



Oral History Project Interview

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

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Gender: Female

Name: Yasmeeen Atta

Country of Origin: United States

Year of Immigration: Born in U.S.

Abstract: Yasmeeen Atta is a senior at Marquette University studying nursing. In this interview, she discusses a variety of topics including her upbringing and education, family values, Palestinian heritage, and cultural/religious traditions. The interviewee briefly touches on community responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and describes recent adaptations in Muslim religious celebrations. Additionally, the interviewee emphasizes the importance of religious practices and traditions in her community, and how they have influenced her personal values over time.

Key Themes: Religion, family, heritage, Palestine, marriage, healthcare, faith, henna

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

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

R: My name is Yasmeen Atta, I am 22 years old, and I am currently a senior in college... At Marquette University.

I: [Laughs] Thank you. So, second, when you were growing up, where did you go to school, did you go to public schools, community schools or a private religious school?

R: I went to public school from K4 to seventh grade, that was when we lived in the Glendale Fox Point area of Wisconsin, kind of near Bayshore Mall if you're familiar, and then we eventually moved to be closer to where my dad is working, and then ah, from eighth grade to high school I went to a private Muslim school.

I: Ok. Let's see... Tell me about places and buildings you spent a lot of time during your childhood.

R: Ooh, I don't know how I didn't see this question. [Laughs] Let's see. In my childhood, a lot of the memories are spending time with my grandparents because I lived with my grandparents, which I consider to be a huge blessing. My grandpa passed away a couple years ago, God rest his soul, and he would often kind of drive us around, he would take us to the mall or take us to different places just to spend time with him, take us to the park, those are some of my earliest memories. Going to the Mosque, also from a very young age, that has become my second home. It's a place that was super familiar to me from very young, and my mom would joke that I've been there since before I was born, because I really was, when she was pregnant- and you know, if you go to the Mosque to pray or for the Friday prayers or for different events. Until we grew up playing with the kids there and playing around with everyone, so I would definitely say the Mosque would be a huge factor. And then, going to my cousin's houses too, that's also how we were raised, spending a lot of time with family. Those are some of my greatest memories too.

I: So, did you always grow up in the Milwaukee area? Is that where you-

R: Yes.

I: Ok. And then did you always go to the same Mosque, too? Or was that- did that change?

R: Yes.

I: Ok. Is that also like- What area of Milwaukee is that?

R: That is on 13th and Layton, it's called the Islamic Society of Milwaukee. I've actually mentioned it to a couple Burkes before, who are like, interested in seeing it. And, of course with Covid, that's- that has changed a little. But I think soon it might be possible uh- because they do tours all the time. So yes, it is in Milwaukee and I have gone to the same Mosque ever since I was young until now.

I: Ok. Let's see. Tell me more about your home, school, or some such building that you remember fondly. Describe the various rooms. Who lived there, who shared these spaces, and what activities happened there?

R: I could describe my childhood home. It is a ranch type house. So, you have one floor, and of course, the basement. I vividly remember sharing a room with my older sister, and that's how we became super close. We are only a year and a half apart, so you can imagine with the closeness in age, we were very close when we were young. Then eventually my younger brother and younger sister came along as well, and so all of us within that house, with my parents and my grandparents were very tight knit and as I mentioned earlier, it's an environment that I'm super grateful to have the opportunity to have been in. Because I know that being- Living with your grandparents is not something that a lot of people get to experience, and it was such a great opportunity to be able to get closer to them. So, that's my childhood home. And then... What else would I remember fondly? I mean, the Mosque, of course, because I go there often, I still remember every single corner of it. But those from when I was younger, the main places.

I: Ok. So, were your parents also in the home with your grandparents, then- or?

R: Yes.

I: Ok. So, was that a lot of people in the house, then, cause you said four siblings, your parents-

R: Yes.

I: Wow!

R: So, yeah. Thinking back to it now, it's a lot of people.

I: [Laughs]

R: Because we are a family of six. With like, my parents and four kids. So, three siblings total, with four including myself, so that's a family of six, and then, my two grandparents.

I: Wow. So, maternal or paternal grandparents?

R: Uh, paternal.

I: Ok.

R: Yes.

I: Interesting... I've never had that experience, so that's- I've definitely like taken care of my grandparents, but not... You know, having them live with me.

R: Yeah, and when my grandpa eventually passed away, that was something that I took with me. The fact that I have those memories of living with him for fourteen years... was a huge part of the coping process, and remembering everything that we shared. So, yeah.

I: Aw. Ok. Tell me how you felt about being Muslim in these different spaces. How did you feel like you expressed your Muslim identity differently in these different places?

R: I guess I could talk about school. So, obviously. Ok so- BACKTRACK! From elementary to middle school, as I mentioned, I was in public school, at the time, I didn't wear a hijab, so I kind of just blended in with everyone else. An interesting aspect though, about my childhood is- I remember my mom coming during periods of our like religious holidays like Ramadan and Eid, and she would like talk about what fasting is and what we do, she would also share aspects of Palestinian culture and she would like bring in sweets to like share with everyone, and... That was just a way for the students to just kind of learn about who we are, learn about my family and where we come from because it was a fairly diverse school district. But, there were not many Muslims and not many Arabs, so that was a way of kind of educating people in a way that was also fun, too. My mom did wear the hijab at that time- still does, and so that was kind of a sign of- Oh ok, they are quote-unquote different from us in some way, and so this was a way since I was very young for her to kind of come in to the class and teach about our culture, teach about our faith in a way that was very applicable to obviously, younger children... Other than that, my Muslim identity definitely comes more into play in college, because I am visibly Muslim [Gestures to hijab] so, I think that's gonna be talked about later.

I: Yeah.

R: [Laughs] Ok, we can leave it at that for now.

I: Ok, let's see. Are you currently employed, which includes working outside the home? If so, what's your job?

R: Yes. I work as a nurse extern, so intern, extern, so it's called an externship in nursing, in an intensive care unit, right now.

I: What hospital?

R: Aurora.

I: Ok.

R: Yes, I wanted to be close to campus. So.

I: Have you been there for a while?

R: Uh, I actually recently started. So I volunteered at that hospital before, my sophomore year, and then I had a clinical rotation there last June, so I actually only just started in January of this year. So, pretty recent.

I: Ok. Interesting! So I guess a question I have is- Would you say that being Muslim, does that impact the way that you give care in your job? Or does it have an impact?

R: Being Muslim definitely impacts the way I see myself as a nurse, and the way that my patients see me. I chose nursing for several reasons, but one of the main ones was because of how personal it was to me, just because of a personal experience that I had when I was young, and the care of the nurse that I had was incredible. And so that was the first push that led me to nursing, and over time I realized how much it mattered to me and part of that was through my faith and being able to serve others. Nurses really serve people in their most vulnerable moments, and that's super important for me, and being able to represent my faith while doing so at the same time is kind of an incredible part of it and of course that's not something that's necessarily talked about in that setting, unless of course I'm asked questions.

I: Mhm.

R: It's just something that's there, but it's very visibly there.

I: Mhm.

R: So, it's nice to be able to kind of remember that as I'm going through my day.

I: Ok, so. The next questions are about your culture and how you define yourself. So, I guess this first question's kind of broad. It's just: How do you identify yourself?

R: I identify as Palestinian-American, and Muslim woman.

I: Ok, just, yeah- The next question here is just which culture or cultures do you most identify with? Like, if any?

R: I definitely see a balance within myself between both Palestinian and American cultures. That are both part of my identity, but, the culture that I most at home with is my Palestinian one, and that's simply based on how I was raised and our practices that were taught to us, of course the everyday things like, food and events and the way we dress has been obviously a huge part of where I come from and something I'm very proud of and I don't see it as a clash at all with my American culture, it's just an extra part of me that is pretty fun [Laughs].

I: I like that! So, uh, do you feel the way that you identify yourself changes with where you are, the place you are? If yes, how?

R: Not necessarily, I see myself as the same person, of course, wherever I go, but I do think that certain parts of my identity can- I don't want to say shine through, but kind of be more relevant depending on where I am. So, obviously with the aspect of like, wearing the hijab, my Muslim identity is always on full display, whereas my Palestinian one doesn't necessarily come up in that much of an obvious manner.

I: Mhm.

R: It is something though, that I do talk about a lot, simply because of what it means to be Palestinian. So, in certain settings, when I do bring out that part of myself, that is what I love to discuss, that is what I love to have to shine through, simply to be able to educate people about a side that they may not know is part of me. So, other than that, though, yeah, that's pretty much it.

I: So, I guess this kind of, like you said, you are able to educate people more about that part of yourself, are there places other than that, where you feel your best, where you can most successfully express your identity?

R: Through being in college, I have actually found that has been really helpful in helping me to express my identity and to kind of just be very open. And, a lot of that has been from people simply asking questions, whether it's about faith, or whether it's about culture, I feel very comfortable in expressing that and talking about it which, I know is something that not a lot of people get to experience depending on whether- where they go to school, the people who may be surrounding them, whatever the circumstances are. Of course when I'm with my family, I- and when we have- Or when I'm with other Palestinians at events or different cultural... parties, I guess? I- My pride and my Palestinian culture goes through the roof because you are just having such a great time and you're with your people.

I: Mhm.

R: But, being able to educate others about it is a different sort of expression of my identity that I enjoy just as much.

I: So, what traditions of your religion or culture do you practice? I know you just mentioned cultural parties.

R: Yes! [Laughs] Pre-Covid! A lot of the cultural parties that come to mind are often related to weddings and engagement parties, within Palestinian culture and Arab culture in general, they are usually pretty extravagant, the one night- er, two nights before the wedding there is something called the henna party, where fresh henna is made and then it's placed like, on the bride's hands, the groom's hands, usually the most elaborate designs will be like- designed on the bride, and then the groom and the bride will do something symbolic where they'll write their initials on each other's hands.

I: Awww.

R: It's kind of cute to be able to witness, but truly just being able to wear the Palestinian thobe, which is like, our traditional dress- that'll be spelled T-H-O-B-E, if you want to spell that.

I: Thank you.

R: Being able to wear traditional dress and being in that environment of music and fun and dancing, really does, just cultivate that pride in your culture. So, that's definitely a big one when

it comes to parties. Even being with family and thinking about other practices that we have, sometimes it's so much a part of your life, everyday stuff that you forget that you do it. [Laughs] Let's see, I'm thinking also with faith, what would also come into play. I did see a question kind of related to- I'll say it here so you can figure out where you want to place it.

I: Mhm.

R: But in terms of faith it is a big tradition, it is prayer. And so, that can come into play in various ways. So, we have five prayers that are spaced throughout the day, but, I would say that a tradition comes in that- of praying whenever you feel like you need to, or you want to become closer to God. And just being able to just spend that time alone because seclusion and just kind of connecting with God in your own personal way is kind of how Islam really started. Like, that's how it began with the Prophet Muhammad, and when the verses were revealed to him, he was completely alone, and then later reflected on those verses. So that's definitely a huge part of how we practice our faith, but it is also rooted in community at the same time, and I think through being Muslim and being Palestinian, community is a huge aspect that I have been raised on, just being able to rely on others, whether family, friends, for whatever it is that you may need is a core part of both my faith and my culture.

I: Yeah, community is huge, I think that's why I chose Marquette, that's the first thing that stuck out to me, I totally get where you're coming from.

R: Sure.

I: Do you use food recipes that you learned from your parents or grandparents?

R: Yes! Is the question whether I make them myself... Hm. I don't know. [Laughs]

I: [Laughs]

R: So, I will help my mom make the traditional foods, I'll say that. I genuinely do enjoy cooking, but the foods of like, Palestinian culture are like, in a realm of their own, and so I'm learning how to, of course, use my mom's recipes and my grandma's recipes to make them in the most authentic way, because you can look up a Palestinian food or an Arab food online and you can make it based off the instructions, presumably it would be written by an Arab person, which would be the preference that it's authentic, but every mom and every grandma will have their own ways of making the recipe and their own twist on it, their own dash of a certain ingredient, so that's been awesome to kind of be with them in the kitchen and learn about their little tips and tricks.

I: Do you follow any food restrictions?

R: Yes, I do eat halal meat, so essentially what that means is, you know, the basis of it is no meat from a pig and any like, pork by-products like gelatin or anything like that.

I: Ok, and then, what would you consider to be your favorite food?

R: If I'm talking about Arab food, it would have to be- Or specifically Palestinian food in this case, it would be, maklooba, and that is spelled M-A-K-L-O-O-B-A.

I: [Writing spelling down] Ok, thanks.

R: It's essentially- It literally means upside-down. And so what it is, is you have a big pot and you layer in different vegetables like onions, or- Not onions... you layer in potatoes and carrots at the bottom and then that is layered with chicken and rice that is spiced and then eventually after everything cooks you completely flip the pot over, bearing in mind that it is very heavy, and it looks like a mountain in the shape of a pot, and it's delicious. And it's one of those things that's considered to be a delicacy and you know that when you make it, you are just going to have a great meal, it'll be a great time sitting around with your family and it's usually served with plain yogurt on the side and like salad, so- Like the Arab version of the salad that we make, so it's delicious.

I: That sounds really cool! I think I've seen a video of somebody like, turning a pot upside-down and I was like, what is that?!

R: [Laughs] It takes a lot of time, which is why it's considered very special when it's made, and very much appreciated and it's filled with a lot of love, so it's worth it, it's worth the time.

I: Yeah, I definitely want to try that some day, it sounds really good!

R: [Laughs] You shall, you shall.

I: Ok, so you said you're not, I guess, cooking-wise, you don't have a lot of experience.

R: No.

I: So how do you find the necessary ingredients to make Arab food?

R: So, we often find ingredients at one of the local Arab stores, of which there are several in Milwaukee, and something about these stores that I'd like to share is how at home I feel when I'm in them, and I don't know why. There's just something about them and the scent of the different spices and produce and groceries around you just makes you feel a sense of happiness, and calm and feeling like, oh, this is where I belong, and it's really weird! But it just feels nice to just be in that kind of environment and know that you're buying foods that have been bought by generations before you or have been used by generations before you. And then it'll culminate into a wonderful meal. So, I generally really love going to Arab grocery stores especially because of living on campus, that's not something that I do very often, so when I come back home and there's an opportunity to go on a trip with someone, I will do that, I'm all for it.

I: Ok let's see, in what ways, if any, do you participate in cultural or religious activities?

R: So, cultural I mentioned the different weddings and from like parties that are sometimes held, religious-wise a big activity, I don't know if it's an activity, but Friday prayers, Friday's are the holiest day for Muslims, and that is the day when we go to the Mosque, if you are able, and you listen to the sermon and there is a special prayer that is specific to the holiest day, that again as I mentioned earlier with going to the Mosque when I was young, that is the main way that happened, is through the Friday prayer, and being able to see the community around me, and of course when I was young, and the sermon is on and my little self is either playing around or playing with the other kids, and that has been a pretty core tenet of my life, again, from a young age, other than that our community does hold different events just to kind of discuss spirituality or faith, or kind of like bring in guest speakers, it kind of just helps to kind of keep you on that path, just maintaining closeness to God and maintaining closeness to your faith, so, that is something that always makes me feel very refreshed whenever I am able to attend them and it's a really grateful, it's something that I'm very grateful for.

I: So, how would you describe your religious life, then?

R: Hmm, ok. That's a very interestingly framed question.

I: You can answer in bits and pieces if you'd like.

R: Yeah, yeah, no for sure. So I mentioned that I was raised going to my Mosque, and I do think that had a big impact in the way I practice my religion because especially again, with living on campus, I do not go to the Mosque as often as I probably would have if I did live at home. And so before the pandemic, when there were times where I was home for the weekend, or let's say, the Mosque was holding an event on a Friday evening, it felt so nice to be able to go back there, and I specifically remember feeling comforted, and like a sense of, the- being reunited with something that I had been separated from for a long time and of course, prayer is something that can be done anywhere, we consider the entire Earth a place of prayer, and of course, using my apartment or that prayer room that's in the AMU, it's also a way to maintain that, but there's something different in comparison, when you go to the Mosque that you've been raised in from a young age, so that's definitely had a big impact. In terms of attending on a regular basis, like I said, not as much now just because of being on campus, but, before that yes, I would try to go fairly often, either for different events that are happening, or simply to pray.

I: And then, yeah, I guess the next the question- Where do you pray or how often do you pray?

R: Yeah, so. We have five prayers, as I mentioned, throughout the day, first one is before sunrise, the last one is in the late evening, depending on the time of the year, because with the time of the sun setting, it changes of course. So, I, the main place I pray now is my apartment. I- In the first couple years of college, I would spend a lot of time praying in the musallah, I'll spell that for you in sec, which is the prayer room on- In the AMU specifically, designated as a Muslim prayer room, and that's spelled, M-U-S-A-L-L-A-H.

I: Thank you!

R: No problem, and that is not for me, that is not only a place to pray, but also just a place to relax because it was very quiet, and if I needed to just clear my mind, that's a place that I would go, again now with scheduling and of course the pandemic, I... pray more in my own apartment, but it is definitely a daily practice in my life.

I: Alright, who mostly does the cooking in your household?

R: That would be my mom. She does most of the cooking in the household.

I: Ok. Alright, can you describe your kitchen? How does your kitchen feel different from your friends' kitchens?

R: I don't think my kitchen feels too different, but there are definitely certain aspects that are very Palestinian. And I think that just comes down to the ingredients that we use, whether it's the bag of rice that will never disappear, because that is such a core part of what we eat, or the vermicelli, which are essentially little pieces of pasta put inside the rice, the spices that we use, the giant bottle of olive oil, that is a core part of we use when we cook, which goes for most people, but in Palestinian culture olive oil is seen as the cure all of every ailment.

I: Oh... Ok. What language or languages do you speak?

R: I speak English, Arabic, and VERY minimal Spanish. I used to be much more fluent in Spanish, and in that time where I mentioned that I went to public school through middle and high school, I actually took Spanish since K4, that's how our district worked. So I believe that is a total of nine years from K4 to seventh grade, and I one hundred percent want to get back into it because the only way you can really maintain a language is if you practice it, and especially being in the healthcare field, that is a huge tool to be able to speak another language, since we are in the U.S., with Spanish being a very common language, it's something that I want to be able to adapt in my own practice. So that's a task that's been on my mind, as for Arabic, I was raised with Arabic, actually as my first language so that's how I was raised when I was young, my- in my childhood we would speak Arabic with my parents and grandparents, over time, with public school, we started speaking more English, and it has definitely faded from what it was before. But, I do still try to speak it with my parents so that we can kind of maintain the language, since that is something, I don't want to lose.

I: Yeah, definitely. So did you parents introduce you to more to English, or was it public schools that taught you English?

R: I would say both, because both my parents are fluent in English. So, for a lot of my friends, who are either Palestinian or from other cultures in which they were also raised speaking languages other than English, their parents are not as fluent in English, and so they kind of picked up on it through going to school and still came home and spoke their native language with their parents, whereas in my family, the same thing happened, but because both my parents also speak fluent English, it became kind of a mixed bag of speaking English and Arabic with them, that's how it's been for us.

I: What are your connections with your parents' or grandparents' homeland?

R: This is... I love this question. So, my grandparents were both born in Palestine, my dad was born in Palestine, and my mom was born here. But my dad- when my grandma came to the U.S., she came with my dad when he was young. Palestine is a huge part of my identity, it is, something that as I mentioned, I love speaking about and educating others on, whether it is related to the struggle of Palestinians for liberation, or simply discussing our culture and why it is so incredible, I have been to Palestine. I have been when I was very young, and I don't remember that time of course, but there have been a couple of times since then, I don't remember how many, the last time, I want to say, was seven or eight years ago. So it has definitely been awhile. But, there are certain aspects that I remember so vividly, I do have relatives there that I am in contact with, we do- Whenever we call them we are able to discuss how things are going here, and how things are going there, and it's always interesting to hear their updates and be able to remember the time we spent with them, whether it's my aunt and uncles, my cousins, and of course I miss them so much. And... I have definitely encouraged them to visit, they have visited before, they've come to the U.S., usually it's for a big special occasion, like a close family member's wedding, so they have visited there. As for living here, we have discussed with them in kind of a light-hearted manner, but I know that Palestine is home for them at the end of the day, just as the U.S. for me, is home. And I've actually thought to myself what life would be like if I lived in Palestine, and when we do go there, we spend the entire summer, overseas. And it really gives you a good look into the culture and just the ways that people structure their days... It is so different from here, but in such a beautiful way to be able to experience that. But I don't know, it's something that I question whether it could be a possibility one day, simply because I have been so used to the lifestyle here.

I: Mhm. Next question: Do you read the daily newspaper?

R: You know, I just thought of something with this. I do not read the daily newspaper in the sense of the physical paper that comes to your house every day. But, when I was young, my dad would always read the Sunday paper, and sometimes I would get it for him from the driveway and he would read his section of the news, of course, and I would go to straight to the comics, and that is an aspect of my childhood that I sometimes forget about, but when I do think back I remember it very fondly, I saved certain comics, and of course I would read the recipe sections too, as I mentioned I really do enjoy cooking. So I guess that would pertain to which sections that interested me as a child, as for right now, I usually get my news from online publications, especially those that are local to Milwaukee, like the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, we also grew up watching a lot of CNN [Laughs] so that is on pretty often in my household, and I do of course, get news from there as well. I try to pull from a variety of a different sources, because seeing the ways that certain pieces of news are published, depending on the publication, is very interesting to me, and I like analyzing how different things are framed.

I: Very good point. Let's see... In what ways, if any have political events in your parents' or grandparents' homeland affected you?

R: I don't know where to start with that!

I: Yeah, that's a loaded question.

R: Uhm... That's so loaded. Uhm... So. How do I frame this? So... political events in my parents' and grandparents' homeland have affected me in ways that many people might not expect. And I will explain that. I mentioned the importance of educating others, on what Palestinians experience, and at some point it does take a toll on you. And I have noticed this in situations where I am reading an article about Palestine for an event that happened, and I will think about it later on and it just hits you. And you think- You realize that this is something that is actually happening, this isn't just something that's on a piece of paper, just something that I read online, this is actively happening, and a lot of people either don't know, don't care, or condone it.

I: Mhm.

R: So, it really does have an impact in some moments, on my mental health. At the same time, it makes me think of the trauma that my grandparents went through, in 1948, it is called the Nakba, or The Catastrophe, and that is when Israel officially became a state. Over 700,000 thousand Palestinians were expelled from Palestine, and that ultimately led to one of the world's largest refugee crises, you will find Palestinians in many, many areas of the world, including Latin American, and it's just interesting to see how their cultures have kind of interconnected in that way, because of being raised in these regions- If that makes sense.

I: Mhm.

R: So I do think about that, and how these events, which some may say are political, but in my eyes, just comes down to humanity and how these events do impact my grandparents in the place they were raised. This is their home, as in Palestine is their home, and they have seen so much that I have not seen, and I cannot help but wonder what they think about when they reflect on everything that has happened, uhm... yeah. That's definitely like, a huge part for me.

I: So I guess in that same vein, like, have you ever taken action on any of the situations in Palestine? Have you led, or done any activism, I guess?

R: So, protests were a huge part of my childhood that I can remember, especially in Milwaukee, and speaking out for Palestinians and seeing the amount of people that would show up and support us, there is a pretty large Palestinian and Arab community in Milwaukee, but we would receive support from people from so many different backgrounds, so many different faiths who are joining us on the fight for social justice, because we are in the U.S. and kind of part of the diaspora, so to speak, it can be hard knowing that direct action is not always possible. As in, action that would affect those that are on the ground. Of course, we can always donate, we can support financially to support we can contribute financially to support those who are in Gaza, which is a very small strip of land in Palestine that... essentially, is an open-air prison. And, that is one way to definitely support those who are on the ground, but, when it comes to violations of human rights, there is only so much you can do. We can raise awareness about it, and I can tell you that it definitely does have an impact in some situations, whether it's on politicians or human rights organizations, but at the end of the day, we cannot change apartheid and ethnic cleansing

simply from making social media posts. The best we can do is educate others, but I have a huge value on doing that, because when one person is educated, that spreads to others, and I do think that the tide in the past few years has been changing on people becoming aware of what is going on. As for getting information about the homeland, there are Palestinian publication that I turn to quite often. That say things for what they are. There is, uhm, a so-called liberal Zionist publication that is pretty popular, it's called Haartz, and uhm, that is a way of also getting further information and simply seeing how they frame what has happened... In the sense of- It's an interesting publication because it's focused on Israel and it's an Israeli publication but it will share things that happen to Palestinians, it's just that it's obviously framed in a very biased way. Whereas, Palestinian publications I turn to, as I mentioned, say things for what they are. When... Mainstream news media, uhm, shares news that has happened in Palestine it is... always DISGUSTING. Always makes me, uhm... Fairly angry because the blame is put on Palestinians no matter what the, uhm, no matter what has happened. Uhm, so that can be frustrating because not a lot of people share what is happening to Palestinians. Of course, we get information from our family members as well, I remember recently my mom was on the phone with her aunt and her sister, and she mentioned that they were sleeping and they had heard some sort of like-bombs, or like, explosions... And this is just the type of thing that Palestinians go through on a daily basis, or on a regular basis, and uhm, this is what oppression is, this is what occupation is. So, those are kind of how all my sources tie in together.

I: Moving on to another section, would you want to tell me more about who your parents are? I believe uh, it's on page eight of the questions.

R: Ok. Who are your parents? I will spell this for you. My dad's name is Othman, which is O-T-H-M-A-N. And then, my mom's name is Ahlam, which is A-H-L-A-M.

I: What is their current status? Are they still working, retired, etcetera?

R: My dad, by practice, or by trade, I guess, is a lawyer. I have very fond childhood memories of going to his office where he worked, uhm, and being able to spend time with him, uhm, over the years, he became more involved with our Mosque and he was actually, I believe he was in high school when... He started to be involved with our Mosque and at that time was kind of being renovated and uhm, really helped him to facilitate growth within the Muslim community. And... over time developed leadership positions and kind of wanted to focus solely on that. So that is actually the main- that is actually his job now. He works as the executive director of the Mosque.

I: Oh.

R: He does still have... Of course he had previous clients but he still keeps up with that- but that would be his main job at the moment. And then... my mom, she- mainly, she essentially... How do I say this? I think the word is homemaker, I think?

I: Sure.

R: But, how do I phrase that? Cause she... Hm. There's so much else that she also does within the community. Uhm, just in terms of like volunteer stuff and all that good stuff. So, my mom

does not have what would be considered like a typical job. Uhm, but she is super active within the Muslim community, uhm and community at-large. She would always be part of, uhm, like the PTA at my public school, and she is active in the PTA as well and like, on the board within the Muslim high school in the community. Uhm, so she is both in and out of the house all the time, that is for sure. Uhm, yeah. That is my parents.

I: So, what is their level of education?

R: Uhm, my mom, in Palestine, graduated with a bachelor's in chemistry. She... actually was super interested in pharmacy, the world of pharmacy, and... When she came to the U.S., she intended on uh, continuing her schooling, uhm, and I would have to ask her for more details, but I remember her saying that the transfer of the credits from her previous university did not work out to come here. But, pharmacy has always been- Chemistry in general has always been something she really enjoys and from helping us on our science homework when we were young, she- that was definitely her forte, or however you say the word [Laughs] And then, my dad graduated with his- I guess, in terms of level of education, so that would be graduate school, in terms of law school? Uhm, I guess. If that answers the question.

I: Yes. Uh, moving on again, like, have you ever been personally targeted by Islamophobia that we know has been, just like, on the rise since 9/11? Has anyone ever specifically discriminated against you in an obvious way?

R: In my situation, I am blessed to say that it has never explicitly happened, that I am aware of. And I say that because you would probably remember if something like that happened to you, unless it was THAT bad that you blocked it out. There has never been anything where I have been- there has never been a situation where I generally felt fearful, or like I was being targeted, of course there are situations where you will... Feel stared at, whether in a uhm, condescending way, or in a way that does make you uncomfortable, but nothing that explicitly targeted me physically or verbally. I do remember when I was young, I was with my mom at the mall and... A woman said something to her along the lines of, did you husband make you wear THAT? As in, her hijab. It's so funny to think about the fact that people actually say these things. But that is something that has definitely stuck with me, and... I don't remember exactly what she said, but... Ugh, I wish I do. But I remember her standing up for herself in that situation and saying, No, I am wearing this for my faith and I am wearing this out of my own choice. Uhm, that is definitely something that my parents have emphasized to me from a young age, is standing up for yourself. That actually makes me think of a situation that happened at my Mosque, I believe it was last year, where there's a group that goes around, uhm, not just to Mosques, they go to- they also went to a Black Lives Matter protest, I'm forgetting their name. It doesn't really matter, but, they came with a bunch of signs, saying Jesus Will Save You and... Also some very CRITICAL signs, uhm, just related to Hellfire and... they were on- they weren't exactly on the Mosque premises, I'll send you a video of this, cause there are a couple articles of this.

I: Oh, jeez.

R: [Laughs] Yeah, I'll send you a video. They weren't on the Mosque premises, but they were on the sidewalk, and.. One of the leaders of the group had a megaphone, and was yelling into it all

these horrible things about Muslims and what we believe, and... There is a video on someone's phone, that was being recorded, where someone kind of left the Mosque, and just came to record them, and just record what was happening. Uhm, later found out that that person was my dad [Laughs] I remember watching that back and being like, Baba, how did you not say anything? Cause, like, my dad would be the first person to defend anyone who is being targeted, and... I remember he told me that he simply- he... he framed this in a really good way. From what he told me, he know that if he did speak out, there would be retaliation. And what I got from that was... The importance of defending yourself while... Hand in hand, the importance of not being stupid. For lack of a better term. Because I know myself, and if I was in that situation, I would have said something one-hundred percent. I... would have wanted to... defend my faith, defend my personal beliefs, I would have questioned what is being said, and... that moment taught me the self discipline you need to have in situations where you are not going to get anything positive from the situation if you do speak out. If anything, it is going to be negative, and the story that will be on the news is of you speaking out, not of what they are doing. So those are situations where people have come to our Mosque, and kind of, these protests have happened, but there are also incredible situations with Doors Open Milwaukee, I don't know if you've heard about it. Uhm, but there are different events where people can tour different locations in Milwaukee, and I have kind of served a couple times as a volunteer within my Mosque, giving people tours, uhm, kind of like serving people food, which is always fun because- they love our food.

I: [Laughs]

R: And, that, those positive aspects of people coming to visit our Mosque, absolutely outweigh the negatives. They are much more prevalent than the negative things that happen.

I: Mhm.

R: So, those are things, uhm, that kind of taught me from a young age to stand up for myself, but also make sure that I'm doing so wisely.

I: You mentioned that, when you were young, you didn't wear a hijab. So, like, what age did you start wearing the hijab?

R: This is actually a good question, I could have talked about this too. So, I started wearing the hijab on my sixteenth birthday.

I: Ok.

R: It's something that I had obviously been thinking about for a while, because it is a big decision. Uhm, technically you are... So in Islam, the moment you become responsible for your actions and your practices is when you hit puberty.

I: Ok.

R: And so, hijab is kind of part of that. So, when a woman reaches puberty, that is when it would be, uhm, how do I say this? When a woman reaches puberty, that is when the thought may come

into your mind that wearing the hijab, uhm, within this time in your life. It is not a thing where the first day it comes, it's like, Ok! Time to put on the hijab! Uhm, it is just rooted in the fact that you become responsible for your actions at that age. In my situation, I was not ready during that period of my life, and so I simply didn't put a hijab because I wasn't ready. Uhm, and I think that is a stereotype that a lot of people believe, that it is something you are forced to wear, or uhm, pushed to wear by members of your family. And, that was not the case in my situation at all. My older sister wore it before I did, and, I remember asking her, are you sure you're ok with this? Do you want to wait? Because, she was younger than me, and they wanted, essentially to make sure she was ready for it, because it is a big step.

I: Mhm.

R: Uhm, the same happened to me as well, I don't believe I discussed too much with my family, because that is how I personally uhm, work when it comes to my own decisions. I keep it on the inside and really reflect on it until I'm ready to share it. Uhm, and then eventually I told myself, the time is now, let's do it, I feel ready, and I chose to do it on my birthday, so it's definitely been a big step, it's a huge part of my identity and how I carry myself. You are absolutely a walking representation of Islam, which, can be a heavy responsibility sometimes, but... It is not an expectation that you are going to be perfect, because, that is not how humans work, uhm, being able to represent the faith, in my opinion, so outwardly, is an honor. And, making mistakes is part of what it means to be an individual, and that's not something I try to dwell on. Of course, I always try to work on something if I do know there is room for improvement, which there always is, but at the end of the day, I see this as an honor, and I'm very grateful that I'm able to wear it.

I: Wow, I love the way you worded that. It's not too often you get to ask personal questions like this, so thank you for that. Also, thank you for doing this, I really appreciate it.

R: Yes, thank you for asking me, and I will see you soon.

I: Yup, bye!

R: Bye!