



A refugee is...

“to wonder: why you?” “to flee for your life”

“to be powerless”

“to feel so small and invisible”

“to live under someone’s mercy”

“difficult and dangerous”

“to feel like the whole world has turned it’s back on you”



“to live in darkness”

“to live with limited resources, medical care, security”

“to wonder: why all the suffering & neglect?”

“to be grateful”

“knowing and hoping everything is going to be ok”



Home is where...



“you are welcomed” “you are safe”
“your human rights are protected” “you can express your feelings freely”
“you have a bright future” “you are free.”

C O N F L U E N C E

A Student Journal of Geography and Environmental Sciences

A Refugee Is...

Kristy Gantzer with Art by Alyssa Tamborski

Artist Statement

This piece is meant to illustrate the extreme, saddening yet inspiring journey a friend undertook to flee his repressive home country. My friend's story, at the time of his initial telling, encouraged a surprising and beautiful uprising of empathy in me- one that truly opened my eyes beyond my limited cultural scope and in sharing his story, it is my hope that others may also benefit from this type of enlightenment. The story follows his harrowing escape from Eritrea to his four-year displacement in refugee camps and concludes with his eventual realization of safety and peace in America. For this project, I employed a Life Course Evaluation to investigate the ambiguous definitions of refugee, freedom and home. With my friend's detailed and personal account of his migration over time, I discovered that in his perseverance and personal evolution (amidst heartbreaking adversity) his own definitions of refugee, freedom and home evolved as well; the meaning of these words, for him, appeared to be relevant to time and place. I became aware of these ideological shifts during the process of my friend's retelling of his story, chronologically. At the beginning of our interview, he described a refugee as someone who struggled- someone who was in pain: life as a refugee was "difficult and dangerous" and being a refugee meant "to be helpless". As we neared the end of our discussion and he began to describe his integration into American culture, his responses to the nature of refugee shifted slightly to now identify a refugee as "to be grateful" and "knowing and hoping everything is going to be ok". Similarly, his concept of home evolved as his

experiences required. Home was initially defined as his life in Eritrea- represented in the art pieces Indefinite Encore and Curse of Repression. Over the course of our interview, home became a place and mindset in America where "you are safe" and "you are free". This new understanding of home is illustrated in the art piece A Warm Welcome Home. With this realization, I confirmed that these words, so seemingly conceptual and large-scale, could be interpreted by looking more closely at the micro-scaled individual. By focusing on one man's evolution of identity as a refugee, realization of anticipated freedom and rediscovery of home, we can better reflect on these concepts at the macro level.

The quotes displayed on the piece are taken directly from my friend's interview responses to my questions: "What is a refugee?" and "Did you mourn the loss of your home?". The artwork was inspired by the story and oftentimes, specifically by the direct words of my friend:

Indefinite Encore & Filtered Hope:

"There is no freedom of speech, no freedom of religion, no free press (there are only government controlled media), gross violation of human rights, indefinite military conscription no freedom of movement (the right to travel), the list goes on. This indeterminant service ruined my life. In search of peace, safety and bright future I decided to leave home. Although I knew the journey could claim my life."

Curse of Repression

“To be a refugee is like living in darkness. No matter how wide you open your eyes, you cannot see much of your future and you feel helpless.”

Trading Chaos for Opportunity

“Now my destiny is in my own hands and there is no better feeling than that.”

A Warm, Welcome Home

“I want to be here. This is my home now.”

Kristy Gantzer is earned a Bachelor of Arts in Geography, Environment, Society and Sustainability in 2019.