



Oral History Project Interview

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

Number of Interview: GA 2.00

Date: September 26, 2019

Name: Ibrahim

Gender: Male

Country of Origin: Morocco

Year of Immigration: Born in United States

Abstract: Ibrahim (name changed for confidential reasons) is a second generation Moroccan American. He was born in Haverhill, Massachusetts, but moved back to Morocco at age three (2002) and spent the next four years of his life there with his brother. In Morocco he attended Quranic school before moving back to the United States where he spent the rest of his education in public schools. After graduating from Whittier Regional Technical Vocational High School, Ibrahim, encouraged by his father went on to study mechanical engineering at the University of Massachusetts (Lowell). Later transferring to Northern Essex Community College to pursue an exclusively self-motivated major in business. As Ibrahim grew older, his early religious influence was challenged by his newly accepted American sense of rebellion, forcing inconsistency within his identity. This internal conflict promoted feelings of confusion and curiosity, pushing the need for research across several religions, finally arriving at the hardworking, determined, and free-spirited identity he holds today. Although this was a tough time in his life, he no longer feels victimized by stereotypes regarding Muslim men and expressed great appreciation for his American heritage as it allows him to chase the “American Dream”.

Key Themes: Muslim, American, Moroccan, Free spirit, Identity

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

I: I'd like to start the interview by asking you some general questions about your background. What is your name, age, and level of education?

R: Well, kind sir, my name is Ibrahim (laughter). My age is 20, what was the last one?

I: Level of education.

R: Level of education, as you can tell (laughter) is college.

I: Nice, growing up did you go to public schools or private schools?

R: Private when I was in Morocco, but public when I got here.

I: How long were you in Morocco for?

R: I was there for four years.

I: What age were you in Morocco- when you were living in Morocco?

R: I was three to seven.

I: Did you find a big difference between the private schools and the public schools that you went to? (Phone notification)

R: Yes, actually I experienced a massive difference. The teaching styles, the buildings, everything. Yeah.

I: Tell me about places or buildings you spent a lot of time during your childhood?

R: Kinda just the house and school.

I: Okay, who did you live with growing up and what type of things did you do at home?

R: I lived with (sigh) my parents and my brother most of my life and we kinda just we rarely entertained ourselves by just like going outside to play and do video games. But we mostly kinda just studied.

I: Would you say he (his brother) took care of you or your parents took care of you mostly, or?

R: I would say my parents took care of us mostly.

I: Okay, when did your family come to the United States and who came?

R: It was my parents that came first at 1998, I believe, and then when we were born, we eventually came here too.

I: Okay, did you have any family that already lived in the United States before-

R: No, they were the first.

I: --coming here. Okay and did any other family members immigrate here after you came?

R: A few did, but none of them really stayed other than my grandparents. They're here right now but temporarily.

I: How did you decide where to settle in the United States?

R: I think my pops was doing it based off jobs that he would find. Preferably machinist jobs.

I: Cool, perfect. What language do you speak at home?

R: Mostly English but sometimes Arabic.

I: What aspect of your parent's homeland culture did they keep as you were growing up?

R: The religion, the food, the language, the way of living, the lifestyle, kinda all of it.

I: Do you work?

R: Yeah.

I: What do you do?

R: I sell shoes at Olympia Sports.

I: How did you get into that?

R: I walked in, and I asked them for a job, and they were like, "Come in at this time" and it worked out pretty--

I: Did your parents encourage you to work or?

R: They did but I also wanted to start making my own money cause that's, yeah, I needed to get my own things.

I: When did you start to drive?

R: Sixteen as soon as I could.

I: How did your parents feel about you driving?

R: At first, they were nervous about it cause its dangerous stuff, but I mean even now they don't care at all.

I: How would you describe your parent's involvement in your education?

R: I'd say they're kinda the leading cause of the education. Well at least, the (sigh) how do I say it. At least, the college way of doing it, the degree form of education.

I: Did they help you in school growing up?

R: They could, when they could but around fourth, fifth, sixth grade they kinda were at the peak of what they could help with and from there it was just like winging it, solo.

I: Did your parents influence your choice of college or major?

R: Yes, big time at first but--

I: How so?

R: --then I gained a little control. Well, I chased computer engineering cause that's what my pops wanted, and I thought that's what I wanted for a while. Then I did it and I was like yo I like nothing about this, so I switched it to business.

I: Awesome, were or are you involved in any religious groups at school?

R: I was when I was in Morocco, but not when I came here.

I: What was that experience like?

R: It was quite harmonizing and unifying honestly, back when I believed it entirely.

I: Uh okay, next I'd like to ask you some questions about your family's immigration and how you identify yourself. What were--

R: Cool.

I: (clears throat) What were the main reasons for your family to immigrate to the United States?

R: For better career options, financial stability.

I: What would've been better in the United States that was worse back in Morocco, job wise or?

R: Well, the economy, honestly. Career options here were much better based off the education that is required. Whereas there, there's not, they weren't really looking for more engineers cause they were (adjusts recording device) at the peak of the use of those guys there.

I: I read that in the late 90's in Morocco that there was like a 16-20% unemployment rate, would that have contributed to a lot of migration would you say?

R: The reason for them to want to come here? Very likely, yeah, I mean I didn't even know about that, but that makes sense why they always tell me how broke they were cause like they came from dirt and a farm, both of them, and they just wanted better, so they went out for it.

I: Okay, can you just speak up a little bit louder, I don't know how--

R: Sorry.

I: Good.

R: That's because it was behind me.

I: Oh, that's okay.

R: But did you get that answer? For the last one?

I: Yeah, we're all set.

R: Word.

I: How did they decide where they were going to settle in the United States, other than work or was that just the major player?

R: They had to stay at the east coast cause that's the closest coast to Morocco and I imagine that was the easiest way to visit Morocco, and the cheapest place to settle at I imagine. One of the cheapest places like there was plenty of factors but in the end, it was all about like proximity, to Morocco as well. But otherwise, I think that was it, it was just work and that.

I: Good answer, (phone notification) how would you identify yourself?

R: I would identify myself as (deep breath) a young adult (not?) Arabian male who's thriving and fiending to get more and aware of his opportunities, blessed.

I: Do you feel that you identify yourself differently depending on your environment like whether you're at home or around friends or?

R: No. When I was younger, I would've said yes, but not anymore.

I: Why would you have said yes?

R: When I was younger, I were in a church or not in a church. If I were in a mosque, I would've labeled myself as like a Muslim, if I were at home, I would've labeled myself as like a child, I guess? If I were at school, I would've labeled myself as a student, but now I kinda just label myself as Yub or Ayoub (bilituv?) and getting where I want to be, deep.

I: Um.

R: Yeah.

I: Are there places where you feel your best or most successful?

R: Most successful, on this chair right now, facing my speakers.

I: Working on your music?

R: Amen.

I: What tradition of religion or culture do you practice?

R: None.

R: Other than eating, I'm good at that one.

I: How would you describe your overall religious life?

R: Entirely spiritual, if not non-existent.

I: Okay, who does most of the cooking at home?

R: My ma, sometimes grandma but, sometimes pops.

I: Does your kitchen feel different from your friend's kitchens?

R: Ssuh, yes it does.

I: In what way?

R: My kitchen feels like they put in more time into the cooking and it's usually more hot, I've noticed. It's always hotter cause they all love using the oven (laughter).

I: (Laughter) Oh I thought you meant spice wise.

R: Well, caliente too, like spice wise.

I: Okay.

R: I don't know why I needed to use the Spanish word (laughter).

I: Um.

R: Yeah.

I: What is your connection to your family's homeland? Do you visit?

R: I try to visit once every two years, every summer. But it's been a while cause it's an expensive trip and I'm trying to make some dough.

I: Yeah.

R: Stable shit.

I: Have you ever encouraged anyone to visit or come live here?

R: (sigh) I mean I'd love for them to come here, but they kinda can't cause the visa system there for them to go international is like a raffle system and I've had family members spend money on it, but they haven't won. Basically.

I: I'm sorry to hear that.

R: Yeah, it's whatever.

I: In what ways if any have political events in Morocco affected you?

R: They kinda haven't, other than concern for people there. Making sure they're safe and stuff, but otherwise nah.

I: How would you describe your political participation in the U.S?

R: Non-existent.

I: How would you describe your parent's political participation in the United States?

R: Possibly non-existent, but I could be wrong, but I've never talked about politics to them.

I: I know that you were too young to remember 9/11, but would you say it changed you or your family's interactions with people?

R: Not mine, but my parents for sure.

I: What obstacles do you think they faced?

R: The fact that they're Muslim Americans and at the time everyone believed that all Muslims were like, or they convinced themselves that everyone was against them and maybe they were right but, it was just a strange time.

I: How did they deal with those obstacles?

R: They kinda just closed everyone off and didn't really talk to anyone other than, the people they knew and even those people they eventually like, faded away.

I: Must've been difficult.

R: Yeah, it sounds like it.

I: The next questions are about your parents.

R: Word.

I: Are they working?

R: They are.

I: If you don't mind me asking, what do they do?

R: Well, my mom's a manager at a restaurant and my pops is a machinist.

I: What is their level of education?

R: Probably finished a few courses of college but, primarily a high school degree

I: Okay, how do you think your parents identify themselves?

R: They identify themselves as 100% devout Muslims from the country of Morocco.

I: (clears throat) Do they mention Morocco often?

R: Yeah, pretty much every day. In every conversation, comparisons, yeah.

I: Do you remember any events that, maybe historical that happened in Morocco and how your parents responded to them, good or bad?

R: Nah I don't know any history that's happened there.

I: Okay.

R: Even though I should.

I: The next set of questions--

R: (Laughter)

I: Is about marriage and (phone notification) culture.

R: Aw snap!

I: In your culture how are women viewed and what is their typical role?

R: Well way back when, when I was younger their typical role that kinda everyone that I knew did was stay at the house, take care of the fam, cook, and yeah. Keep the place looking tightly but now it's kinda like here and there now it's like some women in my family are still doing that role, other women are like chasing their dreams and doing them and whatever they're trying and aspire in, it's kinda cool, but yeah.

I: What about men and their role?

R: Men are kinda more or less the same (laughter).

I: In what ways do you balance your culture and American identity?

R: I just, I don't. I don't even think about that (laughter).

I: Would you say that you kinda have just, like hybridized your own identity?

R: (Laughter) Yes, exactly fermented into the Yub you hear and speak to today.

I: But in what ways, like how did you do that?

R: How'd I do what?

I: Like how did you form--

R: Oh, I did--

I: Your own identity?

R: Some research for myself and I kinda just like asked my own questions. Everything that I quest, like sounded questionable I had to find like hard facts from either sources out there or people that have gone through the same.

I: Okay, (clears throat) how did religious or ethnic upbringing contribute to who you are today?

R: Kind of all religions cause when I was growing up, I did like research on all of them and just compared 'em and just asked myself some legit questions tryna find out, just (sigh) why people hated each other so much, about it, and all that, so.

I: Okay, what does marriage mean to you?

R: Marriage to me, is (sigh) a process that you would go through when you would find someone worthy of sticking around with for a significant amount of time, to grow a family with.

I: Would you move or relocate because of marriage?

R: Never really thought about it. Never even considered it, but at this phase of my life I say I wouldn't.

I: How open are your parents when it comes to marriage outside of your religious, national group?

R: Not open at all.

I: (Drinks water) do you think, I mean do you know of any barriers you or someone you know has faced from their family because of their decision to marry outside of their group?

R: No, but I've heard of other families and their stories, and they usually don't end up well, but in the end they kinda just get their way.

I: What do you mean by get their way?

R: So, the person that chose to marry out of the family kinda just gets to marry outside and stays there as long as they be, in the end the person who's getting married is the person who's choosing, cause like it's their life, you know?

I: Okay.

R: The chooser.

I: I know you mentioned that you were a business major, how'd you choose that major?

R: I like being social with people and it was way more exciting than cleaning/repairing machines that were making parts for pretty cool stuff honestly. But that just wasn't my muse, so I figured, if I can socialize and make money at the same time, why the hell wouldn't I do it?

I: Yeah, I think, I feel like ever since I've known you, you've always been a pretty social person, so I think that's a good choice.

R: Ah, I try.

I: Is there a major you wouldn't do because it would reduce your chances of marriage opportunities?

R: (Laughter) Engineering (laughter).

I: Why do you think engineering would reduce your marriage opportunities?

R: Cause I would commit so much time to being as smart as Tony Stark, that I wouldn't even be social enough to get a girl.

I: Would you marry someone younger than you?

R: (Laughter) depends on what country were talking about.

I: Well, if yes, then how many years should be between you and your partner?

R: Well in America, I would say like three to four tops but, back at the homeland my pops has pulled off like 20-year difference I believe (laughter). So, I don't know if I wanna reach that (laughter) but I'm open for kinda anything (laughter). Nah fuck that, actually it would depend on the maturity that's a critical factor.

I: Do you think that like maturity and like psychological connections are more important than age?

R: Yes dude, mostly it's chemistry.

I: Would you marry someone from outside the U.S.? Say Morocco for instance?

R: Yeah.

I: And then my follow up question would be, why?

R: Why not?

I: I think that's a good answer. Who would you say makes most of the decisions in a marriage?

R: Well back at the homeland it was mostly the family cause that's how the social networks there worked. But here it's kinda just the individual who's getting into the relationship to begin with.

I: Okay.

R: (Singing) talk about some things that we can undo.

I: Who would you turn to in your own house for the final word?

R: (Burps) when I was younger, it would have been one of my parents. But now it is yours truly.

I: You said when your parents (wouljit?) just like whoever was around or was it mostly mom? Mostly dad?

R: It was mostly my mom that was around, my pops (hadnd?) had a night shift, so yeah.

I: What do you think about dating?

R: I think it's a very fun process with the right person.

I: Does social media make it easier for Arab and Muslim Americans to meet future spouses?

R: Social media makes it possible for people to meet spouses, period. Regarding what race, gender, whatever the hell they desire, it makes it easy, socially at least.

I: I agree. How is marriage in America different from your parent's marriage?

R: I think the ceremony is the biggest difference. The process of the wedding here is, a lot quieter, whereas the ceremony in Morocco is a whole lotta music, dancing, dresses, colorful shit. Yeah, it's a lot. Kinda poppin' there (laughter).

I: So, it's all, it's like more of a celebration would you say?

R: Yeah, it's like Brazil.

I: In what ways, if any, do you think boys should be raised differently than girls?

R: Based off the education that they received when they reach certain phases in their life. But otherwise encourage them towards where they be or what they desire.

I: So, would you say, probably something like around puberty like that sorta thing, so they know what's going on?

R: Yeah, exactly.

I: Oh, okay.

R: Based off like their gender and what they're gonna be experiencing, they need to know that stuff, of course.

I: Okay, next I'd like to switch topics to discuss cultural clothing.

R: Okay.

I: Do you have any traditional or cultural clothing?

R: I do.

I: How many?

R: Like one shirt, one pant.

I: Okay when or where do you wear them?

R: I mostly wear them around the house. But, on rare occasions I wear the shirt to parties cause I think it looks classy, classy (repeated word in a funny voice).

I: So, do you normally wear to like special occasions, or just whenever you feel?

R: Yes, I do.

I: Okay, how do you feel when you wear them?

R: I feel pretty classy, if I do say so myself (silly voice after the comma).

I: Does the clothing have any meaning to you?

R: The clothing kinda just more clothes.

I: Is the traditional clothing important to your parents?

R: It is, yeah. It's a traditional thing.

I: Why would you say it's so important?

R: Cause it's for the homeland, of course they care about it!

I: Okay do your parents encourage you to wear traditional clothing?

R: When it's a holiday, yeah.

I: And would you want your children to wear the same type of clothing?

R: Yeah, if their outfit looks nice enough to match it. Hell yeah, that'd look dope.

I: Perfect. The next questions are about your perceptions and beliefs. Do you think people with disabilities can live lives that are just as fulfilling as those without disabilities?

R: Yeah. It all depends on their greater worldly view of life. If they can surpass their beliefs in their bodies, they can have an even more satisfying life than most of us.

I: Okay, in your community do you feel that most families with members that have disabilities are secretive about it?

R: No, I wouldn't say so. Actually, yeah, I'd say they are. It's funny that you say that (laughter).

I: How so?

R: Well, I didn't think that anyone in my family really had disabilities. But I just found out like about two, and they were like, I've never found out about it and they just like plain out just revealed it. And I was like woah! What? That's nuts! So, I'd say yeah, they don't normally brag about it of course, but who would. It's not exactly the best news to deliver.

I: Yeah, interesting do you feel that some of these topics that we've talked about are too taboo to talk about in most Arab or Muslim families?

R: No, I wouldn't say so. But the replies that I gave, that's a different story. That would be considered taboo.

I: Why do you think that they would be, that your responses would be considered taboo?

R: Because of the spirituality replies that I gave, whereas that's mostly frowned upon I would imagine.

I: Mmkay, do you think families perceive disabilities in males differently than they do in females?

R: No.

I: Okay, do you think disabled males have more marriage options than disabled females?

R: Yes.

I: How so?

R: I don't know, it just that, just a social class stereotype bullshit kind of crap there. But, in all, honesty anyone can find the right mate. If they're just willing to never give up, they can find that I feel like. There's always a match.

I: Okay, and now just a few closing questions (cough).

R: Take it away.

I: Is there anything else about your history that you would like to tell me?

R: Yeah, when I was younger, I think this was like the first memory I had. Dog, I got this croissant stuffed with chocolate inside, bruh. I'd love that shit right now. That's it (phone notification).

I: We, was that a--

R: (Laughter)

I: Moroccan dish? Or was it--

R: I think it was French.

I: It was French.

R: Honestly, cause c'mon croissant.

I: I know that France has a pretty big influence--

R: Influence.

I: In Morocco.

R: That they do.

I: Did that affect the ways--

R: Chill! (Talking to brother). Sorry, my brother is being annoying.

I: Did that affect how you were growing up, or the time you spent in Morocco?

R: What the French influence?

I: Yes.

R: Yeah, dude it was required to, I used to know French dude. But I totally forgot it cause I never really used it here. So, I kinda just lost it all, but yeah, I used to know it pretty good like talk it, write it, all that jazz.

I: Okay, that's pretty cool I didn't know that.

R: Now you know. Croissant! That's pretty much all I can say now. Croissant! (Laughter).

I: (Laughter) What did you and your brother do when you were living together in Morocco for fun normally?

R: We would go, well if it was a Friday we would go beg for a dirham (Moroccan equivalent of the U.S. dollar) that way we could go out and buy a candy bar and race there. And we would kinda just like play with toys and watch cartoons.

I: Did you spend more--

R: Yeah.

I: Time inside or outside would you say?

R: More inside.

I: Okay, was there a reason for that or is that just where you liked to hangout?

R: Nah. It was much safer inside, plus outside wasn't always the safest place.

I: Okay so, when you and your brother were in Morocco, were your parents in the United States?

R: Yes, for four years.

I: Okay so, who looked after you or did you guys just kinda look out for each other?

R: Well, I had my aunt and another lady take care of me, raise me and my grandma. I had three women raise me. And my brother had my uncle and his wife to raise him.

I: Do you--

R: And their family.

I: Think that that played, like that really kinda impacted how you two were raised like different, like do you think it was like a difference in how you two were raised, since you had three females and he had a male and a female?

R: I'd say it definitely affected our behaviors and personalities when we were younger but, I'd say the only way that genuinely affected me is in my relationship life honestly. Like nothing would ever last over two months and I honestly never knew why but, I think it's because of the fact that of the mother son bond it was like cut at the age of three and that's not really the best thing to do. So, I would say that could've affected my relationship life.

I: Okay.

R: But otherwise, I would say nothing else from my childhood could've affected me significantly, to this day.

I: Okay.

R: Other than memories that are nice to have.

I: What's your best memory from that four-year span in Morocco would you say?

R: Valid question! Probably the vacation, oh nah, the four-year span. Oh yeah! This vacation, this resort called Pompon De, where it's like next to a beach and it was just mad chill cause like the whole family would gather there and we would share this super luxurious house. We would all like cut in to have it, it's pretty chill.

I: Sounds like a fun time.

R: It was that.

I: And then, last question, do you have any other family or friends you think that we should interview?

R: Nah.

I: Okay, I'd like to thank you for your time Ibrahim, it's been a pleasure.

R: Aye, hella formal.

Follow up questions (Additional questions asked for final paper)

I: I know you mentioned in our interview that you enjoyed making music, how did you get into that hobby?

R: It was something I had always enjoyed really, whether it was back in Morocco or here (United States) it was just always something that made me happy. I like to dance so that just kinda goes hand in hand with music, I guess (laughter).

I: What type of music do you like to listen to or make?

R: I listen to all types of music because that is how I get my inspiration for the music that I make. But I think that, well the music that I make is kind of like hip hop or rap with maybe a little bit of R&B mixed into it.

I: How did you decide you wanted to make hip hop/rap music?

R: Well, honestly it was my friends who put me on. Like we would be hanging out and I just fell in love with the beats initially, you know like started beat boxing. Then started to really listen and decided that if I could put inspirational lyrics over a good beat, I could maybe help people going through it.

I: Did you have a pretty diverse group of friends or were many of them similar to you and your beliefs like when you met them?

R: The school I went to, well like I know you went there too but, it had a lot of Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, African Americans, and obviously white people. I was really kind of surrounded by all these different people, so yes, my friend group was really diverse. Actually, now that I think of it that's probably why I started to listen to rap, all my black friends really loved it.

I: Since you had said you went to college, and alcohol use has become increasingly important aspect of college culture. How has this affected your college experience, and have you ever felt pressured to try alcohol while at school?

R: I would say that I definitely noticed that a lot of people I knew would drink where I went to school and at first, yeah, I wanted to fit in, so I wanted to drink. So yeah, I guess I felt some pressure to try it, but I also have never really been afraid to be my own person and go against what other people are doing.

I: Do you feel as though you have ever gotten any unwanted attention in sports because of your physiognomy or religion?

R: I don't think so. Well actually when I was younger, I really wanted to play baseball, like I signed up and everything. Then, it was at that first practiced when I learned that I wasn't all that great and to make matters worse my coach went up to my mom and suggested I should try soccer because, "Soccer is a better fit for Muslim kids". Even if I wasn't going to quit before that statement, I definitely was going to after. That guy was a jerk.

I: How did it make you feel when the coach said that?

R: I felt really uncomfortable and began to question if I even liked baseball anymore. I just felt like I didn't belong.