

Final Assignment details:

Word Count: Between 2,000 and 2,500 words (**no more, no less**)

Note:

After emailing your assignment **DO NOT REMOVE IT** from your hard drive until after having received your final mark. Make sure you have a copy, perhaps on a USB.

Only send one document. All info (story and sources) have to be in same file.

Assignment requirements:

- A minimum of 5 original interviews.
- You are greatly encouraged to do **MORE** than 5.
- Your primary interview must be in person.
- At least 3 of the other interviews must be in person or by phone.
- Email interviews are accepted as long as you meet the other interview requirements.
- **Contact info** (phone and email) must be included for all interviewees at end of assignment. They do not make up part of the word count.
- Include people you tried to interview but who declined or were unavailable.
- You must have a minimum of one scene in your article. A good idea, but not imperative, is to start with a scene (either witnessed by you or reconstructed). You can have more than one.
- Follow the CP style guide.
- Include your research information at the end of the article.
- It does not make up part of the word count.
- Include a word count.
- Have a tight, catchy title.
- **Indicate target publication.**
- No footnotes.
- You can provide Internet links (but they can't be used to explain your story).
- Sidebars are acceptable but not necessary; they are part of the word count. Make them tight. Give them a headline. Bullet points or other such formats are OK for a sidebar.
- Make sure the file has your name on it.
- For the **first draft only** you can use "TK," which means a certain detail will be forthcoming in the final draft. For example, "In TK, the company published a report..." The TK subs for the actual year, which you have yet to determine.

Gone, But Not Forgotten: Toronto's Immigrants Struggle to Move On

In Turkey during the late 1990s, Gokhan Ozbey and his friends were running from military dogs. As they manage escape by climbing up a tree, the dogs stay underneath, barking and clawing, waiting for them to come down. His village, located in the country's eastern region, is behind a lake that is surrounded by a military checkpoint. The only way for him to get home is to either walk for miles around the lake, or go through the checkpoint. Today, he had decided to risk the checkpoint, and this was the result. With no provocation or even bothering to examine the youths, the soldiers stationed there let the dogs chase them away, knowing that it wouldn't make any difference whether Gokhan and his acquaintances could escape or were mauled to death. At this point, Gokhan is in high school; he is not a part of any kind of organization, and the country isn't in any kind of civil war. This is just another walk home from school. He looks to the other side of the lake, where his village is. As the dogs continue to wait out their prey, knowing that eventually they'll get bored and leave, Gokhan wonders if he'll be able to complete his homework on time.

Decades later, Gokhan lives in Toronto. He left Turkey in 2010, having been persecuted and discriminated against his whole life for being Kurdish, and now makes a modest living as a construction worker. He talks in a familiar, casual way even to complete strangers, a common characteristic among Kurds, who place great importance on the value of community and cooperation, "The main reason I left is being Kurdish in Turkey," He says simply of his life back home. "If you declare you're Kurdish, you have a hard time in the country which you live, because they don't recognize your language, you can't live your culture, you have hardship in school with teachers and class and work. I couldn't make it. I just had enough."

This is one of many stories kept by Toronto's immigrants. By its own estimation the most diverse city in the world, Toronto and its surrounding suburbs have become a home to practically any community you can name. This means that many from around the world are given a chance at a fresh start, or opportunity that they never would have had in their native countries. But it also means that the scars of history, war and persecution hang heavier here than in possibly any other area. For many in Toronto's immigrant population, the relative relief of the present is marred not only by memories of their home's past, but fear for their home's future that is realized more and more every passing day.

Farooq Siddiqui is another such person. A 70 year-old Kashmiri immigrant, Siddiqui is from the Indian-administered part of the area that has been the subject of an intense territorial dispute between India and Pakistan for longer than he has been alive. A member of the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front during his youth who was frequently imprisoned and torture by Indian authorities, Farooq moved to Canada in 1997 and now lives alone in a small house in Brampton, still going on frequent trips to America to advocate for Kashmiri autonomy. Despite spending most of his life under a hostile military occupation, he speaks with a quiet, measured tone even when describing being beaten and tear-gassed.

"You leave your home and you find an army man holding a gun outside in the street, and he will question who you are," he says, describing daily life in Kashmir. "A person who is not from that society, he is an outsider from an outgoing army, and he will question you on all sorts of things. And people are so scared that they have to obey whatever they will say, because they have the power invested in them, because of Draconian laws that are in place where any army man or police officer can shoot a person without any reason, just on the whim that he might be an enemy of the state."

Similar conditions are described by Mahmet Tohti, a former professor and Uyghur expatriate from the Chinese-administered province of Xinjiang. Like Siddiqui, Tohti is also based in Brampton, where immigrants and visible minorities make up a sizable portion of the population, and like Kashmir, Xinjiang and been the subject of insurgencies, uprisings and civil unrest ever since the communist government took over in the 1950s. Tohti, one of the founders of the World Uyghur Congress, was forced to bear the brunt of the harsh military response for the first 26 years of his life until he immigrated to America in 1991, settling in Canada eight years later. When describing the history of Xinjiang, as well as his own life and the continuing escalation of the conflict, he speaks with an anger and clarity that indicates the memories of the injustices that are committed against him and his people still burn within his memory decades after he left.

“Because of Chinese policy targeting Uyghurs as a group for assimilation and crackdown, especially after the occupation in 1949 of Tibet, Inner Mongolia and East Turkestan,” he says, listing the reasons why he left in a single sentence that he seemingly could’ve continued for hours if prompted, “and the Chinese consistently had applied a policy of assimilation of Uyghurs into Chinese and a transfer of millions of Chinese into the region to justify the occupation, and all areas including education, employment, discrimination is widespread, and Uyghurs became second class citizens in their own territory, their own home, and so any means of peaceful protest or discontent against the government is criminalized for persecution, especially in the time before I left in 1989 to 1990.”

Mohammad Madhoon, an IT worker currently living in Mississauga, is from the Gaza Strip, yet another region that has been the subject of a decades-long territorial dispute and occupation, in this case between the states of Israel and Palestine. He left shortly after the 2008 Gaza War mostly for the sake of his children, despite having a government job and, by his own evaluation, one of the better possible lives there. Unlike the others, though, the Israeli military had pulled out of Gaza in the mid-90s, when Madhoon was still young, so he does not have any memories of encountering hostile military authorities or being harassed by law enforcement in his youth. He was never in any kind of advocacy group in his youth, he does so without the casual optimism of Gokhan, the fiery passion of Tohti or even the calm rationality of Farooq. Instead, his memories and thoughts on Palestine are filled with a sense of detached apathy and hopelessness, admitting that the lack of political progress in the situation has made him largely try to forget his life in Palestine and the situation there due to how little has changed since it first began.

“There is no hope, they cannot move out, no jobs, no income, no resources,” he says on the dreary atmosphere that Palestinians are forced to live in. “On top of that, they were forced out of their homes, and even in the new places, they don’t have any pillar for good life. Some people, they are employed by the government or the UN, and those people, they have a good life, but those are maybe 10, 20 percent of the people. Other than that, it’s dark. Regardless of the war, the life there is very dark.”

Even though these men come from completely different parts of the world, the experiences they describe, from the hopelessness to the omnipresent fear and sadness, are relatively unchanged among all of them. Despite this, their attitudes, personalities and viewpoints on their past are completely different. Some try to find comfort in their past, with Gokhan still remaining optimistic about himself and humanity overall. ““The hardship which you experience, just expressing your identity, your language, your culture, it makes you respect other people more,” He says. “Because, you know, if you experience something like that, you don’t want other people to experience the same thing, that’s why

you respect them when you talk with them, or you care for them, I don't know." Others are more pessimistic, stating outright that what they went through has made them think less of humanity overall. "Just imagine: They're talking about four million, maybe more Uyghurs in concentration camps," Mehmet says bitterly. "What is the reaction of the world to that? Do you think that verbal expression is enough to stop the Chinese madness? Did you see any policy action from Canada? Did you see any policy action from United States? Did you any policy action from United Nations? Did you see any policy action from European Union? Money talks, almighty dollars. What could be the right response to that? Just 'We are concerned.'" The only common sentiment among all of them was that their situations were getting worse, and according to international experts, it will likely remain that way for the foreseeable future.

"Surely, after the tragic course of human history that we have lived through, we should have learned by 2020 that this behaviour is odious and appalling and criminal and wrong," says a former Canadian Armed Forces soldier and current professor of Administrative Studies who wished to remain anonymous. "There's a shortage of words in the English language to describe this depravity, that causes the death of the innocent. And yet, we're still at it, in the amorphous collective 'we.' Have some chosen a different path? Yes. Not enough. And are we done? Not yet."

It is easy to buy into the romantic ideals of immigration, of leaving an old life behind for the comfort and opportunity of a new home. Indeed, it's hard to say that Gokhan, Farooq, Mehmet and Mohammad aren't better off here than they were before. Each have steady jobs, comfortable houses, and are free to advocate for their social causes in a much more open environment than they could at home. However, it is also naïve to think that the past can be abandoned so easily, especially in cases as long-running and politically charged as these. "Under oppression, you grow up frail," Gokhan says. "It affects you psychologically. These things stay, forever they stay. Whatever you experience, to see people beaten, or yourself beaten or other things, they stay with you forever."

Even though what these men have experienced is undoubtedly disturbing, it can be said that they are the lucky ones. Millions remain trapped in their home countries under worsening conditions, and even more are born into situations that could be only described as meat grinders. China, Turkey, Israel and India are industrialized nations and major players in the world stage, so even though these humanitarian crises are ongoing, there is some attempt to keep the violence subtle and organized. In a small, developing country in Southeast Asia or Sub-Saharan Africa, there is no such need. Even in a country with such an extensive and well-established refugee program as Canada, to find communities from these wars, such as the Rohingya of Myanmar or the mountainous Yazidi tribes of the middle east, is incredibly rare.

Yet, when speaking to these immigrants, what is illustrated is not optimism for the future or eager patriotism for their new homeland, but a weary, almost fatalistic worldview, no doubt from decades of their struggles being shoved aside or ignored. "It's getting worse, yeah," Siddiqui tells me with a sigh. "As we see through media, it's getting worse. The international community needs to get a hold of this. Especially America, Canada, the United Nations. They have to take notice of this before any genocide can happen." "There is no resolution, no hope to find a resolution." Madhoon says with a shrug. "They tried for 30 years, without any resolution. So I just don't want to think about it."

In a city such as Toronto that is built around communities from all over the world coming together to build something new and exciting, it can be easy to forget the reasons why they came here in the first

place. A lack of economic opportunities, war and political instability are some of the many reasons why a city that prides itself on diversity is so diverse in the first place. Even now, with the immigrant population expected to grow even further in the coming years, when viewed in the context of the motives behind much of that immigration, that projection becomes less of a simple stat and something much more bleak and troubling. As tempting as it can be to think of Canada's acceptance of refugees and immigrants as an unambiguous example of the best of humanity, the fact is that these are issues that are not going away, either for those who remain or those who managed to escape.

"We are talking about massive amount of people in concentration camps, just like Nazi concentration camps in 1940s," Mahmet says in another of his fiery rants. "This is not just a human rights violation, this is beyond the scope of human rights violation, Is there any parliamentary resolution on this? No. Is there any official government statement on this? No. So what do you think, as a human, that should be the reaction, given the extent and scale of it? No. So what do you think about it? Hopeless. Hopeless."

When I ask him what keeps him going, he simply shrugs. "Is there any other choice?"