

## Oral History Project Interview

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

Number of Interview: RA/RJ 1.00

Date: September 16, 2015

Gender: Female

Name: Monaal Barakat

Country of Origin: Palestine

Year of Immigration: Born in the US

**Abstract:** As a second generation Muslim Arab woman who has lived in the United States as well as Palestine, Monaal discusses the journey she went through consciously in order to find her place between culture and religion. As a working mother of two children she highlights the importance of setting a good example for her children in order to influence a sense of strong religious identity within them. Through cultural clothing and her decision to wear the hijab, Monaal hopes her children will learn to be proud of who they are and where they come from. Her daughter encourages her to continue to wear traditional clothing in order to keep a sense of culture. In her interview Monaal's connection with her homeland shines through as she talks about a common feeling of togetherness within the Palestinian community as each individual empathizes with the oppression Palestinians have endured throughout the years.

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

I: This interview is taking place on January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2013. Okay so first I want to start by asking you some general questions about your background.

R: Sure.

I: Okay so what is your name, age and level of education?

R: My names Monaal Barakat and I'm 30 years old, I got a bachelors in science um from the University of Illinois um sorry Northeastern Illinois University and I actually graduated in 2006.

I: So when you were growing up where did you go to school? Like k through 12 grade. Was it public school or Salaam School?

R: Um it was not the Salaam School um we did Sunday school you know at the jam'a with Sister Khadijah like I think everybody did Sunday school with her and we started off with Milwaukee Public School through grade school and went overseas during like middle school years and came back and went to Cudahy high school.

I: Mhm, so why did you go overseas during your middle school years?

R: Um so my mom actually wanted us to it was kind of you know my oldest sister was going into middle school we were kind of end of elementary school and she really wanted us to learn the language, the religion, she thought at a critical age.

I: Mhm, do you think that helped you in your language long term, now looking at it?

R: Yeah. Yeah, yeah definitely I don't think we would be I mean out of all my sisters I'm the one that has the biggest accent in Arabic but I don't think we would've picked up Arabic unless being submerged in it.

I: Okay so tell me about places and buildings where you spent a lot of time during your childhood. Maybe your home growing up or somewhere that you remember when you think back to your childhood.

R: Sorry.

I: Oh that's okay, we can pause...

R: I think you were at familiar buildings?

I: Yeah.

R: Um so as a child, in my childhood I spent a lot of time with cousins and family so going over cousins house or them coming over, we were really family oriented and then as years moved up you know it was just kind of traditional Arab lifestyle, you went to school home and that was it.

I: Yeah, okay so can you tell me about your school when you were overseas then?

R: Yeah so it was a private school um it was an American speaking school that had both um boys and girls so it wasn't a unisex school as most schools are overseas and um even within the classroom you know throughout the years sometimes you had an all-girls classroom sometimes you had a mixed classroom but boys sat on one side and girls sat on another um and it was kind of nice. You know you had English speaking teachers; Arab Americans went to the same school as you and were in the same boat as you. You were an Arab American coming to the homeland for the first time and felt like a complete outside so it was um it was a chance of a lifetime.

I: okay and then have you ever thought having your children go overseas for school?

R: Um I thought of it you know I think if we had um normally developing, 100% yes but given our circumstances I think what I would like to do is definitely spending at least summers there or something for them to have the same experiences I did.

I: Mhm, so when you came back to school here in America, um how did you feel being a Muslim in these different areas compared to back overseas?

R: So I went to um I came back in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and started off at Cudahy middle school and then went to Cudahy high school. We felt like complete outsiders um it was you know we spent four years of our lives overseas and during those four years I felt like we completely missed out of the culture um the American culture um what's current in entertainment news everything so those four years were kind of gone and

coming back felt like we were complete foreigners even though we were born and raised here. Um Cudahy is a predominately white school so the foreign students all fit on one lunch table so um it was a little it was rough you know it was you know predominately the white people spoke with the white people and if you were anything but white you had Asian friends or African American friends and that was the way it was.

I: So was it like that until you graduated?

R: Um it was like that for the first um I would say two years of coming back and then once we kind of got our feet settled um we weren't afraid I think that was the lesson we learned from overseas, we weren't afraid to be our own people so we never really conformed to high school you know social situations or so, we were just our own person and we learned that was good enough.

I: How many siblings do you have?

R: I have um four and a half siblings. I have four siblings, three sisters and one brother and one half brother.

I: Okay, about how old are you now?

R: 30 shhhh.

I: What's current job right now?

R: My official title is transplant services technologist um I work in a diagnostic laboratory at the Blood Center of Wisconsin and what we do is and it's hard because to explain what I do because a lot of people are like oh you work at the blood center you draw blood but what we do is um testing um for finding matches for bone marrow, kidney, lung, liver recipients are in need of a transplant so we find matches for them so to kind of extend their life span.

I: Mhm, okay and are you married?

R: Yes.

I: Yes, was your marriage arranged or how did you meet your spouse?

R: Um that's an excellent question. It was sort of arranged but not really, it was traditional I should say um I met my husband he actually went to school with my brother in law, my sister's husband and I was over my sister's house and he um popped to drop off some stuff so that's how I met him. He then um had good intentions and came to my dad and asked for permission to speak to me before he came and asked for my hand because it was such a big commitment to ask for your hand without really knowing the person. My dad had of course stipulations with that but my dad was as long it was supervised it was okay with so we got to know each other for a good month before he came and asked for my hand.

I: How old were you when y got married?

R: I was three months shy of my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday so I was 20.

I: Okay was it kind of just a came out of nowhere thing or were you kind of looking?

R: Um it came out of nowhere. I was the one that said I was never getting married and said that I had to finish school first um.

I: Okay, um, what are the names and ages of your children>

R: I have two children. Ayah who is 4 and a half will be 5 in March and Deen who is 2 years old.

I: Okay so going back to the marriage thing really quick.

R: Yeah.

I: So you always said you wouldn't get married, what kind of changed your mind?

R: yeah so I was the one that said I was gonna finish school, I had big dreams going to graduate school and I said I would never get married and even people that would even call my mom up before my mom even says this lady called me I be like no not gonna happen and that's how it was, no not gonna happen. I think it was completely taken with surprise with meeting him first and then kind of having that month to get to know each other before the official asking of the hand so um yeah. Kind of as much as you plan sometimes things just happen.

I: Yeah. Okay so the next questions are about your culture and how you define yourself? So how would you identify yourself?

R: I identify myself as a Muslim first, Arab second and I think that um being Arab American and Muslim that somehow gets a little gray um as to what's cultural and what's religious and um I think that's how stereotypes are created.

I: Mhm, so you define more with your Arab culture than your American culture would you say?

R: Um you know yeah I would say so. It goes back to comfort level and where you feel comfortable growing as a child.

(10:00) I: Do you think that has something to do with you going to school in the Middle East for part of your childhood?

R: I think that has a huge part of it you know when I was a kid and my mom used to watch the news and kind of you know be on the edge of her seat all nervous of what's happening I never really understood I'd be like mom that's TV you know why you getting worked up about it and then you go back and you identify your roots and you identify your family and it becomes engrained and no matter how far you travel it's still part of who you are, you can't change it.

I: Okay so your family Palestine right?

R: Mhm.

I: What village in Palestine?

R: Um my mom is from the Khalil which you don't have many people from that village kind of span out and my dad is from Nablus be he was born in and raised in the Bireh even though they lived in the Bireh

with how the villages work um if your family and your history isn't from that town your technically not from that town.

I: Do you feel the way you identify yourself changes with where you are?

R: Um you mean location wise? Like where I am?

I: Yeah location wise, maybe here or when you travel back overseas or even at work do you think you identify with yourself in one place more than the other?

R: Um I don't you know I think that was one thing that we learned with living overseas for those four years I think once we had our core values in and our roots engrained in us it really traveled us wherever we went either home school and it's something we are very open about with conflicts or what's going on overseas or our opinions it's something we stay true to no matter where we are.

I: Are there any traditions of your religion or your culture that you practice? Maybe like recipes or...

R: Um yeah so there is definitely we still cook traditional food um as far as culture um you know we have our traditional um dress wear and things that we try to engrain. I think food is kind of the center of a lot of cultural things that we do. Religious wise you know again with dressing and um prayers you know that's a big thing no matter where you are and what time of day it is you look at prayer times and when it's time to pray.

I: So where did you learn the recipes from? Was it from your mom growing up?

R: Um it was from my mom that we became familiar with the recipes but we really didn't learn how to cook them until after marriage and it was kind of where each time you wanted to make something and you call her up and be like how do I make this and she would have to walk you through it since no recipes were ever written down and it was kind of frustrating because it was like just add a dash of this a dash of this and your fine it will all work it so I think it was learning each recipes one at a time versus getting a book handed down.

I: Yeah. So what's your favorite food from the recipes that you use?

R: Um I love maklooba, I love a one pot dish I think its hardy, its comfort food and it goes back to your roots, your core roots and something I think specific to Palestine.

I: So do you follow any food restrictions?

R: Um yeah we definitely you know have always gone you know um halal um you know and when I mean halal I use it loosely it's not like we make an extra effort to go and buy halal meats we just try to semi on the meat every time we cook even if it's not bought. Pick 'n Save meat yeah you just say bismillah and um you know we definitely are alcohol free have always been and then recently we've gone gluten and casein free just for health reasons and just trying to see if there is any sensitivities there that we could try to eliminate.

I: is it you that usually cooks or does your husband cook as well?

R: No my husband does not cook. He um it is me that does the cooking um and he sometimes feels like he will help by um you know mixing up a bowl or something um he won't peel potatoes because he thinks that's gross with the skin being peeled. And when he lived alone, when he was going to school he lived with his brother and he had a deal. His brother cooked and he cleaned.

I: Okay so in what ways, if any, do you participate in cultural or religious community activities?

R: So you know it's kind of a shame that after having kids and busy lifestyles we haven't been as involved as we would like to um we still definitely you know in contact with a lot of community members of what's going on but when we were younger we used to go every week you know to the mosque you know when I was a child the Muslim community was really small in Milwaukee and over the years its really grown um but it was kind of a nice that you went and you saw the same people and those became almost family. Even after when you run into them you feel like you have this special connection with them even more than them being Muslim or Arab um it was somebody that you knew as a childhood and your families were really close.

I: So what were, can you like tell me the differences between the masjid say overseas that you went to and the one here that we have?

R: Mhm, so what's interesting is um here it's like a weekly thing, the family usually goes and you go as a family, the men go in one area the women in another but overseas the women rarely went to the mosque. The woman's place was to pray at home and here I think it's because of um the community and how small it is you not only go to do your prayers but you go to see your community members and do your hellos and you know a social way of still staying connected to your community. Overseas you know you don't go to the mosque, the only women that go to the mosque are maybe just elderly women that you see them wearing their traditional prayer clothes walking to the mosque um a woman's place was to pray at home and you did whatever social interactions at home.

I: Would you say the mosque was a place of comfort for you when you were growing up?

R: Yeah I would definitely say so it was somewhere you could go back and everybody was the same you know you didn't have to worry about explaining no I can't eat pork or no I can't do this.

I: Yeah, do you still attend it, the mosque here and there?

R: Um it's been you know like I said quite a bit with the kids and stuff but we tried to go to different events or showings of what's there.

I: Yeah, where do you pray usually?

R: I usually pray at home um but then if I'm at work and it's time to pray I usually keep a rug there and pray there I usually take a conference room or somewhere to pray um and um if I'm out and about and stuff you just try to find a place that you could pray. I remember um when of course before having kids used to go out more, my mother in law and I when we used to go to the mall we used to be on wudu and we just hit up a dressing room and just orientate yourself and pray in the dressing room. Yeah I used to kind of want to be out and about throughout the day.

I: Is it a daily thing for you then, praying?

R: Mhm.

I: Yeah?

R: I made a commitment when I was 19 yeah when I just turned 19 I made a commitment to pray every day and I haven't left prayer since yeah I kind of you know um I didn't start wearing hijab until and I'm pretty sure you'll probably get to that later um it was when I graduated college in 2006 um but I knew that um having that strong core values and stuff id go back to religious values and I say you know it's one of the five pillars of Islam, it's the most basic duty that we could do to call ourselves Muslim is a prayer so that's why I commit myself then.

I: What made you decide to put on the hijab?

R: Um it was a tough decision you know um I knew that it was something um that I wanted to do but after marriage and being married for a couple years I realized that before I had kids I needed to wear hijab to set an example that I can't tell them what your culture is or what your religion and not live up to code you know I didn't wanna be a hypocrite with saying this is what you have to do. You know growing up my mom didn't wear it until we were much older you know and that typically how that generation went you didn't wear it as a young girl you waited 'til your older maybe mid 40's or so until you wear the hijab and I just really wanted to set a good example for future kids we have so I asked my husband about it and he said woah woah that's your decision and I can't sway you one way or another it's a commitment that you have to have in you alone.

(20:08) I: So your daughter Ayah, would you encourage her to wear it as she grows up?

R: Um I would love for her to wear it when she grows up um and again I think I wore it not just for my kids to wear it but for my kids to have the values um and so if Ayah didn't wear it and she still had some of the values I think I would be really happy with that.

I: Mhm, did you find it difficult to kind of switch and put it on?

R: Ah yes extremely difficult oh gosh it's like there's something in your head that's like no don't wear it, don't do it and I wanted to wear it for years and kind of pushed it off and after I graduated college cuz I went to school in Chicago, we were at a transition point in our lives. My husband was done with school and we were ready to move back to Milwaukee and I thought what better way to start our move back to Milwaukee with a clean fresh start. Um and it just worked out that way you know with coming to Milwaukee, wore hijab and that was our transition. It was a new chapter in our life and I wanted to start it off right.

I: Yeah, did people react to you differently when you put it on?

R: You know I don't think so I think I thought it in my head. Again it goes back to your inner demons and what you think. I thought in my head that everyone was looking at me differently even my usual going to the grocery store complete strangers that I thought were looking at me strange but then I kept telling myself you know how was it in a time growing up when Muhammad (SWT) was you know bringing the religion about and what torture that he went through just to bring the word that me having somebody stare at me is the least of you know what people have gone through over the years.

I: Okay, um so can you describe your kitchen? Does it feel different than your friends' kitchens? Maybe your American friends' kitchens.

R: Um yeah I think so you know um and I don't know if this is something from I engrained from my mother in law or so but when we talk about American friends kitchens I feel like Arab kitchens are a little bit cleaner. Not that I'm OCD or anything but you know I think in the way that we prepare you know cleanliness is at the center of religion and just knowing that um you know everybody has that you know same focus and that same center you feel a little bit more comfortable eating you know from an Arab friends versus an American friend. I hate to be bias that way um also you know we don't have you know a lot of Arab homes don't have pets and stuff so you don't have to worry about like dog hair getting into the food or so.

I: Do you feel like um Arabs cook more too than Americans usually?

R: Mhm I feel like we have more labor intensive dishes um you know when I mention that I making an American dish and it could be a complete dinner you know a wholesome dinner and something like stir fry or so um its look down upon amongst Arabs like ugh you're making stir fry that so easy you mean you're not cooking in the kitchen for five hours. Um so you know I think it is a little bit a little different.

I: Okay so what languages do you speak?

R: Um I speak English and Arabic and I say Arabic loosely.

I: Mhm, so would you not consider yourself fluent in Arabic?

R: Um, you know from a day to day conversation I have no problem, when you go into trying to translate scientific terms no, um I'm able to read it and write it um not complete paragraphs and letters um but able to get myself by with the language.

I: Yeah, what are your connections with your parents' homeland? So have you visited often or?

R: Yeah so when we um went overseas for four years we lived in the Bireh, we went to school in the Bireh and um every week for the first couple weeks we were there we made a trip down to the Khalil and it was you know um pretty much involved a day of travel so you had to spend a weekend there or so and then it kind of went back to just on breaks going because it was just so difficult to travel.

I: Yeah so what kinds of things did you do when you travelled there?

R: Um so with going to the Khalil um if you know the Khalil there is absolutely zero things to do um so you went from maybe one family to another um and you just stayed home so we tried to um take things to entertain us there whether it was a book or trying to watch basketball or keep up with times but my grandfather was so sweet. In the Bireh I think they had a little bit more leniency for a girl going out and in the Khalil they were very strict, it was a very strict town. Having a girl play outside was in no way called for so when we moved there and we went to visit my grandfather and uncles they put up a basketball net and got us bikes and said go for it. So we played a lot of basketball with my uncles that were the same age of us, um my mom was one of thirteen kids so she was the oldest so everybody was kind of younger so they always just so to entertain ourselves with sports or music you know my uncle on keyboard you know always doing something.



I: When was the last time you were there?

R: So out of my entire family I'm the last one to not have gone back. The last time I was there was 1996.

I: Do you relatives there that you are still in contact with?

R: Yeah my mom's complete side of her family, her siblings, her parents, their children are all overseas you know my dad's side most of them have located mostly to the United States so it's really more keeping in contact with my mom's side of the family.

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

R: Yeah um so it's really difficult with having somebody come over here you know getting the visa, getting a sponsor, getting all that takes years um you know it's not as simple as just saying hey come for a visit so last year we actually had my mom's youngest sister come visit and it's her first time on a plane and she came here for a good month and it was just you don't realize how much you miss family until you see them um so she had a great time she came her kids were older and she um decided to come and that was a little hard because you know you had to not only get all the paperwork in line but you had to convince her husband for her to come. Even though she lives in the Jerusalem and more modern times but it was really hard.

I: Mhm, did she like it here when she was here?

R: I think she missed back home, she missed her kids um she loved seeing us and I think she loved kind of you know it was hard because we would take her to a restaurant and we would have to try to you know um complete food everything was different um so we would have to try to find something that was a little bit more arabesque for her.

I: Yeah, did she know any English?

R: Very little um so um we actually have convinced another sister of my mom's to come visit and she plans on coming in the summer and I would say she knows even less English than the first one that came.

I: Okay, um, do you read the daily newspaper?

R: I do I try to keep tabs. I don't get an actual paper. I keep up on web based news and what's going on.

I: What sections interest you most?

R: Um I think I like you know I like the local news, I like the international news that something to look at. I have an app on my phone that's called flip board that keeps up with what's going on with electronic news, with local and you know national and international news and I try to what's nice about flip board is they pull in articles from all over the world so from BBC and international and Al Jazeera so they pull in stuff so I try to stay away from just mainstream American news to kind of get a full picture on what's going on.

(30:00) I: Yeah. Okay so in what ways if any have political events in your parents' homeland affected you?

R: Um I think there is a lot that has affected so um there's always something going on in the Middle East. The recent event with Gaza that's that you know a little much. We went overseas from 92 to 96 which at that time was the end of the first uprising, the first intifada so we got a feel of what I feels like to have the united nations vehicles everywhere, to have soldier walking with you know rifles pointing at you if you walk to fast so you know we got just a glimpse a small taste of that and then being here in the United States hearing about the second uprising in 2000 and then events have trickled after that have been a little um disturbing because you can't help but find yourself glued to the TV um and at that point you realize what my mom went through you know because when you're watching the news the scary thing is you're watching to see if you recognize anybody. You're like is that my uncle is that my cousin you know so I think that's the scary thing is looking to see did they identify names you know and I think that's what all of us kind of fear for them to say mass causality and to hear of family members.

I: Mhm. So when you were younger when you were there after the first intifada did you understand what was going on?

R: Um I think we had to understand really quickly, um I was nine years old and at that time that was before um the Palestinian soldiers were able to come into west bank territory so it was still occupied territory by Israel it wasn't even where you just had settlements here and there. You had Israeli soldiers patrolling. We had to kind of understand quickly because at that time you could not carry a Palestinian flag, it was against the law. So when we went overseas and we had cousins and jewelry with Palestine flags they ripped it off your neck, you learned really quickly what the law was and what you had to do. We also had our building was the tallest in the neighborhood so we would get frequent visits in the middle of the night by Israeli troops to set up shop on our roof top to kind of patrol the neighborhood, yeah.

I: Yeah did you, were your parents there during the 1967 war? Did they grow up there?

R: You know it's funny my mom um kind of felt the after effects of the 1967 war um I don't think that they came to the states it was 70's mid 70's that they actually came to the united states so they definitely felt a lot of that.

I: Okay, do you regularly vote?

R: It's funny that you say that because I am a big advocate for voting. Um a lot of especially in the community a lot of Arab Americans think oh what's the point why go out and do this and I think it goes back to how you grow up and overseas you don't have that privilege of voting. Um being a woman an Arab American I make it a top priority so when I lived in Chicago you had to make extra efforts to register either as a democrat or republican before you even voted at the site. I made every effort to register to go to the polling site and then same thing here and I encourage family members to go. So during this last presidential election I dragged my mom to the poll and said you're voting! Um I realized not only you know my Arab um background of how critical it is and how you don't really have that right to vote in everyday but from an American aspect as a woman in the 1900's that was a big challenge you know. Women went on hunger strikes to gain right for women and it's something that you can't forget and you can't take for granted so simple as going to the poll to vote that is our right to go.

I: So when it comes to candidates who are from your own culture or religion, I don't think we've ever had any but if we did would that affect your voting behavior?

R: So um I think every time I vote I look at the candidate and what their viewpoint is on my people and that affects my vote so having a candidate I think definitely would because right now I mean we haven't but don't get me wrong every candidate is pro-Israel you just look for the one that is less pro-Israel.

I: Okay um, so you were, were in the United States during the gulf war?

R: Gulf war was?

I: 1991 I believe.

R: yeah I think we went towards yeah.

I: Yeah you were young then right?

R: Yeah I was really young.

I: Do you remember anything from it? Hearing anything?

R: Um no, that was really like and my mom could tell you all kinds of things. The gulf war was you know again you heard of things here and there, you remember your mom talking about being discriminated against a little bit. My mom mentioned an event because my mom has tons of stories and I think that's where I get my story telling of when she was in the mall with my younger brother and my younger brother was 4 by the time that we went overseas in 92 so she was the mall and he had one of those helium balloons and they were going down the escalator and it got caught in the escalator a let out this big pop but it echoed throughout the whole mall. She said it was so loud and everybody ducked you know she said it was Gulf War time everybody was fearful, everybody hit the floor and then they looked up and realized it was the balloon and my mom was like oh great being Arab causing this disturbance um but you know just that story kind of gives you a feel how times were shaky then.

I: Yeah. Okay so how old were you on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001?

R: I was a freshman in college, I went to UWM and I remember watching it in the union I watched it at home and the rest of events that triggered were in the union at college

I: Yeah how did you feel at the time of 9/11 and the days that followed?

R: Um I felt embarrassed. I felt um ashamed of those men that called themselves Muslim, everything our core Islam meaning submission, peace um they just destroyed it. I felt robbed. I was angry.

I: Did you feel like your interactions with others change after 9/11?

(37:27) R: Um I never um hid that I was Muslim or had any problem explaining what Islam or being a Muslim was um so if anything it was an opportunity to educate people on what it was. People would immediately tell me well you're the first Muslim I've known and I found that as a privilege to educate them, enlighten them because that's where ignorance comes from making those assumptions and stereotypes.

I: Did your mom do you know have any experiences going out after 9/11?

R: Um my mom did wear hijab at the time, my sister did. Um my older sister did and she lived in Chicago at the time you know busier city and she had plenty of interactions with people. She had people you know my sister just started wearing hijab um my sister she just started wearing hijab um she had people telling her go back to your country, shouting at her in grocery stores and um mall and you know wherever she had two women whisper when she was doing some shopping at a clothing retail store and say well at least she's not fly a plane um you know my sister even though she wore hijab and you're supposed to be a virtue and peaceful she had no problem calling people out on it and she put people on their tracks right away (laughs).

I: Do you think that kind of influenced your decision whether you wanted to wear it or not or did it push you to kind of wear it more?

R: I think that's insecurities that came in I think those were the insecurities that came in when I wanted to wear it, it was not of being accepted it was of you know you're not only saying you're a Muslim your showing it you're proving it and I think those all kind of fears of being targeted came into play.

I: Yeah. From where did you get your support after 9/11?

R: Um I would say from the community I was really involved in the community at the time in going to lectures and going to weekly prayers so it was really community.

I: Okay, thank you for sharing those experiences. Now I'd like to switch to parenting.

R: (Laughs)

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

R: I don't. (Laughs) I'm really against that. I culturally it feels that a boy has a little bit more um freedom than a female should. A female is usually treated very strictly and um in my opinion it's for one reason it would be that a girl shows when she's pregnant and has the kid where a guy doesn't, it can be hidden. A sin is a sin so I think both should be raised equally.

I: Yeah. Were you raised differently? Did you have brothers growing up?

R: Um I you know it's funny because we were four girls straight and then a boy so he was five years younger than me. If anything you know when we were growing up the only thing that made him feel like he had little bit more special treatment was one he was the only boy and two we were four girls living or you know five kids living in a four bedroom home so two sisters shared a room and my brother Sam got his own room so we were like jeez you get your own room um and you know boys are slightly treated a little bit better than girls you know, so the girls are treated more strict and all that it's because they think the boy carries the family name.

I: Okay so what are the major issues that concern you while raising your children? Although I know they are still very young.

R: Um even though they are young I think you know having an identity and being proud of who they are is always a fear of every Arab American but really you know fear of being targeted for being who they are is also in the back of my mind.

I: Are these the same issues that concern your husband as well do you think?

R: Uh yeah I think so, I think my husband's biggest fear, my husband was bullied as a child um so his fear again it's like how do you deal with just with his field being psychology and hearing a lot of bullying going on in general not specific to race or ethnicity um his fear is you know how would be mistreated in school you send them off to a safe environment but are they really safe.

I: Do you fear that you're kids with identify more with their American culture growing up? Do you want to kind of push them to identify more with their Arab culture?

R: You know I'm hoping that they could find a balance um you know growing up I was first generation and with kids looking at them as being second degeneration what I don't want is that for them to completely de-identify themselves as being Arab and as a hundred percent American I'm hoping they can find a balance of who they are.

I: What are some of the major conflicts you have with your children?

R: (Laughs) Well you know they are really young and it rig now it's a lite bit different than other um families and stuff you know it's like keep your clothes on and don't yell in public (laughs) you know I'm sure a lot of other families um have.

I: Um when you're children grow up, would you kind of step in and help them decide on their careers or would you leave it up to them?

R: Um I think that we will give them whatever possible resources necessary to help them succeed. Growing up and having zero support from family just because you couldn't come home and couldn't ask for help in English or grammar because your parents didn't go you know that wasn't their primarily language so we never really had help with homework so giving them help homework and steering them in the right direction or path and having them get certain connections and shadow and see what areas they'd like to enter I think we'd definitely be involved.

I: What kind of role did your parents playing while you were growing up, like picking your major in college?

R: Um none (laughs). They um pretty much you know we were first generation and just going to college alone was an accomplishment and a lot of time back then it was still kind of new with females going to college and stuff it was like well why wouldn't you get married at 18? You know a lot of females got married at 18 I think over the last 10 years we're slowly getting you know getting married mid 20s you know where 10 years ago getting married at 20 meant you're an old lady there's something wrong with you (laughs).

I: How did they feel about the mentality you had, I want to go to grad school I don't want to get married?

R: Um they thought I was just completely out of my mind um (laughs) they said oh yeah you say that now wait 'til you have five kids and I was like 5 fives (laughs) um you know so it was you know even going to high school eve before you would bring home good grades and most other parents are like yeah that's excited or disappointed we really had no reaction none. I'd tell my dad I got an A or I did really good in a college class and he'd say that's nice daddy (laughs).

I: What kind of husband or wife would you like for your children when they grow up?

R: Um this is where I think I would like a balance. I think olden times it was were the husband came to work he came home did nothing ate and went to sleep and had zero interaction with their own kids so I think I would love for you know still creating that balance with modern days still for the woman to get an education for my daughter to get an education and contribute to the household but still have a balance between work and home.

I: So then the next questions are about your life growing up.

R: Okay.

I: What aspects of your parents' homeland culture did they keep as you were growing up?

R: Um they definitely kept the décor (laughs) whenever you walked into a home I remember the pizza guys coming and seeing um you know the water pipes I mean they had those on display every pizza guy that ever came to the front door said woah what do you guys got there? (Laughs) Um the décor I mean they kept um you know with taking us to Sunday schools and keeping up with the community that was big um.

I: Did they speak just Arabic at home?

R: Yeah mostly just Arabic so my mom would talk to us in Arabic and we would respond in English and even after Sunday school and Arabic lessons and that's when she was like you know they are getting older they should really have it engrained at a young age versus completely disassociating themselves with being Arab.

I: Did your parents encourage you to work or did they discourage you?

R: Um my father discouraged us from working um I was 16 when I got my first job and he said you know why do you need to work and I said you know for responsibility and money and he said money, I give you money (laughs).

I: So what made you want to go out and work?

R: Um I think you know it was gosh everything with my dad was a lesson so you go to him with you know to the grocery store and it was a math lesson you know my dad his highest level of education was 4<sup>th</sup> grade so he was all about teaching us as much as he kid so my dad even though he didn't have a high education he was street smart so he could do math in his very quickly. So we'd go to the grocery store and by the time we got to the cart he'd say were you paying attention how much is our grocery cart? Um so and then you would go to him and ask him for school money or money to hang out or for books whatever and you pretty much had to put together a whole presentation of why you need the money and how it

would be best utilized in the economy uh so it was kind of like one financial freedom and two responsibility so.

I: When did you first start to drive?

R: I was 18 so um you know it again my parents were kind of against it the whole well I'll take you were you need to be why do you need to drive? Being one of five it was hard to get where you needed to go so it was definitely a necessity.

I: So did they discourage you from getting your license?

R: Um you know my mom encouraged it um but it was where if you want your license you're gonna have to do the work to get it you know so all my driving or practice driving majority of it was done with my sister and um lessons here and there with mom but after one or two with mom you realized okay this isn't a good idea (laughs).

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

R: Yeah in college I was involved with the MSA Muslim student association um and you know I think that was a big one you know MSA.

I: Were a lot of your friends from the same religion as you?

R: Um not a lot you know um again you know going to college you know it's you went to school and came home and then when you did see friends it was either childhood friends that you grew up with here and there or some that you saw in school. I would say a mix.

I: Okay when choosing your marriage partner what was the importance of religion and culture to you?

R: Um I needed to so when I I think that was a little bit hard when I was at that young I would say prime age for marriage because culture was so emphasized you know it was where you couldn't go you know by yourself because it was looked down upon so nobody mentioned religion so what I wanted was it was important to me that had a man that prayed if he didn't pray then no I didn't want to um and that put religion first then culture um because I think that could get a little skewed.

I: So how were your parents involved in your choice of your husband?

R: Um.

I: Did it take some convincing by you to get them to agree or did?

R: No you know I think the way that my husband kind of went about with talking to my dad you know talking to my dad first alone and asking for his permission um my dad felt really respected and um felt like you know you know I feel involved so I'm gonna allow this and I was the third girl I'm pretty sure the first one sure was strict and every guy that came my dad was like no no (laughs).

I: Okay so the next questions are about your parents. So who are your parents?

R: My dad is Naguib Musa um he has lived in Milwaukee most of his life and my mom is Faten um and they actually separated um when I was in high school. Um so my mom you know um has gone back to her native name.

I: What is their current status? Are they both working or are they retired?

R: Um they're both working so my dad works at typical what every Arab guy his age does he works in a convenient store in the north side and my mom has recently gone back to work you know she was working then kind of stopped working for a while and is working again so she works as a beautician, she works in the salon.

I: Do you remember when they emigrated from Palestine?

R: Um I wanna say so my dad immigrated much earlier than my mom. My dad came here when he was 14 and I cannot tell you the exact year because that's always skewed. I wanna say mid 60's my dad came and then my mom came in 78.

I: So is that how your dad made a living in the U.S., was it the convenient store?

R: Um he um its interesting my dad came to this country and kind of started off at 14 at the bottom and working at um a hotel in the kitchen and that was when he kind of got his passion for cooking so my dad's a really good chef and is really known in the community for making his sweets. My grandfather was known in the Bireh for his sweets and kind of passed on whatever his knowledge to my dad. But yeah for majority of his life I wanna say convenient store is.

I: So what is their level of education?

R: Um my dad finished fourth grade. My mom finished 6<sup>th</sup> grade in Palestine and when we came back in 96 she decided that she needs to get some education um so she went to MATC and got her degree um in cosmetology.

I: How do you think they identify themselves? Kind of like the same question I asked you earlier. More with their culture or their religion?

(55;00) R: I think definitely with their culture. I think you know culture is a big one um you know but then again you know I asked my dad once because my dad dropped out of school when he was in 4<sup>th</sup> grade um because I saw him writing a note to himself and it wasn't in Arabic it was in English so I asked him do you think in Arabic or do you think in English you know and he said English so I mean he came to this country at such a young age that he still has both and definitely identifies himself as being cultural.

I: Do you think you were raised more culturally than religiously?

R: Definitely, definitely more culturally than religiously.

I: Did you kind of have to find your own path to create a balance?

R: Um I did I did because it was were oh you're Arab, you're Muslim you know you're Arab Muslim but really Arab came first and that was really what was the emphasis so I feel like I really had to find my own



path and where I sort of saw the difference was going back overseas and living there and knowing really what was true culture and then what was true religion.

I: Yeah. Did they used to mention their homeland a lot as you were growing up?

R: Yeah (laughs). It's always about the homeland I think every household had a hand stitched beaded Jerusalem picture you know (laughs) the dome of the rock hung up in their house.

I: Do you remember any specific historical events that they talked to you about?

R: Um you know I mentioned briefly about the Gulf War um my mom mentioned shortly you know with the 67 war a little bit about how that affected their family and kind of where they had to flee.

I: Yeah. Where did your mom have to go from her home in 67?

R: So my mom grew up in Hebron and they she always talks about her childhood home. Um she always talks about their childhood home and they actually had a home near what they call Haram Al-Ibrahim you know where prophet Abraham was buried there was a mosque there and a temple, it's kind of worshipped by both the Jews and the Arabs and um she had you know a home there she recalls being around lots of Christians being that area was a well-diversified area but after the war they had to flee and a lot of her family what they did they fled to Jerusalem and they had all gained membership you know what we call Huweit Al-Quds so they got sort of their nationality associated with being in Jerusalem and they have a little bit more freedom with moving and travelling throughout Palestine. My grandfather on the other hand feared fleeing Hebron so they just moved to another area of Hebron that was less populated and even when we went to go visit my grandfather's home even though over the years its changed its kind of at the bottom of a hill you know and they kind of fled there so they never really moved to the Quds and what they have is called Huweit Al-Difah and with the two nationalities and two passports within the region it makes it so much more difficult with traveling throughout you know Palestine with my aunts I mentioned that came to visit the only reason why we were able to do her paperwork for her to come is because she had Huweit Al-Quds, if it was Huweit Al-Difah I don't think we would've had as much um success with her coming.

I: So the next questions are about your grandparents. Did any of your grandparents immigrant to the U.S.?

R: Yes.

I: Yeah.

R: Um so my grandfather, my dad's dad and that's why he brought my dad here um my dad's dad came um prior to bringing his family um I don't know if it was like a work release or how it was. He came to the United States, mostly east coast um and he worked for a couple years and slowly brought over his family.

I: What are, what is the name of your grandfather that immigrated?

R: Um my grandfather's name is Adeeb um so Adeeb Musa.

I: So from what part of Palestine did he immigrant from?

R: He immigrated from Nablus but then again you know he's from Nablus um he had located his family to the Bireh and I don't know if it was through those channels that he found work and came over.

I: Do you know how they paid for their trip fare here?

R: You know I don't and um that's something I actually wish to talk with my dad about a little more. They don't really talk about that much you know they just mention that he came and brought the family over little by little.

(1:00:09) I: Was he married when he immigrated?

R: Yes. Yeah they had she had pretty much all of her kids um my dad was the second youngest so he came when they were really young.

I: Was it an arranged marriage do you know?

R: Um definitely arranged.

I: Yeah very traditional?

R: Yeah it was similar to how my mom's marriage was arranged um it was were um your parents went to a wedding and another parent came up to them and said I need a girl do you have one and they said yes (laughs).

I: Did they settle in Milwaukee then when they first arrived?

R: No they came to the east coast so they settled in Maryland um and that's where my other aunts so are living um and then when about three years into their marriage they moved to Milwaukee because of a job opportunity.

I: When they um your family came to Milwaukee the first year do you know which side of the city they settled in?

R: Yeah (laughs). They always talk about it, they actually settled in the north side of the city um my dad had an opportunity to work in a store um and the only place that they knew was the store so they got an apartment close by.

I: Okay so next is cultural clothing. Do you have any traditional or cultural clothing like dashadish or thobs?

R: Um yeah so we have um some dashadish that we that we have I would say I more got the traditional clothing after marriage you know when you're a young girl and stuff you never really I felt like traditional clothing was always for women (laughs). So when I got engaged I had um a thob hand stitched um for our henna party for our wedding celebration.

I: Who hand stitched it for you?

R: Um it was a lady in Chicago so we had to you know drive to Chicago give her what patterns what material and she kind of stitched that.

I: Mhm, how many do you think you have?

R: I wanna say I have like maybe 3 or 4 like maybe ne thob and three dashadish and that's a little bit um I think another reason why I have them after marriage is um I feel like thobs and dashadish are more falahi um and depending which region you are from Palestine um and we were madaniya so you didn't really have hennas or that traditional um what we call country dressing.

I: Yeah when do you usually wear them?

R: Usually at weddings only.

I: Okay. How do you feel when you wear them?

R: Um you know that's a good question, um you know I think there's something that kind of connects you with putting on of those on and thinking about past generation and what it felt like or you know three or four generations what they felt like with putting that on.

I: So what does the cultural and traditional clothing mean to you? Why are they so important?

R: Um you know I think it's a reminder of you know back to you know when I say homeland the actually land and where you came from um it has meaning you know same thing with food you know when you cook a traditional meal it's like you think of what the past generations were doing when they were eating that exact same meal and how it kind of changed slightly over the years. Even traditional clothing you know oh I wonder how much modernized it has become as to the traditional, simplified thobs.

I: Yeah. Does religion play a role on how you dress in a daily basis?

R: Um yes so um you know I try to dress as modestly as possible um and still wearing hijab you know and I might not wear the traditional skirts and dresses but I try to keep sweaters and things um you know at an appropriate length and still not revealing to much of the womanly figure.

I: Who influences you to continue to wear the traditional clothing? Or maybe just the hijab even?

R: Um I have to say it's my daughter rum you know I know my mom wears it now and that's great but it's something keeps me motivated with wearing it that you know she sees me wearing it every day and even though she's really young but her going to the mirror and taking my hijabs and putting them on just makes me smile a little bit that's she's not ashamed of coming out with me or embarrassed. I often wonder that you know I wonder what it would have been like with growing up if my mom did wear hijab if I would've felt embarrassed to be around her so her wearing it and being okay in front of the mirror and smiling you know makes you think you're not to that point yet (laughs).

I: Did your mother wear the traditional dresses like the dashadish and everything?

R: Um she did not um she you know wore her jeans and I hate to say it but growing up in elementary school um I sort of took pride in that you know that my mom looked normal you know and I don't think it

was until after we lived overseas that we appreciated the traditional wear. It made me feel a little sad that we didn't have that you know.

I: Yeah. So where do you get most of your dresses from?

R: Um so I kind of utilize um websites and other modern day shipping. I know before we would always ask somebody that was travelling overseas to bring back something we would kind of give them money to shop for you but with all the websites out there and what's out there now it's really to do online shopping and have something very traditional delivered to your home.

I: Would you pass them down to Aya do you think when she grows up?

R: I definitely would yeah.

I: Why is it so important that you pass them down?

R: Um you know again I never grew up in that falahi atmosphere about hearing stories from my in laws and how things were passed along um it just its kind of like you know passing on the piece of your tradition or you know not just your tradition but your peoples' tradition so.

I: Okay so is there anything else about your history that you'd like to tell me?

R: Um you know we talked about a little bit about my time that I lived overseas and um I think you know we kind of associate ourselves with being Arab and I think especially those Palestinians being Palestinian that's you know really strong um but I think you know depending on what time you lived there is how strong of a connection that you feel you know again when there was a time with lots of conflict so when we came back we had a lot of hatred towards even something as a symbol as an Israelite flag you had hatred towards that and you couldn't really figure out why until you realized that all those emotions have built up not only from your experience but from generations of what was going on so we had gosh such a small taste you know I recently reading the "Mornings in Jenin" and all those feelings and emotions all come back you know you're like oh my gosh where di this come from you know you had those memories of soldiers knocking on your door that you had to open it and um of them knocking on the door and calling all the men for a line up and they pick and choose who they want to beat up for that moment um so it you know just the restrictions in travelling and just feeling oppressed as a people I think that's what connects us all.

I: Yeah. Okay well thank you I really appreciate you taking this time.

R: No worries, let me know if you have any follow up questions.