

Waterford Stories:
Seeking Asylum
in Modern Ireland





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The Waterford One World Centre is a development education centre located in Waterford City, Ireland. Our mission is to work in partnership with the local community to educate and empower people to take action on global issues of social justice and human dignity.

Our work explores a range of development themes such as: Fair Trade, Human Rights, Sustainable Development, Cultural Diversity, Racism, and Peace and Conflict. All of our work aims to promote an understanding of the links between our own lives and the lives of people throughout the world.

This project originated from our relationships with people who have come to Ireland through the asylum and refugee process. We have found this community to be generous with their time and knowledge, and we wanted to share that with the wider community.

We would like to thank the Reception and Integration Agency for their support of this project. We would very much like to thank all of the people profiled in this book for their time and courage in sharing their stories.

Lucy Whittle, Coordinator
Waterford One World Centre

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Democratic Republic of the Congo



The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is a vast country rich in resources with a population of 65 million people. Formerly known as Zaire, the DRC has had a violent history since achieving independence in 1960. In the 1990s it was the centre of what can certainly be called the African World War, involving seven nations and many rival armed groups. Nearly 6 million people have died as a result of that conflict and the violence and disease that have followed. Half of those that have died have been children under 5 years old.

Despite efforts to end the fighting and make political progress toward peace, there have been on-going clashes between factions as each tries to regain control of the country and the past few years have seen some of the worst fighting. Current estimates are that 45,000 people die each month as a result. The current life expectancy for an adult in the DRC is in the mid-40's.

The sexual-based violence, carried out both by armed militias and the Congolese armed forces, still occurs throughout the eastern portions of the country and has been called 'unimaginable' by United Nations observers.

Despite democratic elections in 2006, the country has plunged into a new spiral of ethnic and gender-based violence. At the end of 2008, it was estimated that over 1.4 million people had been driven from their homes and were living as refugees within their own country.

Kawaya
Democratic Republic of the Congo

Kawaya has just recently arrived in Ireland from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Kawaya says he misses his country but that it is not a good place because of the constant warfare and the lack of human rights. Kawaya's tribe had originally come from Rwanda and even though they have lived in the DRC for a century, they still face persecution from the dominant tribe.

Kawaya had been working for an organisation that helped children impacted by the war. One day after the children had been fed, one of them got sick. Kawaya took him to the hospital but despite getting treatment, the child died. The child was from the main tribe and Kawaya was accused of intentionally poisoning him and was put in jail.

Kawaya was locked up and beaten for 30 days while the soldiers tried to get a confession. He was able to convince one soldier to contact his mother who paid the man to free Kawaya. There was an order placed to kill Kawaya but he managed to stay close enough to the United Nations peacekeepers to flee into Rwanda. Kawaya says that because there are no human rights in the DRC, that he would never be able to get a fair trial and would be killed if he returned.

Kawaya's mother had given the soldier Kawaya's papers and money and he was able to make his way to Ireland and ask for asylum. He says that the people who he spoke to first in Dublin airport were lovely, they gave him food and didn't beat him. He appreciates that in Ireland the people are safe and there is the rule of law.



Antoine
Democratic Republic of the Congo

Antoine was born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and was living in the capital city of Kinshasa during the fighting that took place from 1996 to 2003. Antoine sent his wife and two children to Ireland to escape the violent events in their home country.

They were given temporary accommodation in Carrick-On-Suir after their arrival. Antoine was able to follow two months later, also with a request for asylum.

They remained in Carrick-on-Suir awaiting the birth of their third child. Antoine did not want to raise his family in a refugee centre so they moved in with another Congolese family in Waterford City. Antoine and his wife felt that living in a house provided the children with a sense of home and family. They were eventually provided with their own home and it was there that they welcomed their fourth child.

The three oldest children are now enrolled in Waterford schools and are getting on very well. Antoine's wife enrolled in courses at CTI and was successful in her exams. Antoine wants his family to continue with their education, to improve their lifestyle and to become fully a part of Irish society. Antoine and his wife still miss their home country, but know that it is more important to have the security that Ireland provides to his family.



Additional Resources

General Background:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country_profiles/1076399.stm

http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/places/countries/country_demrepcongo.html

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/08/AR2007090801194.html>

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/23/world/africa/23congo.html?_r=1

<http://www.mediastorm.org/0022.htm> Graphic images, for teacher use only

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/curriculum/socialstudies/middlegrades/africa/democraticrepubliccongoenvickery.pdf>

<http://www.internal-displacement.org/>

Lesson Plans/Classroom Activities:

<http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/educators/lessonplans/lesson.cfm?lpid=470>

http://www.oakland.k12.mi.us/scope/seventh_lessons/social/unit3/S070304.doc

<http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/docs/curriculum/socialstudies/middlegrades/africa/drclesson7cellphonesandtheconomy.pdf>

<http://www.rpcv.org/lessons/MaliandDRC.doc>

<http://education.crs.org/africa.cfm>

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/curriculum/socialstudies/middlegrades/africa/drclesson4africasfirstworldwar.pdf>





Ethiopia



Ethiopia is Africa's oldest independent country and only one of two not colonised by Europeans following World War I, although it was occupied by Italy for five years under Mussolini. Ethiopia is one of the world's largest coffee producers but despite having this cash crop, it remains one of the poorest countries in Africa.

Unfortunately, Ethiopia is probably best known for suffering through cycles of drought and famine, and for its long conflict with neighbouring Eritrea. Eritrea gained its independence from Ethiopia in 1993 but there have been continuous border disputes between the two countries that broke into full-scale conflict in 1998 during which many thousands were killed and millions lost their homes. The disputed land has symbolic value to both countries and on-going disputes threaten the fragile peace to this day.

As a result, there exists a simmering dislike and mistrust between Eritreans and Ethiopians despite their shared heritage. The Ethiopian government has expelled thousands of Eritreans and people with mixed Ethiopian-Eritrean blood and confiscated their property.

Additionally, Ethiopia is threatened by serious environmental problems that have resulted in over-population and a loss of wildlife and vegetation. Despite these problems, there is much potential in Ethiopia and local communities are starting to address their own situations and put Ethiopia back on the path of economic independence and success.

Meseret
Ethiopia

Meseret is from Adis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. Ethiopia is a very poor country and Meseret remembers getting up in the morning and there being no food for breakfast. She went to school but her mind would wander to what her mother might be cooking but often when she went home for lunch, there still would be no food. She grew up surrounded by people begging, including children and the elderly.

There is also ethnic tension between Ethiopians and Eritreans and as a child of mixed parentage, Meseret was not accepted by either side. At one point, she and others with an Eritrean parent were driven down to the river dividing the two countries and told to get out. They were not accepted by the Eritrean side either and found themselves without a safe home.

Meseret arrived in Cork in 2004 and asked for asylum. She was sent to the hostel in Waterford where she stayed for three years and eight months before being granted asylum on humanitarian grounds. It was during this time that her daughter was born.

Meseret says life is good now. Her daughter goes to playschool and she is taking English classes. She plans on going to college to study nursing.

Meseret says she likes everything about Ireland and has managed to stay happy through hard times because she knows that she and her daughter will have a great life in this country.



Additional Resources

General Background:

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/eritrea.htm>

<http://www.ploughshares.ca/libraries/monitor/monm99c.html>

<http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5490>

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/1072164.stm

Lesson Plans:

<http://www.pbs.org/wonders/Classrm/lesson4.htm>

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/03/g68/moreldrought.html>

<http://www.plan-ed.org/learningcentre/ethiopia/>

<http://edition.cnn.com/2000/fyi/lesson.plans/12/13/eritrea.ethiopia/index.html>

http://www.water.org/FileUploads/WPElemCurric6_0.pdf

<http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/0501/03.ethiopiaEritreaPeace.html>

http://www.deliberating.org/Lessons_Globalization_Fair_Trade.pdf





KOSOVO



Independent Kosovo was born out of the ethnic strife that engulfed the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s. Kosovo had originally been given to Yugoslavia in the aftermath of World War I instead of Albania. When Yugoslavia dissolved, the newly formed Serbian state kept Kosovo as part of their territory.

The region is made up of over 90% ethnic Albanians and the remainder are mostly Serbian. These two groups have different languages, religions, ethnicities, and cultures. The Serbians were able to dominate the region based on their greater power in the country of Serbia.

In 1998, armed conflict began between the Serbian armed forces and the Kosovo Liberation Army that resulted in a brutal crackdown against the ethnic Albanians. NATO's intervention in 1999 resulted initially in further crimes and human rights abuses against the ethnic Albanians forcing hundreds of thousands of them to flee or be forcibly expelled from Kosovo. NATO was eventually able to force Serbia to end their war against the ethnic Albanians, but human rights abuses continued throughout the early 2000s.

It was not until 2008 that Kosovo was able to declare itself independent from Serbia, a fact that Serbia refuses to recognise. Previous attempts at independence were met with political backlash from the Serbian government. NATO and EU forces still remain in Kosovo as peacekeepers which has allowed Kosovo to recently celebrate their first year of independence.

Sahide
Kosovo

Sahide and her family left Kosovo in 1999 because of the Serbian campaign to drive the Kosovar Albanians from their homes. It is estimated that close to a million people were forced to flee Serbian forces and another half a million were displaced within the region. Sahide and her family originally went to a refugee camp in Macedonia and from there to Dungarvan. Despite having lived here safely for a number of years, to this day she has a difficult time speaking of the time spent in the refugee camp.

Sahide was 14 years old at the time and had only heard English spoken on television. She recalls arriving off the bus in Dungarvan to a great welcome from the local people who knew what their family had been through. Sahide and her family were accepted into Ireland as programme refugees, a status granted to people suffering extreme emergency situations in their home countries.

The family spent a year and a half living in Dungarvan where she and her brothers and sisters went to school. After the cease fire in Kosovo, the family hoped that the situation had improved enough to make their lives in Kosovo but they soon realised that it was still too dangerous to raise their family there. The family eventually moved to Waterford where Sahide hopes to pursue her dream of going to school and becoming a nurse.



Additional Resources

General Background:

www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/kosovo

<http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=1243>

<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/serbia/kosovo/index.html>

<http://www.newkosovareport.com/>

<http://www.careusa.org/vfi/kosovo/>

Lesson Plans/Classroom Activities:

<http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/specials/kosovo/lessons.html>

<http://countries.mrdonn.org/albania.html>

http://gc2000.rutgers.edu/GC2000/MODULES/CIVIL_WAR/KosovoLessons.htm

<http://wioc.wisc.edu/childreninconflict/resources/general-and-balkans.pdf>

http://www.usethenews.com/UTN%20guide%20samples/LongRoadHome_SAMPLE.pdf

<http://homeschool-curricula.blogspot.com/2008/02/history-today-kosovas-war-of.html>





Kurdistan



Kurdistan is an autonomous region whose political seat is in Iraq but the Kurdish ancestral land extends into Turkey, Syria and Iran. Despite many promises of an independent state following World War I, the Kurds have been forced to live as a minority population in the neighbouring countries. There have many human rights violations against the Kurds, and the Iraqi government alone forcibly expelled more than 200,000 Kurds in the 1970s.

During the 1980s the Iraqi government escalated its campaign of violence against the Kurds with thousands of men and young boys being disappeared by Iraq. There is evidence of mass graves and executions, the use of chemical weapons and the destruction of Kurdish villages and towns. One of the most horrific events occurred in March of 1988 when Iraqi warplanes unloaded chemical weapons on the entirely civilian population of Halabja. Approximately 5000 civilians died from the two-day attack.

Many Kurds became refugees during the fighting of the first Gulf War and when that conflict had ended, a Kurdish rebellion continued against Iraq, which was brutally suppressed. No-fly zones were established as safe areas and Kurds have since been able to establish their autonomy.

The Kurds remain the largest ethnic group in the world without a country to call their own and have suffered generations of repression and persecution at the hands of the governments in whose countries they have been forced to live. The Kurdish diaspora has resulted in there being 20 million Kurds living throughout the world.

Shamal
Kurdistan

Shamal comes from Mahabad in Kurdistan. Kurdistan is an ethnic region that is divided between Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey. In the early 1990s, the Kurds established self-rule in northern Iraq but still remain officially within Iraqi borders. Mahabad, where Shamal is from, is within the borders of modern Iran. Kurds in Iran have long suffered at the hands of the Iranian government, and social and political repression continue to this day.

Shamal travelled to Ireland in March 2003 and requested asylum. Shamal spend a year living in the asylum centres in Dublin. He found this to be a very difficult year and most especially missed his girlfriend. He was not allowed to work and felt that he had too much time and nothing to fill it with.

After being granted asylum, Shamal studied English and started working as a waiter in a number of restaurants and eventually ended up at the Hotel Kilkenny.

Shamal moved to Waterford in 2008 and started the Social Studies course at the Waterford Institute of Technology. Shamal's girlfriend, Shadi has also been granted her right to be in Ireland and they were married in Dublin in October 2008.

Shamal and Shadi consider Ireland their second home and plan on making their lives here from now on. They both wish to continue their education, get good jobs and live like other happy couples around the world.



Additional Resources

General Background:

<http://www.krg.org/index.asp>

<http://www.akakurdistan.com/>

<http://www.tourismkurdistan.com/>

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/kurdistan-iraq.htm>

<http://mediastorm.org/0011.htm>

<http://www.kurdmedia.com/default.aspx>

Lesson Plans:

<http://www.lyric.co.uk/images/page/KurdishG.pdf>

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/iraq/postwar_4-8.html

<http://www.whitepinepictures.com/seeds/iii/38/teacher1.html>

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/7098375/Tales-of-Gifts-Lesson-Plans>

<http://mesc.osu.edu/documents/Resources.ppt>

<http://downloads.ncss.org/lessons/CFMar96.pdf>

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/iraq/ethnic.html>

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/classroom/lp1.html>





Nigeria



Nigeria is a vast and complex country with a number of different ethnic groups and languages. Nigeria gained its independence from Great Britain in 1960 and currently boasts the largest population in Africa. After gaining independence, Nigeria endured military rule until the 1999 transition to a civilian government.

Nigeria is an oil-rich country which has proven to be both a blessing and a curse as the wealth generated by oil has led to chronic institutional corruption preventing the people of Nigeria from seeing any of the benefits of living in an oil-producing state.

Additionally, Nigeria suffers from both religious and ethnic conflict and a culturally-based system of gender discrimination and violence. Forced marriage, the sale of female children into marriage, spousal abuse, sexual discrimination and female circumcision have been practiced extensively in certain parts of the country. There have been documented cases of children being forced into slave labour or trafficked across borders for sexual purposes or for the harvesting of live body parts.

Despite progress having been made with the 1999 return to a democratically elected government, Nigeria still suffers from a rigid gender-based system of discrimination. Trafficking in women and children, forced early marriage and female circumcision are all still prominent in certain parts of Nigeria.

Agnes
Nigeria

Agnes is from Nigeria and is about to celebrate 6 years in Ireland. When Agnes originally left her home, she would have gone anywhere and it is only by luck that she ended up in Ireland. She feels that she has found a better life here because Ireland is peaceful and she is able to have a plan for her life, to focus on it and to achieve her goals, something she did not feel was possible in Nigeria.

Agnes had to leave behind her husband and young son when she came to Ireland with her baby daughter. They spent their first two years in Ireland living in a hostel, which Agnes found very difficult. Life in the hostel, she says, is the same every day. Agnes felt that her life was just sleeping and waking, with nothing to do, no money and no hope for the future.

Agnes knew that when you are told of your status, if you get a big envelope, that means you have to leave Ireland and if you get a small envelope, then you can stay. She remembers the day she got the small envelope and having to check the name on the envelope and on the letter to make sure there was no mistake.

Agnes completed the ECDL course while she was still in the hostel in addition to volunteering at Sacred Heart Church. Once she received her right to remain, she felt it possible to pursue her dream of becoming a nurse. Agnes is in her third year in the Waterford Institute of Technology's nursing programme, while also keeping two part-time jobs and taking care of her two beautiful daughters.



Tareare
Nigeria

Tareare is originally from Bayesal, a state in southern Nigeria. Her parents had moved there from a rural village in search of a better style of life. Life was good for her growing up because they were in the city. But despite having left the village, the cultural customs toward women and girls followed them and Tareare felt she needed to flee her country for her own safety.

Tareare found it very difficult to leave Nigeria and her family and friends behind. But her concerns for her well-being were strong and she arrived in Ireland in February of 2001. She has been living in Waterford since June of that year and likes the friendliness of the Waterford people.

Tareare was granted her right to remain in May 2002 and moved out of the hostel and into her own accommodation. Tareare does not want to be dependent on the Irish government so has worked many jobs to make sure that she can pay her own way. She realizes that education is important to bettering her life here in Ireland and she has recently returned to college and both of her children are happy and thriving in school.

Tareare wants to be the best mother possible to her children and provide them with every chance in life. She is thankful that Ireland is a safe country and that it was open to her and her children when they needed safe shelter. She has a lot of Irish friends and looks forward to a bright future.



Additional Resources

General Background:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR44/025/2005/en/dom-AFR440252005en.pdf>

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2002/18220.htm>

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/all-countries/nigeria/page.do?id=1011212>

Lesson Plans/Classroom Activities:

<http://www.uni.edu/gai/Nigeria/Lessons/Storytelling.html>

<http://fga.freac.fsu.edu/resources/academy/k1niger.htm>

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/world/nigeria_4-23.html

<http://www.crayola.com/lesson-plans/detail/nigerian-dundun-drum-lesson-plan/>

<http://learningtogive.org/lessons/unit226/lesson11.html>

http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/educators/economics_nigeria.html

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/14/g68/index.html>



South Africa



South African history is a well-known story of oppression and triumph. Apartheid, the legally enforced separation of the races, was established in 1948 following generations of informal racial segregation dating back to the colonial period. After decades of internal opposition and violent reprisals, apartheid was officially abandoned during the mid-1990s.

Recently another sad chapter has been added to the legacy of racial troubles with the rise of violence directed at foreigners within South Africa. Most often referred to as xenophobia, this violence erupted in 2008 when South African youths attacked immigrants from other African countries. People from the surrounding nations still are living in churches and government patrolled camps out of fear for their lives and the lives of their families. This situation is considered volatile and it is feared that the violent attacks could resume at any time.

South Africa suffers from many social ills including high unemployment, a shortage of housing and soaring crime rates, and the attackers blamed immigrants for these problems. Reports from certain South African townships indicate that the police do not take attacks against foreigners very seriously and many live in fear for their lives.



McBonne
South Africa

McBonne is originally from South Africa but had lived outside of the country for a number of years. Upon his return he found that South Africa was not a safe place for people who did not speak the local language. One day he went to Johannesburg to visit a friend who was from Mozambique. While there, his friend was attacked and killed because he was a foreigner and McBonne's car was burned out because it was parked at his friend's house.

When McBonne went to the local police they said they could not do anything because his friend had been in the country illegally and they advised him to quickly learn the local language. McBonne fled fearing that those same men would come after him because he did not have a South African accent.

McBonne has been in Ireland for 11 months now. He had a successful business in South Africa and had to leave behind two children (who are safe because they do speak the local language).

McBonne would like to contribute to the local community and has done volunteer courses in drugs awareness and anti-racism training. He would like to teach Irish children about why people move and about Africa in general. McBonne is happy in Ireland, happy to be someplace where he does not have to look over his shoulder when he walks around. He thinks Ireland is a good place because we dignify human rights. He just really wants to live free from fear and intimidation.



Additional Resources

General Background:

<http://www.southafrica.info/about/history/history.htm>

<http://library.stanford.edu/depts/ssrg/africa/southafrica/rsahistory.html>

<http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/chronology/chronology.htm>

<http://www.info.gov.za/aboutsa/history.htm>

Lesson Plans/Classroom Activities:

<http://countries.mrdonn.org/southafrica.html>

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/world/safrica_4-13.html

http://www.world-affairs.org/globalclassroom/curriculum/Africa/exploring_africa.html

http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/0805/080521-south_africa.html

<http://www.peacecorps.gov/wvs/educators/lessonplans/lesson.cfm?lpid=117>

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/16/g912/sustdevafrica.html>

http://www.pbs.org/kcet/globaltribe/classroom/globaltribe_classroom_safrica.pdf