

A PICTURE CAN LIE, BUT A FACE DOESN'T

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By Raveena Aulakh, Staff Reporter, [The Toronto Star](#), 10 August 2009

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But look again, closely.

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Facial recognition experts analyzed and measured a half-dozen photos of Mohamud from different years and concluded that it's almost certainly the same person.

"The bone structure doesn't usually change after puberty. In this case, it is consistent," said Cathy Mondloch, professor of psychology at Brock University and an expert in facial recognition. "I'm quite sure it's the same person."

Mondloch adjusted all the photos to the same size, height and angle. She then measured the distance between the eyes, eyebrows and two ends of the mouth.

Check. Check. Check.

She also measured the length of the face in all photos.

Check.

It's not enough to bring Mohamud home to Toronto, but the 31-year-old mother, who has been marooned in Nairobi for three months, says it vindicates her.

"I've lost weight but that is me (in the photos)," she said from Nairobi yesterday. "DNA will prove it."

Her ordeal started May 21 at Nairobi's airport as she was about to return to Toronto. She was detained for not looking like her four-year-old passport photo and thrown in jail. The Canadian High Commission in Nairobi called Mohamud an imposter, cancelled her passport and recommended prosecution.

Days later, the Canadian government bowed to pressure and agreed to do a DNA test, asking Kenyan authorities to delay criminal proceedings until the results came. Mohamud's DNA, and that of her son and husband, was taken last week and results are expected soon.

When Mohamud was stopped at the airport, an airline official said her lips didn't match those in the passport photo. Mondloch says Mohamud's upper lip is thicker now, but the bottom lip is full and appears the same in all photos. "It's tough to compare a three-dimensional, moving lip with a static one in the photo," said Mondloch.

Examining the photos, Mondloch says she was struck by the fact that the eyebrows, eyes and nose hadn't changed in years. "But her face is definitely more sophisticated now."

Weight loss is one explanation for a change in appearance but external factors like a head scarf, hairstyle, piercings or makeup can throw people off, said Jim Tanaka, a psychology professor at the University of Victoria, also an expert in facial recognition.

"Even glasses can change your look, but the whole key (to the face) is the structure," he said. "I couldn't say categorically it's the same person, but the structure hasn't changed and that's compelling."

The "other race effect" can play a role in recognition, or vice versa, said Tanaka. "We are good at (recognizing) faces we see every day or in our own race."

The KLM airline official who stopped Mohamud was also black. He is Kenyan, while she's an ethnic Somali.

Tanaka wondered what kind of "identity judgment" training people in such positions receive. "You have to disregard external paraphernalia and focus on the structure," he said.

But if confusion persists, Tanaka suggests taking a new photo of the person whose face has changed and comparing it with the old one.

WestJet airline officials say if a traveller looks significantly different from the passport photo, officials ask for another piece of ID.

"We know appearances can change, especially if you colour hair or lose weight," said spokesman Robert Palmer. "That's when names (and their spellings) are critical." There is no special training involved, he added.

Mohamud showed at least five pieces of ID, including a health card and her driver's licence, when she was stopped at the Nairobi airport.

Palmer remembers an instance when someone in the middle of a sex change was stopped from boarding because the face didn't match the photo. Multiple IDs and close scrutiny helped in that case.

"Sometimes you have to use your discretion, too," said Palmer. "You have to look at different ways of matching a face with photos. But if names also don't match, then there's big trouble for sure."

Sgt. Tim Burrows of Toronto Police Traffic Services compares dozens of faces with pictures on

driver's licences every week. "If it's not the same person, it's mostly quite obvious," he said. Even if someone grows a beard or a moustache, there are several key features that don't change, he said.

Vindicated by her DNA

By John Goddard, Staff Reporter, [Toronto Star](#), 11 August 2009

Nearly three months after Canadian officials in Africa dismissed her as an "imposter" and stopped her from returning to her 12-year-old son in Toronto, Suaad Hagi Mohamud may soon be coming home. Ottawa is preparing emergency travel documents to bring her to Toronto, a spokesperson for Canada Border Services Agency said this morning. But no further details, such as when she might be on her way home, were immediately available.

Results of a DNA test released last night show a 99.99 per cent match with her son, Mohamed Hussein, who has been waiting for his mother since an airport official in Nairobi, Kenya, stopped her for not looking like her Canadian passport picture.

The Star broke the news of the DNA results to Mohamud.

"Oh my God," she said by phone in Nairobi, where for weeks she has depended on charity for food and accommodation. "Thank you very, very, very, very, very, very much. I'm glad this is over now."

Mohamud went to federal court last month to force Ottawa to test her DNA in order to prove her identity. Her Toronto lawyer, Raoul Boulakia, said last night he would immediately ask Ottawa to issue Mohamud an emergency passport, ask Kenya to let her go and then get her on a plane home.

For every Canadian, Mohamud's ordeal raises the question: What proof of identity will Ottawa accept from a stranded citizen abroad?

On May 21, after a Kenyan airport official suggested Mohamud's lips and eyeglasses were different from her four-year-old passport photo, the hapless traveller laid out all her ID at the Canadian High Commission.

She displayed her Ontario driver's licence, OHIP card, social insurance card and Canadian citizenship certificate.

She showed her credit card, two bank cards, Shoppers Drug Mart Optimum card, Humber River Regional Hospital Card and a recent dry cleaning receipt from One Hour Brighten Cleaners on Lawrence Ave. W., near her Toronto address.

She produced a letter from her Toronto employer, ATS courier service, about a recent promotion.

The high commission rejected them all. Worse, instead of helping Mohamud, they sent her voided passport to Kenyan immigration authorities to help them prosecute her.

"We have carried out conclusive investigations including an interview and have confirmed that the

person brought to (us) on suspicion of being an imposter is not the rightful holder of the
aforementioned Canadian passport," Canadian High Commission first secretary Liliane Khadour
wrote to Kenyan immigration authorities on May 28.

Mohamud faced serious charges: being in Kenya illegally and using a passport not her own. The
penalty would be either jail in Kenya or deportation to her native Somalia.

On two occasions, federal officials in Canada appeared to suggest Mohamud had switched identities
with a sister. She has four half-sisters by the same father.

But the DNA results confirm Mohamud is not an aunt. In statistical terms, she is 282 times more likely
to be the boy's mother, says a letter faxed to her lawyer from laboratory director Debra Davis of the
Vancouver testing company Orchid Cellmark.

With Canadian officials refusing to help her, Mohamud surrendered to Kenyan authorities on June 3
and was locked in Langata Women's Prison. She got out after eight days when a friend posted bail.

The Canadian High Commission reopened her case only after the Star began reporting on her plight
on July 1. Officials agreed to take fingerprints, and when they proved to be no use, agreed to take
DNA.

Ottawa's attitude toward her had remained consistent.

After Mohamud surrendered fingerprints and DNA, Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Emma Welford
said she could not comment because Ottawa must protect the woman's privacy.

Two weeks ago, Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon said Mohamud must try harder to prove
herself: "The individual ... has to let us know whether or not she is a Canadian citizen," he said.

Asked if he would accept a DNA match, Cannon replied last week through a spokesperson: "I cannot
answer a hypothetical question."

Canada probes case of stranded woman

By Diana Mehta, The Canadian Press, [The Toronto Star](#), 16 August 2009

After staunchly refusing to recognize her citizenship for weeks on end, the federal government is
now probing how it handled the case of a Canadian woman who has returned home after being
detained in Kenya for months over an identity dispute.



Suaad Hagi Mohamud kisses son Mohamed Hussein, 12, in an emotional reunion
at Pearson airport yesterday after her harrowing ordeal in Nairobi.

Suaad Hagi Mohamud returned to Canada Saturday after being marooned in Nairobi for 86 days because authorities said her lips did not match her four-year-old passport photo.

Public Safety Minister Peter Van Loan said the Canada Border Services Agency is preparing a report detailing just how Somali-born Mohamud, who was visiting her mother in Kenya, ended up spending eight days in jail and over two months holed up in a hotel room as she struggled to prove who she was.

"From where we see it now it looks like it needs a bit of an explanation," said Van Loan. "What decisions were made and why and to get a sense of what actually occurred."

When Mohamud, 31, turned to her country for help in May, consular officials doubted her citizenship, called her an impostor and voided her passport.

Mohamud was finally able to prove her identity through genetic tests last week, which led to charges against her being dropped in a Kenyan court on Friday.

The charges, which included being in the country illegally, were laid as a result of Canada denying her citizenship.

Van Loan said he will wait for the investigation's outcome before deciding whether to award her any compensation for her ordeal.

"We have border services agents that have to make thousands of decisions every day," he said. "I certainly wouldn't want to pass any judgement until I see the results of the report."

Mohamud was welcomed home by cheering family and friends, which included her soft-spoken 12-year-old son, Mohamed Hussein.

"I just want to be with my boy, my boy," said an emotional Mohamud as she latched onto her son at Pearson airport on Saturday evening.

The duo were whisked away to an undisclosed hotel to spend some time away from the public eye.

"It's so they can really have time together, have time to really relax," said family spokesperson Abdi Warsame.

Mohamud spent her first full day back in Canada undergoing hospital tests for an ailment nagging her since an unjust stint in a Kenyan jail.

"She's really sick," her lawyer Raoul Boulakia said yesterday of the woman who arrived home to a hero's welcome after spending three months trying to prove her identity to Canadian authorities in Africa and Ottawa.

Mohamud has been losing weight and suffering respiratory problems since her eight-day incarceration June 3-11 at Nairobi's Langata Women's Prison, Boulakia said.

Chest x-rays were to determine whether she might have pneumonia or tuberculosis, he said.

Another possibility might be some kind of infectious tropical disease, which would be harder to diagnose and treat.

"She has had no proper medical care in Kenya," Boulakia said.

Warsame said Mohamud's case has riled up Canada's Somali community who want the government to ensure all citizens are treated equally regardless of their ethnic background.

"It's a slap on our face," said Warsame of Mohamud's ordeal. "We should not be treated differently."

Warsame said in addition to the official review underway, the Somali-Canadian community wants the government to say it's sorry.

"We demand an official apology from the highest ranking officer of the government," he said, raising his voice slightly. "There should be some sort of accountability."

Warsame ripped into foreign affairs minister Lawrence Cannon for saying Mohamud had not tried hard enough to prove her identity in Kenya.

"I think she should consider suing the Canadian government," Warsame said, adding that he couldn't elaborate on the specifics of any legal action Mohamud was planning in the future.

Cannon's office remained tight lipped saying the minister was committed to getting to the bottom of Mohamud's identity debacle.

"Minister Cannon has asked the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade to do a full review of this case," said spokeswoman Natalie Sarafian.

NDP leader Jack Layton used Mohamud's ordeal to take a jab at the Conservative government in a speech delivered at a party convention in Halifax.

"In our Canada, new Canadians are given help to find good jobs, and won't have to fear when they travel abroad that their passports will be seized and their government will deny their identity," he said in the text of this speech.

Also coming under fire in the aftermath of Mohamud's return is the Canadian High Commission in Nairobi.

"We want an official review of the high commission," said Ahmed Hussen, president of the Canadian Somali Congress. "A lot of questions remain unanswered."

According to Hussen, Mohamud's case is not an isolated incident.

He pointed to the case of a young Somali Canadian man who has been stranded in Kenya for almost three years after an error on his mother's part left him without a passport.

When the man appealed to the Canadian High Commission, just like Mohamud, his citizenship was doubted and travel documents withheld.

"There's mounting evidence Canadians of Somali heritage are not getting the services they deserve," said Hussen. He also said corruption was rife among authorities at the Nairobi airport, who he added went as far as to ask Mohamud for a bribe when she initially tried to leave Kenya.

"The Canadian High Commission had a duty of care to a Canadian citizen and they failed in that duty," said Hussen. "The Canadian passport has to mean something."

