



## Oral History Project Interview

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

Date: 4/27/2016

Gender: Female

Name: Fatima

Country of Origin: Palestinian/ United Arab Emirates

Year of Immigration: 2007

**Abstract:** Fatima (name changed for confidentiality reasons) is an immigrant originally from Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, who came to Milwaukee in order to pursue higher education. She has a bachelor's and master's degree in supply chain management. After graduation, Fatima remained in the United States and between 2013 and 2014 was engaged and married to her husband. They have one child together. Before having her son, Fatima worked as an assistant manager in several different company departments. When not in the United States, she enjoys visiting her national homeland, Palestine, with her family.

**Key themes:** education, independence, marriage, work

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

I: Okay, so I'd like to start off the interview by asking some general questions. First off, I'd like to start off by asking some questions about your background. Where's your homeland, like your country, or the city or town that you're from?

R: I was originally born in the United Arab Emirates, but that's not my nationality. I'm Palestinian, from Nablus, and I've lived my whole life in the United Arab Emirates, Abu Dhabi. I was raised there and studied high school, then I moved here to the US.

I: Can you tell me about the places and buildings where you spent a lot of your time? Like, during your childhood?

R: In Abu Dhabi, yeah, we were living in an apartment, in like a building. So, it was mostly indoors, like playing indoors and stuff like that. Only in winter when we used to go out to the parks and play around and stuff and have barbecues going on. But just because of the weather, like in summer the weather is very hot, so only in winter we could like go outdoors— have some fun.

I: Did you live in any other countries before coming to the US?

R: Yes, United Arab Emirates, and I visited Palestine many times, so.

I: When you visit Palestine how long do you stay there typically?

R: Usually a month to three months.

I: When did you immigrate the US?

R: It was actually 1998 when I first moved to.

I: Okay, and about how old are you now?

R: 27 years old.

I: Were you the first in your family to immigrate here?

R: No.

I: After you were in the US, did any of your other family members immigrate here?

R: Yes.

I: And who were they?

R: Can you say the question again?

I: Like after you came here, did anyone else follow you?

R: Well, we already had the American citizenship, so it's not like that we immigrated. We used to come and visit here every once and a while. My sister moved here to study, as well— my younger sister and younger brother. So, my brother is still here and he's studying here right now. And my sister was here, but she moved back to Abu Dhabi.

I: Are you married now?

R: Yes.

I: Were you married when you immigrated here?

R: No.

I: Was your marriage arranged?

R: No.

I: Did you know your spouse before getting married?

R: Yes.

I: Were you related?

R: No.

I: Do you have any children?

R: A boy.

I: What's his name and age?

R: (Name omitted to protect confidentiality) he's right now three months and a half.

I: And does he live with you now?

R: Yes, of course.

I: What was your level of education before immigrating to the US?

R: I finished my high school. So, when you say immigration, is it when I moved here to study or was it when I first got my green card?

I: I mean, you can...

R: Because when I first answered 1998, that was when I first came to the United States. That was my first visit to the US.

I: But you didn't live here, right?

R: No.

I: So, I guess I would just go based off of when you really established yourself here and you actually lived here, you know what I mean?

R: Oh.

I: So probably after high school, would you say?

R: If this is the case, then the first question should have been like 2007, when I first came here to study and establish myself.

I: Okay, got it. Where did you receive your level of education?

R: From high school?

I: Yeah.

R: In Abu Dhabi, the school's name was Rosary school.

I: Have you received any additional formal education since then? Like college, and stuff like that.

R: Here in the US, yes. Well, I studied a year in college there, at Abu Dhabi university and then I moved after a year, so I transferred here to the US and completed my bachelor's degree and my master's degree.

I: Did you work outside the home prior to immigrating?

R: Yes.

I: What was your job?

R: I worked as a financial aid at Abu Dhabi university and then they moved me to the registration department, so I used to help the students to register in college and stuff like that. So, I was mostly, like, customer service.

I: Are you currently employed or working outside the home?

R: No.

I: Okay, next I'd like to ask you some questions about your decision to immigrate to the US  
What were your main reasons for coming here?

R: I wanted to gain more responsibility because, like, overseas I was kind of spoiled. I used to always rely on my parents and my older siblings to do everything for me. So, I felt that I need a new environment for myself to be more responsible and to improve myself and obviously study because education here is strong. So, I came here to study mainly, and to work and establish my future. Mainly for education.

I: Was marriage to immigrate, or a US citizen a reason for your immigration?

R: No.

I: Initially, how long did you plan on staying in the US?

R: Four or five years, but I had, like, in mind I was thinking that if I found a good job I would stay more, but it was just depending on whenever I finished school and whatever job I could find. But mainly, what happened was that I got married and I stayed here, so. I also worked here so I stayed here more than four or five years.

I: How did you decide where to settle in the US? Like, what made you settle in the Milwaukee area?

R: Because my relatives are here and my siblings studied at UWM, so I wanted to stay in the same environment, like close to my family because, like, it was the first time for me to move on my own. Like, a new country, especially a different, a totally different culture. So, I wanted someone to help out and if I need any help, they would help me out.

I: Would you say that Milwaukee was your first choice of settlement? Like, was that were you originally wanted to go in the first place?

R: Like compared to other states, like if it was my choice, I would have picked a different state. But just because, like I said, my relatives are here so I just picked Milwaukee.

I: Have you lived in any other places in the US after coming here?

R: No.

I: The next questions pertain to your early experiences being in the US When you first immigrated here, what was your life like?

R: It was mixed of, I don't know, different experiences because, like, I was excited about school and learning more about the culture and, like, improving my English and all that stuff. But also, I was worried that, 'How am I going adapt and avoid all of the obstacles and stuff that I'm facing?' So, it was hard for me to cope with the environment at the beginning, but then when I got used to it and when I started learning stuff more and more it got easier. So, at the beginning it was hard, especially emotionally that was the first time for me leaving my family, overseas. Mostly, that was the main problem. I used to be very sensitive.

I: Like homesick?

R: Yeah. I used to cry and stuff whenever I want to say bye to my family or leave my family. But then, you just get used to it. Like, with the time. Obviously when I started college, I got busy, so I had something else to fill up my time and just, like, focus on something else.

I: Would you say that that's how you faced your obstacles? Like, how did you deal with them?

R: Like, I use to say that, like, I wanted to learn more so I would ask questions, especially in college, anything that I didn't know. I didn't want myself to be very shy of asking about something, even if it might sound stupid. Yeah, I just wanted to be responsible so I tried to make everything on my own, as much as I can, not depending on anybody and that actually improved my ability to be responsible. I can do anything I want without depending on someone. So, that made me stronger. Yeah, that's absolutely it. That's a good way for avoiding obstacles.

I: Were some of the problems related to the kind of place where you prayed or lived or shopped or worked in?



R: Can you say that again?

I: Like, do you feel like some of the problems were related to places that you would pray normally? Or like, malls where you would shop? Where you lived?

R: Yeah, there were problems, especially, with my hijab, people used to look at me in a different way. So, also when I used to, like, when I wanted to pray, I used to always try to find a good place because there might not be a prayer room, especially in the mall. So, I used to go to a fitting room, or try to find a corner. So, that was an obstacle, as well. I was hard to keep up with, maybe an un-Islamic environment and try to still do your obligations, like your religious obligations. So yeah, that was an obstacle, and also the language. The language was difficult in the beginning, because we used to study a British English so when I came here the American slang is totally different. I used to, when I first came here, if somebody would talk to me, I would be like, 'Say it again? Like again? Again?' Until, like, I got it.

I: Did you learn how to drive when you came here?

R: I learned how to drive in Abu Dhabi so I had my driver's license before I came here, but then I had to do the exam again because the one in Abu Dhabi did not work here.

I: And how long after you immigrated did you take your exam here?

R: I think a year. I don't remember actually, but I think a year or after.

I: What prompted you to want to drive? Like, what made you want to get your license?

R: Work, school, but when I was at school, I wanted to get a car but because the university was very close to my house. I didn't really need a car unless I wanted to go to some other places like do some grocery shopping, stuff like that. So, I use to rely on the bus a lot, but then when I started working, the place where I used to work at was 20 minutes away from my house, so I had to drive and that's when I bought a car and started driving in the US.

I: How did your husband feel about you driving? Like, did he encourage it, discouraged it?

R: He encouraged it. My car stayed with me so whenever I wanted to go out or something he was fine with it. But just the highway was a little hassle either from the rush hour, or because I'm not used to the speed. Like, mostly my driving was like around the house, so I didn't use to go to a lot of too far places, stuff like that. So, if I would take the highway that would be a little, like he would be a little worried, like, you know? Drive safely and stuff like that.

I: I get it.

R: And especially when I had my baby now, it's different. It's like I don't drive as much as before.

I: Do you feel like driving affected your life or your families' life a lot?

R: Yeah, a lot. It's like affected it positively. So, I used to help my sister a lot and if we want to go out, we just take the car and go and if my parents come and visit or like anyone who wants to go any places, I would help and drop them off and stuff like that. It was very helpful.

I: How did you deal with the obstacles that you face, like did you pursue more education or any kind of training, such as English classes? Like you said that you learned English before, right, in Abu Dhabi? And that you learned the British language, but did you take more English classes here?

R: I went for the ESL program, but it wasn't that, I just did a placement test and they placed me in one of the higher rankings. So, I did not take, because most of the students who came from

overseas, they use to take a year, almost a year of English in ESL to get used to the language and stuff like that. But I just ended up taking, well it was in credits, it was I think 12 credits of English, but it helped me a lot. I think it was counted towards the electives of my major, so it was like I was taking a lot of extra.

I: Pointless classes?

R: Yeah. So, I wasn't just taking ESL just because I had a really bad problem trying to improve my English. I already knew English, but I just wanted to get used to it more. But also, when I used to hang out with my cousins and stuff, like you guys, and when I was surrounded by people speaking English and watching TV that made it really easy for me.

I: What kind of jobs have you had since immigrating to the US?

R: How many? Or what kind?

I: Like what kind of jobs, or how many jobs. Both.

R: I changed three jobs. The first one was in a furniture wholesale, so I was kind of the manager assistant. I used to take orders, write invoices, and stuff like that. That company was called Prime Furniture Wholesale, and then I moved to Rockwell Automation as a contractor. I worked there as quality control assistant and then I moved to another one, another contract also at Rockwell in a different department as a buyer support. So, it was mostly assistant positions in different areas.

I: What role, if any, did your family have regarding decisions about your employment? Like was your husband, like supporting you to work or do you feel like now that you have a child do you feel like you need to work in order to support him?

R: Yeah, actually, my husband does not really like the idea of a woman working, in general, but I, like, when we first got engaged and stuff, like, that I told him I am kind of an independent

person. I just got used to after staying four, five, years in the US doing everything on my own. I told him that's what I see myself doing, working, especially because I did my masters. I don't want my degree to just, like, sit there and do nothing. So, he was like, 'okay,' like in the end he was kind of convinced of me working so after marriage he told me, 'Look for a job and work until you have a baby.' So especially, having a baby is not easy because I have to take care of him and stuff like that. I had almost a year or so, or more than a year for me to try to find a job, but I did not so most of the opportunities I got were too far from my house and again, because I did not drive on the highway that much, I used to cancel them.

I: Do you feel like if your child gets older, he would be willing to let you work again? Or he just wants you to be a stay-at-home mom even when your child is in school.

R: I think he wouldn't want to accept the idea of working again, because he would be like, 'Okay, now my first kid got bigger and he's going to school, maybe there's the second child who I have to take care of.' So, he would picture me just staying at home taking care of the children because that's also kind of a full-time job for me to take care of the house and my husband and my children and raise them and stuff like that. But I have second thoughts, like you know, like in the future, it depends on how my situation is, when my first child gets older, I'll see how, where am I and what am I doing? And then if I felt like I could still work without, like, affecting my children or stuff like that, then I would still discuss it with him.

I: What kind of jobs has your spouse had since immigrating?

R: He had several jobs working in like grocery stores, and they have a family business in the US so it's mostly working in businesses.

I: What role, if any, did your family have regarding your spouse's employment? Like what did your parents think about the work that your husband does?

R: They wanted him to like work in something within his degree because he studied mechanical engineering. I wanted him to be settled in a company, as well. So, my parents were expecting that, but he tried to look for something in his major and he did not find any yet. So, he's still thinking of, still working, kind of works in his family business just until he gets something that suitable.

I: What level of education does he have?

R: Bachelor's in mechanical engineering.

I: Thinking about your life shortly after you immigrated, can you tell me about the buildings and places you spent a lot of your time during the initial years after immigration?

R: School, work, home, visiting my friends, going to the mall, a lot.

I: Can you tell me about your home or some of the building you remember fondly from those days?

R: That I remember?

I: That you remember really well.

R: You mean, like the good experiences that I had?

I: Yeah.

R: School was very nice. It was fun, especially with the friends that I knew, and stuff like that. There were mostly students who also came from overseas to study here so we kind of shared the same ideas and experience, so we were kind of...

I: Like you clicked better with them?

R: Yeah.

I: Okay, so the next set of questions are going to be about of your marriage. At what age did you decide to get engaged and married?

R: I got engaged in 2013 and married in 2014. So that was like a good age for me because I wanted to, I mean that was like three years ago, so I was like, twenty-four. That was a good age for me because I wanted to, before getting married my plan was to get established and finish my school and work, and stuff like that. So, I was already done with my school and my masters, and stuff like that. I just wanted to work more. Like, before marriage I worked at those three places that I listed, but I wanted to work more, but it just didn't happen.

I: Where did your marriage ceremony take place? Was it here?

R: No, it was in Palestine. Where his family is, and my family also went to Palestine to celebrate and stuff.

I: What do you think marriage means to you, like in general?

R: It's a new big step in life. I feel like it's a new journey in life because everything changed with marriage— your lifestyle, your obligations, your thinking. Like, you might change your thoughts sometimes just to cope up with your spouse. So, everything actually changed. So, when I first got engaged, I was a little worried about that, like how's it going to be? You know? I have

some thoughts in mind and maybe he has, like, contracting thoughts and how are we going to have a solution that can...

I: Be a solution to both sides?

R: Yeah. So exactly. Yeah, but then...

I: Do you feel marriage is what you expected it to be before you actually got married, or no?

R: Yes. The only thing is that I love traveling, and I was expecting to travel more, but we traveled. We went to, like every summer, we went to either Palestine or we went to United Arab Emirates and stuff like that, but I just like to get exposed to new places and stuff.

I: Cultures?

R: Yeah. So, I was like, I wanted to go to honeymoon and blah, blah, blah, but it just didn't happen. We were planning on going on honeymoon, but it didn't happen. I mean, it's not the end of the world. And we traveled after marriage to several places. But yeah, it's nice. Marriage life is nice. Sometimes it would be, like I think it's better than what I thought and sometimes problems can happen even if the two people, you know when their trying to keep up and they both have different thoughts.

I: Different views?

R: Yeah, there's no marriage life that can happen without having problems, so problems are something that has to happen, but it's the way how you deal with them that can make it either easier.

I: That can make it or break it?

R: Yeah.

I: What factors do you think play a role in marriage for you? Like, what did you look for in your spouse when you were looking to get married?

R: His personality. I wanted him to be a fun person. Understandable. Cares about my emotions. A person who was educated, he learned in college. And responsible, like someone who can have your back whenever you, like, really need him. Like a backbone.

I: Yeah, would you move because of marriage or relocate for it? Or is it something that you wouldn't consider? Or what, what, factors have to happen for you to have to move with your spouse wherever that is?

R: I think that already happened because I wasn't planning, like I wasn't thinking of getting married from someone here and staying here for my whole life. I was maybe thinking of going back home and, I mean not home, here is home too, but I mean like back to...

I: Abu Dhabi?

R: Yeah, but that didn't happen, so...

I: So, in a way it is kind of like you moved here. You settled here for him?

R: Yeah, just because of marriage. So, I stayed here for my marriage life.

I: Can you tell me about your wedding and the ceremonies that you went through that lead up to your marriage ceremony?



R: First it was Katb al-Kitab, and Qiraat al-Fatiha, and whatever, I don't know how to say it in English, but anyways.

I: No, that's fine.

R: So that was Qiraat al Fatiha, Katb el-Kitab jaaha. Then after that I had an engagement party in Abu Dhabi before I came back here, because I had to come back here for school and work and then a year after, we got married in Palestine. So it was, like kind of three stages, or no, actually before marriage we had the Henna party so that was another occasion.

I: Would those occasions be the same ones that your siblings would go through?

R: Yeah, mostly.

I: What marriage ceremonies and rituals are most important to you?

R: The engagement or Katb el-Kitab is like most important because that's how in our religion and culture that's the main thing for us to actually be married and the wedding is actually just a way of like letting all of the people that we know that we actually got married. So Katb el-Kitab is the main part, and then engagement, well it's like where you get engaged, or yeah. As a party they're all important. The engagement party is good.

I: They all have different meanings probably?

R: Yeah.

I: Okay.

R: Like my sister, for example, she had, after the wedding, she had another party for like a congratulations party and for example, she didn't have a bridal shower, but I had a bridal shower, so it depends on how each one's situation was.

I: Is there anything that you would have changed about, like, the marriage ceremonies that you did?

R: Not really, no.

I: How open are your parents when it came to marriage? Like, let's say you wanted to marry someone outside the religious or national group, would they be open to that, or no?

R: No, not really. They wanted someone, like, specifically who's Muslim and who knows Arabic and who has the same kind of...

I: Like, views?

R: Yeah, like views in terms of cultural views and stuff like that. So, it was like, even it was from other Arabic countries, they wouldn't except that. They just want someone from Palestine and specifically, someone who can enter Palestine, because not all Palestinians can enter Palestine. So, they wanted someone who had the Palestinian ID.

I: Do you think it would be a problem if someone that has a less education level, or lower social status came to ask for your son in the future, or, like, any of your kids in the future?

R: You mean, lower than the level of my daughter, if I would except that?

I: Yeah.

R: I would. Like, most importantly, he would be, like, educated. He doesn't have to have his masters or his Ph. D, like it's fine if he has his bachelor's. Most importantly is that I wanted him to know how to treat my daughter, because the degree is not everything, it's just that helps in life or it helps him get a better job, but it's not, like, the way that he thinks is the most important, because, like, some people are, like, really poor but they are very precious, that they know how to deal with, like, their wives.

I: Like with their problems and stuff?

R: Yeah.

I: What obstacles did you face before marriage, if any? Was there any family problems or differences? Like, do you feel like you had a different view than your family might have had, or he had a different view, or his family?

R: Yeah, there were like a couple of problems. It was, like, we were still in school, so it was kind of early for us to, like, get married so we had to, like, postpone it. And my family was in Abu Dhabi, and his family was in Palestine, and me and him were in the US, so it was kind of, like, how are we going to get together, all of us, and, like...

I: Meet?

R: Yeah, meet up, you know. So, when we got engaged his family— his mom and brother— they had to come to Abu Dhabi to see my parents, and see me, and be able to, like, gather and discuss everything and just, like, get engaged. So that was a little hassle, as well. And yeah, that was mostly it. I mean, my husband wanted to be settled in a job, in a company and so, but that didn't really happen. He was in his family business and my parents were expecting him to find a stable job in his major, so I mean we just [description in Arabic].

I: You just move past it?

R: Yeah. Because, like, the work can come and go.

I: Like, it can come later, it's not going to be a deciding factor. Whether you get married now or later, kind of thing?

R: Yeah. As long as he can open a house for me and I'm going to be comfortable. Like, if I need anything he would be able to get it for me, then it's fine. It's something he can get settled later after marriage. So, yeah.

I: Who influenced your decision to get engaged or married to this specific person?

R: Because I kind of knew him in school, it was, that I knew, for example, that he doesn't go out with girls, he doesn't spend a lot of time with girls, like flirting or, you know, hanging around or going to clubs, or drinking, or doing bad stuff. So, especially like in the US there are a lot of opportunities for boys and girls to get exposed to that stuff, it's not like overseas, but...

I: You feel like he had good values?

R: Yeah.

I: For being here?

R: Yeah, I think he had the respect of, like, how our religion and... [description in Arabic].

I: Like the cultural part of it, okay.

R: [description in Arabic].

I: Like, his reputation was important to him.

R: Yeah. So, that was one thing. Of course, we had to ask about his family overseas, and how are they and stuff like that. Yeah, but mostly his personality, like the way that he talks, that he thinks and how fun is he and stuff like that.

I: Are there any cultural barriers that you faced, or someone that you know has faced, like for marrying someone from the opposite culture, or different religion?

R: Yeah, of course. I hear a lot of stories about that. Not mainly from someone who's related to me. I hear stories of someone is Muslim and is marrying a non-Muslim, either the parents would not accept that or they wouldn't really be happy about their girl getting married to a non-Muslim or non-Arab. So, I just hear stories, but not personally having experience.

I: Yeah, what is your major, and why did you choose it? Did the possibility of children influence your decision?

R: No, the children did not have anything to do with my decision. I studied supply chain management. I always wanted to be like an engineer, or like a dentist, but it didn't work out because when I studied a year overseas all the credits that I took, when I moved here, when I transferred they said that you have to start all over again if I want to go to engineering. I mean, there were a couple of credits that were counted towards general requirements, but not towards the major itself. So, I was like I don't really want to take that long studying for, especially being a dentist or an engineer— it takes like five or more years, or more than four years for me to get done with that. So, I was like, I really don't want to stay that long studying for all that stuff, so I decided to go for business. Especially supply chain because it was a new major and it wasn't still

out in Abu Dhabi, so I was thinking that if moved back to Abu Dhabi it would be a better opportunity for me to find a better job, because it's something that can be demanded but not covered.

I: Like, there's not enough people to do it?

R: Yeah.

I: Okay.

R: So, it was a plus for me kind of, I was thinking that. And when I studied, I really liked it, so I did my masters, an MBA, but with a concentration in supply chain.

I: Okay. Is there a major career that you would not choose because it might reduce your marriage opportunities?

R: Not really. I didn't really think of that.

I: Would you consider marrying a person older than you?

R: Yes.

I: How many years do you think should be in between you and your partner?

R: Well as long as he's older than me, a year or more, he's fine. Well, it doesn't matter, it really doesn't matter. Like, my husband is two years older than me, so I think that's fine. As long as he's not very old, because if he was, like, ten years apart older than me, maybe there would be a difference in thinking, like he would think differently, more differently than I do. So, being in the same age range that would make us...

I: Click better?

R: Yeah, click better and maybe have close thoughts and views.

I: Would you consider marrying a person who was born and raised outside of the US?

R: Yeah, but also to be like, open minded because like not every person who lives inside the US is, not all the people are the same– some are open minded and some are very closed minded, so that really matters.

I: When it comes to marriage, who would have the major role in decision making?

R: My husband. Like I would give my opinion about many stuff, but like the final decision would mainly go from my husband, because it's mostly something that has to do with our family decisions, like as a whole, it's not only about me. It's something that has to do with my husband, me, and the children, and the house, and everything.

I: What do you think about dating?

R: Not really good. Like, I don't recommend dating, because, like, I think meeting up with your spouse or something, I mean after engagement it's more comfortable for you to know him better because, like you get to go out more with him and see how he acts or something. It's not like, like, you can't really go out with him before getting engaged. Because, first it's haram in our religion, second he might not really be, he might just play with your emotions. He might be, well very friendly, blah, blah, blah, and then he might not be jihad.

I: Like, real? Like, he might not have good intentions, maybe?

R: Yeah, he might not really think really about getting...

I: Like he's not serious?

R: Like he's not serious about, like, getting married and stuff. Maybe he wants to play around.

I: Like, he's not serious about a future.

R: Yeah.

I: Okay.

R: So, I wouldn't really go out with someone before getting engaged just because I wouldn't really trust how he could be after that.

I: Yeah. Do you think the internet and Facebook made it easier for Arab and Muslim Americans to meet their future spouse?

R: Yeah, I think a lot of people, like if people were engaged and they wanted to, each one is in a different country, and they want to get along or know each other better they're obviously going to use the phones and internet and all of that stuff—all of the applications. So, like, contact, so.

I: Do you think community events, such as wedding are places where people tend to see future spouses and proceed from there? Like wedding or conventions? Like any big gathering?

R: Yeah, like use that as a way to...?

I: Find a husband or wife?

R: Yeah. I think that that's not a bad idea. I mean, you get exposed to see more people and a lot of people actually got engaged or married through that. It doesn't really have to be the guy seeing a girl or something, even the moms or sisters of the guy can look for a girl in the wedding. Or see how she acts or how nice she is and go from there. That happens a lot in our culture.

I: Would you think in a family of more than one daughter marriage restrictions and processes would vary from the oldest daughter to the youngest?



R: Yes, I think so. Like my family, for example, when my, should I explain in more detail?

I: Yeah, go ahead.

R: Like, my oldest sister she married a Palestinian guy who does not really, who cannot enter Palestine. So, after that, because whenever she wants to go visit Palestine with her kids it would be a hassle for her because it's, like...

I: Because he cannot go with her?

R: Yeah, and going through the jizur in Jordan and stuff like that, because we don't have an airport so she needs her husband to be with her, like to support her and stuff. So that was a hassle. So, parents decided not to, after that, not to let us marry someone who cannot enter Palestine. But then that happened for three— me and two other sisters— but then the youngest one,

her husband has the Canadian passport, so he doesn't really have the Palestinian ID to get into Palestine, but because he had the Canadian passport, he's still able to get into Palestine.

I: Okay.

R: So, my family accepted that just because he had the...

I: Because there's that possibility.

R: Yeah.

I: Okay, so next I'd like to discuss parenting with you. In what ways, if any, do you think boys should be raised differently from girls?

R: I think they should always be same way. I don't know, like, they should all have the same values. I don't really think that a boy can go out with a girl just because he's a boy, and a girl cannot because, like in our culture they put most of the stuff on the girl's side. Like if they see a girl and guy going out, they would first talk about the girl and her reputation and stuff like that. But it's also that the guy should have respect and know his limits and stuff like that, so I think they both have to be raised the same way, in terms of values, but also the girls are more emotional and stuff like that, so I think we have to be more, we have to care more about their emotions and, like be, because they're more sensitive and stuff like that, so in...

I: You have to be there for her a little bit more, you think? Or like in different ways.

R: Or like talk to her in a way that doesn't really affect her emotions.

I: Okay.

R: The boys can...

I: Like in a sensitive way?

R: Yeah. Like, boys can maybe think of stuff in different ways so they would be fine with something, but that could not be the case for the girls.

I: What kind of husband or wife would you like for your children in the future?

R: I mean, it's different. We don't know how's it going to be in the future generation, like with all the technology coming out and stuff. I feel like the new generation is very open to many things, so I think the way that, whenever my kids get older and they're in the age of getting married it's going to be more stuff thinking about. Like, it would be hard for us to really say if a guy is really good because all of these opportunities that are open for him and he would be like very exposed to many things. It's not like, the age of my mother or father where all they use to

go out is just like between school, house, like the parents would do all of the decisions for them. Now the kids, they're...

I: More independent.

R: Yeah, they're more independent and they have their word in the house and they decide about many stuff, like if they didn't want something you really can't force them.

I: Change their mind?

R: Yeah, you really can't force them to do something. It's not like before. My mother used to say that before if her dad would, like, look at her she would really understand that 'Oh my God, I

have to, I did something wrong or something,' you know? So, they use to give more respect to their parents, you know?

I: Yeah.

R: I think the future generation is not like that. So, I think it's going to harder for me to know, but mostly I want someone who's religious, friendly, understandable and who cares about, like it's my daughter, cares about her feelings. And is, like open minded. I don't want him to restrict her if she wants to do something that's something within the limits and is not haram or something, like, let her do it. Do not restrict her.

I: Do you think they'd have to be from the same culture or homeland?

R: Yeah, preferably.

I: So, the next questions are going to be about your culture and how you define yourself. So, how would you identify yourself?

R: As a, in terms of my personality or...

I: Yeah, you in general, like your religion.

R: Alhamdulillah I feel that I've accomplished many stuff in life so far. I've seen many places, dealt with so many people. I wanted to move and get more exposed and be more responsible and I did that. I studied. I got married. Alhamdulillah, I had a child, so I'm satisfied with wherever I am right now.

I: Okay.

R: I just hope that if anything I would want to improve more in my religion and maybe, you know the obligations that we have, like we use the Quran and stuff like that.

I: Yeah.

R: I would want myself to work more on that.

I: Like proactive in your religion?

R: Yeah.

I: Okay. Can you tell me about the places and building you spent a lot of your time today?

R: Visiting friends, home, going to the hospital for doctor check-ups and stuff like that. Not a lot of places. Milwaukee is very, like, doesn't have a lot of places to go to, especially in winter.

I: Yeah.

R: So, it's more restricted. I don't like. I feel like the weather would be warmer, I would have more opportunities to go out and walk, like I would go to the river, or I could go more to the lake, have some coffee out, walk, you know.

I: What languages do you speak at home?

R: Arabic. Like, I know English and French, but we don't use that a lot. I mean, we use English with my siblings and stuff, especially that they studied here so we kind of communicate in English a lot. But yeah, mostly in Arabic.

I: How would you describe your religious life? Like, do you attend the mosque on a regular basis?

R: I would like to.

I: Or do you participate in different community activities?

R: I would love to, but I really don't sometimes because of the limitations and, I don't know. I don't really, I don't always have the chance to go to every event or like Islamic event they do, so I would love to be more involved in that, but the situation sometimes it just doesn't happen that I can go or something.

I: So, do you regularly vote when it comes to elections and stuff?

R: Yeah, I voted for Obama, but after that I don't know. Yeah, I want to vote for the next presidential.

I: Election?

R: Yeah.

I: Do you read the daily newspaper?

R: No. My bad.

I: What are your connections with your homeland? Like, have you visited it? Or did you return to any of the places that you described earlier, like in the UAE?

R: Yeah, I love going there for a visit and stuff, and going to see the family, and go out with the friends, and stuff like that. And even, like, to Palestine– it's like a whole new other experience, like the trees and the nature of it is something that's not in the UAE or not here. So, like there you can go to your own farm and pick up fruits from your trees, and stuff like that. So, it's a whole new nice experience that I love. So, as much as I get the chance to, me and my husband, we would want to go back there, and also see the family and get more social life. Yeah, so I would want to go back.

I: Do you still have relatives there that you're in contact with?

R: Yeah, sure.

I: Have you encouraged your family back home to come visit you? Or come live here?

R: Yes. I mean my family members– they come and visit every once and awhile so, which is nice. But in terms of convincing someone to stay here, like I was, like, part of my brother's decision to come study here. So, I kind of advised him to come here. So, I would recommend it. So, it's something that will help his personality to get stronger, and stuff like that, so why not?

I: In what ways, if any, have political events in your homeland affected you here?

R: Not really anything. I mean, just the [description in Arabic].

I: The occupation?

R: Yeah, the occupation in Palestine, and the stereotype of terrorism and stuff like that some people think that all Arabs or all Muslims are terrorists, and this is not the case. All that stuff affects us in a bad way– where we don't have anything to do with it. So, I mean people should be more clear about this idea of terrorism and hijab and the religious stuff that we do.

I: We you in the United States on September 11<sup>th</sup>?

R: No.

I: Do you have a traditional or cultural clothing?

R: Yes.

I: How many do you have? Would you say a couple, or a lot?

R: I mean the UAE, abayas I have three to four– I think I have three abayas. The Palestinian dress or the thobe, like I don't really have one for myself, but I would love to. I used to always rent ones for any occasions and stuff like that. I would rent them, but I don't really personally have one, but I would want to get one.

I: And when do you wear them?

R: In parties, like the Palestinian thobe is for, mainly for occasions and parties and weddings, but the abayas, like, I can go out with them, go shopping, especially in United Arab Emirates– I can

go out with them anytime, but not here. Here I only wear them if I want to go to the parties or I'm wearing something that's for a party, get it covered so I wear the abaya.

I: How do you feel when you wear them?

R: Here in the US or anywhere?

I: Anywhere. Or you can discuss both, it doesn't matter.

R: Here, I feel kind of special, although people would look at me in a way, like, 'What is she wearing? What is that?' They might not really know what I'm wearing, but in a way, it could be something nice that introduces my culture and I'm proud of it. Also, overseas if I wear the abayas I feel that I'm involved with, like, how girls there wear their abayas. So, I feel like I'm like them— I'm not, like, different. And also, the Palestinian thobe, it's really nice that I love to wear— it's, like, special in a way.

I: What does the traditional cultural clothing mean to you? Like, why are they important?

R: They're very important because they refresh our, or they represent our culture and they keep it going on, like, with the new generations and stuff. So, it's important for us to stick with it.

I: Do you think religion plays a role in this clothing?

R: Yeah, kind of, because the abaya is mostly a religious thobe that you can wear, like clothing that you can wear and it covers all your parts, so that's really easy for us, especially with the hijab— it's, like, very convenient for you to wear it with a hijab.

I: Who influenced you to continue to wear your traditional cultural clothing?



R: I mean the people around me— family members, but also, I'm convinced about it, so I don't really need someone to force me to wear it. I just like it, so I do it.

I: Did your mother wear the traditional dresses?

R: Yes.

I: Did she pass any down to you?

R: From hers?

I: Yes.

R: I mean, they don't really fit me. She didn't, but I mean she passed a couple of her clothes that she used to wear when she was skinnier. They weren't something traditional, but she had some clothes that she kept for herself and they're nice, so she wanted to keep them for us.

I: Okay. Have you purchased any of the cultural clothing on your own?

R: Well, I used to pick up the design. I would go with my mom, she would take me to the places where they tailor, or tailor them, but I used to pick up whatever design I wanted.

I: Do you think they look like the dresses your mother wore? Or are they more modernized?

R: More modernized.

I: Where did you get your dresses from?

R: From stores that they tailor abayas and stuff like that.

I: And would you pass them down to your children?

R: If that tradition was still going on.

I: Okay.

R: Yeah, why not?

I: Is there anything about your history that you'd like to tell me?

R: Not really, but it was nice having my childhood in United Arab Emirates. It was like a spoiled childhood kind of. So, Alhamdulillah it was a nice one, but maybe I missed the part where, because like, I miss the part where, like, I wanted to feel more about having my grandpa, of grandfather and grandmother involved with us, and that really wasn't the case. Like, when I was born both of my grandfathers were dead, and one of my grandmothers also was dead, so I just had my mom's mom, and she was living in Palestine. So, we weren't really involved with her that much and I really miss that part where like, some people say that we really love our grandmas or like grandfathers, and we really remember in our children where she used to tell us stories or make us bread or something, you know? So, I feel that that part was nice to have, or get involved more with Palestine, like living in it. But, I mean, it's fine.

I: Are there any particular services or resources that you think the Arab and Muslim Research and Resource Institute should provide?

R: I zoned out for a little.

I: Do you think there are any services or resources that we should provide for, like, for example the Islamic community or the women that are here in Milwaukee?

R: Yeah, I think having prayer rooms in the malls would be a nice idea, or like outdoors, or any other places. Like, at Rockwell they use to have a prayer room. It was very convenient because I, at the beginning, I didn't really know about it, and I was praying in my office. So once one of my co-workers came in and I was praying and that was embarrassing because he was like, 'Oops, like, I'm sorry I interrupted something.' I was like, 'Oh my God, I'm embarrassed. I don't know,' I mean not embarrassed that I'm praying, I'm just embarrassed that it's not the proper place pray in, but that was the only place that I could pray in. So, when I knew that there was a prayer room, that was very, very helpful.

I: Do you have any other family or friends you think we should interview?

R: Oh yeah, my sister when she comes in for a visit or something.

I: Okay.

R: But one of the first questions you asked about the places where I used to go in Abu Dhabi— it wasn't just home and school, it was a lot more. We used to go on trips to some other places. Like, it was fun. We used to go out a lot. But also, the weather was kinda so...

I: Thank so much for your time and your information.