



Oral History Project Interview

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

Number of Interview: SJA 1.00

Date: October 7, 2016

Gender: Female

Name: Samiah (name changed to protect interviewee confidentiality)

Country of Origin: Palestine

Year of Immigration: Second Generation

Abstract: This interviewee discusses her life and different identities as a 2nd generation American Muslim living in Wisconsin attending a Catholic university. As a young activist for Muslim women who is vice president of the Muslim Student Association at Marquette, she discusses challenges when facing misconceptions and discrimination from identifying as a Muslim, and breaking traditional gender roles of marrying young to instead focusing on education. She shares her thoughts when it comes to the Palestinian conflict, her experiences post 9/11, various work and research experiences, and religious and cultural clothing and why she chooses to wear the hijab. She talks about dating, drinking, and other college activities, along with personal identity development over the years. Jabbar's background, educational history, cultural/religious traditions, family/friend dynamics all contribute to the challenges and insights that result from being a young woman balancing an American, Palestinian, and Muslim identity.

Key Themes: Muslim American, feminism, cultural clothing, hijab, marriage, engagement

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

I: So, could you tell me your name, age, level of education and when/where it was completed?

R: So, my name is Samiah (cough) I am 22, I'm sorry I have a bit of a cough, what was the next question?

I: Age, level of education...

R: So, I'm getting my bachelors right now and I'm in my senior year so...

I: Ok and when and where?



R: Was I born?

I: Was the education?

R: Oh, at Marquette University, sorry I'm already blanking out.

I: No, It's okay. Um, so when you were growing up where did you go K (kindergarten) through 12 (12th grade), public school, community school?

R: So, for kindergarten I went to Riley School it's on the south side so that was a public school then I went from 1st grade to 12th grade a Salam School. Salam Middle and Salam High School elementary as well, and yeah, that was my secondary education. It was in a private school.

I: Okay, can you tell me a little bit about the places and buildings where you spent a lot of your childhood?

R: So, most of my childhood I spent between at home or, like you know, in Salam school because they have the mosque attached so like my family would go for religious functions and we would also go for school. And then like after school activities, or also in like the little community center like the basement type thing. So, I hung out there and just at home type of thing.

I: Okay so can you tell me a little bit about your home, your school, your family, describe your various rooms like who lived in your home with you growing up, who shared the spaces, and what activities happened?

R: Okay sure. So, I lived in a duplex, so the top level has three bedrooms, a bathroom and living room. We would mostly hang out in the living room. I have three siblings so it's me, my brothers Hamza who is 19 right now, my sister Laila who is 15, and then my youngest brother Momen who just turned 12. So, we kind of— me and my sister shared a room and my brothers shared a room and then my parents had their room. And on the lower level of the duplex where my uncle's family lived— my dad's brother— so he lived there with his wife and his three children.



So, after a while they moved out but that was kind of my home structure. We had a small backyard, we had a pet chicken for a while it was pretty fun. And then in terms of Salam school, so, that was kind of like the structure was like a regular school type of thing and then the mosque was a big empty room. The women's section was kind of like a balcony like halfway on the second floor that hangs over– I don't know if you have ever been there– so yeah the masjid has always been like a nice, calm place to like chill. Well not chill but you know, like meditate and things like that, I just liked to sit there after class or something when we would wait for our dad to pick us up. But I lived in the same house my whole life so I never moved or anything but those are kind of the two main places I kind of stayed. There was a park right across the street from my house so we would always play there.

I: Did you like having your cousins and uncle downstairs?

R: Yeah, it was always really fun, like we always had someone to play with. Like besides each other, like my cousins, they had older daughters that were closer to my age than my younger siblings so that was always fun and like, the only problem was when we would be loud upstairs or we'd keep running around upstairs my uncle would always get mad and send my cousin, my boy cousin upstairs "my dad says you guys have to stop running" cause like he couldn't sleep so that was one thing.

I: Are you close to your cousins?

R: Mhm yeah, very close.

I: Can you tell me how you felt about being Muslim in these different spaces and how you feel like you expressed your Muslim identity differently in different places? Like whether it was at school or in your home or just out with your friends?

R: So, in my case, in Salam school, being Muslim was like normal or the baseline because everyone was Muslim except for a couple teachers so like I never felt, I never even felt "Muslim," like I just felt like we were all normal or something– like do you know what I mean? I



never really noticed I just felt like oh, we're all the same type of people or whatever. And then at home I never felt a vibe that like 'I'm Muslim' until I came to Marquette and that's when I realized, it was a complete change. Because in Salam school it was like, very multicultural and to be honest there wasn't really any Caucasian people. So like I didn't like— we all watched the same foreign soaps or Arabic language soaps or whatever just like we all got along. We all had the same interests. So, when I came to Marquette, I was in a culture shock for the first year because imagine like okay, so kindergarten was cute and fun and even then, I didn't realize I was a Muslim. I didn't even realize I was a different ethnicity at the time. Like, because everyone was different in my kindergarten, it was pretty diverse. So, you know, I knew the general holidays like Christmas and this and that. You know watching TV at home, it's just like I don't celebrate Christmas, but I still go shopping, I still eat gingerbread and cookies or whatever. So, it was just like, I never felt different until I started college here. And then I was like woah people's class differences and racial differences. It became more noticeable then— especially the first class I ever took here was over the summer before freshmen year, and I took a theology class and again that's when everything was just different. There is a whole different structure of thinking here. That was the first time that I felt that my identity was something separate than my identity my whole life which is "I am Samiah, I am this individual". Rather than "I am Samiah the Muslim".

I: How has that shaped your experience and identity coming from a totally Islamic school and environment and then coming to Marquette and realizing that it's kind of like a switch? You came from a majority to a minority of Muslims, how has that shaped your individuality and identity?

R: In my case, like being in a place where everyone is the same as you no matter what background you come from, like being in a place where you're a majority, it kind of makes you intellectually lazy. Maybe that is the wrong term but like when everyone is the same as you, you don't like think about your traditions in different way you don't think about how other people are



going from a different angle because there is no person to tell you about it or whatever. So that is one thing, it makes you secure in your religious or cultural identity. You know, we all knew how to like, I had the basics down. You knew how to pray—pray regularly—things like that. Like rituals, things like that. And character things, none of us drink, nobody has sex. In high school those were never discussions, even with our friends, even though we were teenagers or whatever. That just never— nobody does it so no one talks about it. So, if someone does do it, they don't mention it out loud. It's like you know you are living in that nice spiritual happy vibe and then when you come outside, it like makes you switch your brain around so that you have to think in terms of like, you know, everyone else. There have been a couple times where I feel weird, they will have a discussion like “oh yeah this weekend I got so high, blah, blah, blah,” and then it's just like woah people actually do that, it's not just in the movies? So like— and also if you mention something about Salam, people are already— that's when I realized there is a stigma and bigotry around Muslims. Because, you know, you would hear about it but I was around all Muslims, so you are not challenged, but like once you're in that setting— especially that Theo class, we would have to debate and stuff and since I was the only Muslim in the class they would think that they could say something. And if you didn't say something back— but I would always get up and I would always like, defend that point to correct their misconceptions. And throughout my entire Marquette experience, even in a music class I always had to be the person to be like “excuse me that's wrong.” It was just like really frustrating in the beginning, but people just don't know. And now, it changed your mindset to “I'm just Samiah” to now “I'm Samiah the Muslim” because if I don't correct them, they are never going to know. It's the same thing like there were a lot of things I just assumed about Christian people and it wasn't anything bad, it was just like everyone, I never knew the different types. Like Episcopalian. I never realized that stuff because we never learned about it in school only about protests in AP history. I didn't even pay attention in AP History, it was so abstract because we didn't think about the US. In my head I was thinking about US history and Christianity, it wasn't on my mind. But once I came out of that, it shaped my identity because I had to compartmentalize things. So like this is my life, it's different than other people's lives. I have to mediate when there is a



misunderstanding on that side. I have to be aware so I can correct myself when I accidentally assume something that is wrong or generalizing.

I: So overall it has been an enlightening experience?

R: It has been enlightening, yeah.

I: So did you serve in the military?

R: No

I: Are you currently employed? Which includes working outside the home, and if so, what is your job?

R: So I have a couple jobs. I work at the Islamic resource center every Sunday. It is a library, and it also has Arabic classes there. They have different things for the Muslim and non-Muslim community. We have El Verno once a week and we will bring a class there to visit different universities. Sometimes pastors will come to our book clubs, it's very diverse. I work there I also work as a Marquette information specialist, you know the people in the alumni union, we pick up calls and answer questions about Marquette and we answer different questions. I work at AMWRRI. I am the field operations manager, so I have to help coordinate interviews and I also work in the Marquette speech and hearing clinic as an operating clinician– so I kind of help set up clinic rooms and take data of the patient. And then I have a school placement for special education for Salam Elementary school.

I: Are you married?

R: No.

I: So how do you identify yourself? In terms of religion, culture, nationality– how do you define yourself?



R: I kind of define myself— I went on this before— but like I always identified myself as Samiah the individual first, but when I look at myself outwards in, like outwards in like direction kind of, it's like Samiah the individual Muslim person, and then further, I am originally Palestinian. So, I kind of identify myself that way. My nationality is Palestinian— and I love being Palestinian— but at the same time, I never like, I was never like a nationalist type person where I am going to think like in terms of “Oh I'm Palestinian, I'm better than this person, or blah, blah, blah.” A lot of people are like that, where I don't wear the flag and go to sports games and fight with other people. It has never been, like, something that makes me argue with people. The only time I am super Palestinian is when it comes to human rights violations with like that whole issue. So, I keep up with the news and things like that, but I am very open to different cultures and I don't have any ethnocentrism or superiority some people have, I've noticed.

I: So, would you say that Palestinian nationalism is kind of synonymous of, like, an abrasive quality?

R: Not generally for Palestinians, but like people from other places. Like people from the Gulf or you know— I'm just generalizing which is bad— but I have just seen you know, some people— for Arabs for example a girl wants to marry a black guy or a white guy or someone from some other ethnicity and it's like “Oh my God no, we are Arab we don't do that.” I have never been like that in any type of that term, like being Arab doesn't put me above anyone, but I identify with my nationality. When Palestinian people get labeled as abrasive or violent, I am the first person to be like, no stop right now. Let's discuss this in an intellectual way, not through accusations.

I: Do you think that the way you identify yourself changes with where you are? I guess we kind of talked about this with school and coming to Marquette. So, are there any places where you feel you best and most successfully express your identity? How has coming to Marquette been helpful in expressing all of that?

R: Yeah, so kind of like before going back to these cultural superiority issues that comes up every once in a while, I feel like I am most comfortable being a Muslim at home or in the



mosque, because I can do my rituals and talk about the topics I like, you know side topics, and feel comfortable but the place where I feel like my identity, I can just say anything without any taboo from other people is Marquette. My friends were laughing a couple days ago, we were doing a group project and you know, I don't have like, they're like, oh you're so like not awkward, but I don't really care about conventions. Like there was this guy who we needed to ask for help and they were like no it's embarrassing if we ask, or I don't want to go up to him first. I was just like, who cares? I'm me, and I was never like, you know. I don't care for that type of stuff or if someone judges, I am here for me, and nothing bothers me. There is nothing that I want to do that I won't do because someone will say this this and that. So, I feel like I'm more free outside because I can have, for example, the thing I said about superiority. If I said that around other Arabs, or if I said that at the Mosque they would be like "Oh my God don't say that," or don't bring up you know, our community issues type thing— you know what I am saying? So it's kind of like that, privilege type thing, so don't mention it. So, I can do my rituals there and feel like a comfortable Muslim there, but at the same time I cannot express my intellectual self or academic self, compared to how I can say whatever I want at Marquette and there is no ramification of "Oh she is so taboo" or something.

I: Why do you think it is important to correct people and to be the example of what a lot of people don't really understand— a religion that is very misrepresented? Why is that important to you?

R: It is important to me because the biggest way you can make a difference is person to person because like, I think it's two out of three people in the US have never met a Muslim? I think that is a stat, or something like that. And it is so frustrating because people are voting in leaders and pushing for policy, and you don't even know but you are going to generalize and affect complete other continents, like do you know what I am saying? I try to do my work, and this is an intellectual setting, I should be able to say, and I do say when I see something that is wrong that comes up— because if I don't say it, every single person in this room believes the fact that they heard something wrong, but the Muslim didn't say anything so that means it's right. So that is the



main issue, and like I remember the most disturbing thing that has happened at Marquette— I actually still need to submit the report. I had this music professor, it was a music class. There should be no religion involved, nothing. He started talking about the history of Carillon. It is like a church bell, that is what the class was it was, called “History of the Carillon” and I’m like oh I have never played an instrument, I thought it would be a little hand bell, it was actually the history of church bells. So, I was like that is cool I have never learned about even why there are bells in churches, so that’ll be cool, I’ll learn something or whatever. Go to the class and he was like “Okay, we are going to talk about the history of our destruction.” So, he side mentions “Oh in Iraq we stole a lot of things.” Okay, then moves on “Oh and in Vietnam we stole a lot of church bells,” apparently, they were stealing church bells, the American Army. He just sort of mentions this in passing. And then he plays this video and it’s just this al-Qaeda video, I don’t know where he got it. If I had googled that stuff, I would be with the FBI right now. It was terrible. It had the imam playing in the background or the “call to prayer.” It’s like, that is the alarm on my phone and if people were to hear that later like they would think “Oh my gosh this is al-Qaeda or something.” But it had that in the music, and it was like in Afghanistan. Do you know the big buddha-like temples? They were like, you know, they were crazy extremists and were like destroying everything because they don’t like, you know, they don’t like other religions, they are crazy you know? Obviously, they harass Muslims you think they’re not going to harass other people? So, they were just destroying everything and the teacher says “Muslims believe that you must destroy art, blah, blah, blah,” that was the professor talking, after showing this terrible video that showed all these like random verses of the Quran on the bottom, and it was the story of Prophet Abraham and it’s the story about when he was going to slaughter his son and is exchanged with the lamb. It was used out of context to say like, “slaughter them all!” or something, like oh my God what is this? And everyone in class looked so disturbed, and everyone in the class is staring at me. Imagine. How could I not say anything after that? I was so shy, I was shaking. I raised my hand after the video and the teacher looks just completely clueless, he doesn’t even care. This is the epitome of white privilege when you can teach people about my religion and then basically show this terrible thing, and you expect that I’m not even



going to say anything. So, then I raised my hand, and it was the first time at Marquette that I had to go off on a teacher, and I'm like "first off all how is this relevant to anything? This is supposed to be a class about bells there were no bells in this video. That's the first thing. Second, have you ever studied Islam? Like what is your background in Islam?" He said that he didn't know, he just found it on the internet. I said "Do you know if I would have looked this up, I would be on a watch list right now? This is literally like an Al-Qaeda commercial that they show to other people." And I'm like "this is the call to prayer, I have it on my phone" like it's an ambiguous thing that they just threw in there, and I had to go through and explain like every single part of the video. And I was shaking the whole time. I was just like "Bro why are you doing this?" Smaller things have happened after that, but at that point, I can never let anything go because if I never say anything, because even after that, because like someone was like "Oh I would have honestly never have, like, I would have never questioned what he said unless you said something." And that is when I noticed that like my identity, I have to literally express it in the setting because if I don't then people will not even know?

I: Does it even get tiring to always be a warrior for—

R: Yes!! It is exhausting it's so exhausting...

I: —a religion that is inherently peaceful and that—

R: It's exhausting, because like even after that on the last day he was like "How are you going to spread your knowledge of the Carillons to other settings?" One said that like I'm going to write to my church that they have a recording of you know like church bells or something like that and I'm going to write to them to purchase a new bell." And you know they are all saying the same thing, that I'm going to go to church and then he [the teacher] asked "What are you going to do Samiah?" And I'm like oh you know I can like tell my friends what it is because no one knows what a Carillon is. And he was like "Or you can just blow it up and then build one." And the whole class just started staring at me. And I was like "Bro, you didn't learn from the first time I went off on you?" Like even once you educate them, they still want to crack jokes about you. In



one class the teacher was just talking about what's that thing called? Oh, the Crusades, and he just referenced randomly going off on me, like I was sitting in class, and he was like "It's because of your people..." this, this, this, and that. And I was just like, I didn't even like start, it was just really bad. So, it's just sort of exhausting that people will say things about you and like, right away, everyone stares at you. And you have to say something back, you have to fix it. And it's like "Oh my God do I have to say something now" and things like that.

I: Pretty tiring job... but I think it's very important. So, what traditions of your religion or culture do you practice daily? Do you have different food recipes, or do you follow any food restrictions?

R: So just generally I identify as Sunni Muslim, for me the denomination, I don't care that much. Some people are negative towards Shi'ites. I honestly don't care I just kind of do the Sunni-type things. I do follow food restrictions; I don't have pork or anything. Other intoxicants like alcohol, drugs— but you can take a prescription that makes you kind of woozy you know or whatever— but medical things are different than recreational intoxicants. Those are the things I don't eat.

I: Why do you think that is important?

R: Just like, I believe that it is a commandment from God, and like it just saves me trouble, I guess. I'll never have cirrhosis of the liver (laughs), things like that I don't have to worry. My health and things like, for the health reasons and for religious reasons too in general.

I: So how would you describe your involvement with the Muslim Student Association?

R: So my involvement with that, me and Aniya are co-presidents of that, and in previous years, I always wanted to help out. I saw it as kind of a fun thing and as like, this is a whole new setting when I came to Marquette, so then maybe I could get that old feeling back of like— you know it's mosque school with all my buddies when all of us... so I used to always make the little posters or flyers online, just like designing them, and then after that when elections came and like me



and Aniya became president... and it's like very good. We have weekly board meetings, and we are going to start having general body meetings. We kind of want to make our focus this year kind of like something, like addressing Islamophobia in like a humorous way or in a provocative way. Because, in the past years, the MSA events are kind of like Sunday school, things that are only relevant to Muslims. So, I want to make it relevant to Muslims and non-Muslims and have it be provocative to attract more attention, and like we don't have to go over the Islam basics 101 of praying, you know what I am saying? Because even then, there's still a minority of like Muslims on campus that practice— that are very practicing. Everyone is on a different side of the spectrum and you kind of have to make it accessible, that is what we want to do.

I: Have you ever felt like, like coming to a school where it is kind of a culture shock freshman year, do you ever wonder, or did you ever want to change your identity to fit in more? Or to do activities that other kids are doing like drinking, partying, have you ever been tempted to do that? Has that ever come across your mind?

R: For me, well I am kind of an outlier among people, I don't know, I never wanted to change myself. I never felt the need to. My kind of mentality is like no matter what, you should never change yourself for anyone because there will always be someone that does not accept you. So, like you know, you can always try to become more Americanized, but then you're still too Arab for the Americans. And then you start being too American for the Arabs. Or something with religion, I guess I was never attracted to changing myself, I'm still Samiah, I will always be Samiah, it's an immovable concept. And the other things, the summer I was in the program called the EOP, so it is the Educational Opportunity Program. They make you stay six weeks in summer, so I got the college experience sleeping here. I would have done whatever I wanted but within the first couple days, I see people go and binge drink or something and they looked miserable. I'm actually happier and there are like good people who had dropped out after that. So, I'm like I'm not missing out on anything, from seeing that. Or people who date or whatever, then a couple days later they are crying, "Oh he broke up with me," or, "Oh he's mean to mean," I have 99 worries, I don't need those things. So, I'm a pretty simple person. My other friends are



kind of different. You know, they want to try stuff but that is their prerogative, it's fine. For me I never felt any need to change myself.

I: Do you pray daily, do you go to your Mosque on Fridays, where do you pray?

R: Most of my prayers are on campus in the prayer room in the AMU. I used to go on Fridays but now I have class during that prayer time, so I don't go to the mosque I just pray here. Just in general if I want to read Quran, I usually read it at home, things like that.

I: So, who mostly does the cooking in your house?

R: My mom does most of the cooking. My dad can also cook but he only cooks American food.

I: Is your kitchen different than your friends' kitchens?

R: So, it is kind of different in the fact that we have different spices, and we like, utilize different vegetables. I have never eaten a rutabaga or beets or some vegetables. I have only had asparagus like twice and it was outside. We usually eat tomatoes, cucumbers, like different kinds of lettuces, radishes— we eat those type of things, that is maybe how we would be different, and we don't have any pork or alcohol in our house.

I: What languages do you speak?

R: I speak English, Arabic, and I know a little bit of Turkish and a little bit of Urdu.

I: What are your connections with you grandparents' homeland, and have you ever visited? If so, when?

R: I went to Palestine when I was two. I don't really remember it, I remember playing with rabbits, like I have this vague memory but that is about it. I am connected but I haven't gone back because I haven't been able to. But my grandparents have passed away except my grandma from my mom's side. I'm very much just like, you know, emotionally connected to it. You know the concepts that go around the war.



I: If you have the ability, would you want to go back?

R: Yes, I would.

I: Do you think that you will do that in the future? Do you think it is important when/if you have kids to bring them up with that as a part of their identity and maybe even show them your grandparents' homelands?

R: I think it would be good to take them back there and show them. Some people kind of, going back to the superiority thing, your nationality does not make you better than anyone else, but I would just kind of discuss with them the history of the tradition in a soft, happy way not in any type of negative way.

I: Do you read daily newspaper, if yes what section interests you the most?

R: I do, I just mostly like looking at international politics, so that is kind of what I jump to first and then after that you know... maybe health.

I: Anything in specific about politics?

R: Just you know for the international politics what is happening in Palestine, what is happening in Syria, what is happening in basically every Muslim country. What's happening in Europe, I want to stay updated.

I: So, what ways, if any, have political events in your parents or grandparent's homeland affected you?

R: It is always kind of affecting me. I just pay attention to the news, and a lot of things just kind of happened in terms of like, even my friends. One of my friends, her grandparents' house was getting demolished and even though we are not there, it was still really emotional for all of us. The stress of our parents while they try to figure out between their siblings what to do and stuff like that, and people getting trapped at checkpoints. For example, when my grandma was dying, my dad had to go through so many checkpoints to get her medicine and by the time he got back,



she was already in the process of passing away. All those things kind of tie you to it, like you get affected by the affect of your parents' type thing.

I: Have you ever taken any action, or feel like you need to raise awareness about what is going on in Palestine?

R: I do go to a lot of protests, I do support BDS. So, like the Boycott Divestment Sanctions movement works to end international support for Israel's oppression of Palestinians and pressures Israel to comply with international law, and anything related to Zionism type stuff. Just divest from that. That is kind of how I spread awareness and my mom shares my Facebook so that is how she does.

I: How would you describe your political participation in the United States? Do you regularly vote?

R: Yeah, I do regularly vote. I participate a lot.

I: When it comes to candidates who are from your culture or religion what ways, if any, does it affect your voting behavior?

R: I feel like that wouldn't really affect my voting behavior, I would have to pay attention to their specific stances, because anyone can really be born Muslim, it's just a lottery type thing, do you know what I mean? It is just a statistical chance that you are a Muslim or end up converting for your own reasons but it's the policies that matter to me more in elections. And there isn't anyone from my background it's just choosing the lesser evil.

I: So, were you in the in the United States during the Gulf War?

R: The war in Iraq? No. I wasn't even born in that time.

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

R: Yes, I was in first grade.



I: How did your experience of being a Muslim change right after 9/11?

R: In that time, I was still kind of ambiguous— I am Samiah, I am not anything else. And I was in first grade, I remember being so scared that day and all of a sudden, the school flooded with parents. I don't even remember what the announcements were saying, just that the school was flooded with parents, and I got picked up. I remember both of my parents were watching TV and they wouldn't let me look at the TV. She kept kicking me out. I remember being like “No I want to look at the TV, I want to see what is happening,” and I looked, and it was this bearded guy and he kind of looked like an uncle or something. [My mom] was like “Stop get out of here!” And then after that we couldn't go to school for a couple days and my mom didn't go out for a while. My dad looks white passing, so he still went to work, everything was fine. Nothing has ever affected him to the point that he has a lot of Republican friends, and they just don't realize. They call him ‘Charlie’ instead of his name, Khalil. Maybe that is why I never felt extra Muslim-y because of my dad, it doesn't show on him, and no one has ever dealt with us in a bad way when we are with our dad. But when we were with my mom, that is when we noticed “Woah people are mean.”

I: Can you share any experiences?

R: Yeah, so people will just yell like “You fucking Muslim” like the whole spiel “Take your scarf off,” or “Why are you wearing that?” We were at Safeway and this guy yelled at my mom and she got scared, but my dad turned around and started yelling at the guy, and he got scared because he realized they were married. He just thought another white guy was just yelling at him and he got scared and just left. The whole time I didn't want to have fun anymore, it took the fun out of the day because, it just like, why would someone yell at my mom? So random, that is kind of my experiences. After that, I kind of became more aware, of you know, that people don't really like Muslims.

I: It has probably been a difficult experience, I am guessing, but do you look to your family for support or your community, your friends, sisters?



R: Yeah, so I do look towards our community after that, I think it was when I was in high school that they started up some class about how to be Muslim in a public place setting. If anyone yells at you for these reasons or blames you for 9/11, this is what you say. You know like that, or just different things if people say that “You guys are inherently bad based on these verses,” you can argue back that these are out of context or something like that. So, the community tried supporting the kids in that way because we are all too isolated from people for them to even argue with us, but they knew that once we got to college or older, people would start to bother us about it. So, they made an effort, and like my mom always listens– I can go to my mom if someone is like the Carillon teacher, like someone is being irritating I can talk to her.

I: Is it a pretty well-known thing that when you leave high school it’s going to be big culture shock and that people are going to be totally out of their element?

R: Yeah, so me right now, I also kind of advise parents. So, for example, so many parents are terrified, especially conservative parents, that “Oh Marquette is going to turn my child into an atheist.” I’m like if your child is secure in their religion like it’s up to them in the end. You can’t, as much as you want to, be Muslim, it’s up to what they feel in the end. Get that worry out of your head because there is nothing you can do. And like, so kind of things like that or moms who won’t let their kids dorm at college or go to a far-away college because once you dorm you’re in every action. But if your child is secure in his or her religion, even if they want to identify as a more liberal Muslim, it is between them and God. I do help the parents let go because there is this sense of “Oh it’s going to be so bad outside or scary for my child.”

I: So, in your culture, how are the women viewed and what is their typical role? What about men?

R: So, the way that I see it, before anything else is, they are a servant of God and they have to take care of showing respect to God and showing respect to other people. And then things like taking care of their families, or if they chose to have a family, things like that and just doing things that are good for society. You know, like humanitarian things, the good deeds stuff. Just



generally, in society, I feel like men are more like, looked at to do like, its changing, but especially in my mom's time, men were generally looked at to work. And the women, if they didn't work, they would just stay home, type of thing. Or like men, you can go for a PhD if you want to, but for girls it's like "You're going to get so old, no one is going to marry you." And like one of my friends is like, she's going to grad school and I have another friend who is going to med school and every time they see an auntie or something, it's the questions of "Oh my God when are you going to get married, you should get married asap because no one is going to marry you once you're 25+ and I'm just like, okay that is just ridiculous.

I: So, do you think that is changing?

R: Yes, it's changing. Girls are arguing back at this point. Your job is never going to wake up and say that it doesn't love you anymore, your education and what you do for people, that will never leave you. I feel like that is such a priority, and marriage can come at any time. And like religiously that is not supposed to be an issue— it's cultural. People are more focused on that as being the ideal image of being married with kids looks better than being single and going for your success in an academic sense.

I: So, you say it's changing though, which is pretty cool. What are some ways in which you balance your faith and your American identity?

R: So, like my faith, I feel like everything is kind of separate but also intertwined. So, like I always go to classes, and I do all the daily things I need to do in terms of a public secular sense, and then in between classes I'll pray. I am not the type of person who will like leave in the middle of class to go and pray on the dot. I try to be flexible with both worlds. So, I'll pray in between classes or if I'm fasting, I don't complain about it. I know that some people do, or they will take off work or leave early because they are so tired. I just suck it up because I can't give the short end of the stick to one identity or like public sense and then like you know; I do try to balance it that way. I do try to make sure I do my obligatory Muslim things or religious things and then I try to like, do all my obligatory non-Muslim life things.



I: So, do you think— we kind of talked a little bit already about marriage and that right now you are focused on school, but do you think that you will get married at some point, and that kids are in your future?

R: Yeah, I think that inshallah— God willing— one day I will find the right person and I will get married and have healthy kids, and things like that. I don't think I want to have a lot of kids but maybe one or two compared to— I'm not the kind of person who wants to have seven kids or anything like that. Some people think it's good to have a lot of kids and a big family and I'm just kind of like eh, no. Even though I only had four siblings, I just kind of want two kids.

I: So, the first characteristics you look for in a potential husband, would religion play a big part, or could you see yourself falling love with someone who didn't identify as a Muslim? Or what do you look for?

R: For me in my own personal sense, the first thing I look for is religion and then, I'm not totally like, he has to strictly be Hanbali and Shafi'i, like that's a type within Sunni— it's a type of school of thought. So, I'm not that strict as long as they are doing their five daily prayers, as long as they respect God, it's called Taqwa, they have fear and love of God. So, if someone has fear for God and uses it to oppress someone else because they know that God will be upset with them so they will never bother me or be mean to me. They would be a good spouse with those traits. I feel like Islam, I am Muslim and I grew up with those traits that identify me. Like, that if I should hurt someone else besides, the fact that it's mean, God will not look at me in a favorable way. So, if someone has that mindset then I feel like I could definitely get along with them very easily, especially if we are on the same page. That would be the first thing I would look at. And then, another thing would just be like, I don't really care about race. My parents care about race. My parents even want him to be from the same village and stuff like that. I'm like okay Palestine is already this big (make a gesture with her hands) and the same village is already this big (smaller hand gesture). People I already know there is no one around who I even like so I'm just like, I'm going to have to argue with them on that. For me, I don't care about nationality, or race or anything like that. I just care about being a Muslim and being a good person.



I: Why do they have to be Muslim?

R: Because I feel like that's who I would get along with most and also because it's obligatory that Muslim women should marry a Muslim man, because it's the same concept. They will give you your rights that are based in Islam, where if someone who was not Muslim, they don't have to give you the rights that are owed by Islam. So different things like that.

I: What do you think about dating, and do you think that the internet/social media has made it easier for Muslim women and men to meet their future spouse?

R: For dating in Islam in general, you can know somebody in a public setting, you know classmates or friends in school or something and that is fine, but in our sense or, I don't like to even use the word dating because of the connotation of sexual activity or whatever. I personally don't do that, other people, more people are doing it these days. And you know we're in like a secular setting so people can do that if they want to, but I kind of stay away from that only cause my own reasons and health reasons. If I'm never having sex, then I don't have to ever worry about getting pregnant. Or any of those worries the people are having in college or things like that. And I would feel comfortable. But I think that the internet does— I know a couple people who got married by meeting someone or chatting online, so it is opening the path up to finding more Muslims that are outside of your general community circle.

I: So, it's more of a personal decision to not date that a religious thing you would say?

R: It is more religious for me I would say, but I would also say that it is a personal thing. Even if I could, even if I didn't have the religious reasons, I personally would not be interested at this point.

I: How do you think the intersection has changed the Muslim Arab Identity? Social media and its different forms— how do you think that has evolved in your setting?

R: Do you just mean like the intersection between my own identities with social media, or with other people, or just the concepts themselves? I feel like they made me more open kind of. In



your own circle you might hear prejudices, or like you know, different opinions and you will never learn anything if you don't see opposing opinions. Like social media, reading the news, staying up to date, lets you round yourself out and make educated decisions and more educated assumptions rather than just what you hear in your general bubble.

I: Do you think that people in your community feel the same way and that they maybe have more of a voice in different settings?

R: Yeah.

I: Parenting. Do you think that boys should be raised differently than girls?

R: No, I don't think so. That is always something that I have kind of hated, that you boys can get away with so much. Me and my mom were discussing this yesterday, like there is this kid I know, and he was calling this girl a slut for wearing shorts, even though she isn't obligated to wear this—we didn't wear this—it doesn't matter if she wears shorts either way. But he was calling her a slut because she wears shorts but then he's having sex all over the place, and he has herpes and I'm like bro, just exposing yourself first of all, second of all, what? Boys can get away with doing all of that and no one ever says anything about him, but then he can look at any girl and be like "Oh she is raised wrong, she is a slut." You can't do that. And I feel like that is how boys are raised a lot, not all of them, but a lot of boys get that sense of where "I can do anything" and the parents are lenient and you know, break a bunch of cultural taboos but if girls do it, it's like the worst thing ever. And, God forbid your daughter ever does anything, or wears shorts or something like that.

I: Do you think that is going to change with your generation?

R: Yeah, it is because all of the girls that I know hate it, and the boys I know say "it didn't affect me." But they just didn't notice. It is going to—it isn't 100% going to become gone and like equal, but it will change.



I: Do you think it is more of a Muslim occurrence or an American experience? Or do you think it happens in both?

R: It happens in, in terms of Arab Americans. It happens in the kids that are born here, and it also happens a lot with the kids born overseas too like—

I: More so than in other places?

R: Yeah, maybe more so than in other places. My girl cousins especially, they are really limited in what they can do than my boy cousins overseas. In America, we are more equal, kind of, because it is more flexible but there are still those taboos. For example, my mom would never let me be on campus late. But for my brother, she would say “Oh no he’s a boy he needs more time to work, you can just work at home, its more safe here” and all this. So, it is from protectiveness, but it is frustrating. But it is becoming less, now me and my brother both stay on campus late because I told my parents, that is not fair that you treat one child this way and we are all your children in the end, so they kind of got better with it.

I: What other gender norms are frustrating for you whether, it’s at the Mosque, in your community or at school?

R: One thing in the mosque nothing really bothers me. I know we go to the women’s sections but for me it’s fine because when we pray, we are bending over on the floor. I wouldn’t want a guy behind me. Some people, a small minority of Muslims, get upset about why do we have to pray behind them? It’s not even actually Muslims who get upset, it’s more non-Muslims who say “Why are the women praying behind the men?”

I: Has that ever bothered you?

R: When people say that?

I: Yes, and also to not be able to pray together, or have you even ever thought of it?



R: I have never even thought of it. I like the women's section I think it is more comfortable, especially for the women who don't wear a scarf but still want to pray. And you're going to be getting dressed in that section so why would, that would be so weird— I would feel so shy. And we do sometimes pray in halls, so sometimes we don't pray on a different level, we pray on a different floor in the mosque, but like praying behind them always feels more comfortable to me. If I were to bend over and put my forehead on the floor and there are guys behind me that would be weird to me. I don't know about other people, but just the kind of behavior norms of those gender norms “Oh girls shouldn't be laughing loudly” or just like those things are cultural things. And those things are irritating. Like no, just let me do whatever I want stop saying, “Girls do this and boys do that.”

I: Do you think that comes from Islam or the cultures around Islam?

R: It comes from the cultures around Islam. Islam gives general decorum-like things for everyone. For example, everyone should talk in a respectable way and not scream and yell. That is like a Hadith, or something like you should speak in a nice way to people. And then people took that and made it “Oh its sounds nicer if girls speak softer, so be quiet.” It was just the culture itself. And like with Hijab, the rule is that everyone must be modest, and men must cover from here to here, but the whole point is that you have to act modest, you have to not be like— you have to respect yourself and not bother people. So, there is that ruling but then guys will cat call and do things like that. So, I'm like, that's not modesty that's not respectable behavior, so that is another gender role that the culture only puts on women to be quiet. It is the same thing in the US, just in a different way in different religions. Same thing in different cultures, I mean.

I: So, it is not inherently Muslim?

R: It's not inherently Muslim. No, no, no.

I: If you were to have children do you have any concerns that you would have for your daughter that you wouldn't have for your son?



R: I feel like in general my concerns would be the same, you know like would they be a good child. First of all, would they be a healthy child, would they be a respectful nice person, but for a girl, I would worry that same things for my little brother and my little cousin. I worry for both of them. My sister, sometimes my mom will worry that, because she is a little more Americanized than me. She doesn't wear a scarf and she likes the general teenage things more than me, so I was always kind of weird– I didn't watch a lot of TV. Even though we had a TV, and I could've watched whatever I wanted, I would always rather go color. She is fifteen, she loves pop music and all this, so she is kind of, I worry sometimes that– there was this lady in the mosque one time and she was like kind of shaming her. She was saying “Oh you're not humble enough or religious like your sister.” And it's not even that I am that religious it's that I'm quiet, so they assume that I am being humble.

I: Does that bother you?

R: Yes, that bothers me! And for example, when I wear my abaya to school– sometimes when I am going to pray at school– I am the kind of person who like, I always like wearing leggings. And an abaya is the same type of concept. If you wear it with a blazer its looks like a black dress. It looks really nice and is so comfy, it's not restrictive like dress pants can be or anything. And some people, like when I first met other Muslims on campus, they assumed I was so conservative. Why are you assuming my stances when I am just wearing an outfit?

I: I think that goes across cultures.

R: It does, and people will just like, look at when my sister is wearing skinny jeans to school, or some more colorful outfits and “Oh you are not humble like your sister,” and my sister will ask me “Well am I a bad girl?” and I'm like, “You're not a bad girl, do whatever you want, live your life, you are a great person with a good character.” It doesn't matter about your outfit or if you're not wearing a scarf and things like that.

I: Do you think she is less of a Muslim than you if she doesn't wear a scarf?



R: Of course not, it is one obligation and it's like, maybe she is a more honest person than I am maybe she has a cleaner heart or prays more than me, do you know what I am saying? I would never use this to gauge anybody, you can't do that because you don't know what people are doing in their spare time, or how they treat others privately.

I: The next questions are going to be about your life growing up. What aspects of your grandparents' homeland did they keep while you guys were growing up and what languages did they speak? Did you grow up speaking Arabic?

R: My mom would speak Arabic at home and then my dad would speak English. I don't know why he speaks English, sometimes he speaks Arabic. I think it is because he works in an American setting, and everyone speaks English so I guess then when he would come home, he would keep speaking English. My parents kind of held onto food and were always telling us, even when we were little, they would tell us about Palestinian politics, but then they would be scared to show us 9/11 things. Which I always thought of as so weird and even when there would be Ghaza, and it would be really graphic they would still show us, they would be like "You have to know what's happening overseas." And they would be like no this can happen to basically your cousins, and that actually someone is shelling them, you can look at it. It was that kind of mentality where they made us very politically aware of what was happening in our homeland and things like that.

I: Do your parent encourage you to work, do they discourage you?

R: They encourage me to go far in my career and things like that, they just never wanted me to do a labor job. For example, when my dad first started working, he did a lot of labor jobs and ruined his knees. So he thinks it's not good for girls, even for any of his kids, he doesn't want my brother to do that. But he was like "I went through the tough things so that you guys can go forward and have a nice future and be comfortable in your futures." So, my parents fully support it.

I: Do you drive?



R: My parents are always begging me to drive, and I have to take my license test and whenever people ask me if I can drive, they automatically assume when I say no that it's because of Islam. So, I have to be like no I'm not Saudi or anything that no one is letting me, my parents are begging me to take my test. I am so scared because I think I'm going to fail, because I kind of suck at merging.

I: I do too. [laughs]. Can you tell me a little bit about your parents and if they are still working? Were they the ones that immigrated here?

R: My dad's dad, my grandpa, he would work here and then go back overseas. So he would make a little money and then go back overseas. My dad was the one who immigrated over here and then stayed, and then brought my mom, and now we live here and they all have citizenship. My dad's name is Khalil and my mom's name is Salwa and, what else?

I: Do you remember the year or how old they were when they came?

R: My mom was in her early twenties, my dad was in his mid-twenties, so their ages were pretty close.

I: They came from Palestine?

R: Yeah. He came for work and studying, and my mom married him and then came here, and she worked with him a little bit and she just stays at home, and she takes care of us and everything. She is a stay-at-home mom. She went to a couple college classes, she is going to finish up some English classes she took. What else is there...? Oh, my dad is a field engineer and he kind of like takes it easy, so yeah.

I: What are their official levels of education?

R: My mom finished high school and some post-secondary work, and my dad has an associate's degree.



I: So, talking a little bit about clothes and about cultural clothing... do you have any traditional clothing?

R: Yeah, I do.

I: How many do you have?

R: I can't really count because me and my mom are the same size, so she has a full closet of cultural clothing and I have, maybe three abayas I rotate and like three dishdashas, and those are like the embroidered heavy Palestinian clothes. I don't really wear those except for weddings. The abayas I wear to work. I rotate them for both jobs because it looks professional, and it is an Islamic setting anyways, so I can wear it comfortably.

I: How do you feel when you wear them?

R: I feel like it looks very classy, I always have the black ones with the black beads, so it always matches if I mix up my scarf or my jacket or something. I feel very classy in it, I feel special in it, and that it looks nice.

I: How does religion play a role in your choice of clothing?

R: I am a Taibah, so I go through with what the hijab things, so everything is covered except my hands, my face, and my feet. I try to wear kind of like loose-fitting clothing. I'm pretty like, liberal with it, I guess. A little bit of my hair is showing, not on purpose, and it is not like I am trying to be seductive or anything but like, I'm not that strict. I know that God is not going to be upset with me for like, five hairs showing, and I do wear leggings even though its tight on your legs, but like I'm trying my best, I am human.

I: Why do you think that is important to dress modestly?

R: For me, it just goes back to the commandments of what you should do and the recommendations. I feel like it's good and beneficial to be modest, and it is comfortable. With



my own disposition as a person, I feel more comfortable wearing more modest clothing. I prefer it personally and for the religious reasons.

I: Do you think there is a difference, do you know that men get away with not dressing as modestly as women?

R: In that case for example, you should be modest either way. For example, it is the same guys who say, “Oh she doesn't wear a hijab,” and the ones who are taking selfies with their muscles out, they aren't being modest either. The whole point is, it's not the body that is a shameful thing, it's that you are trying to garner people's attention for something superficial when what matters is in your heart and in your mind. Beauty fades, but the person is always there. Why are boys not being held to that extent, you know from the belly button to the knee, but they are wearing shorter shorts. Why are you bagging on girls but then after that you are not even following through completely?

I: Do you think it is unfair?

R: It is, but it is up to everyone's choice, but the double standard is unfair. But it is cultural.

I: Why do you choose to wear the hijab?

R: I chose to wear it when I was sixteen, and I just felt like at that time I understood the concept of what is. Inside matters more than what is outside, and kind of just like being modest with yourself. And I realized the protection it gives you. When some of my other friends will get bothered or when people look at their outside and have bad intentions towards them, it [my hijab] protects me from that in a way. You know no one can check me out. Well, I guess they still can but there is not that much showing. It is a protection in itself, but it is also up to men to not act in a bad way.

I: Would you describe yourself as a feminist in the sense that men and women should be held to the same standard and deserving the same treatment?



R: Yeah, I would. I would say that, but I just never use that word because people start arguing and I already have enough to argue about. But I do agree it should be equal.

I: What is it like as both a Muslim and a feminist?

R: It kind of sets you up for people to argue with you, but you have to stand up for what is right. Like men and women are mentioned equal times in the Quran, so that is a symbol in itself, that no one takes precedent over someone else. So it's just a different identity. Me and my friends are all like that— I think it is just a new generation of girls not tolerating it. But it's just hard dealing with older people who have the older mindset, that's when you stand out as a feminist.

I: What would you say to someone who says something along the lines of Islam is a sexist religion that suppresses women?

R: I would just say don't base your Islam off of policy and cultural traditions of random governments because we can't even call them Muslim majority countries, but they are not acting completely on the Sharia. For example, Egypt is just corrupt, it may be a Muslim majority country, but you are supposed to enforce the commandments, when it comes to governing a country, that no one is supposed to be starving in your country and that is a huge thing. Once you take care of that, then you can work on putting in consequences for people who steal and commit fraud. That is how that would generally work, and most people don't know that. So, like if Islam was so repressive then why— it's just totally different than what these governments or al-Qaeda does when they abuse women or whatever, there are bad people in every religion. If you go back to Islamic sources, the Prophet's wives were riding their own camels and going with him places, they would argue with him and tell him what to do. They are humans too, and they were treated with the upmost compassion and respect. That is who you should be basing your actions off of, not off of corrupt people. There are domestic violence issues here too, like when a boyfriend gets mad at his girlfriend and say, he beats her up you say that he is a terrible person, but no one ever says he's a terrible Christian, he is a terrible atheist. No one says that. It is in essence, just terrible people.



I: Is there anything else about your history you would like to tell me?

R: No, I don't think so, I think that was a lot.

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 communities to which you belong?

R: Well just in general, but I am going to put in a plug for the research I do. So, my research regards Arab and Muslim communities and how they perceive disability and how that affects their access to services. So, just kind of doing more awareness with that. Just in terms of disability. I perceive that there is a stigma against invisible disabilities rather than visible ones. Invisible— I mean psychological, learning disabilities, things like that. People are more likely to assume "Oh if you have depression, you are probably a sinner, you are probably doing a lot of sins, that is why are a depressed." No, it can be a chemical imbalance you know, there are a lot of people who still makes those assumptions. Even my younger brother had a speech impediment, an articulation disorder, and instead of people supporting us when we would get him a speech therapist they were like "What is speech therapy? No, you don't read with him enough." They told my mom "Oh you probably did something wrong, how are the other one's smart and this one is not "smart?" He doesn't know how to talk." So, it is very abrasive, the way people talk, and they might not mean it, but it all goes back to lack of awareness. So, that is one thing that I find that we could work on as a community.

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

R: We can talk about it later.



I: Lastly, do you have any letters, old photographs, notes or any kind of documents– awards, certificates, diplomas– that you think will help us understand your family history? Can we have a copy of it?

R: Not with me but maybe some I can bring next time?

I: That would be perfect. Thank you for your time and energy and for sharing your experiences with me. You have given us valuable information about your life and your family. If you need to contact me, please do so. Also, if I have any additional questions for you, may I contact you again?

R: Thank you so much.