



Oral History Project Interview

Arab and Muslim Women's Research and Resource Institute (AMWRI)

Number of Interview: SH 1.00

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Gender: Female

Name: Sarah Al-Hakimi

Country of Origin: United States/Yemen

Year of Immigration: Born in U.S., returned to country in 2015

Abstract: Sarah is a first-generation American—she was born in the US but moved back to her parents' homeland of Yemen at age five, and then she returned to the US as a teenager due to the Yemen Civil War. In America, she now attends Marquette University as a Clinical Lab Sciences major and aspires to become a physician's assistant. She identifies as a moderately practicing Muslim hijabi woman and she enjoys volunteering in her community. She is married to a half-Mexican, half-Yemeni man who she loves, and she discusses her experience growing up with three brothers and her parents. She is extremely grateful for Marquette's incredible faculty and staff and their help, but sometimes feels as though the Muslim and Arab communities can have a hard time feeling welcome in the university community.

Key Themes: Education, religion, marriage, immigration, conflict, cultural differences

Note: In the transcript, "I" refers to Interviewer, and "R" refers to Respondent/Interviewee.

R: Hello!

I: Hey, Sarah!

R: Hey! How are you?

I: I'm good, how are you?

R: I'm doing good.

I: Well, um, alright, so I'm just going to tell you what I'm going to do here. I've got a list of questions. Um, there's a bunch of different topics, so when I'm switching topics I'll just let you know, um, what that topic's going to be. If you want to answer any questions you can; if you want to take a question a different direction, it's totally up to you, so just answer how you like. Um, yeah! Alright, so are you ready to start?

R: Yep!

I: Perfect. Alright. So, these ones are just general questions about your background. So, where were you born?

R: Uh, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

I: Cool. Um, I understand that your parents immigrated from Yemen to the US, so what made your family choose to move back to Yemen?

R: Uh, to go back...so, they were here because they were on a PhD scholarship, both of them. Um, and then, uh, visa, student visa ended, so they had to go back to Yemen to serve the government over there by teaching.

I: Okay, um, alright. When you moved back to Yemen, what city did you live in?

R: Uh, Sanaa

I: Cool. How do you spell that?

R: And that's the capital--Um, S-A-N-A-A.

I: Okay, got it.

R: That's the capital city.

I: Oh, perfect. Sounds good. Alright, um, was this the same city that your parents lived in before they came to the US?

R: No.

I: So where did they live before they came?

R: Uh, it was a city called Taiz. So it's spelled T-A-I-Z.

I: Got it, perfect. Alright, um, so what made them move back to the capital city on their way back to Yemen?

R: Um, I would say that the capital city has more opportunities, and more stronger universities, so that's why they did their teaching over there.

I: Cool, got it. Um, could you tell me about the places and buildings where you spent a lot of time during your childhood?

R: Uh, can you repeat that question?

I: Sorry, yeah. Could you tell me some—about the places and buildings where you spent a lot of time during your childhood?

R: Uh, like back in Yemen?

I: Yeah.

R: Um, like what type of description?

I: Like, I guess—the question is definitely really vague—like schools, house, stuff like that.

R: Okay, so we were in an apartment in a four-floor building. In terms of school, um, I had the privilege of going to an international school and it's called Turkish International School, um, so it was like a nice campus, a little bit, uh, further from the Capital, like 20 minutes away, 30 minutes away. I had to travel 30 minutes away, but I guess my parents did that just so we can learn the language English. 'Cause they knew that one day we were gonna come back to the United States.

I: Got it, cool. Alright.

R: They had the feeling, at least, that we were gonna come back.

I: Right, okay. Alright, um, so did you live in any other countries before you came to the US?

R: No.

I: Alright, sounds good. Um, so when did you immigrate back to the US?

R: Uh, 2015.

I: 2015, sounds good. I guess I should've asked this earlier: how old were you when your family returned to Yemen?

R: Um, I was around five years old.

I: Got it, sounds good. Um, alright, and how old are you now?

R: I'm twenty-four.

I: Got it. Um, which members of your family—were your parents the first members of your family to move to the US?

R: Uh, yes.

I: Got it, sounds good. And, um, when you came here in 2015, did you immigrate with anyone else or was it just you?

R: It was me and my brother, who's two years younger than me.

I: That's cool. Did he come for college also?

R: Yeah, actually, we didn't come for college, we were actually evacuated by the United Nations.

I: Oh, okay, do you want to tell me more about that?

R: Yeah, sure. So because we have the US citizenship, um, we were there so we applied to this, um, evacuation—because it was hard to leave the country in the war in 2015, um, so, um we had to apply to—for evacuation, so we—a couple months after that in—we applied in 2014 and then a couple months after, so in 2015, we got a response from the, uh, American Embassy over there that, um, we got a, like, we got—they were gonna evacuate us from there. Uh, because the airport was closed, and everything, over there in Sanaa, the capital city. So there was no flights coming to Yemen, or out of Yemen, so it was very hard to---that's how we came.

I: Cool, alright. Um, that's really interesting. Alright, um, let's see. Um, after you immigrated to the US, did any of your other family members immigrate here, like after your brother?

R: Yeah, so it was me and my brother in 2015, and then my parents came in 2016. So one year after.

I: Got it, sounds good. Um, what are your parents like?

R: Um---(laughing) so they both have PhDs, and, uh, yeah!

I: Cool. So you have a brother, what's he like?

R: Um, my brother—he's currently a college student. He's, um, about to graduate in one semester.

I: Got it, super cool. What was your level of education before you returned to America?

R: Uh, it was high school.

I: Got it, sounds good. Um, where did you get this education.

R: Uh, the high school?

I: Yeah.

R: Oh, it was in Yemen.

I: Okay, sure, got it.

R: The Turkish school.

I: Cool. Okay, so now you're a student at Marquette University?

R: Yup.

I: Got it. So what year— what year are you?

R: I'm a senior now, so I'm graduating in two months. Yay!

I: Ooh, congratulations!

R: Thank you, I'm excited.

I: Alright, what are you majoring in?

R: Clinical Laboratory Sciences.

I: Wow, very cool. Um, did you go to any college before immigrating—I guess you've already answered that. Alright, what were your main reasons for immigrating to the US, besides—

R: Um, I guess we were also forced by my parents because they wanted us to be in a safer place.

I: Yeah, okay—that makes sense. Um, so did you have any say in this decision, or was it mostly just your parents?

R: Um, it was mostly my parents, and I feel like at that point I didn't know what was best for me, because I was very attached to my friends and family over in Yemen.

I: Sure.

R: So I guess I was gonna just stay there [laughs]. But I'm glad that actually went with the decision of coming here and getting a better education. Yeah.

I: Alright. Um, were there any political, social, or economic issues that made you want to immigrate? Obviously the war, but anything else?

R: Um, no, nothing else.

I: Cool.

R: Yeah, I'm not involved in a lot of politics, but yeah, it was mainly the war, and not—like there was no electricity, water over there so it was really hard to have like a normal living. Yeah.

I: Cool. Alright, um...so when you emigrated back to Yemen when you were five, um, do you remember it?

R: Uh, yes, I do. I remember that [laughs] I was here in the states, and like, you know, like a lot of buildings, like nice streets, stuff like that. And then, I always, like, before I—before we went back to Yemen, I always drew—Like I heard my parents saying, “Oh, we're going to Yemen, we're going to Yemen,” so I've always had that vision in my head that it's like a desert. So when we went there, it was not really a desert, but it was similar to what I expected. Yeah, and it was very different, too, because I was born here, and I lived here for like the first five years. I think I, um, went to kindergarten and I just started first grade and then we went back to Yemen. So I, like, the only place I was familiar with was the United—was Milwaukee and Wisconsin, so it was a big change to go to an underdeveloped country.

I: Yeah. Alright, how was that experience of moving to Yemen different than moving back to the US, um, in 2015?

R: Um, I would say both, um, both travels or both movings were very diff—was kind of a shock. So as a child, um, going to school, going to parks every day, um, having like a nice building of school and stuff like that, um, to going to Yemen was very different than living in Yemen for, I think, fourteen years and then coming back here. So I think it was just, like, the opposite.

I: Yeah,

R: Like the feeling was opposite, yeah.

I: Okay. Alright, so how did you decide where to settle in the US?

R: Sorry, can you repeat that question?

I: [Laughs] Yeah. Alright, so when you returned to the US, for college and um, in 2015, how did you decide where to, like, um, like, move to? Like, what city?

R: Yeah, so um, I had two brothers, already living in the US. One of them lives in Georgia, Atlanta, Georgia, and the other one lives here, in Milwaukee, um. Because it was me and my younger brother, uh, I think my parents and my brothers decided that one of us lives with one brother and another one lives with the other brother, so it could just be separated responsibility, instead of both of us being at one, uh, with one brother. So, I ended up going to Atlanta, Georgia. I lived there for, uh, around two and a half years before I moved to Milwaukee. Before I moved to Milwaukee, I would say. Yeah.

I: Cool. So how many total siblings do you have?

R: Uh, three.

I: Got it, sounds good. Alright, and all brothers?

R: Yeah. Unfortunately. [laughing]

I: [laughing] Alright, um, when you first returned to the US, what was your life like?

R: Uh, did you say before returning to the US?

I: Um, when you first returned to the US.

R: When I first returned. I think I was, uh, I was kind of like in a culture shock, because it's been a long, uh, time that I've last been in the United States. Um, that was the first feeling.

I: Yeah.

R: It was also, because my first language is mainly Arabic—um, so my English, although I learned English in, um, in Yemen, but it was not that strong. I, like, kind of had an accent, um, so I was like, very shy, um, I was um, didn't have a lot of friends, uh, just like, isolating myself in the beginning, very shy. Um, not speaking up, I would say, also. It was very hard adjusting in the beginning. I would say for the first two years, like towards 2017 or 2018. So it took me a while to like really adjust to, um, the environment too. Like school, and the culture, and everything else. Um, yeah.

I: Okay.

R: And I would say also in the beginning, uh, it was very hard because in Yemen, we would always be used to, um, like listening to, um, hearing, I mean, like bombs and stuff like that. So like, coming to here, it was, like, a very big change. So, uh, yeah.

I: Wow. Okay. Um, what obstacles did you face in the US? Or still face, yeah.

R: Still face...I would say, I...there are sometimes, like this feeling of, uh, mm...not belonging to Yemen, because of the war and also not belonging to here because this is not the country

where I was raised. So there's this sense of like, where do I actually belong to? Like, to Yemen or to the United States? Yeah, so.

I: Sure. Yeah. Alright, um, in other obstacles, did you face any economic, racial obstacles, um, besides like the ones where you don't belong to either country fully?

R: Uh, uh, I would say no. My parents, when they came back, it was a little bit hard for them to get a job in the beginning. So that was a little bit challenging, so we had to, me and my brother we had to, like, work part-time jobs in order to, uh, support the family. But, um, then they, they got jobs so it got much more easier. Yeah.

I: Sure. Alright, um, and you're a woman, so does that have an effect on your school life or life in America at all?

R: I would say as a, as a hijabi, like I wear a hijab, and like when people see me, they see me wearing the hijab, they assume that I'm a Muslim. Um, I would say sometimes I'm looked at differently, sometimes in a good way, sometimes in the bad way. Uh, but luckily I didn't, like, face, like, racial, um, like, um, injustice, I would say. Um, directly. But, I sometimes do feel, um, like I'm looked at differently, because of my religion. Yeah.

I: Yeah. Alright, um. Alright, do you know how to drive?

R: Yeah. I also have something to add for the previous question.

I: Sure!

R: I'm currently married, so a question that I always get from, um, from Americans, is, "Oh, did, um, was that an arranged marriage?" And I feel like this is a big stereotype about hijabi Muslim—hijabi women. People always think that, "Oh, like, their—her parents forced her into a marriage, of, to someone she doesn't know." Um, but that's totally, like, not true. And I try to explain that to the people who I have conversations with, that, no, I actually married a person who I, who I love, and, um, my parents didn't have any decision about that. It was my, uh, decision. Yeah.

I: Cool. Alright, well, congratulations on that!

R: [laughing] Thank you!

I: [laughing] Alright, um—

R: I don't know if that fitted, like, the answer to that question.

I: No, yeah, perfect, for sure! Going back to obstacles that you faced in the college environment, how do you--how do you deal with those obstacles, if there are any?

R: Um, you said, in university?

I: Yeah.

R: Um, hmm. Um, maybe if, like, sometimes I feel that, um, mmm, I'm left out, or, uh, like a feeling—not directly, but, like, indirectly—where I'm feeling that people think that I cannot achieve things just because of what I come from, um, I just try to, um. I feel like I take that as a motivation for myself, that no, I can actually do whatever anyone else here can do, um, and it's not because I'm a minority I can't reach my goals or I can't reach that, uh, American Dream, as everyone says. Um, yeah! So I just try to believe in myself, and work hard, and uh, yeah, shoot to the stars! Reach for the stars.

I: Yeah! Alright, uh, okay. So do you speak any language besides, just other than English?

R: Um, I do speak Arabic, and I'm currently learning Spanish.

I: Wow, cool. Alright, so is English your second language?

R: Uh, I would say, I would believe so. Yeah, because my parents at home, uh, they've always spoken Arabic, so I would say I picked up on Arabic before English.

I: Got it, cool. Um, let's see. Um, who was most helpful to you upon your arrival to America, and in what ways?

R: Um, I would say my brother, definitely, who I lived with in Georgia. Um, and then also, there was a couple of friends in—so I attended the community college over there for two years, and there were, Georgia's, so Georgia's really known to be very diverse and there's also a city over there called Clarkson, and it's one of the most diverse cities in the, in the nation. Um, so I would say I had, I had a couple friends there who were also international, and I feel like they really helped me, um, dive in, and then like, you know, just adjust to, um, to the States.

I: Okay. [sirens outside] Sorry, there's noise outside my window.

R: No, it's okay, that's fine.

I: [laughs] okay. Um, alright, so what college did you go to in Georgia for two years?

R: Uh, it's called Georgia Perimeter College.

I: Got it, sounds good. Um, what role, if any, did your family have in your decision about where to go to college or what to study?

R: Um, I would say they've always told me, they've always told me to study whatever I like, or whatever I wish, and um, and they would give me, like, guidance or guide me towards something but never, like, force me towards a certain degree or a certain major. Um, yeah.

I: Got it. Um, let's see, mmm. Right, so thinking about your life shortly after your return to America, tell me about, like, the places or buildings you spent a lot of time in, during like, the initial period of, like, your arrival.

R: Um, I would say, in the beginning, like for the first couple months, I was taking online classes, and I was actually taking the online classes, like, here in Milwaukee, although I was, um, a Georgia student. So, I would say, yeah, for the first couple months, mostly at home. I would, um, go out sometimes, like, to a park or something, but yeah I didn't, like, when I started university, I did not, or when I started college, I didn't go immediately to college. There was, like, a couple months where I took classes online.

I: Got it.

R: Just because of the in-state, out-state thingy.

I: Right. Alright, so, what are your fondest memories so far about college?

R: Um, I would say in, uh, so when I came, I came in 2015 and then um, I got a part-time job. I would, uh, like it would be a great experience for me, especially since I'm, like I just, I just came to the United States, so in 2016 I got a part-time job in school as a tutor, and I feel like that was a very great experience for me.

I: Yeah.

R: And the tutoring center, was, as I said, it was a very diverse school, so I had, like, friends and the students who I, who I, um, who I tutored from, like, all different backgrounds and countries, like, I can name like 20 different countries of, um, the students that I tutored. So it was a wonderful experience. And then I also thought, from that, I, I, I was like, "Yeah, I'm not the only one who's different here." There's also people who immigrated and we're all in this together.

I: Yeah, super cool. Alright, um, what about your home? Do you live on campus or do you live somewhere else?

R: Um, I live, um, yeah, it's not on campus.

I: Alright, sounds good. Um, do you like this environment?

R: Like, off of campus?

I: Yeah.

R: Uh, I've always wanted to live on-campus, just because [laughs] I can wake up five minutes before class.

I: [laughs]

R: But, uh, yeah. It's very expensive, so it was, uh, much cheaper for me to live with my parents. But then now I'm with my husband, so. Yeah.

I: Yeah. Super cool. Alright, um, alright, actually, speaking of your husband, we're talking now about dating and things like that. Um—

R: Yeah.

I: Yeah, so, all sorts of questions, um, alright. So in your experience with your culture--as a Yemeni-Muslim woman, right?

R: Yep.

I: How are women viewed in, like, your eyes and what is their typical role, do you think?

R: Um, like, in terms of what?

I: Um, just, general. [laughs]. It's a pretty, general question. So, yeah.

R: Okay. I would say, um, the city that I come from, which is called Taiz, um they're very, it's a city well-known in Yemen to be um, a city of educated people. So, I'm, like, I'm fortunate to come from a family that believe that a woman's place does not belong in the kitchen or is not just to be a housewife or just to be married and have kids. I'm fortunate to be, to have a family who believe that, um, that education is very important for a woman. Also, building a career for myself is very important. So, um, I've always been surrounded with those type of people, like family and, and friends in Yemen. So I feel like that, um, that kind of, um, built my, uh, like my vision of what the role of a woman is. In my culture, at least. Yeah.

I: Sure, yeah. Alright, um, so then also, what about men? What is their typical role and how are they viewed?

R: Uh, in Yemen, um, like the man is always viewed as the, like the man of the house, and he's, yeah, he's the one who has power and he's the one that makes most of the decisions. Um, yeah but, like as I said, like, in our, in my family, like it's kind of different, in the city that I was raised in. Um, it's different, so it's like 50/50 for a woman, like 50% for the men, like they both come in and make decisions together and they both, uh, participate, um, in family decisions. Yeah.

I: Cool. Alright, um, alright, so what are some ways in which you balance your faith and your American—and your American identity? Do you find that, like, it's pretty easy to do, or, like, some people think that it's really hard to do. So what are your thoughts on that?

R: I would say it's kind of easy, kind of hard, 'cause, like, in, in the middle. We pray, as Muslims, we pray five times a day, so it's definitely challenging sometimes, like I'm in the middle of a class or middle of a lab or in the middle of doing something, and um, so it's like a little bit hard to, sometimes, to ask the professor, um, sometimes at work, um, when I worked as

a part-time. It's sometimes hard to, um, just like leave what I'm doing and go pray and come back. Yeah. But I try and make it work.

I: Got it. Cool. Um, alright. Um, how did—how did your religious and ethical upbringing contribute to who you are today?

R: Um, I would say, like, religion is a very big—a huge part in my life and it affects, like it affects me in, like, different parts. Like I just took an exam right now and like in the beginning, before the exam started I said a prayer, I was just like making a prayer in, like, an Islamic prayer, and I felt like it really helped me a lot during the exam. So, um I would say it helps me in different, um, in different aspects, like whether it's school, work, um, family relationships, uh, marital relationships, like I feel like it affects every aspect of my life. And um, and I try to incorporate it into, uh, every part of my life as well. Yeah.

I: Cool, got it. Alright, so what does the word “dating” mean to you?

R: [laughing] for me, um, it means, uh, trying to get to know a person more, uh, with the intention of, probably, if there is, like, some sort of chemistry, um, then like having an, um, the goal of like, marriage.

I: Sure, got it. Alright, so what factors play a role in dating? So what—when you were looking for your husband, what were the characteristics that you looked for in a person? Was it like homeland, nationality, whether they are Muslim or not? Did those things play into it? And, like, what other things as well?

R: Yeah, um, it had to be a Muslim guy because in our religion women are, uh, not, like, women are—Muslim women have to marry, um, Muslim men, so a Muslim guy was number one for me. Um, and then all of other factors like education, open-minded--um, nationality was really, uh, not a big factor for me. Like, my husband is half-Yemeni, half-Mexican, so, um, that was not a big thing for me. Um, but I would say education, open, open-mindedness, like, um, for him to also accept that I have the goals that I want to reach in the future, like, I want, I want to become a PA, um, I want to do a—get my doctoral degree in Clinical Lab Sciences, so I was really looking for a person who would respect that and accept that and support me, to, along the way, to reach my goals. And then also, me too, I [laughing] obviously me too, I'll have to support him as well.

I: [laughing] Right. Alright, um, alright, so...did you find relationships—well, first of all, where did you and your husband meet?

R: Um, we met here, in Milwaukee.

I: Cool. Um, did you find relationship—relationships and dating easy to initiate on campus?

R: Um...I would say no, um, at least not at Marquette University, but, um, in Georgia State, um, like the campus that I was at in Georgia, I think it was easier because it was more diverse.

I: Sounds good. Um, do you think that that's the same for your friends—is that different between your, um, non-immigrant and your non-Muslim friends?

R: Um for Marquette University, are you talking about?

I: Yeah, yeah, in Marquette and Georgia.

R: Um, I would say, um, a lot of, a lot of the stu—um, my friends that I would, uh, that I've been surrounded with, uh, they have, like, most of their close friends are, um, not from school, they're normally either high school, or their neighborhood, or stuff like that, so, uh, it was—mostly they like people from outside campus more than in campus. Or at least that's what I've been seeing.

I: Yeah. Alright, um, what aspects of your religion are most important to you?

R: Uh, I would say, mmm, this is a hard question. [laughs]

I: [laughs] Yeah, I know!

R: Uh, I'm trying to maintain a strong faith, uh, at all times, no matter, uh, no matter, like, um, how high or low my, um, like, my situation is. Like whether it's good times or bad times. Um, also I would say, um, just staying close, um, or [sighs] how do I say this? Um, holding strong to the—holding strong to the values and the beliefs, um, and not compromising it in any way.

I: Yeah, cool! Um, um, what obstacles do you face in, like, relationships with friends, or with like, just other people in general? If you feel comfortable answering.

R: Um...yeah! I would say at Marquette University it's really hard to make friends. I feel like I have—most of my close friends are from Georgia, um, and I would say that aspect is because it's more diverse. Um, and, yeah. But at Marquette University it's been very hard for me to, uh, make friends, so most of my close friends are from Georgia.

I: Alright. Well, what made you decide to major in what you're majoring in?

R: Yeah, uh, so, um, I was—in the beginning, um, so when I was in Georgia I was actually majoring in biology and I figured that if I, if I graduate, um, I really did—I really wanted to, um, get a job right away out of college, and I thought that it would be impossible to do that with a biology degree, so I started looking into—um, because my parents were here in Milwaukee, so I started to looking into transferring into schools here, um, and then I, um, looked into, uh, Marquette University and I saw that they have a major called Clinical Lab Sciences, and it just, um. I don't know, so it's like—it's 100%, like, placement, like job placement, after graduation, so I knew that right after college, right after undergrad I wanted to work for a year or two just to gain experience, then attend PA school. Um, I also, deci—I also chose this major because, um, I felt like it would be, um, a very good, uh, like, major. Or it would give me, um, a lot of medical background, uh, um, and that will help me when I become a PA, so I'll know, like, a lot of diagnostic tests and, like, the reasons of why we're doing testing and stuff like that. So, yeah.

I: Yeah, alright. Sounds like a good decision! Is your husband--just a second. [voices passing by in the background] Is your husband older or younger than you?

R: Older.

I: Older, got it. Um, how many years are between you and him?

R: Four.

I: Four, got it. Um, are you current—is there anything else you want to tell me about your relationship with him, anything you think that would be good here?

R: Yeah, it's very interesting. Uh, like because he's multiracial, so because he's, uh, or biracial, I would say, like half-Mexican, half-Yemeni. It's just--it's very interesting to have that, um, like, come out in a partner, 'cause I'm now, like, now learning how to make some Mexican food, or like, I'm learning more about their, I don't know, music, or more about their culture, so it's a very interesting thing. Yeah.

I: Super cool! Alright. Um, so you talked a little bit about arranged marriage before, so did you want to tell me anything else about your thoughts on that?

R: About uh, arrang—did you say arranged marriage?

I: Yeah.

R: Uh, mmm, I would say it's a bunch of stuff about the stereotype. Like I would love that to change at some point, because like, whenever like, someone, like, looks at like the ring on my hand, they just, like, assume, um, that it's an arranged marriage, so hopefully like one day that will change.

I: Yeah, that sounds difficult.

R: Yeah.

I: Um, do you think that the internet and social media has made it easier for Muslims Americas to meet their future partners?

R: Uh, yes.

I: Yeah?

R: Yeah.

I: Alright, um, where do most Muslim people you know tend to meet their future spouses?

R: Mmm, I would say either through, like, friends, um, or like, through a gathering. Um, I also know some people who got married through, like, uh, dating apps as well.

I: Cool. Alright, um, do you think that your parents' expectations are different for you than for your siblings?

R: Um, like in terms of, like, career, or life goals, or?

I: Life goals, yeah, anything you can think of.

R: Um, yeah, for my parents, I would say no. Um, they have high expectations from me and from my siblings, who are all males. I don't think it's any different. Yeah, but I would say they were at least more protective than me than my siblings. Yeah.

I: Okay, got it, sounds good. Alright, so then we're going to move on to a whole bunch of questions about parenting. Um, so what are your favorite things about the way you were raised?

R: Um, uh, I was always raised in an environment where they made, uh, family the priority. Um, also, um, like, we have like, Fridays, was such a big day 'cause we have, like, the jummah prayer, so that was, like, a big deal. Like all of the family would up, come together and just, like, have a nice meal, cook together, like do something together. So that was, like, I would always look forward to that, uh, day during the week. So it's kind of like a Saturday or Sunday here. Um, I was always, also, always looking forward to, um, our Islamic holiday, like which is called Eid, um, and it's spelled E-I-D, um, and that's after the month of Ramadan, um, I always—like those days were always, like, I don't know, it's kind of like Thanksgiving and Christmas over here. So we would always look forward to that. Um, what else...

I: Yeah.

R: Um, yeah, I feel like we always have been raised in a family that gave us trust. Also, um, yeah, just like always showing us what's right and wrong.

I: Got it! Super cool. Um, so when you think about, like, someday maybe having your own kids, um, is there anything that you would do differently than what your parents did, or would you do it pretty much the same?

R: Mmm, I would say, maybe being less protective [laughs] uh, and just, like, kind of letting them—not just kind of just like throwing them out in the world and not giving them guidance, but kind of, like, letting them make their mistakes, so that they can learn from it.

I: Sure, yeah, sounds good. Um, do you think your experience in America influenced that idea, or something else, or just your experiences?

R: Um, yeah, I think it's just my experiences. Yeah.

I: Sounds good. Alright, so when you think about your future, do you imagine having kids?

R: Yes. Yeah.

I: Cool. Would you want your kids to go to public or private schools, and would you want them to grow up in America, or Yemen, or somewhere else?

R: Um, I would say, um, I would prefer, like, outside of America, maybe in Yemen or an Islamic country, but if not, maybe in, like, in the States, but like, in a, in a Muslim community, where they have, like, Muslim friends as well—well they'll have non-Muslim friends, but also Muslim friends, and they have that, um, Muslim community, like the jummah prayer and like other things they can attend so they can always remember, like, um, that they're Muslims.

I: Sounds good! And you said that prayer—how do you spell that?

R: Uh, J-U-M-M-A-H.

I: Got it, sounds good.

R: Or you can say Friday prayer.

I: Oh, perfect. Alright, um, did your parents have any fears about your experience in American college? Did you?

R: Uh, yes, I did. I, like, I, um—in Yemen, um, the way that they teach student is mostly, which is not good, but they really just teach them to memorize stuff, and um, not really, like, understand it. So when I came here in the beginning, it was a little bit challenging because everything required understanding, writing, um, more than memorizing. Um, also, wait—what was the question again? [laughs]

I: [laughs] No, it's okay! The question was just, did your parents have any fears about your experience in American college?

R: Oh, okay, so I said my fears. My parents' fears, um, I think they—they were, um, they might have been, like, scared, that I, um, I maybe get distracted by, like, other things in college, um, and not focus on my schooling. So I think that was something, something that they were always scared of, and always will try to remind [laughs] me I need to stay on-track.

I: Alright. Um, alright, so lots of kids have like, conflicts with their parents concerning big transitions like college or other things. Um, have you had any major conflicts with your parents around that—those sort of things?

R: Um—uh, yeah, so I started college in 2015, then around 2017 and 2018 I started getting opportunities outside the state of Georgia, like summer internships and stuff like that. So I had like, so I had some conflicts where, because like they would think that, or at least they used to think that a girl cannot travel alone, like she, she needs some sort of, like, like a brother or someone like to be with her just to protect her. Um, which is like, not really feasible because

everyone has their own life, so I think that was like my only conflict where I—they started like, I tried to make them realize that a girl can travel alone, can go and do stuff, as long as she's doing the right stuff, I think that that's okay. So I've always, like, tried my best to, um, to tell them that. And then eventually I, I won! And I was allowed to travel alone and do internships and stuff like that. And, and then in 2019 I went to a conference in, like, in American Society of Micro, so that was really fun. And that was just because I stood up for what is right, and I knew what I was doing. It was, like, things that was related to school, and my, my future, so, yeah!

I: Cool! Alright, now we're moving on to questions about culture and self-definition. Um, so, how do you identify yourself?

R: Um, I would say as a Muslim hijabi, um, minority, although, like, America doesn't consider, uh, um, like, people from the Middle East as minorities because we are considered white, but I do consider myself as a minority. Yeah.

I: Sure. How do you see yourself in terms of religion or culture?

R: You said how do you define yourself?

I: Yeah.

R: Um, I would say culturally, I would say Yemeni, and then religiously I would say Muslim. Yeah.

I: Alright, sounds good.

R: Practicing Muslim.

I: Yeah. Alright, perfect. Um, so you said before that you have a hard time identifying with—more with Yemeni or with American culture, do you—like how do you define yourself, like, in-between those two. Or what parts of yourself do you identify with each culture?

R: I would say my, um, like my career goals kind of stand in between, because I feel like no matter what, whether I was in Yemen or here I would still reach the goals that I want to, even though the opportunities are like, way different. Here, it's obviously, like, much better, uh, but I would say even if I was in Yemen, I, I would have imagined myself still going into, like, medicine or something like that. Yeah. So I would say that part, or that aspect is, like, in between both of my identities, Yemeni and American.

I: Alright. Um, so where do you spend most of your time now? Like, buildings, cities, things like that.

R: Um, um I would say in the hospital that I'm currently doing rotations. Unfortunately I spend eight hours a day over there. [laughing]

I: [laughing] Cool! Wow.

R: Yeah.

I: Well, alright. So, how do you feel when you're working there?

R: Um, I would say, mmm, [sighs] that's a hard question. So something that I really like about myself is that I'm confident, like, no matter what, even though I'm a hijabi woman. Like I'm confident in my skills and what I bring to the table or what I bring into the team. Um, so, even though I, like, sometimes feel left out, or, um, or some different feelings, I always remind myself that I'm here, I have a goal, and I can achieve whatever.

I: Cool. Alright, so your parents speak mostly Arabic, right?

R: Yes.

I: Alright, got it. So when you're at your apartment, what language do you speak?

R: Arabic.

I: Got it, sounds good. How would you describe your religious life, overall?

R: I would say moderately practicing. Not—not loosely and not very strictly. So, like, somewhere in between.

I: Got it, sounds good. In what ways do you practice your religion?

R: Um, prayers, fasting, also, just, like, I feel like—or I strongly believe that Islam is the religion of kindness and empathy and just treating people with, like, a good heart and with kindness at all times. Yeah. So I would say that that's also part—like I consider that part of my religion too.

I: Sure, yeah. Alright, um, in what ways, if any, do you participate in Muslim community activities?

R: Um, so, there is the Islamic Society of Milwaukee, so I try to—they have some gatherings or some events that happen, in person before COVID, but now mostly virtually, so I attend those whenever I have the time. Um, also, before COVID, they always had the, like the jummah prayers, the Friday prayers that I was telling you about, and also the Eid, the Islamic holiday celebrations, so my family would also always participate in that. Just so that we—because we are away from home, at least that could, um, could make us feel like there's a connection between us and our religion and culture.

I: Super cool! Um, so how would you describe your political partici—participation in the US? Do you regularly vote and things like that?

R: Uh, yes.

I: Got it, cool. Do you vote in all major elections or just the presidential? If you feel comfortable answering.

R: Um, yeah. I honestly just vote in the presidential.

I: Got it. I mean—yeah. Alright, when it comes to candidates who are from your culture, homeland, or religion, um, or potentially if there were some for the larger ones, in what ways would that affect your vote?

R: Um, I would say that I would not try to put that into, uh, consideration. I would just say, like, uh, I would just consider or look into the qualifications of the candidate, um, and not into, like, the nationality or their color or their race, yeah. ‘Cause I think that’s just not fair.

I: Yeah. Alright, um, when it comes to candidates who are from your—oh, I already read that question. Um, just a second. Are you involved in any community issues or activities?

R: Community issues, um, I love volunteering. Um, so I volunteer regularly, and also in Georgia I used to volunteer in this refugee clinic, um, that, um—it’s a free medical clinic, that, um, they have patients, uh, who are refugees, all of them are refugees who do not have any insurance and come from different countries, so I really enjoyed that. So, I would say volunteering is a big aspect of my life.

I: That’s really, really cool. Alright, so do you read or watch the news regularly?

R: Um, sometimes, when I have time. [laughs]

I: Alright, where do you mainly get your news from?

R: My husband. [laughs]

I: [laughs] What are your connections with your homeland?

R: Um, I always try to, um, I always try to stay on top of the news that’s happening there, because of the war, you know, so I always try to see what’s new and what’s happening, although it’s mostly sad news, I try to be optimistic and see okay, is this happening, is the war going to stop, stuff like that. Um, I also try to stay in connection or in contact, close contact, with my family members, and, and friends from high school and from elementary school back home.

I: Super cool. Alright, um, have you visited Yemen since you came here, or not?

R: No, it’s really hard to go there.

I: Yeah, alright. Um, so you have family members and friends still living where you’re from in Yemen, so have you encouraged your family back home to come here? Like, obviously, it’s difficult, but would you want them to come here if that was a possibility?

R: Yeah, yeah, of course.

I: Alright, um, um, in what ways, if any, have political events in your—in Yemen affected you here?

R: Um, political events...I would say, like, the whole war over there is political, um, more than anything, um, so I would say if the war did not happen there, like I would most probably be, still be there. Or I would, um, go to college over there. So I would say like what happened, like the war and the, and the politics, um, that's why I ended up coming here. Because the situation.

I: Right. Where do you get your news about Yemen? Just like regular news channels here or from another source?

R: Um, I would say mostly from, like, family groupchats and friend groupchats, but also, like, websites.

I: Sure, yeah. Alright, um, so, um in terms of, like, support from Muslim, like, support in your faith and support in your culture and things like that, where do you get that support from?

R: Mmm, like over here, in the States?

I: Mm-hmm. [affirmative]

R: I would say definitely my family. Um, friends who are like me, like Muslim and, uh, Arab, um. Also, like, from professors and um, from students and friends who really appreciate like diversity and, and different backgrounds.

I: Sure. Um, alright, were you in the US during 9/11, then?

R: Uh, I think so. But I was like, very young.

I: Right. Sure, um, so do your parents remember anything about that, or have they told you stories?

R: Yeah, they told me that they were—so both of them were PhD students at the time, or at least working in UWM, um, and I think that they, like the news, they heard it in the news, um—oh, my dad was actually at home and he opened the news and he just saw these, like, buildings and the planes just crashing into the buildings, so they always keep, um, telling me about that. And my mom was outside, actually, not in the apartment, and she just came back home. Just left the lab and came back home. Yeah.

I: Yeah. Okay, um—

R: But I don't know what I was doing, so [laughs]. Probably playing.

I: [laughs]. Right! Thank you for sharing that experience. Um, so then we're talking about cultural clothing in general. So do you wear traditional cultural clothing, besides the hijab?

R: I would say like at events, but not in normal day life.

I: Got it, sounds good. And about the hijab, um, do you wear it all the time?

R: Yes. Oh, but not at home.

I: Not at home, got it. Um, let's see, um, how does it make you feel, wearing it? Like what are your, like, reasons, or, like, feelings around it?

R: Yeah, I feel like it's, it's my identity. It's who I am. I can't—I can't imagine myself, like, not wearing it. It's just part of who I am. And, um, yeah, and it's—it's true that it's like a huge part of religion, but I also consider it a part of who I am, in terms of values and beliefs.

I: Yeah, sure. Alright, um, so obviously religion plays a role in that, so what specific ways does that—does religion, like, affect that?

R: Mmm...[long pause]

I: That's a vague question, I'm really sorry. [laughs]

R: No, it's okay. Like, can you repeat that question?

I: Yeah! So, um, religion obviously plays a role in hijabs, so is there, like, a specific, like way that that ties in for you, or?

R: Yeah, so, um, mm, so I...in terms of religion, it's protection for a woman. Um, so I would always remember that and, like, besides of like my identity, I would always remember that it's also part of my religion and, um, it's, I'm wearing it to protect myself.

I: Alright, so, um, does your mother also wear it?

R: Uh, yes.

I: Alright, so was that like an influence for you, or did that encourage you to wear it?

R: No, actually when I started wearing it, my parents, like, told me, like, not to wear it, [laughs] because I'm, uh, what is it called, I'm petite, like small in size, and when I was around fourteen, fifteen, like I, um, showed, like, my interest to my parents that I wanted to wear it and they were like, "No, you don't have to! You're still small, you're still young! Don't worry about it!" So. [laughs] I would say it came from me.

I: [laughs] Got it, all right. Um, so then, I guess that's almost the end. Um, just like other information—so is there anything else about your history that you would like to tell me about?

R: Um, no. Not really. Yeah.

I: Got it. All right, and then are there any particular resources that you think that the Arab and Muslim Women's Resource and Research Institute could provide to the communities to which you belong to?

R: Um...you mentioned resources?

I: Yeah.

R: Um, I would say just the—do they publish articles?

I: I'm not sure, but I could find out. And if they do, like what would you—like what would you want them to do with that?

R: Yeah, um, I would like, maybe share it to the public, and just share their findings about, like, certain things. I think that would be like a good way, um, for Muslims in general to, like, just know about and read about—also like, um, you, the question before that you said is there any additional, uh, things to mention?

I: Yeah.

R: Um, I would say, um, also what is driving me into medicine now, so I'm going into the medical field, is like all of, um, the diseases and, and um, the infectious diseases happening in Yemen, like malaria, uh, dengue disease, that's also what's driving me into, um, into what I'm getting into for my career, and future, as a PA and like a doctorate student.

I: Super, super cool. Alright, and then also, as a student at Marquette, is there anything that fellow students or faculty or, like, administration could do to make—to provide to Muslim students more?

R: Yeah. Um, I would say, um, I think MUSG, like the student government, is playing a big role in making the Marquette community more inclusive, which I really appreciate, um, because I feel like it's not only my feeling but the feeling of other Marquette students too, is that sometimes they feel left out, or like they're just one, like they just hang out together and they don't hang out with, um, other, uh, nationalities. So, um, but I feel like MUSG is playing a big role on that. And also like, faculty, and um, I have professors in my department who always like encourage me and always [male voice in the background] [Sarah laughing] I'm sorry about that!

I: You're all good! [laughing]

R: Oh my God! [laughing] I don't know where he is, I'm so sorry! [male voice continues] [laughing] Oh my God. Give me one second, I'm sorry!

I: You're good, you're totally fine!

R: Sorry about that. I didn't know how to turn it off, so just ignore it if he interrupts again. So, I forgot where we were at, um...

I: Yeah, so anything that, like, faculty are helping you a lot, anything else?

R: Yeah, so my professors, they always encourage me, always, they always send me, like, scholarship opportunities or tell me to apply to this, apply to that, and, like, if I need any letters of recommendation, like I have a job interview for like—like a full-time position after graduation, and when I asked them for letters of recommendation, they were more than happy to help me out. And I'm pretty sure also for PA school they are going to help me with applications, and with um, letters of recommendation. Yeah, so I'm very appreciative of, um, the faculty and everything else, at Marquette.

I: Super cool. Alright, well, thank you so much for sharing anything, is there anything else you wanted to add?

R: Um, no. Wait, what's your major?

I: Um, I'm Writing-Intensive English.

R: Okay, that's very cool.

I: So, very different than yours, for sure.

R: That's really cool. So, is your minor Arabic?

I: Sorry?

R: Is your minor Arabic?

I: Oh, no, I'm actually taking this as an elective, um, I took a Latino Studies, um, class last semester and I really liked it. So I decided to go into more, like, cultural studies things, so this is the one I'm doing this semester.

R: Wonderful!

I: I'm really enjoying it. Well, thank you so much for sharing everything!

R: Thank you!

I: I'll let you know if I have any questions around anything, but yeah, thank you so much.

R: Yeah, let me know if you need any help with anything.

I: Perfect. Have a great night!

R: Thank you, bye!