



Oral History Project Interview

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

Interview Number: MB 1.00

Date of Interview: 3/15/2021

Gender: Female

Name: "Hayat"

Country of Origin: Palestine

Year of Immigration: 1980s

Abstract: Hayat (name changed for confidentiality) is a first-generation immigrant from city of Palestine, now living within the Milwaukee, Wisconsin area. She first came to America, initially New York City, in 1980s, as an 18-year-old girl, one year after her father had left Palestine for New York. Hayat was a graduate of a Catholic High School in Jerusalem, Palestine. Her main purpose behind her immigration was for additional education after high school, and her father left to find work and make money in America and send it back to his family back home. Their immigration plan was meant to be temporary, however, this was no longer an option anymore, as Netanyahu, who was the mayor of Jerusalem at the time, had taken away Hayat and her father's residency. She has lived in Milwaukee with her three children since and she is a high school math teacher in Milwaukee. In this interview, Hayat discusses the political trauma her family endured as Palestinians from Jerusalem and how it affected them financially, giving them no choice, but to leave. She also discusses the struggles of people a Palestinian in exile, but how her close relationship with her father supported her through these hardships. The most recent hardship of her life has been the COVID-19 pandemic, as it's affected everybody, but especially her family financially.

Key Themes: Immigration, heritage, cultural differences, education, family, teaching, trauma

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

[Background]

I: I'd like to start the interview by asking some general questions about your background. Can you please state your age?

R: 56 years old.

I: Where is your homeland?

R: Jerusalem, Palestine.

I: And is this where you were born?

R: Yes.

I: Do you think that you could please tell me about the places and buildings where you spent a lot of the time during your childhood?

R: I would say uhh my my my home, uhh my school, Rosary Sisters' School, and uh the Old City, Jerusalem, the Old City.

I: And who lived with you and your home?

R: My mom, dad and myself. I was the only child as a child.

I: Mhm. And what kind of activities would happen at your school or in the Old City of Jerusalem?

R: I-I kinda was active actually. There was uhh like Girl Scouts. There was uhh volleyball team. There was literature activities always, poetry. And of course, there was Ramadan "Eiyad" (celebrations).

I: Mhm. And uhh before coming to the U.S., did you live in any other countries?

R: No.

I: When did you immigrate to the U.S.?

R: 1980s (exact date omitted for confidentiality).

I: And how old are you when you immigrated?

R: 18.

I: Were you the first in your family to immigrate to the U.S.?

R: No, my dad was in the U.S.

I: So, he emigrated before you?

R: Yeah, yeah.

I: And after you went to the U.S., did any of your other family members join you?

R: They joined us uhh in 1990 -- when it was the Iraqi War, you know? They were afraid to stay. So, that's when they moved.

I: Which family members?

R: So, m-my father remarried after my mom passed away and I had uhh a brother and sister and they came with my mom – my stepmom, when I say “my mom”.

I: Mhm. And are you married?

R: Yes, I am.

I: Were you married when you immigrated to the U.S.?

R: No, no. I was, you know, just a teen.

I: And was your marriage arranged?

R: No. No. I mean, in our culture when you say “arranged”, it's not really “arranged”. They, they just take time to know each other, and it has to be with the permission of the parents. And then with the blessings of the families, so if you call that “arranged”, it will be arranged. But otherwise, you can say “yes”, you can say “no”, it's your choice.

I: So, you did know your spouse before getting married?

R: Yes.

I: And, in your culture, is the tradition of dowry, or mehr, practiced?

R: It's something on the marriage document, only. But uhh I didn't have any, no.

I: Mhm.

R: -neither mehr or dowry. It was written on the the marriage certificate and it said Dinar “Urdoni” (Jordanian), uhh Dinar “dahab” (gold), I think. Dinar dahab? And I never got it. It was just something that was said.

I: So, what does dowry mean to you?

R: I mean.. the way I understood, it's like a way to uhh give the bride money for herself, she can buy stuff, she can prepare herself for marriage, you know? She can spend it whatever she wants.

I: Mhm. And when looking for a suitable husband, did your family, or you, take into consideration the wealth of the groom, or his family, to determine?

R: Not at all.

I: Okay. And do you have any children?

R: Yeah, I do.

I: If so, what are their names and ages?

R: So, I have, one of the oldest, is (name omitted for confidentiality), and he's 27 years old. I also have uhh, the second is the daughter, and her name is (name omitted for confidentiality). She's she's 19, she'll be 20 soon. And my baby, [chuckles], uhh she's not a baby anymore, she's 18, just turned 18. And she's a senior.

I: And, your children, do they live in the same city and country as you?

R: Oh yeah.

I: What are their education levels?

R: My son finished uhh associate degree and he's he's working in management and he's trying to finish his bachelor, but is -- he's taking his time because he's married. My uhh my other daughter is in college and m-my youngest, she's a senior, and she'll be going to college.

I: And do any of your children have children?

R: Yes, my oldest, he has three, two boys and a girl.

I: And how did he choose his spouse? How involved were you in their marriage?

R: I kinda wasn't, uhh he loved a a high school sweetheart, he was in love, and uhh he wanted to be married to her, and I thought I'm not gonna stop him, so I believe in if a relation to be, it should be "halal" (Islamically permissible), so marriage is the way, so I approved it.

I: So, his spouse was not raised in your homeland?

R: No... She's totally she's she's mixed. She's half black, half -- the other half is Puerto Rican and American.

I: Mmm, and what was your level of education before you emigrated?

R: I had uhh, I just finished high school actually.

I: And where did you get this ed-education? Which high school?

R: (Name omitted for confidentiality).

I: And since emigrating to the U.S., did you receive any additional formal education?

R: Yes, I finished my bachelor. I did uhh uhh some graduate studies and master's in education, yes.

I: And, where did you complete these?

R: So, uhh at some point I was doing Health Administration in San Francisco, University of San Francisco, but I umm I did not finish it because my family had to come from Jerusalem, so it was interrupted. But I had uhh a graduate diploma in genetics and in UW Wisconsin, and [sighs] and umm um, what it is? Mount Mary, I had my master's in education.

I: And, prior to emigrating, did you work outside the home?

R: Working with my father is, I don't know if that's considered uh uh uh work. I really didn't get paid as working for other people, I was getting allowance, but I was helping my dad always with his work.

I: And what work was he doing?

R: He was a money changer, exchanged money -- exchanging money. He had this place. I remember I used to take money from his money change, as a little kid, I used to put in like the paper bag? And go and get -- I used to [chuckles] go and get this money exchange, big amount of money, in a paper bag, it looked like fruit bags, actually.

I: Mhm.

R: --and come back and it used to look safe, because I'm just a kid, actually, but I-I guess he used to trust me and they used to think that I was sharp, or something, back then.

I: And are you currently employed?

R: Yes, I am.

I: So, what's your job?

R: I'm a math teacher by uhh Milwaukee Public School.

I: And could you tell me more about your workplace? What kind of activities happen inside?

R: So, my workplace is a school. What kind of activities? All kind of activities that could happen in school. Uhh, what am I involved in? I'm involved more in with uhh ESL students, students who-whose English is second language and uhh we have a club, for international students.

I: Mhm, and are there places within your work, where you socialize with your colleagues?

R: All the times. We do "Common Planning" and we, sometimes, we take off and we go have dinner – not dinner, lunch, together, or brunch.

[Decision to immigrate to the U.S.]

I: Mhm, and next I'd like to ask you some questions about your decision to immigrate to the U.S. What were your main reasons for emigrating to the U.S.?

R: Education – I came to study, that's all.

I: Mhm, and so, what exactly prompted you to get your education in America, and not overseas?

R: B-because my dad was here, so, I guess it was, you know? I was encouraged by the by the family to come and be with my dad, uhh get U.S. education, education in uhh U.S. university, American university.

I: And what was the reasoning for your dad emigrating?

R: Actually, my dad was uhh money changer, and we're from Jerusalem, and his place was in the Old City, and the Old City umm is a place that has been targeted by the Israelis, to uhh get people, try to push them out of Jerusalem, so my father, as a result, was – had lot of taxes in him umm and they were, you know, they-they're defa-, they're not re-, they're not real, he didn't make that mo-, that money, n-not even close. So, th-there were millions of dollars, or shekels, to be paid, and he doesn't have that m-, that kind of money, he was pushed out in a way, so he left to the – he couldn't open his place, and practice his work, without paying the taxes. He can open it, but he cannot work, so, yeah, we end – he end up coming to the United States – he had an uncle that had some kind of, you know, he helped him out, and he... he made -- he made a living, he helped the family survive.

I: And you discussed the political oppression, that your family experienced, so how did this affect you, economically?

R: Oh, it did affect us a lot, I mean w-we used to have a nice uhh a nice life, peaceful, and then, it's like, all of a sudden, we have lot of debt – it's taxes; my father cannot be working anymore, and then he has to leave, h-he he left the country, and he started working in the U.S. and sending us some money, to survive, and then, it just – we were pushed out, kind of, and then, I-I I went to the United States, to study, and then, later on, in 1990, the rest of the family – he remarried, a-as I explained, they also came to the United States.

I: And this political trauma... your family experienced, was it only your family, or did many other families also –

R: --No, lot of people uhh; it's a trauma that people uhh experienced, living in Jerusalem – lot of people have been... pushed out uhh, it-it's in an effort to change demographics of Jerusalem – East Jerusalem, as a Jewish city. So, lot of people, if you leave for any reason, you cannot come back, or or like I said, they want to have, as much as possible, of the Old City, so businesses of the Old City are at risk because, this is what they do, uhh, now there is more law, but at some point – and maybe *not*, maybe I'm wrong, but at some point, uhh they pushed lot of people, when Netanyahu was the mayor, actually.

I: And, initially, how long did you originally plan on staying, in the U.S.?

R: Just for education.

I: So, what changed your mind?

R: I-

I: Why did you stay longe-

R: -I lost m-my my uhh Je-Jerusalem residency, which I'm not supposed to lose it. *Actually*, I'm a local, I'm the- [smirks], I'm supposed to be, you know, this is my country. Whenever I wanna go back, I *should* be able to, but that's not how it is, real-life. Uhh, it just umm, a second class, I don't have, uhh to the Israelis, or to the occupation, uhh I don't have any rights and they just didn't allow me to go back, neither my father, under the claim that your... your residency had expired, even though I was in the United States less than a year, and I couldn't go back.

I: So, you did try to go back to Jerusalem?

R: Within a year, yes, I w- I wasn't able to, I wasn't able to.

I: Mhm.

R: And then, only after I had the um citizenship, I was able to. This is uhh something that only happens to the Jerusalem -- or mostly to the Jerusalem residents, because they try to get as much less Palestinians, or non-Jews, be-, umm get rid of them as residents of Jerusalem, to claim Jerusalem as a Jewish city.

I: So, are you allowed to go back to Jerusalem?

R: Yes, I am – but only as an American, and I cannot live there, though.

I: You can't l-live there?

R: No.

I: Okay, and how did you decidel – Sorry, [laughs], how did you decide where to live in the U.S.?

R: My father was in uhh Brooklyn, New York, so that's where I went. That's where I... where I lived, and I went to Staten Island for college – College of Staten Island.

I: So, what made you settle in the Milwaukee area?

R: I got married... to my husband, and moved.

I: Mhm, and you have – have you lived in any other places in the U.S., and if so, where?

R: I lived, little bit, you know, as I said, in San Francisco, like eight months. I lived in uhh Philadelphia, at some point, uhh for less than a year? I lived in Minnesota, for maybe five months? Something like that.

[Early experiences being in the U.S.]

I: Mhm, and the next questions pertain to your early experiences being in the U.S. So, when you first immigrated to the U.S., what was your life like?

R: Uhh, very different. I mean it's like, I didn't know people here. Umm, my father didn't know much people... and uhh i-it was so terrible at the beginning, until you start knowing the community, and you know people, and – or maybe until I went to college to... it was couple of months until I went to college. When I went to college, it was – it started getting better because you know people from there.

I: Mhm, and wh- after you arrived, did you learn how to drive?

R: In New York City? No, you don't learn how to drive. I did drive at some point – I wanted t-to have my license, I had an accident, I decided “I live in Brooklyn, I don't need a license”, so-.

I: Mhm.

R: -not until I moved to Milwaukee.

I: And the obstacles that you mentioned before, how did you deal with them?

R: Like the being – feeling like uhh you're – this is new for you?

I: Mhm.

R: So... yeah, you get over it with time, but I mean, you *never* get over the fact that you cannot go back to your homeland, so uhh, I always miss being back home, but I guess I cannot be, you know, other than visiting.

I: And umm who was most helpful to you during these times?

R: There are some people in the community who were really helpful and nice. Of course, my father, he was a big part of my life, you know? If he wasn't there, I mean, he became – me and him became very close; he was my friend, my father, uhh, my roommate [chuckles], all of that.

I: And what jobs – what kind of jobs have you had since you immigrated to the U.S.?

R: When I was 18 years old, I started working as uhh in, actually, medical billing. So, it was cool, and I didn't know much at the beginning, but I learned, and I became good at it, and I kept working until I graduated, and I became a... umm a manager in billing, at some point.

I: And could you please tell me about one of the workplaces... that you've worked in? Who worked with you?

R: Y-you need the history of my work? Or are you talking about that time?

I: A-any any job that you had.

R: Okay, so at some point, I was doing billing, umm that's until I finished my uhh – graduated from college, but after that, I – my undergrad was computer, so I started working as umm system analyst... umm for a lab. And at the same time, I was also supervising billing, medical billing, but I missed – basically I missed uhh – oh, I wanted to finish healthcare administration, so I moved at some point to San Francisco – I never finished that, and uhh I end up, after moving to Philadelphia and Minnesota, I came back to New York, and I went back to college and finished medical lab technology, the second degree, where I worked as a medical lab technologist, for so many years... Until I-I was encouraged by my girls and my son to teach, maybe teach math, because they realized that I was good at it and my major, my undergrad, was also computer science, meaning that I knew all the math. I took the prerequisite math, and I... I end up being a math teacher, licensed also.

I: Mhm. And what role, if any, did your family have, regarding your employment decisions?

R: Well, my girls encouraged me, and my son, but mostly my my girls encouraged me to become a teacher, of course, with the blessing of my husband too.

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

R: So, he had his own restaurant, and uh at some point, and he's been having his transportation company..uh for a while. Th-the restaurant is closed at this time. He was about to open uhh... Biggby? Coffee place. It's like, it's one -- it's like Starbucks, something like this, but the COVID-19 started, and uh everything went uh on hold, you know, was stopped.

I: And, what role, if any, did your family have, regarding your spouse's employment decisions.

R: Oh, I was encouraged to do whatever I wanted, actually, so-

I: -No, I meant, did your family have any involvement in your *spouse's* employment?

R: Oh, no! No.

I: Okay.

R: Sorry, I misunderstood.

I: No, it's okay. And what level of education does your spouse have?

R: He has also umm a college degree, but from Jordan.

I: And thinking about your life, shortly after immigrated, could you please tell me about some of the places or buildings that you spent a lot of time in, during your first few years of immigration?

R: I would say my home, and after that, it would be the college. [Puts laptop down on table].

[Marriage]

I: Okay, and the next few sets of questions – the next set of questions – are about marriage. So, in your culture, how are women viewed, and what is their typical role?

R: The woman is umm the mother, the sister... the daughter, uhh the one who runs the house. Women are very respected in my culture.

I: And what about the men?

R: Mens are partners; they're respected too.

I: Mhm, and what are some of the ways that you balance your faith and your American identity?
[pause]

R: Just never forget who you are, and also, every culture, and every belief, has a good and bad things. Uhh... accept the others, and just never forget what you are. You practice your beliefs – I mean, we're lucky we're in the U.S., umm, it got worse after September 11, but it- still, I mean, you still can practice and uhh, the mosques, and everywhere, every-.. yo-you feel the belonging, that you're not the only person.

I: And how did your religious, or ethnic, upbringing contribute to who you are today?
[pause]

R: I would say it's it's kind of complicated... it's it's how you were raised, your experiences over the years, uhh activism, faith, all of that. People, you know, they play a role.

I: And what does marriage mean to you?

R: It's uhh completing the other half.

I: And what are the factors that play a role in marriage? Like what are the first characteristics you look for in a husband? Homeland? Muslim? Arab?

R: Muslim, and Arab, respectful, and open-minded.

I: And, would you move because of marriage, or relocate because of marriage?

R: Yeah, I did, actually. My husband wanted us to live in uhh Milwaukee, so I moved.

I: And could you tell me about your wedding and the ceremonies that you went through?

R: Not much, it was like um it was in a... in a cruise, cruise-like, but it's semi-cruise, it's like a four hours cruise around New York City, and uhh only 25 people, of us, were there. Umm the ship had other people, other than us, but we had um a corner side, for the ceremony.

I: Mhm, and are these the types of ceremonies that your siblings would go through?

R: No. Mine was different [chuckles]. Uhh, my siblings had traditional ones, where we have a big party and uh in a hall, with dance and DJ, and singer – actually, my sister had a singer, so yeah.

I: And what marriage ceremonies are the most important to you?

R: I think the uh – I mean, it's not – we didn't practice it, but uh when I start- when I go to other people's uhh parties, I like the "Henna" [a traditional Palestinian marriage ceremony before the wedding, typically practiced by "Fellaheen", or villagers], a lot, and the wedding, of course.

I: And [pause]... is there anything that you would have done differently or changed about your-

R: Yeah, I would go traditional, like a big uhh party.

I: So, how was your marriage ceremony similar to the ones in your culture, and how was it different, to the norms?

R: It's very different because it wasn't in a hall, it was in a ship. Uhh, it's different because it was very little people, very expensive, too, and uhh, if you have it in a big hall, you get lot of people -- it is expensive, but people will also give you uhh money gifts, that will balance out, but um, I guess it's more fun if it's in a hall and lots of dance. But [back] then, I didn't think so, but now I do think so [chuckles].

I: Mhm. And how open were your parents when it comes to marriage outside of your religion, or national group?

R: I don't think they're opened.

I: Mhm. And would it be a problem if someone, outside your ethnicity or your religious group, or somebody, with less education, or a lower status, asked for your daughter or son?

R: Maybe the education, or uhh the status is less considered, but outside the ethnic group, or the religion, is highly uhh important.

I: It's important that they're outside of your religious group?

R: It's important that they're NOT outside.

I: And who among your parents would have a hard time, when it comes to marriage outside your ethnic-

R: My dad... my dad.

I: Mhm. And who influenced your decision to get married, or engaged to this specific person?

R: Nobody did.

I: Mhm.

R: It was my choice... With the blessing, let's say.

I: And is there a major or a career that you would not choose because it could reduce your marriage opportunities?

R: No... Not at all.

I: And would you have ever considered marrying somebody born and raised outside the U.S.?

R: Yeah, my husband wasn't raised and born in the U.S.

I: Mhm and when it comes to marriage, who makes most of the decisions?... You or your family?

R: When I get married, you mean?

I: Mhm.

R: No, it was me mostly. I-it has to be their blessing, but I have to be convinced to get married. They try to convince you, but it has to be *me*.

I: Mhm. And do you think that social media has made it easier for Muslim Americans to meet?

R: I don't know if it works that way, but maybe they do now, yeah.

I: And how is marriage in America different than your parent's way of marriage?

R: I mean, it's not different; it's like different, globally. So... now people, they they know each other more, *way* more, before they get married.

I: And-

R: -I think before, they briefly knew each other, maybe?

I: And do you have an older sister who is married?

R: No, I'm the oldest.

I: So, how was your marriage different from your sister's marriage?

R: Um, it's the same, except the party. I mean, she get to know him for a while, you know, with the blessing of his family and my family, and then the the wedding was in a hall, a big wedding in a hall, traditional, was very traditional.

[Parenting]

I: And next, we will discuss parenting. So, in what ways, if any, do you think that boys should be raised differently from girls?

R: They shouldn't be raised different... differently from girls, at all.

I: Mhm... and when your children were deciding on their careers or majors in college, what role did you play in leading them to choose this path?

R: I mean, I tried to convince them that, if they choose a major, is to choose a major that is in demand and that is well-paying, especially if you go to a university and you pay a big amount of tuition, and maybe loans, that means you have to have a rewarding career.

I: And how important is it to you that they marry somebody from the same religion?

R: It is very important.

[Culture and identity]

I: Mhm. And the next questions are about your culture and how you identify yourself. So, how do you identify yourself?

R: Um I'm Muslim Palestinian.

I: Mhm, and are those the cultures that you most identify with?

R: Yes, absolutely.

I: Could you tell me about the places and buildings that you spend a lot of time in today?

R: Umm, my home – it's COVID-19, it's my home. So, I don't spend any plac- [chuckles] – I don't go anywhere umm basically, barely, you know, I visit people, but otherwise, uh I go – I teach online now, so I go to school, so I spend lot of time at school. For now, it's not the case, but I teach online, I see my students online, I see my coworkers online, virtually.

I: And what languages do you speak at home?

R: Arabic and English.

I: So, which language is emphasized more at home?

R: I'm trying to think, I think it's Arabic, though.

I: Mhm. And would you describe your religious life? Do you attend the mosque on a regular basis?

R: We used to, on a regular basis, until COVID-19 started, so everything is done virtually now.

I: And did you, before COVID, did you participate in community activities?

R: Absolutely.

I: And how would you describe your political participation in the U.S.? Do you regularly vote?

R: Oh, yeah. I'm a Democrat too – registered Democrat.

I: So, what elections do you vote?

R: All elections.

I: And when it comes to candidates who are from your same culture, homeland, or religion, in what ways, if any, does this affect your voting behavior?

R: Well, we didn't have one yet, so I don't know how... how much it will affect my voting behavior, but at the same time, even if it's from my culture, or from religion, you have know what is he, or she, running for -- what is the agenda they're promoting.

I: Mhm, and how have you been involved in any community issues or activities?

R: We've been – I've been helping with the refugees at some point. Uhh, when I was younger umm, there was ADC, Arab American – Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, and I, when I was youth, it used to be the clubs at school, you know? Things like that.

I: And do you read the daily newspaper?

R: Not... I do, I do, but uhh not the newspaper, it's through – it's virtually.

I: So, how do you receive your news then? Through TV? The internet?

R: The internet and TV.

I: And how has your mosque, and/or the Islamic Center, responded to the calls for justice, raised by the Black Lives Matter movement.

R: Actually, they were kind of active, all the mosques.

I: Mm, and in what ways has your Muslim community showed solidarity with Black Lives Matter?

R: In many ways, between demonstrations, between murals, between uhh having events talking about it, having speakers, and also having some uhh – there was like an activity, Civil Rights activity, was like a group called “Fanana Banana” – it was Muslims for Black, painting murals about um unity and uhh you know, Black Lives Matter.

I: And what do you think Muslim communities in America should be doing, in regards to social justice, like racism, islamophobia, and violence against minorities?

R: They should be doing exactly how the rest are doing – it's addressing and uh uh not giving up until things are changed, actually. There *has* to be some change.

I: And what are your connections with your homeland? Have you visited it?

R: I visited it until before COVID-19, every summer.

I: So, did you return to any of the places from your childhood?

R: Umm, yeah, I did. Absolutely.

I: Like the ones you described before, like your school?

R: Yeah, my school, my home, uhh the places I visited – the Old City, yes.

I: Do you have family members or friends in these places?

R: I do have aunts, yes. Cousins.

I: And have you encouraged your family, back home, to visit or come live in America?

R: We encouraged uhh my stepmom and my brother and sister to come, and they came to the United States in 1990, yes.

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

R: Whenever there's trauma, whenever there's uhh something going on, whenever there is conflict, wars, or unrest, of course it affects you, especially that yo-you're deprived uhh, to be part of that life... only as a visitor.

I: And where did you used to get your information about your homeland, while you were here?

R: In the old times, it used to be mostly telephones because you won't get much of internet and uhh news over the TV -- sometimes you do, but not always. Nowadays, it's the social media and phones, of course, but it's the social media.

I: And were you in the US during the Gulf War?

R: Yes, I was.

I: Were you in in – in what way did your life, with others, change during the Gulf War?

R: Uh I was actually in San Francisco, and I was going to finish this health management degree, but I couldn't because now, we have another plan – is to have my – the rest of my family, and so, I had to move to New York, and prepare a place uhh for them.

I: And did your interactions with non-Arabs, or non-Muslims, change during this time?

R: No, no... I don't think so.

I: Were you in the U.S. on September 11, 2001?

R: Yes, I was.

I: And how did the experiences after 9/11 compare to the experiences after the Gulf War?

R: It's not comparable. Uhh, September 11 was was really bad after – after September 11, i-it's been horror for all Arabs, I guess, because we were afraid that this would be a change of how we will be treated. I mean, there was a change, actually. Uh, Arabs and Muslims were viewed as “terrorists” at some point, too. So, it was uh – it was different.

I: And how did this change, or affect your life, and your interactions with non-Muslim or non-Arab people? Did you get discriminated against?

R: It's basically uhh little kids who – or during schools, kids will – kids are not shy, you know, they don't hide things. Whatever, if they are – if they are discriminative, they will say whatever they have. So, uhh yeah, my kids they suffered after September 11. September 11. They were called “terrorist”; they were called sand n-words; they were called all different things.

I: And umm, where did your children get support, during this time?

R: It was us, and it was ADC, and it was the mosque and uhh the community, and it was me, going to school, and addressing every single problem that had – you know, until they became uhh preacher themselves. They started to educate, each of them became an educator about our background and things like that.

I: Thank you for sharing your experiences. I'd like to switch topics to cultural clothing.

[Cultural clothing]

I: Do you have any traditional or cultural clothing, like a thobe, dishdasha, abaya, etc.? And how many do you have?

R: I do have. Uhh, I have thobes, maybe I have three of them? Abayat, maybe I have also maybe four. And dishdashas, you know, it's like something – I do have a lot of dishdashas... but it's not fancy, the dishdasha. So, it's abayat, the ones that are fancy, and the thobes.

I: And where and when do you wear these?

R: Dishdasha, at home; the abaya – basically I wear abaya when I go to Hebron [city in Palestine], or when I go to the uhh Masjid al Aqsa in Jerusalem. I wear also abaya, when I go to weddings, you know, on top of, you know, fancy dress or something. Also, thobes... when I go to Henna, I wear a thobe.

I: Mhm and how do you feel when you wear them?

R: Oh, so proud. It's like, this is me, my identity.

I: And what does cultural clothing mean to you? Why is it so important?

R: It is important because it's like the thobe is the Palestinian uhh folklore uhh dress, so, it-it's the Palestinian dress, and I'm Palestinian – I'm so proud about it. The abaya is like an Islamic dress too, you know? And I'm proud I am a Muslim.

I: Mhm. And does religion play a role in your clothing? If so, how?

R: Uh, I don't wear them all the time, but I mean, the abaya, when I go to uhh the “masjid”, or the mosque, yes, or even if I wear a thobe, yes.

I: And did your mother wear traditional dresses and if so, did she pass any down?

R: No, she did not pass any down and I don't remember her wearing any, but she passed away when I was young, too, so I don't remember that part.

I: And so, you purchased all of your dresses?

R: Yeah, yeah, I did.

I: Where did you get your dresses from?

R: From back home, mostly.

I: Mhm, and would you pass these on to your children?

R: Yes, [smiles] if they want it, yeah.

[Perceptions and beliefs towards disability]

I: So, the next questions are about your perceptions and beliefs towards disability. Do you think that people with disabilities can lead lives that are just as fulfilling as people without disabilities?

R: If they're taken care of, yes. Depends on the disability, though, but uhh disabilities should be addressed and should be um – should have some modifi-... -differentiation during education or they should have some privileges to improve their uhh – help them. I had couple of teachers who I-, because I'm a teacher, so I had a teacher (coworker) who is a special education teacher and he shared with us that he was, when he was growing up, he has his PhD now, but when he was growing up, he was a special education student, meaning he had some kind of disability, he did not explain what it was, but he was taken care of, and that's an amazing story, I think.

I: And generally speaking, do you think there is a prejudice towards people with disabilities in your community?

R: I wouldn't say it's my community only. If there is, there might be, but yes. But it's like as if it's in general in all communities, but I mean th-there is a misconception that needs to be understood – it should be handled better, there should be more education about it.

I: Mhm. And in your community, do you feel that most families who have members with certain learning disabilities, or mental illnesses, are secretive about it?

R: Maybe. Maybe, yes. And some are – i-it depends on how... how they're thinking, or how they – it varies from one family to another, but this is what it, this is how it is with all cultures, too.

I: And do you feel that your community is more open to speaking about disabilities now than in the past?

R: I-I see that, yeah.

I: And do you think that some of these topics are considered taboo to talk about in most Arab or Muslim families?

R: Maybe it used to be. I-I see them speaking now, though.

I: And do you think that families that have disabled family members perceive the disabled male different than the disabled female?

R: No, I think it's the same.

I: Do you think that families who have disabled *female* family members feel more hardship, or more restricted in their caring options, than if they were to have a male with a disability?

R: Maybe they'll be more uhh cautious of what kind of services to give her, but I mean uhh it's not hardships, though.

I: Mhm, and do you think that the option of marriage for a disabled man is more available than to a disabled female?

R: I don't think so, no.

[COVID-19 Pandemic's Impact on Personal Well-Being]

I: The next questions are about the COVID-19 impact on your personal well-being. How has the COVID virus affected you personally, in terms of financial, social, and health situations?

R: Health, I put on lot of weight, and I'm home, and I'm not uhh living the normal life I lived. Social, umm I'm not seeing people, and I'm social distancing. What else?

I: Financially.

R: Financially, my husband is not working either, as a result of COVID-19. And we didn't open the uhh Biggby. We had other plans that totally ruined and uhh we lost lot of money in it, in the process.

I: And how has the outbreak affected the way that you conduct yourself with people close to you?

R: I mean, within my family, it's the same – maybe we got closer, we stay home more, we talk more. With the people who are friends and uh coworkers, or even students and friends, I see them less. Virtually? Yes, I do.

I: And since the outbreak, what is the main way that you c-communicate with family and friends who *aren't* in your household?

R: Family and friends? It's phones and social media.

I: And during the COVID-19 pandemic, were there any uhh apps that you began to use?

R: Oh, apps, you mean? There are apps like dash door – Door Dash – to get food, there's apps to get uhh uhh food delivered [chuckles], you buy online food, it gets delivered. You buy online, in general, and uhh other apps? The Zoom and Google Meet, and many, many apps that I use in interactive and virtual – learning and teaching.

I: So, before the COVID-19 outbreak, were you employed?

R: Yes.

I: And what is this occupation?

R: I'm a teacher – high school math teacher.

I: On average, how many hours did you used to work per week?

R: I used to work like 40 hours per week, but with the preparing and grading, and all of that, I would say a teacher will put minimum 60 hours a week.

I: Mhm. And what kind of help have you received because of the outbreak, whether financially or socially?

R: Um, socially? I mean, it's us – the family supporting each other, there's nothing else. Financially, I think it's everybody's else who got stimulus checks, they got the stimulus checks, that's the one thing people got.

I: And what kind of help have you given to others, including family and friends, living in the U.S. or other countries during this time?

R: I guess it's emotional support and words, uhh advices, uhh staying connected, even though we don't see each other.

I: And what strategies have you used to cope with the physical and emotional challenges of COVID?

R: I'm still trying to cope with it, but it's – I need to exercise, which I'm not doing. I'm trying to eat healthy, uhh I kinda tried to, but it's so-so. Umm, other challenges, sleep. I used to sleep better, before the COVID; I sleep less.

[COVID-19's Impact on Religious Practices and Beliefs]

I: And these next set of questions discuss COVID-19's impact on your religious practices and beliefs. Have you continued your religious traditions, like Friday prayer, Ramadan, Eid?

R: Ramadan and the Eid, they continue, but from the home. Friday prayer, it's gonna be just a prayer at the house, nobody goes to the mosque – some people do, I did not.

I: So, how have Ramadan and Eid changed for you?

R: We're – it's only your household, Ramadan and Eid... unfortunately.

I: And since the outbreak, have you participated in any virtual religious activities?

R: Um, yeah, yeah. Since the outbreak, yeah.

I: And what are your thoughts and feelings about practicing religion virtually? Do you like it or dislike it?

R: Something is better than nothing, but i-it's not as interesting, or uhh as fulfilling, as in person.

I: And how have the religious leaders of your mosque used Muslim historical sources to help community members understand and cope with COVID?

R: Actually, uhh an example of Amr ibn al-As [Arab Muslim military commander], he became uhh "hakim" (ruler) for one city – I can't remember what it is – he asked his people, the people, to uhh, it was a town – asked the people to stay home, if they don't wanna – if they wanna not leave their houses, until the outbreak [plague] is gone, and to mask, if they just leave. This example was used... as an example that you should abide by social distancing.

I: And how has your religious practices played a role in understanding and coping with the virus?

R: [sighs] "Ma Sha' Allah wa Ma Qadr" – this is a will of God, God knows better. God takes care of everybody; we believe in that.

I: And umm many of the questions so far have been about difficulties and hard times. Yet, even during difficult times, good things happen in life. So, the next set of questions are designed to explore that aspect of your experience. What was the uplifting experience since the outbreak of COVID-19 for you?

R: Uplifting?

I: Like something that inspired hope or happiness.

R: Maybe the vaccine. I'm not sure... I hope so.

I: And what is it that you look forward – most forward to doing, once you get a vaccine?

R: I wish we can go to the – to our old norms, if just life... goes back to the old norms.

[Closing]

I: And now we will get into the closing. Is there anything else about your history that you would like to tell me?

R: Not really.

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

R: I think the mosque provides – uhh are providing a lot, there's lot of activism there too.

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

R: No, no.

I: And lastly, do you have any letters, old photographs, or any kind of documents, that you think would help us understand your family history?

R: No.

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

I: Thank you so much.