I love U.S. education, but I still prefer the way Mexican schools are organized.

Tamales



Tamales are the most important dish in Mexican cuisine. Tamales are made of tamale dough and other special ingredients. There are different types of tamales.

First, sweet tamales are made of sweet dough and raisins. They are usually served on *Posadas* (Mary and Joseph's search for lodging) with *ponche* (hot fruit punch).

Second, there are spicy tamales. These tamales have dough and meat with salsa.

Some are red, and they are more spicy than the green ones. They are made for celebrations or anytime. Finally, there are *rajas* tamales.

They are made with chili slices, cheese and dough. *Rajas* tamales are rare because most people do not like them. Also, there can be more types of tamales, but these are the most popular. Tamales are served with pico de gallo, salsa, and other foods.



Susmita Chaudhari



I am Susmita Chaudhari. I am 19 years old. I have four members in my family. I have a cat named Smokey. I graduated from Moline High School, and now I go to Black Hawk College. This semester, I have two classes, Oral Skills and Writing. I am very excited because this is my first time in person at the college, and I got to see a lot of my old friends. My goal for this semester is to do well in both classes. Also, my dream is to become a doctor and make my parents proud of me. It is also my parents' dream to see me as a doctor, and I want to make them happy.

Moving to the United States

Moving to the United States and starting a new life was very hard for me. I love my country, Nepal, and I had made many memories with my friends, cousins, and dog. The main reason I did not want to leave my country was because of my dog. She was very attached to me and so was I. She was a very good pet of mine, who always stayed with me all the time. I knew that she will be sad if I move here. Sadly, because of the situation, I had to come to the United States with my family. But I knew it was for a better education and future. When I came here, I was eleven years old. I lived in Quincy, IL and went to middle school there. I made a few friends who were very kind to me. But I was new, so I faced difficulties like language problems, boredom and fear. Everything was different and new, and I was learning new things every day.

First, I had a hard time understanding and speaking with an American accent. In Nepal, I went to English school, but I did not learn American pronunciation because they teach differently there using British pronunciation. I did try to do my best and asked teachers for help if I had any questions. Also, I tried to talk to my counselor about the language problem, and she provided me a teacher helper, whose name was Mr. Meyer. Mr. Meyer was a retired teacher. He always helped me during my study hall. I used to ask many questions about my homework every day, and he was very kind about it. He never talked harsh with me, and if I didn't understand something, he would be happy to explain it to me until I understood. Because of him, I was able to do my homework every day on time and do well on my tests. He would always prepare me before my tests, and I always had As or Bs in every class. He used to correct my pronunciation and helped me improve my accent.

Next, boredom was something I faced when I came to the United States. In Nepal, I always had fun because I lived with many people around me. When I came here, it was only four people in my family: my

mom, dad, brother and me. I was used to having fun all of the time, but when I came here, I only stayed in my room, watched TV, used my phone, ate and repeated everything. It was very boring because I had friends, but I was not that close with them, so we could hang out, but my parents were scared to let me go.

Finally, I think everyone faces some fears as an immigrant in any country. During my first year in the United States at Quincy Junior High School, I was very scared of speaking with people because I thought they would not understand me. There used to be times when we had presentations, and we had to speak in front of the class, which made me very anxious. I feared mispronouncing words and people noticing my accent because everyone there were native English speakers, except me. It was a very challenging time for me, but I had support of my family and teachers who always pushed me. I made a few friends, whom I used to sit with at lunch time, and I felt good that I was not alone. My friends were very kind and supportive as well.

To conclude, moving to a different country is hard because of the different system, rules and language. But never give up and always push yourself to learn from the challenges that life has for you. Be confident and prove everyone that you can do anything, and no one can pull you down. In my life, I have faced many difficulties, but I have never given up. I would rather choose to learn from my mistakes and improve myself instead of just giving up.

Nepali Momo

Momo is a very popular and delicious food in Nepal. Almost all Nepalese love *momo*. It is a very addictive food. *Momo* is inspired by the Chinese dumpling but with a Nepalese style. It does look like a Chinese dumpling, but it does not taste the same. Nepali *momo* has that kick of spices, and the tomato dipping sauce makes it even more flavorful. *Momo* is made of flour and filled with meat. You can use any meat like buffalo, chicken, goat, pork, and you can also fill it with vegetables as well. The most popular in Nepal is buffalo *momo*. Almost every restaurant in Nepal has *momo* on their menu because it is the best food that you will try. Also, you can find *momo* easily in the street. It is one of the specialties of Nepal.

Eliezer De Los Santos



My name is Eliezer De Los Santos. I am 18 years old. I am from the Dominican Republic, specifically from Santo Domingo, which is the capital. I moved to the United States two years ago. I went to Regina High School in Iowa City. At Regina, it was a bit difficult to learn English since there was not an ESL program, but the teachers were amazing and taught me everything I know today. During my senior year, I received an offer to study and play baseball at Black Hawk. I would like to be a Spanish teacher. Education in my country is not the best, and I think that the solution lies in having more teachers, and I would like to contribute to change. My goals for this semester are to pass all my classes and have a good baseball season.

The USA in the Eyes of an Immigrant

The dream of any immigrant is to live in the United States, but the reasons may be different; it may be looking for better opportunities, family or business, but in the end all immigrants have the same vision: to live in the United States.

First of all, the United States has many opportunities, and this is one of the things that the United States has that other countries do not have. In some countries, there is a lot of unemployment, and this makes immigrants want to leave the country for new opportunities. Many immigrants also leave their countries in search of a better education.

On the other hand, there are many immigrants who leave their country because they have relatives in the United States. Many immigrants come to the United States to visit relatives. In my personal case, the first time I visited the United States was to see my grandmother, whom I had not seen for three years. I imagine that many immigrants decide to come to the USA just for a visit, but then they realize all the opportunities they have here. For immigrants, life becomes easier when they have family in the United States because it is important to have someone by your side who knows more about the United States who can guide you and help you progress in that new country.

The USA has a number of different races, cultures and traditions. This is something that is very important for immigrants because when you come to the United States for the first time, the first thing you have in mind is to look for people who know your culture because that way immigrants feel closer to home and feel more comfortable speaking their native language.

In conclusion, hopefully after reading this, we can learn about why immigrants want to come to the United States and how immigrants see the United States.

The Dominican Carnival

The Dominican Republic is a country with many important holidays, but the most anticipated event of the year, without a doubt, is the Dominican carnival. The carnival is characterized by the different costumes and by all the joy that the carnival brings.

The carnival is celebrated on February 27 of each year. There are colorful parades that take place every Sunday until the first weekend of March. The reason why this event is important for us Dominicans has a bit of history. The tradition of dressing up during carnival disappeared due to the Haitian occupation. This was not for long as the tradition returned after the Dominicans achieved independence from the Haitians on February 27, 1844. February was established as the month of the Dominican carnival.

When I was little and went to the carnival, it was difficult for me to understand the meaning and why these people wore these costumes. To understand the Dominican carnival in its entirety, I had to familiarize myself with the main characters and their meanings in Dominican folklore. El Diablo Cojuelo is the main character. This character wears a colorful costume with little mirrors, rattles, ribbons and a cowbell. As a child, this was the one that scared me the most as it carries a bladder made from the dried and cured inflamed bladder of a cow, and it goes along the parade dishing out a kick to the butt to distracted onlookers.

In conclusion, Dominican culture is beautiful, and there is never too much to learn from different cultures, so if one day you go to the Dominican Republic, do not hesitate to visit the Dominican carnival.

Ahai Djemilnah



My name is Ahai, which means “to be or alive” in the Tupuri language, and my last name is Djemilnah meaning “our handsomeness” in Shuwa Arabic. However, I go by the name Ahaiper, which I have received under the inspiration of the Spirit. It is composed of three morphemes, A-(a grammatical morpheme signifying “one”); Hai-(a free morpheme signifying “living” in Hebrew) and Per-(first syllable of the free morpheme “perfect”, root to the word perfection). So Ahaiper means “a living perfection/ masterpiece.” I am from the Republic of Chad. I am 31 years old and single. Also, I am the only member of my family living in the U.S. I like singing, acting, spoken words and writing; I am a Christian hip hop singer and songwriter and a thespian in the house of the Lord. My school goals are to not miss classes and do all that is required of me and achieve good results at the end of the year. I would like to hone my writing and speaking skills, getting myself ready and well prepared for college classes. Also, I hope to major in arts and transfer to a 4-year college. My dream is to become a Christian creative writer and performer and teacher/lecturer.

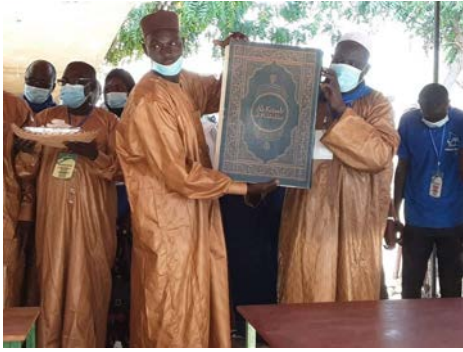
Al-Kitaab al Mukhaddas

Al-Kitaab al Mukhaddas is a version of the Holy Bible published in December 2021 in Shuwa/Chadian Arabic; however, the script is in Roman script. It is the result of work that began in 1995 by the Biblical Alliance of Chad with the technical assistance of SIL-Chad. There were previous publications between 1998 and 2016 of portions, including the books of Genesis, Exodus, Ruth, Daniel, Jonah, and excerpts from the book of Proverbs. The Al-Kitaab al-Mukhaddas was completed with the layout of the entire Bible being done in 2019. The word of God is the best-selling book of all the time, and it has always found its way to be represented and spread everywhere across the languages and cultures. Let us first take a look at what is Shuwa/Chadian Arabic, why a Shuwa Arabic Holy Bible translation has been published using Roman script instead of the Arabic, and finally, what the intentions behind that translation are as opposed to others in the various Chadian languages.



Shuwa Arabic, sometimes referred to as Chadian Arabic is a form of the Arabic language that is spoken in the Sahelian region, mainly in Chad, Sudan and South Sudan, the Central African Republic and also in Borno state in the north-east of Nigeria, the far north region of Cameroon and the Difa region in southeastern Niger. In Chad, Shuwa Arabic is used as a vehicular language, especially in the north of the country, and is spoken by 60% of the Chadian population; this includes 10% as a mother tongue and 50% as a second or vehicular language. Among the Shuwa Arabic speakers are Christians, whose faith is less represented in the world media

due to the Arabic language and culture often being associated with Islam. As opposed to the Christian faith, the profession and teaching of which do not need to carry along Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, Islam seems to deliberately religionize Arabic. This gives the impression, which is completely wrong, that every Arabic-speaking country is a Muhammadan land; and that is how wrong people are about Chad. Everywhere I go, when I tell people I am from Chad or they hear me speaking Arabic, most of them think or state, “So you’re a Muslim.” That’s an error, and it denotes a lack of knowledge or information.



Next, now you may wonder why Roman script was used to translate a document that is supposed to convey a message in Arabic to some Arabic speaking people. Well, the reason that lies behind this was simple and very interesting; in Chad many speak Shuwa Arabic but do not know how to write or read in that language. Part of those people have been to school and university; they have graduated and are educated, but they are only literate in French or English since they did not bother learning to write and read in Arabic even though they like it, speak it, and for some it is even a mother

tongue. Furthermore, even though the Republic of Chad adopted Modern Standard Arabic as one of the official languages in 1978, its usage and teaching in Chadian institutions was not mandatory until recently, in 2010.

Another question is what the purposes of the Al-Kitaab al Mukhaddas translation are as opposed to the many other Bible translations in Chadian languages. There are more than 144 local languages in Chad, which use the Roman script when it comes to writing. Also, it is important to note that not every Chadian speaks Shuwa Arabic; the language is spoken by only 60% of the population. Chad is a large landlocked country spanning north-central Africa; it covers an area of 1,284,000 square kilometers (496,000 sq. mi) with various people with diverse cultures and unevenly distributed. Many Arabic-speaking Chadian Muslims and pagans think ignorantly and strongly that the Holy Bible is a book of Western philosophy and ideas, a mere book of myths and legends, a white man’s literature. So, they are hostile and harden their heart to the Good News because it comes to them in another language than theirs or the one they understand better. So, using Roman script makes it easy for them to penetrate the word of God; it also helps all Shuwa Arabic-speaking people from other countries to better understand the Scripture. Even more, it allows any person who can read Roman script to learn Shuwa Arabic in some way. Moreover, the Al-Kitaab al Mukhaddas helps the Christ-professing Chadians vary in imparting the word of God without deviation.

In fine, the Al-Kitaab al Mukhaddas (ADT19) is a translation of the Holy Bible in Shuwa Arabic, a variety of Arabic spoken by many people in the Sahelian region. The reason why Roman script was used instead of the Arabic script is due to people being well-accustomed to the Roman script. That version of the Holy Bible comes to defend itself against some misinterpretation; it also aims at provoking and giving compelling clarity to set free those that are captives of the spirit of ignorance. To every Shuwa Arabic speaker that has never read or been in contact with the Scripture, I invite you by quoting a former Yale historian, Kenneth Scott Latourette: “If you are an intelligent person, you will read the one book that has drawn more attention than any other, if you are searching for the truth!”

Ahai Djemilnah (continued)

Fi l-Muftariq

(a poem in Shuwa Arabic, Roman script)

Taabi l-chaarii, fi l-wakit giddaam l-fajr;
Wakit naas al-induhum al-Ruuh al-Khudduus gaydiin
waa'iyiin wa fi salat.
Sah! Wakit al-huruub fi l-samaawaat.
Ana irif nit a'aziil tawa, achaan al saaea daggat
Leh ni chiil aw derib l-moot, walah derib l-hayat.
Alhamdulillah, fi l-yoom da ana simi't;
Sah, nitzaakar Haraka hana hiss baarid,
Hiss al-hikma fi l-chawaari', da akiit;
Tinaadni wa tiwassifni al-tariig al-nichiilah.
Hu gaasi bilheen wa baabah dayyikha,
Laakin fi waraha fiyah al-maalak l-hamal.
Zoohl maayi guul "aftah ya sumsum", lah.
Illee naadum al-yad'i be usum Isa.
Mashallah, marag min khachmi be gudrat Ruuha;
Wa be ziiyada baddala hissii
Leh l-zabuur wa ukhniee l-mukhaddisiin.
Ana a'azeel na' abud Allah, ma nafar Rubirt Junsun.

At a Crossroads

Walking down the street at the time 'fore the sunrise,
When spiritual men's whispers open their eyes;
Aye, a time of wars in the heavenly realms.
I knew the decision hour has come;
Either for me to choose life or death.
Hallelujah, that day I heard
A still small voice shutting up spirits.
Surely 'twas Wisdom in the streets,
Calling my attention to the way I should go;
narrow way with strait gate though.
Yet here is a precious treasure behind that door.
But no way to say "Open sesame" so to enter;
Only if one calls upon the name of the Lord.
God willed, to my lips The Spirit gave words;
What is more, he tuned my vocal cords
For me to sing psalms and spiritual songs.
I chose to serve the LORD as opposed to Robert Johnson.

Kossi Gbossou Gbedessi



My name is Kossi Elvis Gbossou Gbedessi. Yes, my name is difficult to spell, and it is why I go by Elvis. I was born in Togo in West Africa, precisely a town named Lomé. I just turned 20 years old. I am a kind of introverted person focusing more on my own personality, being a hard worker, and seeing everything like a competition. I just came to the USA three months ago and just started my classes at Black Hawk College. I work a part-time job at Walmart too and am trying to adapt to this new life full of opportunity. I like to use my free time to listen to music (RnB, slow music, and African music). I like to play basketball, dance and travel. I am really passionate about modeling. I want to become the best model in the world and will work very hard for that. I am the kind of person who loves to be in control of everything, who is very rigorous with himself and very motivated about his life choices. I am also an artist who loves drawing. Family is something very important to me, and I really love my family and will do everything for them.

Gbagba

I experienced a special holiday in my country two years ago when I went to my village, Kpalimé. We were celebrating a festival called *Gbagba*. The festival occurred in the king's court where a lot of different people gathered: white visitors, people coming from big towns, from Germany and other localities. The festival took place for a whole week. It started at 7 p.m., and people went to the king's place, where the festivities started with cultural songs using cultural instruments as Tam Tams and others. People danced, laughed, shouted together, and enjoyed the night. People served different foods like *akoumè* and drinks such as *déha* made from palm trees. In the morning, everybody went to a different place called pyramid, a vast place where people perform magic. This holiday was exceptional for me because I discovered a very interesting part of my culture.

Antoinette Logossou

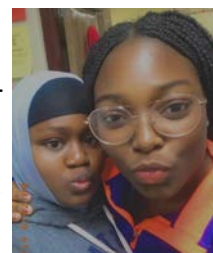


My name is Antoinette Logossou, and I am 20 years old. I was born in Togo, West Africa. I have been living in the U.S. for four years with my dad who has lived here since 2004. I also have one sister and one brother, and I am the oldest. My family and I are Christian. We believe in God, so I always put God first in my activities and my life. I am going to Black Hawk College to study more about business and improve my knowledge. My dreams are to be an entrepreneur or a businesswoman and create my own companies. I hope to learn something new each day that helps me grow in better ways. I also hope to make my parents happy.

My Experiences in the U.S.

I came to the U.S almost four years ago at the age of sixteen. I came here because my dad was already living here and to continue my school. Living in another country is not always easy for a lot of us because you have to start learning many things. For example, you will be getting to know a new country and new people, getting in contact with other languages, and learning more about other cultures. The idea of coming to the U.S and facing new challenges such as starting new things, going to school, work, and learning a new culture was full of stress and more difficult at first than I thought. It took me a while to adapt, but I was able to overcome these difficulties with the help and support of some people around me.

Firstly, my first day in the U.S began with learning new things. My first day in the U.S was horrible. I remember it was in the winter, and I wore a light sweater. I was so cold, and I did not have any gloves with me on that day. Because it was a long day, my dad took me home. Another day, I decided to go out to buy something, and I saw people say hi to me all of the time. I did not understand that because in my country we only say hi to people that we know. People were also smiling at me all of the time, something that I did not understand, so I asked my dad why they were doing that. He told me that we should be nice to others, and that is why when people look at other, they smile; it's because they are kind. He also said I should smile back at them. In America, there are also different cultures that I could see, and it was so easy for me to learn from them. All the people here are available for help even though you do not know each other. It was hard for me to understand English because not only did I not speak English, but I also could not catch what people were saying to me because of their different accents. It was hard for me to learn at first, but it also helped me to learn English faster.



Secondly, my first day in high school in the U.S. was full of stress, and I was lost. I still remember that day when I was sixteen years

old. My dad woke me up early in the morning, and after my bath and breakfast, I got dressed. I thought that I would dress in my new school uniform because in my country we have a school uniform. I found it interesting to wear my own outfits to go to school, and I was happy about that. My father took me and my siblings to school that day. The school building was very big and seemed grand. The gate of the school was very high. There were more than twenty classrooms, hallways, a large library, two larger gyms, and a nurse's office. It was at that moment that I got stressed. I got lost in the school because I did not know where my classes were at, and I did not know that the students were the ones who go to find the teachers' classroom. In Africa, the teacher is the one who comes to the students' classrooms, teaches, and leaves before the next teacher comes in and does the same thing. I thought it was going to be the same, and I did not know anything about how the system worked. I was so stressed to find my classes and every time, I came to class so late. I had the chance to have wonderful teachers, especially my English teacher. Her class helped me a lot at school. I met different people who came from different countries in my English



class. We used to learn the language from each other by communicating and sharing our knowledge. I felt comfortable when I came to English class. Our English teacher always told us an interesting story, and she was a kind person. The teachers were very friendly to me and were available any time to help us. My fear disappeared after the classes. At the end of the classes, the bell rang, and my dad was already waiting for me in the school parking lot. We came back home, and I started telling my dad about my stressful day.

To conclude, moving to the U.S has taught me a lot. I have learned a lot of aspects of life in the US that I had not thought about. For example, I learned about the people, their mentalities, their culture, and I also learned how the education system works in the U.S. I am also very proud of myself for who I am now when I look back. Moving to another country is not always easy, but now I am able to share my experiences with other people.

Gbagba

In my country, Togo, we have 37 group ethnic groups, and each year, we celebrate the mix of African traditions in distinct parts of the country. One of the largest Togolese holidays is *Gbagba* (the Harvest Festival of Ewe d'Agou), and the name *Gbagba* comes from tams-tams. There are two sizes, large and small. It was made and installed by our ancestors. It also has become an annual traditional ceremony. This Togolese event marks the end of the agricultural season and celebrates the beginning of a rest period. In Togo, a region called Kpalime celebrates this event every August. People hold ritual ceremonies that take place over several days. They also do prayer ceremonies directed to the ancestors, the young girls in the *Gbagba* tradition, and the tourists on that day. Many other rituals also take place during the ceremony. At the end of the ceremonies, the beautiful girls sing and dance to close the day in the *Gbagba* tradition.

Mazahalo Malou



My name is Mazahalo Malou. I was born in Assahoun in Togo, West Africa. I am married and have two boys. I went to school in Sokode, Togo. I graduated from high school in 2007 and attended the Université de Lomé where I obtained a master's degree in 2014. I worked as sociologist investigator with WEP-TOGO: Woman Environmental Program – Togo. I started as a program manager for potable water and sanitation in January 2015 before traveling to the United States in November 2019. I worked at Tyson Fresh Meat before I started ESL at Black Hawk College in January 2021. These days, I am a stay-at-home mother and attend school, where I am still learning English. I am an optimistic woman. I have big dreams. In the future, I will be a health care professional. My dream is to become a nurse.

Self-Medication in Togo

In developing countries such as Togo, self-medication, that is to say treatment provided without a prescription, is a frequent therapeutic approach. In Lomé, capital of Togo, it is the first resort for illnesses that may be more or less serious. Because of poverty, a third of the population cannot afford medicines. Sometimes, products are more expensive in Togo than in industrialized countries. However, the majority of patients in this country do not benefit from insurance, and the expenses incurred are entirely their responsibility. There are many reasons that push people towards self-medication, but poverty, cultural problems, and illicit pharmaceutical markets are the main causes.

First, poverty or precarious living conditions and the severity of the disease force the majority of the population to rely on less expensive treatments. Indeed, the strong income inequality, the random functioning of the public sector, and the significant corruption of the state apparatus are the main causes. When illness, or more generally ill-being, strikes someone, the person finds himself, in a way, confronted with a dilemma. If they patients have chronic diseases, they go to traditional practitioners, and when they have acute diseases, they go to modern health services, sometimes regardless of the distance. The use of health services or a type of treatment is also a function of the knowledge and beliefs that populations have of this system, but also of the medical and social benefits expected by these patients.

Second, cultural problems are a second important cause of self medication. Indeed, culture is a set of ideas, customs and behaviors shared by a given people or society. The disease that quickly kills children and the elderly in Africa is malaria. In Togo, each culture group perceives malaria in different ways, but generally when someone has a fever or a hot body, it is considered to be malaria. The first recourse is traditional plants. Indeed, the majority of the population who have died of malaria in Togo did not receive a consultation in a

clinic or hospital and were treated either at home or by a healer.

Finally, self-medication is caused by illicit pharmaceutical markets. These markets are a notable success with the population thanks to the services they offer at a reduced cost. The illicit pharmaceutical market presents itself as an economic alternative in the eyes of the population, who is sometimes unaware of the health risks associated with the use of these products. The population of Lomé is increasingly going to the illicit pharmaceutical market although there are pharmacies in each district of the city. Because these markets are not regulated, they have developed almost everywhere outside of formal circuits. The consequence of this illicit trade is inevitably the increase in the practice of self-treatment. Togolese women traders go to neighboring countries, such as Nigeria and Ghana, to stock up on medicines that they come to resell at a good price. Illicit pharmaceutical markets are more accessible for people, which explains the choice of treatment without recourse to a doctor.

In conclusion, self-medication in Togo is explained by various factors, namely poverty, culture and development of parallel medicine markets. The anarchic and disorderly consumption of medicines has dramatic repercussions for the health of individuals. It is therefore necessary and urgent to act. The Togolese government must raise awareness of the risks involved, sanction the traditional healers, promote generics, and repress illicit pharmaceutical market sellers.

Recipe to Prepare the Local Drink *Sioulim*

I would like to share how to prepare the local drink of northern Togo commonly called *sioulim*. It is made from sorghum and generally served in a calabash. *Sioulim* means the drink of genius. It is served during ceremonies and rites, especially to the eldest. To prepare *sioulim*, the sorghum is first poured into water for eight hours. Then it is poured into a basket to extract the water for about three days, giving time for it to germinate. Then, we wash it again and spread it out in the shade. Three days later, we bring everything back to the mill. After crushing, we mix it with water and let it dry for about one hour. Then we pass it through a sieve to collect the water that we put aside to be used later. It is the residue that is put on the fire for a minimum of four hours. It becomes thick and heavy by adding water to it. Then, we sieve again using the basket to recover the drink itself. We keep it until the next day so that it takes on a certain consistency and ferments well to boil again. After this step, we let it cool all day. We can already serve it, but it will be soft and not strong (fermented). For it to ferment, we collect the foam from what is already fermented and pour it over the new one in preparation to obtain *sioulim*. Today, this drink once intended only for ceremonies or genies is marketed on a large scale and accessible throughout the country.



Nant Kha Note Phaung



My name is Nant Kha Note Phaung, and I am 41 years old. I am originally from Myanmar. I moved to Thailand in 2007 and lived there until I moved to the U.S. I moved to the U.S. in 2019 with my family. I am married with two sons, 10 and 5 years old. I graduated from college in my country and now I have started studying at BHC to improve my writing. I am a homemaker, and I serve full time in my church community. My dream is going to seminary to learn the bible. I want to be a full time missionary like my mother.

How My Son Survived Cancer

Hope is one of the most important and powerful emotions that humans experience. Hope moves us forward and gives us optimism for the future. It makes us all better, both ourselves and our lives. Without hope, we can lose our lives because hope is what makes life meaningful. It gives us insight into things that were impossible in the past, and most importantly, helps us to survive in the midst of all that is happening in our lives. Through my experience with my son's health, I learned that there is hope for everyone who is lost in various circumstances. For me, that hope came from God alone.

To begin, this happened to my eldest son while we were in Bangkok, Thailand, before we moved to the U.S. His name is Steven, and he was born in 2011. When he was two years old, he had itchy skin on his scalp, but we thought it was just a normal skin condition and consulted a dermatologist. The doctor prescribed ointments, but the itching did not go away. One day, when he was four years old, when he came home from school, we noticed a lump on the left side of his forehead. We thought he had an accident at school and thought it would go away in a day or two. However, it did not go away for three or four days. When I asked my son, he said that it was not painful, but we still went to see the doctor. The doctor told me to start with a biopsy, and it would cost about 30,000 baht (\$1,000). At that time, we could not do it right away because we did not have enough money. About three months later, my son's left eye was slightly protruding. At that time, we had to start compulsory medical examinations. After that, my son was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer called LCH (Langerhans cell histiocytosis). Doctors said the cancer cells had spread throughout



his body, and it was also affecting his brain. This was very shocking news for us.

Then, treatment started, and chemo was given twice a week. In fact, we learned the symptoms of LCH include a rash on the skin, so we did not know he had the disease since he had a rash when he was two years old. It was flu season three months after he got his chemo, and he got infected by the influenza virus and got sick. About a week after his illness, his condition worsened, and he was hospitalized. He was hospitalized for a month and a half, but his condition worsened. That month and a half was a battle for me, but I had complete confidence in my faith and hoped that God could do it. I never gave up hope that my son would recover one day.

Finally, my husband and I were called, and the doctors talked. The doctor said my son did not respond to medical treatment. In his last days, only morphine would be given for comfort. They said that he will be gone in three to five days, so we could take him home or stay at the hospital during his last days. So my husband and I asked God what to do; we prayed that we would obey Him what God told us to do. God answered with these bible verses, “He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds” (Psalms 147:3). “For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life; Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning” (Psalms 30:5). After we got the answer, we brought our son back home. We stopped every treatment, even the morphine. We prayed, our community prayed, and people around the world prayed. God started working when people thought it was impossible for man. I began to see the miracle of God. My son got better and better day by day without the treatment. God created new creation in my son day after day. Now, my son is ten years old, and yes, he is cancer-free.



In conclusion, looking at my son's case, there is hope for everyone lost in various circumstances. We think we are lost, and there is no hope, but there is always a way. That is the way of Jesus. In the Bible, Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life,” So when we feel we have no way and no hope, just call Him, and He will answer.



Nant Kha Note Phaung (continued)

Myanmar Traditional Dish: Coconut Milk Soup Noodles

I have always been proud to be a Burmese. There is a lot to write about Myanmar culture. As a person who loves cooking, I would like to tell you about one of my favorite traditional Burmese dishes. It is called *Ohn noh Kao swel* in Burmese. In English, it can be called chicken coconut milk soup with noodles. You can also cook it with shrimp. This food is eaten daily for breakfast, and it is also served at weddings, birthdays, or donation ceremonies.

Ingredients for the soup are chicken, coconut milk, garlic, ginger, chili powder, turmeric powder, chickpea, onions, eggs, salt, sugar, chicken powder and cooking oil. When preparing to eat, we need noodles, thinly sliced boiled eggs, lime, roasted chili powder, thin slices of onion, fried bean paste and cilantro.



The recipe is simple and easy. First, we need to steam the chickpeas and blend them well. Then we have to cook the chicken. Add oil to the pan and when the oil is hot, add chopped garlic, onion and ginger. After that, add chili powder and turmeric powder. When the oil is fragrant, add the chicken, salt and sugar. When the chicken is cooked, put it aside. Add water to the pot and bring it to a boil. When the water boils, add the ground chickpeas. Then add the cooked chicken and slices of boiled eggs. When it has boiled for 15 minutes, add the coconut milk and then add salt and sugar. After boiling for 10 minutes, taste and serve it. Put the noodles, thin slices of boiled eggs, lime, roasted chili powder, thin slices of onion, fried bean paste, cilantro and soup all together. It is a very delicious traditional Burmese food with a smell of coconut milk.

Mishelle Naranjo Leiva

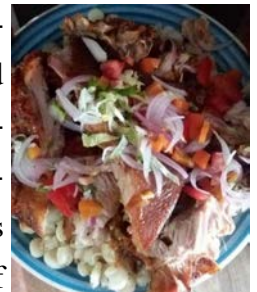


My name is Mishelle Alexandra Naranjo Leiva. I am from Quito, Ecuador. I am 30 years old. I graduated in 2014 and got a bachelor's degree as a graphic designer. When I was in Ecuador, I used to work in a marketing department, so my main activities were visual arts for social media and printing information, like flyers, roll ups, packaging, etc. My dream is to learn a lot of languages. I want to know at least four languages, English, Japanese and Russian. That is the reason I left my home, and I decided to come here and start chasing my dreams. I have another dream. I would like to travel around the world for fun and for work, so maybe in a few years, I will apply for pilot studies. Some of my hobbies are watching anime movies. I love to read novels and manga, eat sushi and desserts, and lastly, I enjoy running marathons. I have been running since my graduation in 2014. Also, I like to stay at home with my family. We are really closer. I consider myself a good friend and a dog lover. I cried a lot when I came here without my dogs, but I will go back for them for sure.

The Regions of Ecuador and their Traditional Dishes

In the world, there are a lot of different places that you can visit, and the tourism industry has endless options to choose from. Each country has unique characteristics like beautiful scenery, nice-looking landscapes and delicious food. The traditional food in every place is distinctive and special because people incorporate their customs and traditions in the way they prepare the food. Ecuador is not an exception because it offers not only beautiful touristic places but also different dishes in each region, which are the coast, the Amazon, the Andes and the Galapagos Islands.

First, the coast of Ecuador is characterized by the warm and humid weather, and there are a lot of beaches. Montañita, Salinas, Atacames, and Manta are the most attractive ones, and there are also touristic places like Guayaquil, which it is the biggest city of Ecuador. In these places, typical dishes are *encebollado*, *majado* and *ceviche*. *Encebollado* is a type of soup made with catfish, onions, tomatoes, mustard, and oil, and it is delicious; besides, some people eat it to avoid hangovers. *Majado* is a dish made with green plantains, cheese, and pork or shredded beef, and the juice of the meat mixed with the green plantain is so good. *Ceviche* is soup with all kinds of seafood like fish, shrimp, clams or a mix of all of them. It is made with orange juice, onion, cilantro and other herbs.



Second, the Amazon region is known for its rain forest, jungles, rivers, and wild animals. It also houses a lot of indigenous communities who share their

customs and traditions with tourist and locals. The typical dishes of the Amazon region are *chontacurros*, fish *maitos* and *cassava chicha*. In fact, *chontacurros* are a kind of Amazonian worm, and people eat them grilled on a stick or alive, but it tastes like shrimp to me. Fish *maito* is a catfish wrapped with a banana leaf, which people cook over a woodfire; also, the dish is accompanied by potatoes or cassava, plantains and corn. *Cassava chicha* is a sour juice that it is like liquor; it is made from cassava chewed by women, which is then fermented in big clay pots by men.



Third, the Andes region is the most important region in Ecuador. The capital of the country is Quito. In this region, there are 48 volcanos, which are frequently visited by locals and tourists. The tourism and



trade throughout all the cities provide opportunities for work. The traditional dishes are *llapingacho*, *fritada*, *cuy* and *locro*. *Llapingacho* are tortillas made with potatoes and cheese, and this dish is accompanied by avocado, chorizo, onions, tomatoes and fried eggs; besides, it is delicious and my favorite of all. *Fritada* is fried pork



with corn, fried banana and a salad with tomatoes, onions and lettuce. *Cuy* is an animal called guinea pig, and this is a traditional dish from Ambato, which comes with potatoes, corn and salad made with lettuce and eggs. *Locro* is a thick soup made with boiled potatoes, cheese, and cilantro; when it is done, you can add avocado so that it tastes even better.

Finally, Galapagos is a beautiful island where the tourism is the best experience; in addition, there are



a lot of plants and wild animals like giant tortoises and maritime animals, which are endemic species. The principal dishes are seafood rice, cassava bread and green plantain stuffed balls. Seafood rice is a mix of rice with all kinds of seafood like shrimp, fish, mussels, clam and crab; people use spices to add color to the rice. Cassava bread, as its name says, is a soft bread made with cassava and cheese.

In the Andes region, people prepare this bread as well, but it tastes different; however, I recommend the bread from the coastal region because it is crunchy and delicious. Green plantain stuffed balls are a traditional breakfast and dinner from the coast and Galapagos where people prepare the balls with green plantains and fill them with cheese or pork; in fact, it is the favorite of locals, and they eat it with coffee or juice.



In conclusion, those dishes from the coast, Andes, Amazon and Galapagos regions, are just a few of the most important from Ecuador; of course, there are many more that people love to eat. However, they can enjoy the diversity of food from each region of Ecuador since we incorporate our own customs in the food preparation. Ecuador has a lot of different dishes to offer and people prepare them in different ways, but the tradition of all of them is going to endure for many generations.

An Ecuadorian Holiday Called Carnaval

In Ecuador, there is a traditional holiday called Carnaval. This is always celebrated in February, but it is not on a specific day. Carnaval is characterized by activities like dances, traditional clothing, drinks, and parties. One of the main features of Carnaval is water balloon fights. People throw water on each other just for fun using water balloons and water buckets. In some cities, like Ambato, they throw eggs, flour, mud, paint, and other weird liquids. Little businesses take advantage of this holiday to sell jewelry, food and *espuma carnavalera*, a foam version of silly string. This is mainly used by people who prefer not to play with water. Ambato celebrates the *Flores y Frutas* festival, where big exhibition cars are decorated with flowers and fruits. Those cars are shown in a big crowded parade. Groups of girls dance amazing choreographies, and they are dressed with cultural customs and beautiful make up. Since the Covid pandemic, those activities are forbidden at the moment, but people are waiting to celebrate again as they used to.

Ikram Sehb



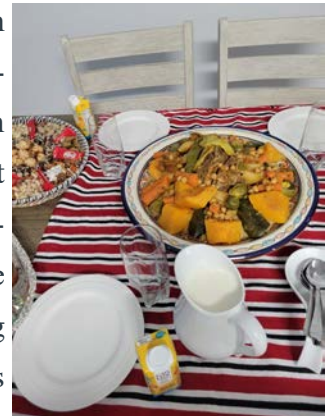
My name is Ikram. I was born in Morocco. I graduated from high school before I was 18 years old. In August 2006 after I had graduated high school, I went to university and majored in history and civilization. I finished my internship as a teacher in private school by the time I graduated from university. I got married in 2013, and in 2015, I moved to the United States of America. I never spoke or learned English before I moved here. That is why I enrolled in the ESL classes at Black Hawk Outreach Center. I have been studying English since 2015. In 2016, I gave birth to my first child. When my son reached the age of two, I started working at Ross Store so that I can have more interactions with people and practice my English. At the same time, I was still going to school. In 2019, I took my first academic class at Black Hawk College and so far, I have taken three classes. In 2020, and after we moved to our new house, I gave birth to my second child. In the future, I would like to become a computer programmer.

Morocco

Morocco is located in the northwest part of Africa. It is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. It is one of many countries that attracts tourists from all over the world and that is for many reasons, such as various types of food, beautiful ancient sites, and attractive traditional clothing.

First, Moroccan cuisine occupies a unique place among the kitchens of the world as it is famous for its delicious dishes with a distinctive taste and wonderful flavors. Among the dishes Morocco is known for are Moroccan couscous, *meat tagine* and *tagine Marrakech*.

Moroccan couscous is one of the dishes that tourists look for as soon as they set foot in Casablanca, and it is customary to eat this meal at lunch on Friday for various Moroccan families, and it is one of the main dishes served during big events. Moroccan couscous contains many types of vegetables such as



pumpkin, carrots, potatoes, tomatoes, white and yellow turnips and onions and some areas add dried beans. It is prepared from soft grain flour like wheat with vegetables of various kinds and meat. The couscous dish is prepared in a bowl called *cascas*. It is perforated with small holes, which work to pass the steam towards the couscous grain. The steam comes from the lower bowl, in which vegetables and meat are being cooked. There is also another dish that is very popular in Morocco called lamb and plum *tagine*. It is one of the most famous dishes that is often served at weddings. It consists of pieces of meat prepared with onions, garlic and Moroccan spices, and decorated with honeyed plums, almonds and sesame.

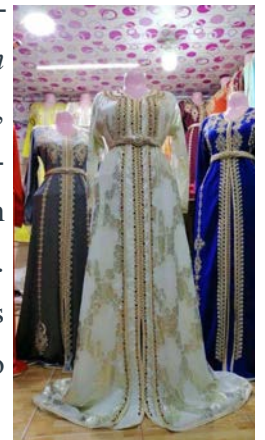
Secondly, Moroccan traditional attire is a group of traditional and popular clothing that the Moroccan people have preserved since ancient times. There is no doubt that the traditional dress is an integral part of the Moroccan heritage.



Moroccan *caftan* is a long dress with a wide cut from the bottom, adorned with prominent embroidery and sometime stones and accessories at the chest, waist, bottom and the sleeves as well. The elegance of the Moroccan *caftan* is complemented by the belt that is worn around the waist. The modern Moroccan *caftan* is distinguished by its attractive colors and various embroideries. They are either prominent and abundant embroideries or thin and light embroideries that add an aesthetic touch to the outfit. The fabrics used in the manufacturing of *caftan* are usually silk satin and valor. The Moroccan *caftan* is no longer just a traditional piece. It has become an elegant piece, in which the stars appear on the red carpet for many festivals, official events, and accessions. It is chosen by many important woman figures, such as the wife of the former president, Hillary Clinton. The beautiful diversity in the traditional dress of Morocco has brought together a variety of cultures that have known Morocco over the ages.



Finally, archaeological areas in Morocco captivate many tourists. Many people know Morocco as one of the most important heritage sites in the world, which has witnessed many civilizations and people belonging to different dynasties, leaving behind many of their monuments. Even the UNESCO has included a large number of the sites on the historical list, including the ancient city Volubilis. It dates back to Roman times. The city was an important administrative center during the Roman era. Today, it is the best place to visit if you are a fan of archeology and interested in anthropology, and you can see the remaining pillars and other ruins, which testify to the greatness of this place at an important period of history.



In conclusion, Morocco has a lot to offer to tourists, whether it be the delicious foods, the traditional markets, or the heritage sites, so we really advise you to put Morocco on the list of countries to visit. This will be a unique experience and you will not forget it.

Ikram Sehb (Continued)



Henna Designs

Henna designs or henna tattoos were and still are among the most important rituals and customs that Moroccan women would do on all occasions, such as religious holidays and weddings. Therefore, the henna design on the body is one beauty secret of Moroccan girls that has been passed down from generation to generation, due to its splendor of appearance . In order to engrave henna accurately, women who specialize in henna designs use a henna needle that is bought from a natural beauty products store to squirt henna design on hands or other part of the body to create a beautiful design. By using this henna needle, you can get very beautiful sub permanent tattoos and designs in an easy and subtle way.



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