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Date: September 17, 2019

Gender: Female

Name: Nylah Ali

Country of Birth: United States

Country of Family Origin: Palestine

Abstract:

Nylah Ali is a 19 year old student at Marquette University. While she was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, she identifies strongly as a Palestinian American as she grew up in Palestine from the age of four to nine. She also identifies as a first generation American although her mother was raised in California and Hawaii. Since living in Milwaukee, from the age of nine, Nylah Ali has connected strongly with her community and religion, as she takes time work for her local mosque. Although Nylah Ali has experienced occasional instances of feeling like an outcast compared to the average American due to her religion in the United States, she explains that overall being Muslim helps her feel empowered. Nylah Ali also discusses the importance of tradition, specifically in terms of family and marriage, and what it means to her.

Key Themes: family, American dream, tradition, marriage

I: Okay. So, um, first I'd like to start the interview by asking some general questions about your background.

R: Ok.

I: So the first one is, uh, can you state your name and age?

R: I, my name is, um, Nylah Ali and I am 19 years old.

I: Okay. Then, uh, where's your Homeland? So like your country and then the town or village that you're from.

R: Okay. So I was born in Wisconsin. Milwaukee. Um, but my parents, um, were, and like I, I was living here for six years over in Palestine. And so, um, there's a city named Ramallah, uh, or I'll say the correct way, not the white way. There's a city named Ramallah. It's, um, near Jerusalem, the capital of Palestine. And the little, um, sort of tribe that I'm from is called, um, Bedouin. And, um, it used to be pretty far from Ramallah but recently, like I think a few years ago they made like quicker paths. So long story short. It's very close. Um, so yeah. That's where I'm from.

laughter

I: So then, uh, tell me about places and buildings where you spent a lot of time during your childhood.

R: Um, do you mean like over there? So we're strictly talking about with overseas.

I: Um, either.

R: Okay.

I: If you want...

R: For culture.

I: Yeah. Um, so like, like your home, your school, um, just like some buildings you really remember.

R: Okay. Um, so I went to school actually there from like from kindergarten to like late elementary school. Um, and there would be something that I distinctly remember was that there was this like candy corner shop like right next to my school. And like all the girls, it was like an all girl school and all the girls would like go there after school and like, you know, grab a bag on your way in and like, put as much candy as you want and like the guy behind the register would just like weigh it and you'd like pay for it with you and your like little coins. *laughter* It was cute. It was just like a daily thing or it'd be like, I don't know, on Fridays, like after our exams

I: Mhmm.

R: or something. Um, but yeah, it was just something that like like we did together, which was really fun. Um, let me think...

I: So did you, how, how long did you like go to that school for like up until?

R: I went to that school from, I think it was like first grade to like that specific school right next to candy corner store to like fourth grade.

I: Okay.

R: So like a few years. Um, funny story, actually this is kind of off topic, but I remember, you know how when you're young you have baby teeth and they fall out?

I: Mmhmm.

R: I remember I had a loose baby tooth and I don't know why, but I had Gushers for lunch that day.

I: *laughter*

R: you could probably see where this is going. But, um, so... What did I do? I think I like ran up to my teacher and I was like, I don't know what to do. I have like a loose tooth and I just like bit into those Gushers and I think it like fell out.

I: *laughter*

R: And my entire tooth, started bleeding or whatever. And so.

I:*laughter*.

R: I wanted to like run to the bathroom, rinse with like cold water, which was kinda hard because like, I don't know, since it's kind of a like the tri- like the little kind of clans within the tribe are kind of, um, well it is a third world country, but it's kind of hard to explain. Like, I dunno, I'm kinda going a little.

I: It's alright

R: I'm having trouble explaining, but yeah, so it's just kinda, it's really different. The vibe there you can say, but um, yeah, it's kinda my fall into the story.

I: Okay. *laughter*.

R: I just thought I'd mention it.

I: And then, uh, did you live in any other countries before coming to the U S.

R: Any other countries? Um, I did not just Palestine.

I: Okay. Um, and then how long uh, did you live in Palestine and then, uh, like when did you immigrate to America?

R: So, um, like I mentioned before, I was born here,

I: mhmm.

R: but then when I think I was like four. Um, so yeah, like around kindergarten I went overseas with my family to Palestine and then I spent maybe like five, six years there, um, during school and then I came here. Um, do you want me to kinda link them that story? Like how I came over? I think it's important. I don't know. I remember a came like in the middle of the school year and it was like, mind you, um, new year's Eve and it was snowing really hard and in Palestine, like it's kinda near the equator. So when we get snow it like, just melts the next day.

I: Ok, yeah.

R: And so like, we've never experienced that much snow. I remember we were coming, like, I was just dragging my suitcase, like up the stairs, for- for our house, and I was like, Oh my God, there's so much snow.

laugher.

R: It was just like thinking, Oh my gosh, I'm gonna make a snowman somewhere. It was just cute. Um but yeah, we came, it was, it was snowing really hard. Um, and I remember like, it took us a while to get accustomed and like find a school, um, that would accept us like in the middle of the year. Um, but yeah, and then I think I went to... Um, just like a K- K through eight, um, middle school in the area there. ...yeah.

I: Okay. Um, so the, the next question is about how old are you now, but you said you're 19, right?

R: mhmm.

I: Yeah. so Um... So, uh, were you the first in your family to immigrate to the U S and then, um, if not, what relatives were already here?

R: So my family was one of the first, uh, like my dad, uh, coming over here to the U S uh, I out of my family, but, um, I think my uncles followed. So my dad came to Milwaukee, um, I'm a commuter by the way, so I live like.

I: Oh, ok.

R: 10 minutes away, uh but yeah, my dad came to Milwaukee and then I think like within a few months or a few years, like my uncles kind of followed. Um, and they, yeah, they kind of like live nearby, just that, like they recognize people and they started like a family business.

I: Okay, cool.

R: Mhmm, yup.

I: And then, uh, are you married at all?

R: Nope.

I: And then, um, I'm assuming also that you don't have any children,

R: Nope.

I: correct?

R: Yeah.

I: Okay. So, uh, what was your level of education before immigration?

R: Before I- so before I came? Um, so for me it's kind of different, um, compared to the rest of my family. So I have, uh, four siblings and I'm the youngest. So when I came uh, here to Milwaukee, I was only in fourth grade, so I was still pretty young. I was like, what? Maybe nine. Yeah, nine going on 10. Um, and all my siblings, like my sister was maybe a freshman in high school and then my brother, um, well I guess my siblings don't really matter, but just like to put into perspective, like I was pretty young when I came. Um, so yeah.

I: Okay. And then, um, have you received any additional, formal education since immigrating to America?

R: As in... college?

I: Oh, yeah...

R: What do you mean?

I: So like, so when you where, what was the last level in, um, outside of America that you, that y- like,

R: I never com- like, I think the last full level that I completed.

I: mhmm.

R: was kindergarten. Like I completed

I: oh kay, yeah.

R: elementary school here.

I: right.

R: and middle school and high school.

I: Okay.

R: Yeah.

I: So so then everything.

R: Yeah, I just basically, yeah. All my upper level education.

I: Mhmm, yeah. Um, did you work outside of the home prior to immigrating but..?

R: No.

I: No.

R: *laughter*.

I: Cause you were younger.

[inaudible].

I: um, are you currently employed or working outside of uh your home? And then if so,

R: I am.

I: uh, what job?

R: Uh, I have two jobs. So I've never had two jobs before, so it's a little stressful at the moment.

I: Yeah.

R: Um, but yeah, extra cash flow is always good for broke college students.

I: Yeah.

R: but like, but yeah, I am currently working at a local youth program at my, um, local mosque.

I: Okay.

R: Um, so we basically do like leadership activities and like we'll bring in speakers to kind of give like a little short lecture. Um, and then like hearing where we do like different events like retreats and like lock-ins and stuff like that. Um, but then also my second job is here on campus as a TA for one of the, um, gen bio classes.

I: Oh!

R: I'm just really excited. It's cute.

I: Yeah.

R: Having the freshmen around.

I: *laughter*

[inaudible].

R: *laughter*.

I: Uh. So then, uh, tell me more about your workplace. Uh, describe the interior and exterior spaces. So I guess, um, around your community, that area where you we're.

R: So you don't want me to start to talk about Marquette?

I: Uh, you don't need to.

laughter.

R: [inaudible]. Yeah, ok. Um, so actually my local mosque is literally like a mile from my house and I've been going like to that mosque that's kind of been like, you know, my mosque or my family's mosque to go to, um, since I got here from overseas. Uh. What else did you wanna know? Like about like the vibes or?

I: Just, yeah, just like interior and exterior

R: about it.

I: spaces. [inaudible]

R: um, so building itself is actually, um, it's like a mosque but it's connected to a high school and middle school. So it's like a school at the same time. And I actually went there for one year, but.

I: okay.

R: um, I decided to leave cause I had like a, um, um like an opportunity to go to different school with a good program. Um, what else about the school? They actually have frequent um, excuse me. frequent tours there so people can just like walk in and like get the jist about like what Islam was all about as a religion and like what we do with the mosque.

I: Oh, that's cool.

R: Yeah. Which is really nice.

I: So like, um, people of just like any background at all.

R: yeah, any background.

I: that's really cool. Just kind of getting educated and learning more about the community in that space,

R: mmmm. which I feel like is important.

I: Yeah.

R: Cause I feel like you live near the mosque and you like drive by every day or whatever.

I: right, year.

R: I think you should know like what the,

I: exactly.

R: like what we do. And the same for like any, um, any other like religious buildings. I know there's a lot of like, um, different churches and like different sects around the area, so.

I: yeah. so then, uh, the next little clump of questions is about like you and your family's decision to come to America. Um, so what were the main reasons for immigrating to the U S.

R: that's a good question. Um, I mean in the moment when I was like very young, I wasn't really, I mean it was kind of clear, but at the same time you're just like, Oh, we're just moving.

I: mhmm.

R: Um, but I feel like the number one reason that I feel like all maybe not all, but most immigrants will probably answer is just like better opportunities.

I: mhmm.

R: Um, and just like, the American dream.

I: Okay.

R: Um, and just like going off of the opportunities curve. So just something to kind of put into perspective for me. Like recently, sorry, I'm losing my voice.

I: oh, it's totally fine.

R: But, um, my cousin, um, lives in [inaudible] the same tribe that I'm from and she goes to college, she's a sophomore and she would tell me sometimes that like she'd go to college, like she take the bus and um, the college that she goes through, I think I was like a half hour drive, but basically like sometimes she'd go in, classes are all canceled. Like I think.

I: oh.

R: just a few days ago she was like, yeah, I went to go to like my nursing lab and I just found out that there was a Shahid and I was very surprised. Um, so Shahid means like somebody passed away.

I: Okay.

R: And so I think, I mean she didn't tell me the details, but I assume that there was like some sort of protest and that somebody had like died in the violence,

I: mhmm.

R: which is really crazy. And so all classes were canceled that day. And that, I mean, like that specific event doesn't happen very often,

I: mhmm.

R: but what does happen happen often is that her classes are canceled because teachers are like rioting, um, because of like the pay. So I guess that's also a problem here. Um, but yeah, like they literally cancel class for that reason. But I think it's kind of crazy to think about because the last time Marquette had canceled classes, was when there was like negative 40 degree weather,

I: *laughter*.

R: you know, like people don't just like randomly,

I: uh huh.

R: you know, that because of like a violent offense. But, um, it's just kinda different.

I: mhmm.

R: like the situations and like the political atmosphere for sure.

I: ok yeah.

R: Um, so there's that to consider.

I: mhmm. so in terms of like, uh more opportunities and everything, is it just like specifically like more college things or outside of college? Like there are better opportunities here?

R: Um, it's not just like educational.

I: mhmm.

R: But that was kind of an example that I gave.

I: mhmm, yeah.

R: Um, I feel like it's, it's also, um, work-related.

I: ok.

R: because... Like occupational, like occupationally was, um, I feel like it's very hard to make like a good salary.

I: mhmm.

R: Um, and try to get like a good education, I guess that is education, but in general just like, you know, your aspirations.

I: mhmm.

R: uh, growing up if you're, if you don't have access to them. Um, and then I mean even though there is a college it's just kind of different,

I: mhmm.

R: uh, it's just like when you're there and you realize like the different style, like the way of life. Um, so for instance, like... You can even say like maybe 20, 30 years ago, like it wasn't really normal for I'm so out of breath, but.

I: Oh, that's fine.

R: it wasn't really normal for girls to go to college to begin with.

I: mhmm.

R: Um, so I remember my mom was telling me like she wanted to go to college and like when she was, she uh grew up overseas.

I: ok.

R: the same place,

I: mhmm.

R: um, and her mom and her dad like didn't want her to at first.

I: oh okay.

R: because like it was kind of like a stereotypical thing that a woman should.

I: uh huh.

R: like kind of stay in her house and just like, and not work.

I: mhmm.

R: Like she wasn't really supposed to work. She was just supposed to like stay in the house and I know like, when I say this out loud, it sounds like very, you know, um, how should I say this? It sounds like something that's very- stereotypical.

I: mhmm.

R: and of course like times have changed.

I: mhmm.

R: and like we're more modernized. But I mean that in a way of where people think it's like strict, but it's not like, it's the culture.

I: ok.

R: and like there's like a specific mindset of the people that we have like as our people.

I: Mhmm. So do you think, do you think it stems more so from like Arab Eastern um culture and less of like, because I feel like in, in Western culture, some people will like point at that and say like, Oh, it's just not modern. When it's just kind of like different culture,

R: It's a different culture.

I: so do you think it's more so like that? Ok.

R: Yeah. It's not like the time period though. Like I mean right now it's, it's not like they. It's not that they don't get an education,

I: mhmm.

R: it's just that, with like the way of life and like the style of living, um, people kind of like end up in different spots.

I: Mhmm.

R: So like kind of continuing my mom's story. Um, hold on, I have to breath uh, she was actually ulada, which means she got the best score, um, in like a nationwide exam.

I: Ok, oh wow.

R: And so I'm just kinda giving you this example to put into perspective.

I: uh huh, right

R: But so basically she was like, you know, like the mentioned her name on the radio and stuff.

I: uh huh.

R: and like she could basically go to like any college she wanted to.

I: mhmm.

R: uh and so she had a specific college of mind, but my grandparents didn't want her to go at the moment they're kinda hesitant.

I: mhmm.

R: Um, and mind you, at that time it wasn't, it wasn't just like randomly, like, no, it was also for safety because my mom, when my mom was growing up, there was, um, the intifada, which is kind of like a historical time period where there was like a lot of um, you know bombshells going in the air. And then there's just like, it was kinda like the political atmosphere uh was just not very stable.

I: mhmm.

R: Um and so her going to college at that time, being like the oldest in her family was not really uh, it wasn't like the right time.

I: mhmm, right.

R: Um, just so you like, you don't just think like, Oh she couldn't go.

I: Yeah there's a lot of variables that...

R: There's like always that. Yeah, there's all kinds of things. Yeah, for sure. Um, so I'll make sure I covered everything. I think I mentioned something that I didn't finish cause this was like an entire tangent.

R: *laughter*

I: the main question was like purpose for immigrating to America and.

R: yes.

I: just go in depth about like the opportunities here that aren't from your home.

R: Yeah, definitely. So my mom, um, when she like then the intifada was kind of over and everything was settled.

I: mhmm.

R: My grandparents, um, were okay with her going to college, like after everything was like cool

and okay. Um, and so she came here with my dad after they got married and they moved to Milwaukee and my mom was starting in a lab. Um, you know, she liked like with her aspirations and whatnot.

I: mhmm.

R: um to college. But yeah. So I think that just coming to America, like one of the main things is definitely like the American dream.

I: mhmm.

R: Um, and kind of going off like stereotypes. I mean a lot of people think that like, I feel like I have to mention this, but you know, the American dream and everything and like the fact that like, what is the American, you know what I mean?

I: mhmm. yeah.

R: Because a lot of people think like, Oh, it's just, you know, your typical white guy off the street.

I: right. mhmm.

R: But like, you know, thinking about the reason why people came to America in the first place because.

I: mhmm.

R: they were persecuted by their religion.

I: yeah.

R: Um, and they'll just, just like kinda like the atmosphere of living here. I remember when I, uh, I was in fifth grade I think,

I: mhmm.

R: and it was like my first year, like practicing to wearing the scarf at school.

I: Okay.

R: And the year before I, when I was in fourth grade, um, I wasn't wearing it. Uh, but in grade I wanted to just kind of practice, cause I'd like end up, you know, going to college, like walking around with a, and I want to, you know, kind of get a head start. Um, so it was kind of different or interesting to see the different ways that people would treat you.

I: uh huh.

R: just based on like your looks.

I: yeah

R: So I remember like in fourth grade it's like a different school,

I: ok.

R: so it's not like the same people.

I: mhmm.

R: Um, but you know, people were very friendly. Like especially that I came in the middle of the year, like I didn't know anyone.

I: Right.

R: Um, but in fifth grade, like, like people would, um, not really treat me like the, I don't know as well as they treat others.

I: mhmm.

R: just because I looked different.

I: yeah.

R: And to me that was kinda confusing cause I thought, okay, I like- you're putting the blame on me for different stereotypes.

I: mhmm, right.

R: of like things that happen, you know, political agendas and whatnot.

I: mhmm.

R: Um, which is kind of interesting to see. For sure.

I: Yeah.

R: Um, but yeah, like thinking about the reason why we came here,

I: mhmm.

R: just kind of like, I don't know, it became kind of a, what's the right word? Kind of like clashing like images.

I: mhmm.

R: Or like thoughts I guess, because you think like on the one hand, um, you know, you're trying to get the American dream with like whatever job you have. And I mean everybody knows that,

I: mhmm.

R: but then like coming from a third world country, um, and kind of like under-represented, uh, especially in this area, it was just kind of interesting to see like the differences between that.

I: mhmm.

R: I don't know if what I'm saying is making any sense.

I: Yeah, no. It actually does

R: just stop me and be like what? Um, but yeah, just like, like knowing the reasons why I came here.

I: mhmm.

R: and at the beginning, like not really seeing, I guess the, well, yeah, not really seeing like, or like having to remind myself that like the opportunities, um, they're going to come like later.

I: mhmm.

R: because like an elementary school, like people are, you know, young.

I: yeah.

R: and like they're not really old. They don't really have open minds.

I: uh huh.

R: But like in college, like I don't think I've ever been, uh, approached the same way.

I: Yeah.

R: And so like looking back on, I was just kind of one of those childhood mishaps. But.

I: uh huh.

R: like at the moment, like right now, like coming to Marquette, you know, being in a great program, um, it definitely makes me think that, uh, the opportunities that I came came for,

I: uh huh.

R: or like the sole reasons uh for immigrating here are definitely like, *door closing* I seeing like the fruits of your labor in a way, if that makes sense.

I: What's that?

R: I said you're like, my family feels like we're finally seeing the fruits of our labor

I: oh okay.

R: because I'm like the last of our family and I'm like almost graduating college.

I: Ok yeah.

R: Um, so yeah, it's just kinda seemed like our dreams come true. No, it,

I: yeah!

R: If that makes sense.

I: Yeah, that's kind of inspiring actually. For awhile. Did you guys kinda think like, Oh, like, I don't know, the American dream is gonna work out. Like I don't know if it's really true or like, I don't know.

R: right.

I: if the American dream is like, as inclusive as it kind of acts like it is.

R: I mean, I feel like every immigrant kinda thinks that.

I: uh huh.

R: because like you come to America, you finally escaped whatever political, violent atmosphere you left behind.

I: uh huh.

R: And then instead of being treated with like open arms, some people just kind of look at you and they're like, go back to your country.

I: mhmm.

R: and you're kind of thinking like, okay, I came here to escape all that. But now I have to deal with like being ridiculed and being, you know, outcast.

I: Yeah.

R: Um, and so that kind of makes it hard to go after your dreams when people are like putting you down. But, um, I feel like the communities that we have here in Milwaukee, so like we have a lot of Hmong people, we have a lot of somali's, sudani like people from different countries.

I: mhmm.

R: Um, and so I feel like if you have like a strong community.

I: yeah.

R: with people who are very similar to you with similar backgrounds, that you can definitely like, um, kinda jump over those hurdles.

I: mhmm, year.

R: and you'll kind of come to realize that like, there're, there're going to be always tho- always those like people, uh, you know, I guess you can say, putting you down, that sounds very disturbed.

I: yeah, but.

R: Like those haters.

I: mhmm *laughter*.

R: No. Like, I don't know.

I: yeah.

R: Um, but yeah, I think that if you just like the most important part is finding like a good community to connect to. Um, which is the reason why I decided to join like the youth program.

I: mhmm.

R: and just kind of like help people and bring people from different schools. Um, so like, even though we hold the program, like at a mosque,

I: mhmm.

R: at a Muslim school, we tried to bring in people from my public school.

I: mhmm.

R: who maybe might not have, um, m- much interaction with other like Muslims or other people from their, uh, from their race or ethnicity.

laughter

I: So was, was it always your family's plan to stay in America or was there the possibility of

going back to your Homeland?

R: Do you mean like going back and living there for a while or just like visiting or what do you mean?

I: Um, more so going back in like living there,

R: Living there?

I: living back there. But um but also, I guess like visiting as well.

R: That's a good question. Um, when I was younger I didn't really think about that, in the, in the grand scheme of things, I just thought, Oh, we're just going there. Like not a vacation wise, but I didn't really think about like the out-,

I: mhmm.

R: Like the, like the far future.

I: mhmm.

R: Um, but yeah, I guess it kinda was, um, in our plan to stay here for a while as long as, you know, like there was, uh, good opportunities like for college and whatnot. That was always important. Um, because my mom did consider me going overseas for college cause they have like, you know, the tuition there of courses outside of the U S it's much less.

I: Yeah, *laughter*

R: unfortunately. Um, for us. But yeah. Um, we actually visited not last summer, but the, like the summer that just passed, but the year before, uh, we went for a visit for like a month or so. Um, just because we haven't been there in awhile and it was really nice to like see the different,

I: yeah.

R: Like sites that I remembered as a child.

I: mhmm.

R: and everything, so yeah. But I don't, I don't really see myself going back and living there.

I: mhmm

R: for the rest of my life, but I do see myself going back and taking my family just so that like they could see- know their roots as Palestinians because culture for me is very important.

I: mhmm.

R: Um, even something as simple as like the way you conduct your weddings, um, like anything from like, you know, what you wear to like the tribal, um, songs that you would sing,

I: mhmm.

R: like during different aspects of the wedding, like stuff like that to me is like very important. Um, so yeah, I definitely see myself like living there with my family for a while, but I feel like I probably because of like the atmosphere and it is like always pretty shaky overseas.

I: uh huh.

R: Um, with like the Israel Palestinian conflict. But long story short, I feel like my answers are so long.

I: That's good.

R: You like that?

I: There's a lot of- a lot of bulk to it. Yeah. *laughter*

R: That's true. Uh, I could write a whole essay, look at this.

I: *laughter*.

R: or biographraphy, right?

I: You should. *laughter*

R: Autobiography. Um, but yeah, I see myself staying in America for the most part. Like in the

long run.

I: Mhmm. Um, so, uh, it, has your family always been from Milwaukee and then like what made you guys co-, choose to come from Milwaukee?

R: It's a good ch- uh good question. Uh, *laughter* um, you know, like looking back on it, I'm not really sure because like I said, like I was younger and like I didn't really know why we chose Milwaukee to begin with, but I do, I mean and like I'm older of course, and it's not like completely out of my, you know,

I: mhmm.

R: reach of understanding.

I: yeah.

R: But, um, I do know that while I was overseas, like my dad would come like back and forth from Milwaukee and Palestine.

I: mhmm.

R: and he kinda already opened up like, uh, uh, his own business there. And he'd worked with my brother when he was older, but I'm not really sure why he chose Milwaukee.

I: mhmm.

R: Like out of all the different cities. Um, but looking at it now, I can see that there's a lot of people from our tribe who, um, have moved to Milwaukee.

I: mhmm. oh thats really cool.

R: So a lot of them are from Bedouin, which is really neat.

I: Uh huh.

R: And so like, um, every once in a while we have like little gatherings.

I: mhmm.

R: or we like, you know, have a little barbecue or something. It gets cute.

I: yeah, That's fun.

R: Yeah, just like people like from the same roots as you.

I: mhmm.

R: literally like the same cities too.

I: yeah. Uh, so, uh, the next questions pertain to your early experiences in the U S.

R: okay.

I: Let's see. So, um, so when you first immigrated to the U S what was your life like?

R: Okay, so I think I covered some of that, right?

I: mhmm.

R: *laughter*

I: Yeah.

R: Uh

I: Um, yeah, and if you want to skip over that one.

R: Unless I can like think of something else. I guess at first it was just getting accustomed to things.

I: mhmm.

R: and the, *laughter* you're going to laugh at this. But, um, so we had a joke. with me and my brothers,

I: uh huh.

R: it was kind of an inside joke, but I don't know where we heard this joke from, but it was about

like somebody making fun of somebody else to like tell them to pay their taxes.

I: uh huh.

R: And overseas like in the tribe that we come from, there's not really, I mean there is of course like a government in place with the system. Um, but like I said, it's like a third world country and so there's not as much regulation.

I: mhmm, right.

R: as you would kind of put it. Um, so we don't really like, there's no, um, taxes that need to be paid or any tax returns or stuff like that.

I: Oh.

R: So when I came here, I mean like, when I was younger, like the only thing I probably.

I: Yeah.

R: would pay taxes for before it was candy. But yeah, it'd be kind of weird cause like I'd go in, like when I'm buying something, I'm like, wait, what is this? What is tax? I didn't buy tax.

I: *laughter* yeah.

R: like I, I wouldn't remember that when I was younger. And so I just like, that was probably one of the biggest things for me.

I: mhmm.

R: that I got confused about. I think I, at one point I actually asked the cashier, what is this? I didn't buy it.

I: *laughter*.

R: I don't know. Maybe I didn't. I was so young. Like it came with like a dollar in my pocket.

I: uh huh.

R: Yeah. I was just walking in the gas station with my brother, mind you, this is fourth grade,

I: *laughter*.

R: so I wasn't like old enough.

I: yeah.

R: to be like you should know.

I: uh huh, yeah.

R: But yeah, it was just something really funny. *laughter* Yeah, that's a big thing. I don't know if I can think of anything else though.

I: Um, so I know you've kind of mentioned, um, wearing the headscarf and getting kind of like accustomed to that change, but are there any other kind of like obstacles you've faced?

R: I feel like just getting used to the system in general, um, of how things work here, so... the different laws. Um, *thinking* sorry. It takes me a while cause I'd have to like dig that out of the back of mind.

I: yeah, yeah.

R: I can't think of anything. No. Just like in general, like getting used to like the system.

I: mhmm.

R: and how things work around here.

I: yeah, right.

R: But I feel like that was easy because like being the youngest, it was kind of taught to me.

I: mhmm.

R: like slowly but surely. Oh, okay. I do have one thing.

I: mhmm.

R: Um, yeah, just before I mentioned, I just wanted to say that like having older siblings made it

like really easy for me because like I was already accustomed to things based on their experiences. And I know a lot of my friends are, I'm the oldest of their families.

I: mhmm.

R: and so it's kinda harder for them to go through, like things that I would just ask my older sister about,

I: yeah.

R: like something as simple as, well, not simple, but something as like, you know, going to college, and like getting scholarships and stuff like that and like how that even works. Um, you know, my siblings have been through and so I feel like I kind of have that knowledge that like other people don't cause they're like the first in their family.

I: Yeah.

R: But yeah. Uh, something else that I remembered is getting used to the currency.

I: Oh yeah. *laughter*.

R: Because I'd be like, okay, well the nickel is bigger than the dime, but it's worth less.

I: Yeah *laughter*.

R: like something funny like that because of course we had different currency overseas but.

I: mhmm

R: Yeah. I remember, I think before we had left overseas, my mom was like teaching me about like the coins, the coins was the most confusing thing. The dollar like you know, you can understand like the paper money.

I: Did your parents like no it right away or like did it take them a while to pick that up as well?

R: Okay. I think I missed telling you this cause you didn't ask me, but my parents were actually, I think my dad was born overseas.

I: Okay.

R: Um, yeah. But then my mom was actually born in America.

I: Okay.

R: Yeah. So she kind of lived in California and Hawaii. So she was already accustomed to like a lot of the systems.

I: mhmm.

R: and stuff like that. So it wasn't as hard for like dealing with different situations. Um, in terms of like legally with like taxes and stuff like that, like my mom already knew about,

I: mhmm.

R: which I feel like for me was a great advantage compared to my, my other friends with their families, like their moms, well not moms, but you know, their, their parents like in general just weren't really familiar with like.

I: mhmm.

R: things like, um, how can I put this into perspective? So one of my friends runs a refugee group.

I: Okay.

R: And so they bring people uh here to Milwaukee.

I: mhmm.

R: And so something that she told me just was kind of eye opening. She'd tell me like these stories about uh moms and their children's and that the mom, I think something happened to her kid and she didn't know what to do.

I: mhmm.

R: and she didn't know that you can call nine one one.

I: Yeah, oh my gosh.

R: Or like, you know, I can't think of another example, but that one just kind of stuck with me.

I: oh wow.

R: and I was thinking like, wait, what?

I: yeah.

R: I have to hear the story again.

I: uh huh.

R: and I was like, okay, like something like for us, like that's simple,

I: yeah.

R: like that stuck into our brain.

I: right, yeah.

R: Call nine one one. Um, but like, I mean for me like obviously like,

I: That's so scary.

R: Yeah, I just kind scary, like she called like the my friend who runs the thing.

I: uh huh

R: Um, but yeah, I mean from my family, like we were definitely familiar with like all the, you know, the system's like and stuff.

I: Yeah.

R: Um, but yeah, just kind of me growing up with like the money, that was probably the only thing.

[interview transcript ends early due to confidentiality reasons]