



Oral History Project Interview

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

Number of Interview: SJ 1.00

Date: 9/30/2015

Gender: Female

Name: Anonymous

Country of Origin: Palestine

Year of Immigration: Born in the US

Abstract:

Nada (name changed for confidentiality reasons) is a second-generation woman who has spent most of her life in the Milwaukee area. She identified herself as a Muslim first, and Palestinian American second. She is currently a student at Marquette University where she majors in Clinical Lab Science. Nada grew up with her parents who have incorporated much of their heritage into their life as she was growing up. She was born in Milwaukee as the youngest of her siblings. Although she has spent most of her life in the United States, she feels a great sense of pride in her Palestinian heritage. Growing up she visited Palestine numerous times during her school vacations. Nada attended Milwaukee Public Schools for all her K-12 schooling. Despite having few Muslim friends outside of her family growing up, she maintained a very strong sense of her Islam. Nada also pointed that throughout her life, she has very scarcely been ostracized due to her Muslim identity. She hopes to make her parents proud by excelling in her studies and becoming successful.

Key Themes: Islam, Hijab, Palestinian, education, heritage, pride

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

I: What is your age?

R: I am nineteen years old

I: What is your level of education?

R: I am currently a junior, undergraduate student.

I: When and where are you studying?

R: I am studying Clinical Laboratory Science at Marquette University

I: When you were growing up, did you go to public schools, community schools or religious schools?

R: All my education here has been in Milwaukee Public Schools, ever since kindergarten to 12th grade, but I did go to Sunday School at the local Islamic Center of Milwaukee, just because my mom wanted me to have the background in Arabic and all of that.

I: Tell me about places and buildings where you spent a lot of time during your childhood. Perhaps places you remember, perhaps relatives, or the ISM. Do you remember spending time there, the places and experiences you remember?

R: Sure, I remember a lot of times my parents would take me with them to the Friday prayer at the ISM, and I have a lot of memories there. I ended up knowing a lot of the older community members, just because that is who I was really exposed to more. The mall was a frequent place we would go, sometimes my dad would meet up with his friends there, that was also a place where I spent most of my time. But other than that, it was mostly school and home.

I: Tell me more about your home, your school and the places you do remember: who lived with you, who shared these spaces, what activities happened here?

R: I am the youngest one of my siblings, so growing up my youngest brother (who is older than me), he lived with us, and both of my parents. It was a normal at home life. My parents are both a bit older, I guess the interesting thing in my life is that my parent's ages are similar to the grandparents of most of my peers. I was raised with more of people who have that older mentality. And both of my parents are immigrants from the West Bank, city of Ramallah.

I: Tell me how you felt as a Muslim growing up. Whether it is in your public schooling, or in your home. How were you brought up as a Muslim?

R: I should establish that I did not wear a hijab throughout my public school education up until I graduated from high school. Actually, I made the decision to wear it on my graduation day. People in my school, even since elementary school knew that I was a Muslim, I kind of made that public, my teachers all knew. It was interesting because I didn't really get any negative reactions from it, it was the opposite. My friends were really interested, I would share with them my experiences of my summers I spent over-seas, the different holidays we have as Muslims, things like that. I remember, even in kindergarten, I would tell my teachers near the summer vacation that I am going to visit the *blaad*, because in Arabic *blaad* is the common term we use to say overseas. And my teachers would look at me and think is this child crazy, what is she talking about. But I would be excited, I bring them back gifts from my visits overseas. It was all really good; they were all very understanding. And in high school I got to learn more about my religion, so middle and high school fasting, that type of thing. Even in elementary school I remember my peers would be having lunch and I would be sitting with the teachers playing

computer games. It was a very positive experience for me, being a Muslim. It wasn't something that I would hide. I know a lot of people struggle with the social interactions, because during high school and middle school people like to hug each other and stuff like that. But I really didn't get a lot of awkwardness, because people would just know, "hey, she is Muslim, it's just part of her religion, she doesn't engage in that type of thing." I was happy with the way I was able to practice, even though I didn't wear the hijab. And finally, in high school I was pestering my mom in the last two years to wear hijab, and she was sort of like "are you sure?" she kept telling me that this is a commitment, wearing it and taking it off might not be the best thing to do. And I was like "no I really want to" until I finally convinced her. Towards the end I told her that this is something I really want to do. I think it's very important in our social interactions with others, even here in college, I try to explain this to a lot of people and my friends. People have the misconception that it's something we are forced to do, and that it's something that we don't like. I even had professors making comments about that, and they think that we are oppressed. And I am like, "I made this choice", I can be walking around in a knee-length skirt if I want to, it's not like my parents would mind, but I like the idea of being able to control what I show to people, being able to control how much of my body is showing. I personally just like the idea, it's not like I am brain washed, or anything like that. It is something that I wanted to do.

I: Did you have any friends in school who were Muslim? Growing up did you have Muslim friends?

R: In elementary school, no, not at all. I always encountered Muslim family members, but in school: elementary school, no, Middle school, no, high school, there were a couple of Muslims here and there and I encountered them, but not really. The time in my life when I began meeting Muslims was here at Marquette University. It's funny, the Muslims I knew were family members and grew together. We became a lot closer when we started college together. But up until then, I haven't really encountered a lot of Muslims.

I: Are you currently employed, and if so what's your job?

R: For the past four years, I have actually been a Sunday School teacher at the of the ISM Weekend School, for first grade. Actually, the ISM weekend is where I made all my relationships as a child with Muslims. In my Sunday School class, that is where I met a lot of the Muslims in the community who are my age. After I finished that highest level there was for Sunday School, I decided to volunteer there, and eventually I became the first-grade teacher.

I: How do you identify yourself? If someone was to ask you 'tell me more about yourself' how would you identify yourself?

R: First and foremost, as people can tell, I identify myself as a Muslimah, as a hijjabi, people can tell that I am Muslim. Secondly, I am very proud of my Palestinian heritage, so I like to identify myself as Palestinian. I am also an American, I like to make sure that people know that all the time. At first glance, I know that people wonder where I am from, they are kind of surprised when I say "I was born here in Milwaukee, this hospital."

I: Are there places where you feel your best and most freely and successfully express yourself? Why? Verses other places where you feel you are limited to express yourself, your ideology and beliefs.

R: This is something I thought about a lot. In high school I felt free with telling people about my religion. People were genuinely interested, keeping in mind that I went to a public where there were so many different sorts of people from all different backgrounds. I have noticed that since I came to Marquette University there are also so many people like that who are genuinely interested, and I love to share my ideas with them. I noticed that there are somewhat less people of different backgrounds here, everyone seems to be from a similar background. There is one place where I feel really comfortable on this campus, it the EOP (Educational Opportunity Program) building, there I find that I encounter a lot of people who are similar to the people I met in high school. There are all sorts of different cultures, everyone has different causes which they are passionate about. And it's very easy to meet really open-minded people.

I: What traditions of your religion or culture do you follow? For example, do you use specific food recipes which you follow from your parents? Do you follow any food restrictions?

R: So, both religion and culture, not just religion?

I: Yes.

R: Growing up, my house was full of different artifacts from Palestine. The city which parents are from is Al-Beerah, and it was knowing for having many water wells. My mom would tell me that back in the day, the older women would walk around and would have these big ceramic jugs and they would carry water in them. I always had a lot of background about that. But the thing that stood out for me- my mom has a background in sewing the traditional dresses women from our city wear, most Palestinian women have different costumes (dresses) which are native to their villages. I wanted to learn, not necessary to make those dresses, but just the designs on those dresses drew me so much. So, when I was younger my mom taught me how to do cross stitch, I'd say I am proficient, not enough to make a full dress. And other general traditions, like the two holidays that we have every year, we always make ma'mool (which are the date cookies we usually make for those holidays). Palestinian weddings in my family are really big, because they last so many days, are really time consuming and fun. I like to listen to Arabic music- if that counts. There is so much to talk about, I love every aspect of Palestinian culture. My mom cooks every day, so every day I have a home cooked meal that is something from our city, our country, our culture. So, it's in every aspect of my life, pretty much.

I: Do you cook Arabic food? Where do you or your mom find the necessary ingredients?

R: I'd say I am proficient in cooking; I am really good at making the desserts, but I can cook a meal if I had to like makloobah, or something like that. The ingredients, there are multiple Arabic stores here in Milwaukee, Holy Land (food market), and others. Not just Arabic stores necessary that are owned by people of our own village, even places like Cermak, you can find a whole aisle full of Arabic food and Arabic ingredients. It's not difficult, it's pretty easy to maintain that part of one's culture in this city.

I: How do you feel when you go, say to Cermak or Pick ‘N Save, and you find an aisle that is all Ziad (an Arabic food company) ingredients?

R: It makes me feel excited, it makes me feel happy that my culture has had that type of influence on this city where there is a demand for those sorts of ingredients, it’s always a good feeling.

I: How would you describe your religious life? Do you attend the Mosque on regular basis? Do you participate in religious community activities in your center?

R: I am a full-time student, sometimes when we have holidays on Fridays, I go with my parents to Friday prayer. I pray five times a day. When we have holidays, like last week we had Eid Aladha, which is the holiday of sacrifice for Muslims. I was lucky, I didn’t have a class that morning, so I was able to go with my parents to that (i.e., holiday prayer). Sometimes they’ll organize events, like a special guest lecture who talks about a specific topic, and I really like going to those. Even conventions which they might have in Chicago, things like that. When I am able to, I go to those too.

I: Where do you typically pray? You mentioned that you are a full-time student, if you can elaborate on that. For example, you mentioned that you pray five times a day, where do you find the place to pray?

R: Luckily here at Marquette, since sometimes my class schedule is packed, when I get a chance, I go pray the afternoon prayer in the prayer room we have in the Alumni Memorial Union. Sometimes I do miss my prayers, and I get to make them up at home. So those are the two main places.

I: Who mostly does the cooking in your household? Can you describe your kitchen? How does the aroma in your kitchen feel? You did mention you have cultural food every day, if you can elaborate more on that.

R: My mom is the one who does most of the cooking, I am at school most of the day, not that that’s a legitimate excuse for me not to (cook). Our food is heavy with spices, and most of the spices we have at home and some of the special ingredients, I know one that is significant, we call it kishik, some people call it jameed. It’s basically dried yogurt balls Palestinians use to make their broths. Every two years or so we go to Palestine, just to visit, so my mom makes sure to stock up on spices and things like that to store them in the freezer and use them. It’s hopefully, I am pretty sure, close to what a kitchen would smell like in Palestine. Maybe not as great.

I: So, would it smell like a typical American kitchen?

R: No, although we do have American food every once in a while, lasagna or something like that. But it’s typically more Arabic food. Like I said, my parents are older, so my dad, I think, appreciates Arabic food a lot more.

I: What languages do you speak?

R: I speak English, Arabic, Palestinian Arabic, because I know there is different dialects. It should be noted that it's the falahee dialect, which uses some different letters than the other dialects. We'll have little arguments over whether that is the proper way to speak or not. So, Palestinian falahee Arabic. And I did take French for four years in high school if that counts. So, I can say some small phrases.

I: Are you fluent in French?

R: No, I would not say that.

I: Do you read the daily newspaper? If so, which section interests you most?

R: I do not read the daily newspaper. Honestly, my main source of news is probably Yahoo News online, if I ever glance at it. But I mostly get my news through social media, through Facebook, people are pretty quick to post when something is happening. That is just how I get my news.

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

R: I could go on and on about this!

I: Please do.

R: It should be noted that I am a dual citizen, so I have a Palestinian passport, I have Palestinian citizenship as well as my American citizenship. Sometimes I wonder if it's a burden, but I am proud to hold my Palestinian citizenship. As I mentioned we go to Palestine, maybe every two summers or so. Every time we go, because of the conflict between the Palestinians and the Israeli Zionists, I can't go directly to Palestine, I actually have to take a plane from Chicago to Amman, Jordan. And then I would have to cross a bridge, it's called the King Hussain Bridge on the Jordanian side and the Allenby Bridge on the Israeli side. It's such a struggle for me and my parents because of my Palestinian citizenship I am not allowed to go through Tel Aviv, like someone who is just an American citizen would be able to do. So, it's just a series of questions which they ask, sometimes they'll detain us. It's just difficult. My dad has a metal hip replacement, and every time that seems to be the thing that sets them off. Because he's older and he's sort-of impatient sometimes. Personally, it annoys me because they take it as an opportunity to push his buttons, detain him, and when you are detaining a seventy-some year-old man, he's not going to be happy. It's just an exhausting journey for us. It's something that my mom often says that she doesn't want to visit Palestine during certain summers just because of how draining the experience is. And especially, the soldiers they'll treat you like a second-class citizen, they'll look you up and down, sometimes they'll laugh at you, it's just not a fun experience. So that definitely affects me. When I was younger, I got my official Palestinian citizenship ID when I was 16 years old, I happened to be in Palestine for a summer and my mom told me that it was the right age to get it. So up until then, I had been able to go through Tel Aviv with my family, which was the better experience. And then we started going through Jordan. Up until then, I have been able to visit Jerusalem, which is one of the main reasons that a lot of people like to visit the West Bank and Palestine. But in recent years I have not been able to visit Jerusalem because of my Palestinian citizenship. I guess they consider people my age to be a security threat, or something like that. Which people who know me, I am far from that, but anyway I guess that's

just how things work. But yes, it has definitely affected every aspect of my life. I have countless relatives overseas, some of them in Israeli prisons, for various reasons- most of which are invalid.

I: How would you describe your political participation in the U.S.? Do you vote, when it comes to candidates do you have preference of one over the other?

R: I am just 19, so for the last election I don't think I hit that age yet. But hopefully, for the next election I will vote.

I: When it comes to candidates who are from your own culture or religion, in what ways, if any, does that affect your voting behavior? So, say if a Muslim candidate runs, would that affect your vote without looking at the specific policy that he/she is advocating. Would religion affect your choice of candidate?

R: That would be a major step if a Muslim or Palestinian were to run, I would think that would be very interesting because I don't see that happening soon. But I definitely don't put religion and culture before policies. I don't really care what someone believes, if their policy is fair and just, then I would definitely vote for him. No matter who he is whatever his religion is, Jewish, Christian, whatever he is. I will definitely vote for him if I liked his policies.

I: Were you in the United States on September 11, 2001?

R: I was. But I mean to be honest, a lot of my peers have all those memories of them being in kindergarten class and being notified about it, because that is how old I would have been at the time. I would have been like five. I have no memory of it. I just don't.

I: Since 9/11 how has your life been impacted in any way?

R: Yes definitely. I mean, I remember growing up and we would be walking in the mall or somewhere then I would hear someone call out a name to my mom that wasn't really desirable. English is my mom's second language, often she's not the most fluent, I'd often understand it before she would. When I was younger, I would be confused, as I grew older it would make me upset. Even as a hijabi now, I think we are still dealing with backlash of what happened. So yes, it definitely has impacted us. Sometimes I think I overcompensate because I am a Muslim who wears a hijab in a university. I think I am extra nice to people; I always have people telling me, "Oh, you are so smiley, you're so this or that". I don't know if it's a negative thing, I am not sure why I should be overcompensating for something I didn't do, nor did someone who is really affiliated with me do. I guess I focus more on presenting myself in the best way possible, just so that people don't associate with me these things. But I guess they still do.

I: Thank you for sharing your experiences. We are going to switch to another topic, we are going to switch to marriage.

R: Okay.

I: In your culture, how are women viewed, and what is their typical role? What about men? How do the two genders differ in their typical roles?

R: In Palestinian culture, I definitely would say that roles have changed a lot since my grandparents and parents time to now. I think traditionally, in any culture, it seems that the woman is supposed to be the one in the home. The one who is taking care of the children, raising the children. While the man is supposed to be the breadwinner who goes out and makes the money. But recently, I feel like more and more females are getting educated, they are getting jobs. And it seems like there is more equality in the roles in the household. Traditionally, our culture, I hear about stories, granted I always ask my mom, I think my grandmother got married when she was 21, which I don't consider to be young per say, but I know of some women in my village who claim to have gotten married when they were 14 or 15, which I consider really young. Now a-days, I feel that as girls are trying more and more to get educated, they are putting that before marriage. And I feel that they are delaying the age at which they get married.

I: What are some reasons do you think, that has led to the change in roles? You mentioned that, compared to your parents or grandparents age, the roles have changed. From your perspective, why do you think things have changed?

R: I wish I would have put more thought into this, but I feel most of it is due to the large influx of immigrants to western countries like the U.S. Here, over time, men and women are becoming more of equals. So, I feel that Palestinian immigrants who are here first generation and second generation are being more influenced by that. So, I feel that they are more readily having females be educated, just because of all the people who have immigrated here, and Europe and different places like that. Granted, even overseas and people who are overseas in universities, there are so many girls who are graduating along with guys, where you wouldn't see that back in the day. I guess people are just accepting that girls have the abilities just as guys do, sometimes even better.

I: What are some ways in which you balance faith and your American identity? You did mention that you see yourself as a Muslim first, and American third. So how do you balance this?

R: Let me rephrase it, I probably should have said that I see myself as a Muslim first and I don't put being Palestinian before being an American. This is the country that I was born in. I am going to make those equal. I make sure that don't let my Muslim identity limit me from anything. If sometimes in class we have to do a project with someone from the opposite gender, I am not going to say, "I can't speak to you, I am not going to do this with you". You still talk to people; you still befriend people. It's just a balance that you have to have to make sure that you are not doing something that is against your religion. So, in my mind, everything I do, as long as it's not against my religion, as long as I am following the path for knowledge, like our prophet Mohammad (salah Allah alihi wa salim) is said to have said, "follow knowledge even if it's in the Orient". As long as I am on my path trying to attain knowledge, trying to find a career, I'll do anything as long as it doesn't interfere with my religious teachings.

I: How did your religious or ethnic upbringing contribute to who you are today?

R: Do you mind rephrasing the question?

I: Yes sure. When everyone looks back at their life, there are certain things or certain events, or individuals influence your life in specific things. For this question, we are looking at how specifically your religious and cultural identities have influenced who you are today.

R: I feel that I have developed a strong sense of pride of whom I am. In high school, in 10th grade this sticks out in mind, we had to do a Personal Project. We were supposed to pick something that would reflect you, and to make a project about it and present it to a bunch of people at a public event. So, I decided at the time to choose Palestinian culture and Palestinian heritage, and specifically the costumes I was mentioning because I saw them so much in my own home that they impacted me. It was interesting, because when the time came for me to present the project, the individual whom I was presenting to was one of my counselors who at the time I knew as a Zionist. I remember presenting the project to her and having her say, "Do you mind coming to my house sometime and teaching me how to do this?" And at the time I was like "Sure, why not?" It's sort of interesting now how a lot of the Palestinian culture has been adopted by Israelis. It's something that I find interesting. It's definitely a source of pride for me. I know that at every social event, if I wear a thob which is the name of those dresses. It just makes me feel like I am on top of the world because, I don't know how this will change in the future, but up until now, I feel that is the only Palestinian traditions and aspects of the culture which has not yet been adopted by Israeli culture, which makes it so much more valuable to me.

I: What does marriage mean to you? You did mention that you are not married, but when you look at the future, when you look at marriage in your life in your family, what does it mean to you?

R: I think for me, marriage is, from observation, means finding someone to share your worries with you. (It's funny because sometimes a word in Arabic would pop into my head and I can't find the translation in English.) But it's someone to share your load with you, your worries, I don't think in a traditional sense, you'll hear Palestinian women saying they got married out of necessity, they needed someone to take care of them, they couldn't stay in their parents' household for long, and needed to find someone to buy things for them and take care of them that way. Nowadays, as I said, women are becoming more equals to men in that sense they are working they make more money, I guess it's just a source of finding compassion of finding someone who will share your load and whatever stresses you have you will be able to confide in them in a way you can't with someone else.

I: What are the first characteristics you look for in a husband? Homeland, nationality, Arab, Muslim, or the specific town they are from?

R: As a Muslim, the person I would prospectively look for would have to be Muslim. That is out of a requirement of my religion and personal preference.

I: Would you move because of marriage or relocating because of marriage?

R: Yes, I guess in this day and age that is a given. People meet each other in different places, and sometimes it's difficult to find someone where you are. In our faith we have this thing known as nasseb, it's the idea of destiny, you can't really gauge where your spouse will be from. Moving it just a given sometimes.

I: You did mention weddings a little, if you can elaborate a little more on how weddings in your culture happen. How many days do you celebrate, do they typically happen the same way between different individuals or does every town or village have the things they do?

R: I have been to weddings of people mostly from my town, just because that is where most of my relatives are from. But I do notice some slight differences between different Palestinian villages. So, the weddings consist of multiple ceremonies. People first have a tulba, so that is actually when the groom formally asks for the bride's hand. They are sort of introduced to each other. I guess it's like an old-time dating period where they are given a couple of months to meet each other and are introduced to each other. At the end of that period, they decide if they like each other or not. After that they have a khutba, which is an engagement party, and then after that they decide how long the engagement period is. And then they have what we call a henna and a wedding, those are the more exciting parts of the whole marriage process. Where for the henna, it's the paste they often decorate the bride's hands with it. And she often wears a more traditional dress like the ones I was describing with the cross-stitch embroidery. In my village, that is often what the girl would wear. And then they have a wedding, usually the next day or a couple of days after that.

I: How does the wedding look? Is it more traditional or more American?

R: Nowadays, I am noticing that usually people for the henna they'll wear more traditional outfits, but for the wedding I am noticing more and more people are getting to wear evening dresses, whereas the older generation often sticks to the traditional dresses.

I: Would you consider marrying someone who is younger than you are? Would this be a possibility for you?

R: Generally, it's not against my religion by any means, but this is something that I personally would not consider.

I: Culturally, is it something that is acceptable?

R: Culturally, I do have family members who have done that, and they are totally okay with it. Across the board culturally, you don't see it very often. You always hear that women tend to age before men, then it's kind of awkward if the woman is older than the man. This is something that I just wouldn't consider.

I: Do you think that in general, in your culture, if there are careers that if women were to pursue it would reduce their chance of getting married?

R: When we talk about this, I am a firm believer in the idea of naseeb, where God has written your destiny for you, so as old as you are, if he has written for you to get married, then you are going to get married. But it is something which I have noticed, I do have a lot of family members who have chosen to pursue careers which require a longer time in college, maybe pharmacy or doctors a lot of people I know have done this. And I have noticed that they are not often the first ones to get married. I am not sure why exactly, but it seems to be an issue in our society.

I: Would you consider marrying someone outside of the United States? Someone who was raised in your homeland.

R: I don't really have a problem with that honestly. I feel that a lot of people, a lot of my friends we tend to joke about this a lot. The reason that a lot of them say that they wouldn't consider it is because of a language barrier. I am fluent in Arabic, and I see that as something normal. The crude term for it, everyone is like "I don't want to marry a FOB (Fresh Of the Boat)." I mean, aren't our parents FOBs? What's wrong with that?

I: When it comes to marriage in your culture, who makes most of the decisions and the final decisions? Is it the parents, is it the mother, the father or the bride and the groom?

R: Firstly, the bride and the groom seem to be the main people in this process. They need to agree that they are comfortable with each other, they accept the other person. And then after that it seems that the parents are the ones who are in charge of organizing all the processes that are involved in marriage just because they have more experience in that sort of thing.

I: What do you think about dating?

R: Personally, I don't agree with dating. It is something that is unheard of in my family. Going to public schools, I always see my friends doing it. But I feel that in order to have that sort of a relationship with someone of the opposite gender, I would need to know that I am spending the rest of my life with them. I need some sort of a certification before that even happens with them.

I: Do you think it's religious or cultural barriers to dating? What kind of hindrance are present in your culture, from your personal perspective?

R: From my perspective, dating is definitely hindered because of religion. Saying dating, isn't even saying friendship. A lot of times I hear that men and women, girls and guys can't even be friends just because of the obvious attraction involved often. Dating, you are going out around with someone without being engaged to them, without having anything. Personally, I believe that in order to have that kind of relationship with a guy, you need to have a marriage contract done.

I: Do you think the Internet and Facebook/social media made it easier for Arab and Muslim Americans to meet their future spouse? Or one of those Muslim dating websites?

R: Honestly, personally I don't think it works like that. What I have noticed in my culture so far and from people that I distantly know, the way it works isn't that the guy directly contacts a girl on social media. But it's that maybe he sees a picture of her, and his mom figures out who she is, and then they go and ask for her hand. I feel that if the guy actually contacts the girl saying "Hey, do you want to get married?", not that it happens like that, but I feel if that was the process then it would get lots of backlash. It would be sort of distasteful! But I feel that it works the other way that I mentioned, where he might see a picture of her, he might think she's attractive, he might figure out what her background is, and if she's a good match. And then maybe ask for her after that. But definitely it (social media) has made it easier for people to meet each other. Here in the

U.S., it's kind of harder for Muslims to meet other Muslims verses back in the old country where he would see her walking down the street.

I: Do you think communication types such as cell phones/texting and Skype made it easy for males and females to get to know each other before making the decision to marry?

R: Yes, I hear a lot about that happening with people where they'll Skype each other, they'll text each other before hand just to see if they are a good match. People do that instead of dating in my culture.

I: Do you think community events/centers/weddings are places where people tend to see a potential spouse and proceed from there?

R: Yes, I hear about people doing that. Where else are people going to see each other? So yes, that seems to be true.

I: How is marriage in America different than your parent's way of marriage, or your original country's way of marriage?

R: Honestly, I feel that, as I mentioned, in Palestine it's more likely that people will actually run into each other. The universities there have people from the same background and are mostly from the same culture. There is a higher chance that they'll run into each other there. And maybe they'll tell their parents, "Oh, I met this person, they might be a good match for me" or something like that. And I feel that also happens here, at some universities in MSAs (Muslims Student Association) or SJPs (Students for Justice in Palestine), people might run into each other. But I feel it's a lot harder here. So here I feel that community events and social media might come in as a way for people to potentially meet others.

I: This is a hypothetical example, in your experience, a family which has more than one daughter, do you think the marriage restrictions and process are different between the oldest daughter and the younger daughter?

R: I think that it would depend on the age difference between the daughters. But then I don't see why the oldest daughter would have to get married before the younger one. If a guy is seeking out one of this family's daughters, he would seek her out for her individual characteristics and individual self. For example, if he was better match with the younger daughter, I don't see why it would be an issue for him to marry her before any of the older ones. But I do know that that was an issue back in the day, throughout history in Palestine that some parents would refuse to marry of their younger daughters before the older ones. Just because they would worry that the older one would never get another potential spouse.

I: We'll talk more about parenting now, the gender norms and role expectations. In what ways, if any, do you think boys should be raised differently from girls?

R: I feel that the one thing that parents should highlight when it comes to boys is that they need to make sure that in their dealings with (I mean they are bound to encounter females whether at school or work or whatever) they need to make sure that it is ingrained in their brains that they should treat girls the same way they would want other boys to treat their sisters. I feel that is one of the main, main things. I feel that is not such an issue for girls and their dealings with males, just because they are girls. I feel that boys are more prone to be sources of stress for their parents

nowadays then girls, just because they might get into relationships which they are not ready for and that sort of thing. They need to make sure that they treat women with the same respect they would expect for their sisters.

I: When it comes to raising children in the U.S., what are some major issues do you think that parents would have?

R: We are running into a generation where a lot of children are like, "I see my friends dating, why can't I? I see my friends go to prom, why can't I do that?" It's weird because personally I never considered those sorts of things, they never appealed to me. I never asked my parents, "Why can't I do that". It was just known that was not something I would be interested in. We are running into a generation where they see that sort of thing happening and they want to do it. As Americanized we have become, as Westernized as we have become. A lot of people living in the states it's really valuable for children to be taken every once in a while, to visit overseas and to know their roots. Just to see how life is over there, so that they can get an idea of why their parents make the rules that they make.

I: Do you see in your immediate family or extended family that parents would have particular concerns regarding their daughters vs. their sons or the other way around?

R: Honestly, I feel that personally in my family are more trusted than boys. Granted, thankfully in my family we haven't had any issues at all, but it seems across the board that girls are more trusted because they have been raised more strictly. While boys are often have been given more freedom in the way they were raised. So, when they get older, their parents are a little bit more concerned because the boys are so used to that freedom.

I: What kind of freedom are you talking about? When they were raised up, what are some of the differences you think existed between the two genders?

R: Personally, I feel that for girls growing up there is no sleepovers, there isn't that sort of thing. I feel that parents might limit that kind of thing. Girls have a curfew growing up, whereas boys might also have a curfew, but they'll be more free to go out with their friends and do things outside. For girls, the dad is probably always calling and checking to see. Personally, going to school, my parents, right when I get to school, I am expected to call them and let them know "Hey, I got to school safely". Where's I don't think that was an expectation of my brother, for example, when he went to college.

I: When it comes to deciding on a major, or the specific career you wanted to study, from your experiences. Do you think individuals have conflicts with their parents regarding what they want to study? Or is this something that is even discussed between the children and the parents?

R: Personally, my parents have always valued my education, they always wanted me to go to college. All of my siblings went to college. When I decided on my major, I told my parents about it. At first my mom was like, "What is that?", she wasn't very familiar with the term. And when I explained it to her, in the hospital you run diagnostic tests, she was very happy with it. Even yesterday, I heard her as she was talking to my aunt about different majors over the phone and she was like, "Anything in the health field comes with a lot of good deeds and it is something to be respected". That is something significant. Personally, my parents would have never put a limit

on my education had I wanted. I am considering perusing a higher degree after my bachelors. That is not an issue with my parents at all. I could have done anything that I wanted to do in college, they wouldn't have had a problem with that.

I: Culturally, are there things that boys verses girls would be restricted to study from your experiences? Or if there are certain fields that the parents would either stress or under-stress for their children to study?

R: I don't know if this is across the board, but this is something I have seen. I know that parents sometimes, if a boy is trying to pursue nursing, they might try to drag him out of that. Boys are more in the business field or engineering or maybe doctors. Doctors is a big one, lawyers. Where nowadays, even girls are encouraged to become lawyers, they are encouraged to become doctors. Times are changing it seems.

I: We have a few more questions about your life growing up. Did your parents encourage you to work when you were younger? Why or why not?

R: It's funny because I am about to get my newest job, along with my Sunday School job, and my parents never really encouraged me to work when I was younger. They felt I was always busy with school and what not, but then towards the end of high school when I started getting involved in a lot of extracurriculars which required volunteering, they encouraged me to get out into the community and that's how I landed my weekend school job. Even now, my parents are sort of starting to encourage me more to work because it's necessary now to build up a resume early so that eventually you can find a good job in your career.

I: When did you first learn to drive, and who taught you how to drive?

R: I first learned to drive when I was fifteen. My dad was the one who mainly taught me to drive. It was a fun experience, because he was always so worried. I am actually the primary driver in my household now, just because my dad is getting older and driving is getting to be a bit of a challenge for him, so I am the household chauffeur.

I: How did your parents feel about you driving when you first started driving on your own?

R: They really encouraged it a lot, especially my mom because my mom has been here for twenty some years and my dad has been in the States since 1967, it's been quite a while. My mom has never learned to drive. A couple of times when I was younger, my dad would try to teacher her and take her out to an empty parking-lot. It was something that never caught on for her. But she recognized that I need to be independent eventually when I get a career and I need to be able to take myself where I need to go. So, she definitely encouraged it when I was younger.

I: How would you describe your parents' involvement in your education? For example, helping you with homework, being part of PTAs, helping with school activities.

R: I can honestly say that my parents are both not proficient in English even though they have been here for a long time. When I was younger in elementary school my mom really wanted me to be a perfectionist, "Color within the lines!" She always made sure that I had the neatest homework. She always put lines on my writing for me so that I would write straight, and all these sorts of things. She would help me in whatever way she could. She would always encourage me to read, she would have my dad drive me to the library and get stacks of books. I

was a book worm when I was younger. I guess that really encouraged me to make her proud. So that's why I really pushed myself in high school, alhamduLilah (All praise be to God) I was able to graduate as valedictorian, that made it all worth it. Even today, when I am getting sick of studying, I just push myself because I know she wants me to be successful. The funny thing is when I am staying up late to study, she refuses to go to sleep, she'll sit next to me, and she won't go to sleep until I am done.

I: In school, or in your college, were you involved in any religious or cultural organizations?

R: Yes, in high school I was in French club, just because in high school it was rammed in my head that we needed to be in a bunch of different activities. I was president of French club; I was in National Honors Society, which isn't a cultural activity. As I said before, in college as I started to meet more Muslims, more people whom I could relate to. After I became a hijjabi, I found myself relating more to hijjab's, people who look like me. I guess it's the natural thing to do, to sort of try to find someone to relate to when you are in a new environment. I joined SJP, Students for Justice in Palestine, I go to their events often, based on what I shared earlier, and MSA on campus. Also, I love all organizations that promote diversity, just because it was such a comforting thing growing up, that I really value it now.

I: Did you make a conscious point of having friends who have the same cultural or religion as you have? Or did it just happen?

R: Honestly, it just happened. My friends aren't only people who have the same culture and religion as me. Actually, the first friends I made here at Marquette were Hmong, Indian. I have all sorts of different friends. In high school I didn't know any friends who were the same culture or religion as me. I don't really make a conscious effort to do that, I actually talk to everyone. But I guess it's just new to me to have people I can relate to, I guess I sort of got excited about it. My friend circle is pretty diverse.

I: The next few questions are about your parents. Tell us more about your parents, where did they come from and when did they come to the U.S.?

R: My parents originally from the same village, they are both from Elberah in Palestine. My dad came here in 1967 and my mom came here in 1993.

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

R: They are both retired

I: Why did they decide to immigrate to the United States?

R: I don't think I have ever honestly even asked them this question. I feel that that was the trend in the mid twentieth century. There was an influx of people coming here to seek better opportunities. The war had broken out with Israel, and it was a way to make money. That is why my dad came here. My mom, the reason she came here was because my dad lived here. He went overseas to marry her, and he brought her here.

I: When your parents first came to the U.S., specifically your dad, how did he make a living in the U.S.?

R: He had various jobs. I remember one of them, he worked in a bakery for many years and then eventually he owned a store, which I think was his last job, here in Milwaukee.

I: What are your parents' level of education?

R: My dad claims to have never finished elementary school. And my mom, I believe, made it to first or second year of high school.

I: How do your parents identify themselves? We asked you about how you identified yourself, how do they identify themselves and how do you feel about that?

R: My parents would both identify themselves as Muslims first and foremost. After that, I believe that they put their Palestinian culture before their American culture, although they are both technically Americans, and my dad has lived here for the majority of his life. It's something ingrained in them, the place in which they were raised, they seem to put that before being an American. The primary language that they speak is Arabic.

I: When they first came here, did they participate in cultural or religious activities? Was there an Islamic center when they moved here, did they participate in that?

R: My dad told me that back in the day when he and a lot of men from our city had first come here, there was this place they would all visit. It was similar to a kahwa, similar to how a coffee house would be in Palestine. It was owned by a Christian Palestinian lady. They would all hang out there. It was them trying to recreate the environment they would have had back in Palestine. Something I noticed, even for my mom, I am not sure when she first came here if she would visit the Mosque on a regular basis, but she does always tell me that the whole people wearing hijabs and that sort of thing, it's relatively new here. I hear that back in the day, Palestinian immigrants who were here didn't wear hijab, it's something new it seems. Although they did practice all of the Muslim holidays and that sort of thing, and they prayed, but wearing hijab has become something new.

I: Growing up, did they often mention their homeland, if so, how did they do it?

R: Yes, my mom always tells me about the environment was growing up. My parents both definitely valued their homeland because they make an effort to visit it every couple of years, and make sure that I am familiar with it. They always have various stories, it's something that is very ingrained in them.

I: The next few questions are about your grandparents. Did any of your grandparents migrate to the U.S.?

R: Yes. Both of my grandfathers, I am not sure if they attained citizenship or not, but I do know that my maternal grandfather worked in Detroit, in a hospital for a few years when my mom was younger. I know that my paternal grandfather worked in Boston for a few years when my father was really young.

I: What was the reason for their migration?

R: Again, it was probably to seek better opportunities to make a better living

I: Did they immigrate alone, or did they have family members with them?

R: They were both alone.

I: Were they married before they immigrated, and if so, was it an arranged marriage and how did they arrange for their family to be taken care when they were here?

R: My paternal grandfather, he was married when he came here, but he didn't have any children yet. And my maternal grandfather was married, and he had my mother and all of her siblings. He would send my grandmother some money every once in a while, from his work to take care of his family. I am not really sure about my paternal grandfather. He was much older that I don't really know much about him.

I: We are going to talk more about cultural clothing. You did mention the costumes that your mother makes. Do you typically wear the cultural clothing, so the Thub, Dishdasha, Abaya and what specifically do you wear?

R: Abaya is something that I would buy. So, I typically wear those to the Mosque when I am going there to observe prayer, for extra modesty. The thub, some of mine I buy, and I think one I own was made by my mom. But I typically wear those to weddings, hennas.

I: How do you feel when you wear the traditional clothing?

R: Like I mentioned, when I wear the thub, it's like I am on top of the world because it's just something so rich in culture, so rich in heritage. Looking at them, they are so complex. There is a stereotype that people who make those must be uneducated, otherwise how do they have the time to sit down and make those. No, they are actually really educated, and they have a lot of talent. It's such a huge symbol of the Palestinian women.

I: Does religion play a role in your choice of clothing and how?

R: Yes definitely. When I was in high school, I didn't wear the hijab, but the clothing that I would wear, the only thing that I lacked was the headscarf. The rest of my clothing was hijjabi appropriate. It was what I wear today with my hijab. I definitely make sure to maintain long sleeves. I often make sure that my shirts are at least mid-thigh. Just to maintain modesty. I do not wear abayaa to school.

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

R: Definitely my mom, because she was the one who introduced me to it.

I: Did your mother wear any traditional dresses, on regular bases?

R: No, more of irregular bases. She usually wears more Western clothing, shirt tops and skirts. But for special occasions she does wear her thubs.

I: Where do you typically get your dresses from?

R: I think all of my dresses are from Palestine, from my visits, I make sure to bring back for me and for a lot of my female relatives who ask me to bring back for them.

I: If your mother was to pass down dresses to you, would you wear them? Or would you feel that they need to be more modernized?

R: It would depend. I probably would wear them. I would be worried to wear them of damaging them. But she always talks to me about it. She has this big suitcase overseas and it has twenty or

so dresses that she made in her youth that she doesn't even typically wear. I think I would wear them.

I: And would you pass yours down to your children in the future and why would you do so?

R: I definitely would, just as proof that Palestinian women have been wearing these things for a long time, it sees that there are constant attempts to erase Palestinian history, so these are a source of history which should not be erased, and I will continue to make an effort not to erase it.

I: A few more closing questions. Is there anyone else in your history, in your life growing up that you would like to tell us more about that you didn't get a chance to mention? Any religious leaders who stick out in your memory, anything really.

R: No, not really. I think I shared what I really wanted to.

I: Are there any particular services or resources that you think the Arab and Muslim Women's Resource and Research Institute should provide to women, to meet the needs of community?

R: I feel you do this already, but maybe just have more opportunities for women of different cultures to meet each other, for more dialogue. It's always really nice for people to meet people whom they can relate to. With recent events, there are a lot of refugees who are coming in, honestly for them specifically, sometimes financial help isn't the only thing that someone might want. Sometimes just finding someone to talk to, finding someone to relate to is really valuable. You guys are probably doing a lot of this already, I just think that that is really valuable.

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

R: I have mentioned this study to a lot of my family and friends, I posted it on my social media network. So hopefully, they are interested. I will definitely share my experience with them, and I hope they will be interested in doing it.

I: Lastly, do you have any letters, old photographs, any kind of artifacts that are important to your family history? Would it be possible for us to borrow them and have a copy of them?

R: It's hard for me to consider this on the spot, but if I do find something I will definitely contact you and let you take pictures of it.

I: Thank you for your time and energy and for sharing your experiences with me. You have given us valuable information about your life and your family history.

If you need to contact me, please do so. Also, if I have any additional questions for you, may I contact you again?

R: Yes.

I: Again, thank you so much, I really appreciate your help.