



## Oral History Project Interview

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

Interview number: AS 1.00

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Gender: Female

Name: Leila

Year of immigration: 1995

**Abstract:** Leila immigrated to the United States from Rabat, Morocco in 1995 with her three children after being recently divorced. She immigrated to Illinois and lived with a friend for three months until she obtained a job. She then moved with her three boys to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Leila experienced the hardship of homesickness after first immigrating because she left without being fully able to say goodbye to her family. The greatest cultural difference she experienced was the “individualistic” society of the United States. She wasn’t used to not being friendly with everyone, because in the Moroccan culture, being with friends and family is an essential part of everyday life. Leila explained to me how difficult it was to come from a very traditional family and be divorced. She didn’t have a lot of support from friends and due to the laws in Morocco, she was given absolutely nothing from the divorce. However, she found strength in her religion to be able to raise her three children as a single mom. Leila graduated from university in Morocco and then received a bachelor’s degree in Business Administration from University of Madison. She recently began an online business and her children are in college. Leila also explained about the cultural significance of the Caftan and Jebella, two important cultural clothing pieces in her culture. They both represent modesty and sanctity of the female body and tell a different story. Leila is proud to be a Moroccan-American citizen and is thankful for all of the opportunities she has been given. As an extremely bright and driven woman, she was able to take a successful life for herself despite being a single-mom in a foreign country without family.

**Key Themes:** Independence, religion, overcoming hardship, cultural clothing

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

I: Where is your homeland?

R: Morocco. Rabat, Morocco.

I: Is this where you were born?

R: I was born in another city, Casablanca.

I: How come you moved from Casablanca?

R: To the United States?

I: To Rabat?

R: It was because of my dad’s work. My dad was the government official, so we used to move a lot from town-to-town because of his work.

I: What did he do in the government?

R: He was actually, he started as an official and he climbed the ladder to be the major, yeah. But he died a long time ago, he died when I was twenty-one.

I: I’m sorry.

R: Yeah, thank you.

I: Did you live in any other countries before coming the United States?

R: No. mmmnnnhhh.

I: Can you tell me about the home you grew up in?

R: The home I grew up, I grow up in government homes and they were a big homes, and we had many privileges— you know because of my dad’s profession— and they were big homes and they had a huge garden with all kinds of fruit and vegetables and, we had our own driver our own nice— I’m getting emotional, but yeah we had a nice life.

I: What types of privileges did you have?

R: Just having a comfortable life I guess, that's a privilege in life, you know not everybody has it. So...

I: Who did you grow up with in your house?

R: My mom, my dad, and my siblings.

I: How many siblings?

R: I have two brothers and three sisters. Huge family [laughs] but we were very close to family, my aunts, my uncles we always had a full house literally there were always people coming and going.

I: Why was that?

R: We just, my dad is the oldest, he has four sisters and four brothers, and they were all married and had families. My mom has two brothers and three sisters. I had my grandma from my mom's side, my grandparents from my dad— I didn't know them, they died when he was young so, so we just like, you know, we were very...so yeah we had, we had a busy family life [laughs].

I: Did you grow up in a city or a village; can you describe that for me?

R: It's like small cities, but then when he became a mayor we were in a big Rabat is a huge town. How can I describe that...it's not like the— it's like busy life, the streets were always full of people and you know, so my life was not, it's like going to school, coming home, you know just hanging out with friends at school so yeah.

I: When did you immigrate?

R: I came here in the summer of 1995.

I: What kinds of things did you bring with you to the USA that represents your culture?

R: My Moroccan dishes, [laughs] Moroccan tea glasses, you know this is like our staple in Morocco, Moroccan teapots, clothes, pictures, things like that and memories and stuff.

I: Why were those important to you to bring over?

R: I guess because they are a part of my culture, and somehow they are part of me, so it's not easy to immigrate so.

I: What were some of the hardships that you faced?

R: Just being homesick [crying].

I: I understand, it's okay, don't worry.

R: And I mean I, I, it was much easier for me because I spoke English, so that was kind of made it easier, I'm sorry [crying].

I: Its okay, you're very brave for coming.

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

R: Yeah, I was actually. Yeah, I am the oldest so, things didn't turn out how I planned them and, just really I guess it's just my destiny because I never thought about it— leaving my country, yeah. But you know life happens I guess, and you just have to do what you have to do.

I: Who did you immigrate with or alone?

R: No, with my three children.

I: How has immigrating changed your perspectives and opinions?

R: Oh I would say I think it just made me face life in ways I couldn't even imagine, and I guess I've always been kind of different I guess, more open minded more, more open to other things so, and also I guess for us over there the United States [laughs] is the peak of civilization, so I was not really, there was no, I wouldn't say no but there was not that much cultural shock so and also I guess the language gives you a different, much— I would say, not, it's kind of open society to you because it's not only the language, it's your learning language you learn about the culture also so I knew a lot of things before I came here but, yeah in general my perspective on life is, yeah I used to be this sheltered, you know, daddy's girl [laughs] and all of a sudden yay I'm on my own which has made me who I am today I guess.

I: If you're comfortable, and if not I completely understand, what happened that you were on your own and had to immigrate?

R: Yeah that's a long story, but to be brief I got married and it didn't work. So, it got really nasty where I just had to run away [laughs] you know so.

I: I'm sorry.

R: Yeah, it's okay. Everybody has a story I guess and that's mine so.

I: Was your married arranged?

R: No. No. But it was, it was like families but it was, you know, in Morocco it's a very traditional culture and my family was traditional, so we don't have where a girl can hang out with a boy and they just get to know each other, so it's whenever we see each other with family, so we didn't really know each other you know and it was not the right choice.

I: How long were you married for?

R: For nine years. Yes, I married young and I get my bachelors in English literature and yeah, he promised me like, because I was really bright I got a scholarship to go to the Sorbonne from high school and because I can't, I am from a traditional family, my dad said no, no, no, no, girls don't travel alone, forget about that. So I stayed at home I had to go to just university close to home, and so my ex-husband promised me the, [laughs] the moon and the stars and you know, yeah I am more for it, I support you, you'll get your PHD because I was bright and I want to study. And once I got married, he was like no. I don't have a wife who goes, like what are you going to do with your education? Work. No, no, no, no. My wife doesn't work, doesn't. So it was really kind of— I stayed because it's the culture, you know divorce is a big thing in Morocco and this is, I'm talking about late eighties, nineties— now there is big change for women thank God [laughs]. But back then it's— especially when you are from a traditional culture— it's very bad to be divorced and it is I guess, anywhere you go, but so it just didn't work and I, I, happened to have a Visa for the USA. I actually had visas for many countries, for France, for England, for Spain and they were all indefinite visas because my ex-husband was a business man and he was a lawyer so we traveled pretty much, and I guess it's part of my destiny again, I mean because I wanted to be something else and I ended up with English literature, but when I think about my life I had to

write a book about it! [laughs] Really, I, I, wanted to be a journalist, so I always loved English, since I started taking it in high school. When I started the first time, my first teacher was an American in the Peace Corp, and so anyway I went to college for English literature, by default not by choice, and I had like open visas to many countries and we came back from a trip to France and he took my passport and he burned it, literally, so it was gone. So after a while, you know he apologized and he got me, he made another passport for me, and he get he started putting visas on there so I got the American visa and in Morocco, when the kids are small they are still young, the mom has them in her passport so they were with me in one passport that's what saved my life, and a big thing happened and we just got divorced. So, thank God I had that, so I just had to leave— I mean I had no choice.

I: How did you see the role of women from your perspective as opposed to your dad and husband?

R: Well, it's kind of, I mean I didn't see myself as— I said I was very, very, very bright literally and this photographic memory, and I was a reader, I read a lot— you know back then we didn't have computers, we don't have many things so my hobby was just reading and I loved it and really it saved my life in many ways actually, because reading changes your brain, the way you think and your perspective on life so I didn't see myself as different I went to a mixed high school since, I mean in morocco we don't really have separate, it's like boys and girls. I had friends and I didn't really like realize how bad it is until I got married and my dad, even though he was a traditional man, he also encouraged education he just, when you know, it comes to traveling by yourself you know, but he always encouraged us to study— it's important to us you know [laughs]. Unfortunately he left very young, he was only forty-eight when he died. Yeah [laughs].

I: How did your parents feel about the problems you had with your husband?

R: Well, my I lost my dad and he wasn't there, but my mom, it's as I said divorce, it's really bad you know. A divorced women is I don't want to say looked down on, but it's a bad thing to happen to you so it's, oh you know maybe he, you guys are still young, he will change with life, with kids, with blah, blah, blah. And you know of course, yeah try to and it's also something you don't talk about much it's not like here, but we tend to be very, very secretive, very something is

going on in a couple, you keep it to yourself. You always try to put on a smiley face, it's all working perfect, but I just got troubled and that's why I had to move, yeah.

I: Do you have any children?

R: Yeah, I have three wonderful children.

I: Where do they live?

R: One goes to school goes to school in Wisconsin, the other goes to school in Colorado, and the other goes to school in Illinois.

I: Where were they born?

R: In Morocco. In Casablanca.

I: What are their education levels?

R: One is in the third year of college, the other is in the first year of college, and the other is in the fourth year of college.

I: Can you just clarify, what was your level of education before you immigrated?

R: I had bachelors in English literature.

I: From which university?

R: University in Rabat.

I: Have you received any additional education since then?

R: Here? Actually, yeah. I went for a business administration, and I have a bachelors in business administration.

I: Where is that from?

R: From Madison University, yeah.

I: What was the university like that you attended in Morocco?

R: Well hmmm, like in what, what ways?

I: The teachers, the culture of being in school?

R: Actually, it was great, it was a great life. I mean college life is great everywhere, you just, like the teachers we have a mix of British, Moroccans, we had an American teacher, so but I mean at the end there were more Moroccan— I mean British and American. There used to be more, but I mean that's people who got educated, and we had more Moroccan. It was a great life, I mean it opens your mind in different ways.

I: Where did you spend a lot of your time as a kid and teenager growing up in Morocco?

R: A lot of my time, well the school year of course in school and home and, but my vacation I used to spend them a lot in Casablanca. I had my family there, my grandma and, it's just to hang out to go to the beach and it was beautiful time mhm [smiles].

I: So, you spoke earlier that you had privileges like having like a driver, so how was that, was it different from other kids, can you explain?

R: Yeah, it just, I guess like here I mean it's all government. They give those privileges to their high rank officials, just like a government here. I bet he has also like, a personal driver or little they call them in English, like brick, you know. So, that's what I meant it's not like I am cause I don't like to give that idea, you know, so well yeah, I mean but I didn't really feel like, like I am better than the other kids. We were just like kids, you know. I had a normal childhood and friends and I guess I am, I don't know, because I don't want you to get the wrong idea. I don't want like to sound like I'm...

I: You're not at all.

R: Yeah, but I don't know, I had, I had a nice life and yeah. I am, [laughs] and now I am on my own [laughs].

I: Did you work outside the home prior to immigrating?

R: No.

I: Right out of college you got married?



R: Yeah, actually. I got married kind of towards the end of my fourth year. Graduated, stayed at home, no work no, yeah I was jailed I didn't– I felt jailed yeah [laughs].

I: How did that affect you personally?

R: Yeah, I just kind of, I kind of, it broke my heart because that's not what I wanted for my life and you know, I had the you know, when you are bright and full of life and really like this fiery brain inside your head ,you want to accomplish things and give things to people. It's exciting and unfortunately, I didn't have that.

I: Are you currently employed or working outside the home?

R: No, right now I actually started a small business that's start up, so I have an online store and I do house parties, and so I just, to be a translated interpreter– I worked like, teaching French teaching Arabic yeah.

I: Where was that?

R: To train Arabic? Here! And what else? Yeah, I worked in a bank as a teller, and like those little jobs, you know so yeah. Now I am my own my own boss [laughs].

I: Congratulations.

R: Thank you.

I: What does your online company, what is that?

R: It's just artifacts, you know like cups and rugs, lanterns, things like that.

I: They are beautiful.

R: Thank you.

I: Coming to the United States, and on your own with your children, what was that like?

R: It was difficult. It was challenging, to say the least, but I think I am a survivor. I'm very strong inside and I believe in God, so I thank God for watching over us, and it helped me He get me through, literally because he put a lot of good people in my path so thank God.

I: Did you have family here when you immigrated?

R: No, I had a good friend, a very, very, good friend, and she's part of why I came here. She's a lady from Wyoming, and she's one of my angels, and the story, she bought a business in Morocco and she didn't know a word of Arabic or French whatsoever, only English. Pure American. And she bought this business, a travel agency, and the girl that worked at that travel agency was a friend of mine so, and the girl stayed in her work so she called one day— oh you know there's this American lady and, poor thing I'm so sorry for her, and she bought the business because she got married to a Moroccan guy and he was in the business of tourism. But he— his English was just kind of a little broken, could barely communicate with her [laughs]. So she called me, that friend of mine, she said hey we have some time can you please translate, and I'm like yeah, sure! So, she brought her home and she was just like oh! Thank God! you know this is like 1994 and now it's more like English, you know this internet globalization, everybody— not everybody— but more, a lot more people, especially young people like her age, they speak English. In Morocco, back then if you didn't study English, I mean it's like more French. So, she was so happy oh! Somebody understands what I'm saying! And she had this many like files because of the business, and all her papers from the minister of tourism, and she couldn't understand a word, it was all in French. And I'm like yeah, I'll help you, just relax. And I got my dictionaries and I started translating all these things for her, and we became friends and we started talking and she goes you know what? You don't belong here you are so different and really, literally, that's what she said you want to come to America? And I'm like oh, yeah no. You know I wish, I have, I have children and no. And she said yeah, of course with your children, and she's like— I never talked about it, even though I was stuck and my life was just like, really down there [laughs]. So we're like yeah, of course with your children and, I'm like oh you know, how I'm going to do this? I have no money and she goes, well you are welcome to stay with me. So, and until you, you know, find a job. And so that's how I ended up, you know. So, we really clicked, me and her. And nobody knew whatsoever. She's my savior in many ways and that complete stranger, but people I knew there, were a lot of good people out there, she just had a heart and I don't know I just think she's my angel, so yeah. And I ended up working with her and she sponsored me, you know, so that's how I started. And then my family, yeah you asked if I had family here, after a couple of years in 2006, my sister came to the US and she had the bachelors in science. And she came here and we do it, she got her student visa so she went to

school and she became a doctor. She went to medical school in New York, and she's married and she has two— expecting a little girl, and she has two boys also.

I: Congrats.

R: Yeah, she's expecting a little girl in June, she lives in South Carolina. Yeah, that's my only family here.

I: So, did your family know that you were immigrating?

R: No. Nobody knew except my mom. And until actually the very— I left yeah, my airplane was leaving Morocco at like five in the morning, and I had to go say goodbye to my uncle at midnight, so nobody knew. No, because you know I was running away [laughs]! So, yeah mhm.

I: How did your mom feel about you immigrating?

R: Well, my mom was, she was heartbroken, of course. But I just said no, that's my only solution. I just had to get away from him, and save myself and my children. So yeah.

I: Were you, after you were divorced in Morocco, did you live with your mom?

R: Yeah, I lived in my parents' house. Yeah, again, there were no rights it's like you have, you just like, literally nothing whatsoever. Nothing whatsoever, and like the child support, if he doesn't want to pay, then you have to go to court and it is a lot of— you know I told you he was a lawyer and businessman, you have money, forget it. There was a lot of corruption, so yeah it just, to hell with it because he wanted me back, you know, come back, come back. I'm like no, I'm not coming back if you're the last man on the face of the earth. And yeah. Well, you know, he was putting pressure on me with the kids, he didn't want to give child support, or support them or anything, yeah it was hard.

I: I'm sorry.

R: Yeah, but now it's a little bit— it's still not perfect but it's much better than it used to be, at least the women now get the home, and you know, she keeps like half of everything, just like, almost like here. But he doesn't pay the child support, he goes to jail [laughs]. So yeah, it's much better now with the new king and the new government so.

I: Is that why you think it's changed?

R: I think after the late king died, and his son took over, his only chance was to really make big changes you know, because people were just fed up, you know, injustice, I guess. And also, there were a lot of human rights organizations that were involved, you know, from the US, and from Europe, so they put pressure on the government to change laws and to change things for people.

I: What kind of injustices were there?

R: Like I said corruption, you know, a lot of— really like you see all kind of things [laughs]. Crazy things, you see people who are crazy rich, and you see people who don't have like clothes, who don't have like, you know, like the minimum, the bare, bare, bare, necessity of like decent life you know. So yeah.

I: How did you view the Moroccan government with your dad being an official, and then when you had trouble when you were divorced?

R: I mean like my dad was really, like, he was a very good man. He was really a man who worked his tail off for the good of people, really. I mean honestly, and he's, he's gone and that's the least I can say about him, and how did I view the government? I guess I was, when I was in high school, you know, back then its— we had the communist ideas and, you know, human rights and you know. So I was a very, not a very, but I was a little active in just things my friends, my group of friends were in for the justice for human rights. We were very aware of what's going on in Palestine, and the war in general. I was, I don't want to say an activist, but you know I was against injustices anywhere in the world not only in Morocco, yeah. So I'm very ,very— touches me very deep— like what women go through in many parts of the world, what children go through, you know, what the oppressed people go through, and a lot of things that are part of this world, and unfortunately there's not much I can do.

I: Were there any restraints against those groups when you were in high school?

R: Yeah, yeah, especially the university students. They were oppressed, I mean when they used to be more, like they would go to the street revolting against whatever, yeah. They would be jailed, many, many young people, girls and young men, just disappeared you know?

I: When you first immigrated, where did you immigrate?

R: Illinois, you can tell by phone number, I still have it.

I: How did your friend help you get on your feet?

R: Actually, I stayed with her for three months in her house, then you know, as I said, I started working with her. It was really flourishing back then before all the trouble started. Then after three months, I got my own apartment and, yeah.

I: Initially, how long did you plan on staying in the United States?

R: I don't know. I mean, in the beginning it was really hard, I mean many, many times I was just like forget it, I'm just going to go back, because as I said, it was hard, you know. You get homesick you, this is a beautiful country, yeah, I love it, and people are more receptive, more tolerant, I mean as far as my experience. Thank God, I never had any problem with anybody, and it sure gives you opportunities. It opens its arms to all people who come here, but the same time if you have grown in another part of the world, it's kind of really, it's literally— I would be in the snow, and I smell like Moroccan smells, literally like physically, and over there its more organic. So, it's like fruit, you smell fruit, you smell vegetables, you smell herbs, you— I don't know, it's just different, I guess. So, it's all different. So, I was really homesick to the point I got those smells, but it's still hard, you know. I was emotional earlier, and I guess I am over that now.

I: What made you settle in Milwaukee?

R: That's another story. I— can I just not talk about that please? Because it's part of what I've been saying, and it's just very troubling. So, I don't want to talk about it.

I: I understand. Have you lived in any other cities?

R: No, only Illinois and Milwaukee, I didn't even know where Milwaukee was really. I'd never heard of Wisconsin [laughs]. Like wow, where is that? [laughs] But I did travel. I like traveling so, when my kids were still young I did many road trips. I took them to California twice, we did the South once, and we did the North another time. So all of lake town, Napa Valley, San Francisco, San Jose, Sacramento, all those things. San Diego, Disneyland, LA, I took them to

Stanford University, everywhere. We went to New York, we visited the, what is it called again? The island for immigrants.

I: Ellis Island.

R: Ellis Island, oh my God! I love that place, the Statue of Liberty, Empire State building, Times Square. We went to Cancun, Mexico. We travel a lot, I love traveling.

I: Why was it important to travel the United States?

R: I think I just love traveling, and I love nature, I love architecture, I love history, I love civilization, whatever it is. And I mainly did it for my boys, so I just want them to see the world, I guess.

I: You mentioned you really like Ellis Island, what kind of significance does that hold?

R: I just remember seeing all those, you know the boards, they have with pictures of early immigrants. What they wrote about, and I can just relate to that, even though that happened in the you know nineteenth, eighteenth, century, maybe early like settlers, and came all the way, you know [laughs] twenty-first century. But there are things that are like, same, same because we are all humans, we have emotions and its hard. And I experienced it twice, so Morocco to Illinois was one, but Illinois to Milwaukee was like all over again.

I: What were the differences you saw?

R: I don't know, I mean Milwaukee, I mean to be honest with you when I moved, I lived here so I am here since 2004 it's been what... nine years. So when I came here and I went down the street to get groceries, literally because it's like those fresh eyes, I thought I was in Germany, everybody look German, I'm like what the? What's wrong? Well, you know the settlers are originally from German settlers and Polish settlers in Milwaukee. I'm like really? Wow, you know, when you have fresh eyes you see it. And I think people are like more, a little cold, whereas Denver its more diverse, more lively. Even though it snows in Denver, the next day is open, and the sky's high and blue and sunny. I mean the earlier years were really hard for me because it was just so gray, gray, gray, and snowy, and cold, and I don't know. I get that feeling

people are, not that, I don't know. Receptive, friendly, I don't know. I guess its people are from there, [laughs] just like the weather you know [laughs]? Cold, cold [laughs].

I: I hate the weather, too.

R: Are you from here?

I: Illinois.

R: I guess— I love Chicago, by the way— I love it, it's just one of those towns, I'm there and I'm all happy, it's a nice place.

I: Thank you, do you see any similarities between cities in Morocco and the United States?

R: In what way?

I: Architecture, people?

R: Yeah, like Casablanca and Rabat. It used to be, I mean it's still a nice town, but its more turning into more— what's the word? Resort. Like a resort. Lots of hotels, so it's losing the kind of the touch it used to have. Casablanca is just a big, huge metropolis you know, like New York, LA, crowded, noisy. But one thing about Morocco, the streets are always full. People are going and coming, whereas here its more cars. You don't really see people that much, but Morocco you still see life in the street, you see kids, you see, you know? So...

I: What was the biggest difference you saw cultural wise?

R: Don't laugh at me, but the first thing that shocked me is, [laughs] it's like when you're coming to somebody having lunch or breakfast or whatever, and they would just, you know, eat, eat, eat, by themselves, it's like okay. So, in Morocco it's a big no, no, no. Culturally, it's like if you come at lunch time, oh they would drop everything and get you your lunch, share with you whatever they are having. So I guess that's that individualistic more, kind it's mine, mine, mine. We don't have that in Morocco. So mine, once you come to this door to my house, it's like the guest is here, it's a big thing, you give your guest the best thing you have. So that was hard for me to, to kind of, it was different you know [laughs]? So what else? I guess that the individualistic touch for the US. In Morocco, I mean now, the 2000's years here, it starting to,

because of this global, you know thing, going on the internet, it is a lot of the US influence in Morocco now with the English, with the— so it's, there is a lot of American culture going, I mean exporting that way. But back then, it's, we didn't know much about, you know this aspect of life. So now people are becoming individualistic too, and it's like hardly saying hello to their neighbors, everybody's busy. When I was growing up, and even when I was married, people would go home at lunch time, have lunch, and then go back. But now it's like people just, like here they will go, leave their home early in the morning and now won't come back until its dark. So it's like here, getting there and again it was a shock for me. We have that unity, family people, and the group versus, you know. So just that thing, I mean even with my friend it's like, you know [laughs]?

I: When you immigrated, did you learn how to drive, or who taught you?

R: No, I was driving in Morocco already. I got my driver's license when I was eighteen.

I: When you came to the United States how was that different?

R: No, no. I got my first car after three months, it was stick shift car so, yeah [laughs].

I: In Morocco, what prompted you to want to drive?

R: I guess it's like, I mean Morocco is really like a modern country, so women do drive. So it's not like something women don't do, so yeah. I was looking for it and I get, wow I want to get my driver's license. My dad said ok, you know, took the class and passed.

I: How did your husband feel about you driving?

R: [sighs] I was allowed to drive to go to visit my family. My mom and that's it.

I: How did you get groceries and...?

R: No, he, we had like somebody helping in the house and stuff, so yeah.

I: Did you face any other obstacles when you first immigrated to the United States?

R: No, thank God, no. Other than being a single mom I guess, that was a big challenge.



I: Now I'm going to go into parenting. In what ways, if any, did you think boys should be raised differently from girls?

R: I think boys, they need a male in their lives. I had friends and, I tried like to, to, to, the best of my ability and to the best of my knowledge, of course. Because parenting doesn't come with a handbook, you know? So, you learn as you go. And, so I put my children in swimming, I put them in martial arts, I put them in— they tried a little bit of everything, tennis, basketball, soccer. So, you know I did all the right things, I guess. And thank God, you know, they are great kids so I never had any trouble with them. And I also took them to Sunday school at the Islamic community, the mosque, and yeah. They learned Arabic and Quran and stuff. Yeah, that's how I stayed, I had them grounded, and kind of, you know what the boys do. Because of course I'm a girl, what do I know about boys? [laughs] But and especially I, I became more aware of it as they grew, you know, as they became teenagers. Then there was this, you know so it's like boys are different than girls, of course, yeah.

I: How did you overcome the bridge, I guess?

R: I think what really helped us is I'm very open with them, so we talk pretty much about, you know life, about things, and so yeah. Just communication. I think communicate really with your kids, and I'm there constantly, I'm not the kind of mom who really has much of a life of her own, so my life was my kids. I was a very dedicated mom, and I'm still, so I guess when you are present in your kids' lives, and you communicate with them, things go well. Yeah.

I: What kinds of obstacles did you face as a single mother?

R: Yeah, just having to work and, juggling coming home. You have things to do, you have to cook, you have to clean, you have to do all that stuff, and at the same time you worry as a parent, you know? You worry about your kids, about the outside world, about the challenges of teenagers, and in these times, you know? All kinds of things you hear about, and you read about so yeah.

I: What was your involvement in your children's education, who helped with homework? Did you go to parent meetings?

R: Yeah, I did. Whenever I could, I would go. When, when I had them with work, when they were little, as they grew up, they were bright kids. I guess they got that from me [laughs]. So, yeah. They were really, they were in honors and always had like, really good grades. So yeah, we didn't have problems with that.

I: What was the importance of education to you for your children?

R: Oh my God, it's like the most important thing is education.

I: What kind of significance does that hold?

R: I think it holds significance that's, that's more cultural. Like I think, and maybe psychological, if you will. So, I come from a generation where it's like, you are educated, you are, you are regal, regarded with respect with, you know. And also, you are educated— not anymore of course, because there is like unemployment— I mean many, many, in Morocco, especially many people with high degrees and here they end up driving a cab or selling whatever because they cannot get a job. But again, because that's why I said it's more psychological, I guess. Because educated means also you can have an easy life, you can have a nice life, you can have a job, so yeah. It's very important to me [laughs].

I: How old were you when you had your kids?

R: I was— I had my first kid at twenty-three. And three years later, I had my other kids when I was twenty-six years old.

I: What schools have your children attended?

R: They graduated from public high school and are in colleges now. One is at Madison.

I: What was the reasoning for decisions about schools?

R: Well, I guess it's just what you do when you are older. You are bright, you get your degree, you go to school, you want to be educated, you want to have a nice life, so yeah.

I: Was it hard for you when your son decided to go to school in New York?

R: Yeah, it was a little hard, but they come visit and I go visit. We see each other.

I: Did they ever attend community schools such as salaam school?

R: No, just public schools.

I: What are some of the major issues that concerned you when raising your children?

R: As I said, just like doing the right things. They got to get jobs, you know, for them to grow to be, to be good people first of all, and to be successful. But thank God, I think I did a pretty good job, given my circumstances. So, I guess their hearts are in the right places, they say. They are good people that's what matters the most.

I: Did your husband help raise your children?

R: No. No, he didn't whatsoever.

I: How did that affect you and your kids?

R: I mean for sure it affected me, because you always want what's best for your kids, you want your kids' lives to be much better than yours, and my kids are— thank God— very resilient, very strong. And I'm sure it affected them, but they are pretty level because, again I was there twenty-four-seven. I was available, I was dedicated, I mean I just gave them my life. So I guess that helped them a lot. Of course, we had little things you know like growing up, like you know, growing up aches, I guess. Teenage and little things, but nothing major, so yeah.

I: What I've seen culturally is that children mean so much, why do you think that is? Is it a part of the culture or who you are?

R: I think it's part of the culture, first of all. And also, I don't know, I guess also part of who I am. I'm just really, I don't know, they call it in French "maman poule," like a hand that covers her little chicks, you know. So, of course a woman is different. I mean motherhood is different from woman to women but culturally, yeah, its children are just, I don't know, the apple of your eyes. [laughs] Yeah and also maybe because of what happened, I'm a very soft-hearted person, and maybe because of what happened in my life I just gave it all to my children, so they became— and I became responsible for them. So that responsibility weighed on my shoulder, weighed on me really, and I really kind of, strived to be there and to do my best so, yeah.

I: How do you think the way your parents raised you affected how you raised your kids?

R: I think, for sure I mean because we are all a product of many things, of what happens in our lives, so for sure that affected me in, in a way. Maybe I am aware or maybe I'm not even aware of, but also my education, my readings, literature, you know is amazing in shaping human beings, you know. The readings, all the human condition you know, so that's my religion. Also, the sense of responsibility, the sense of doing the right thing, the sense of , you know, fitting God in everything that you do. So that's a gift given to me, a responsibility given to me, so I better handle it– I mean you better handle it in the best way you can, because that's your responsibility and so yeah.

I: When your children were deciding on their majors in college, what role did you play in leading them to choose a major?

R: Not really, I mean I just, I mean for me, it's like as long as you get educated in whatever feels right to you so, because I was there, you know. I had my passion too, and I want them to, to, follow their hearts and their passions.

I: What kind of a wife would you like for your children?

R: [laughs] I don't know if I ever talk about that because they are still young. I just want them to be, of course being in love is a beautiful thing, that's a must, that's the first thing. But also, when it comes to marriage, it's you really have to know the person and take your time and know the family, of course. It's not only the person, it's like what kind of, of, contacts that person is growing and, yeah. I guess that's pretty much it, just knowing the person because once you know the person, of course you know what you are doing– what you are getting yourself into [laughs]!

I: How important is it that they marry someone from the same culture, homeland, and religion?

R: No. not really. I mean, maybe religion, but yeah religion, I think. I would love, I would prefer a Muslim, but again, it's not really– how can I say that in a good way? I think a good person doesn't– it's universal, it doesn't matter what culture, what your religion is, there are good people in all religions and all cultures. So, I just pray that they are going to meet the right person [laughs].

I: How old were you when you immigrated?

R: 1997, I was thirty years old.

I: Okay, how old are you now?

R: Forty-four almost forty-five.

I: How do you define or identify yourself? I know it's kind of a hard question. Some people see themselves in terms of religion, the country they came from, their new country, their culture.

R: I see myself as a person of the world, I guess. I mean, I am Moroccan, I am American, I am Muslim, I am Arab, I am Berber, I am all kind of things. So, because again, it's like I am many things at the same time, so I cannot just— I am an Arab or I am Moroccan or I am, because I am from both worlds, so [laughs].

I: How do you represent your identity and your culture, the mixture?

R: What do you mean? It's like I don't really get the question?

I: Like are there Moroccan traditions that you've combined with American traditions or mostly Moroccan traditions?

R: Okay, I guess I'm just like, your average American person. We're all American no matter like, because they say it's a melting pot, but we share. We all are American, we share many, just like the way the everyday way of life. So, but, maybe have traditions that I have gone to, and of course I celebrate holidays.

I: What holidays do you celebrate?

R: Well, Ramadan and Eid and, you know.

I: Is it difficult for you to celebrate those holidays?

R: Not really, I mean, yeah when it's— because it's more about family, it's more about— and here it's kind of, I try my best to get with my friends, so we create family that's mostly here and, yeah. We cook the dishes, we really have at that special occasion, and that's about it. That's what we do.

I: So as your kids were growing up, how did you instill Moroccan traditions in them?

R: I guess it just seeps into you, you know as you live your life, the way of life, like I said. We celebrate, we took them to Sunday schools, I took them to activities at the mosque, and I just— something as you live your life, you know, doing those things, it gets into them, so yeah.

I: How have you noticed your identity change over time?

R: I don't think it changed really, I'm still who I am [laughs]. Maybe I've evolved a little bit, maybe little things. Deep down I'm still the same, old person [laughs].

I: What language or languages do you speak at home?

R: We speak Berber— that's the native Moroccan language. The natives of Morocco are Imazighen, that's the Berber word for, and it means free people. And Arabic actually came to us through Islam, and the years 600— I think 682— 682, so that's like fourteen, no like, thirteen hundred something with Islam. So, the Berber accepted Islam and they settled in Morocco just like the British and the European settled here. So, it was the native of the United States, it's the American Indians. So those are the Berbers, the natives of Morocco, and I'm one of them. I speak Berber, I speak Arabic, I speak French, and English, and a few words of Spanish, little bit. Yeah.

I: What is being able to speak Berber mean to you?

R: Oh, it means a lot, it really, it's— that's another identity! [laughs] That's another facet, yeah it's great! It's— I'm so lucky because there are many Berbers who don't, and you understand, I guess, the culture, the poetry, the songs, the language, and the— and again like I said earlier, language is not only words, its culture. It opens doors and windows and perspective, you know [laughs].

I: Which language did you emphasize the most at home?

R: I switch with some Berber, Arabic, French, and my dad was the product of colonization, so his education was in French, so we spoke a lot of French. And his reading was in French more than Arabic because of the part where he grew up and went to school. The French people were governing Morocco, so everything was like, Arabic was a very sedentary— and also the

government with all the dealings, were in French, so his work, everything was in French. All the letters, all the things, you know, were written in French. And my mom, it's more Berber and Arabic mix. With my friends it's Arabic.

I: How about with your kids?

R: Unfortunately, we kind of adopted English a lot, so we communicate in English.

I: Do they understand Berber, Arabic, and French?

R: They would understand, it's kind of Arabic a little bit. But Berber they don't speak, but they—my oldest one understands, but he doesn't speak. The youngest one not much, no.

I: What language was taught in your schooling?

R: Arabic and French. Yeah. And then as you get to high school you choose a third language. Yeah, but we start with Arabic and French.

I: How would you describe your religious life?

R: I am religious, I pray five times a day, and I fast. I don't have the hijab, but I try you know, and that's something I'm struggling with because I believe in it. I believe I'm meant for modesty and for— what can I say that? [laughs] I think a woman is more, I think protects, you it's, I don't know, I, what can I say? Can you help me? I'm struggling with my words, so yeah. I would love to put on the scarf, but I try soon enough, because again you are the product of how you grow up and I grow up in a society where it was more Europeanized, because we have the French and Morocco, and I didn't really know much about my religion to be honest with you. It was more culture. We fast, we do Eid, we do, but its more cultural than religion. So, I took very little, minimal, maybe one hour a week not even, of Islamic teaching. But very superficial, so I learned when I came here and I started taking my kids to the mosque, and of course they go to a class and do their things and I hang out, so I need to do something. What am I going to do to kill time, so I took classes. You know they have classes for converts, they have lectures. So, as I started to go there I kind of, I learned. So yeah [laughs].

I: Why was that important for you to learn?

R: I guess because it's again, my identity. It's part of me, and it's part of me but it's not because it's part of me, but I had a need to understand, you know? It's like, I guess the quest of life is like going after truth and understanding the meaning of why are we here what are we doing in this world, why do we die. So, all those questions. So, and yeah, I did learn and I did understand. And yeah, I just believe, really, that it's not to oppress a woman, it's not to put her down, it's to value her, it's to put her up there, and I really had like, this idea— oh they are Americans, they are more civilized, they don't really look at the women in weird way or whatever. American men, I mean. And I guess us women we, we, we, think about man in our own tones just like the way we are, and also, we kind of think of like civilization. So, it's a weird thing we can talk like, here until four in the morning if I want to go into detail. But just to be brief, I had the wrong idea and then I go to this gym, but then I was like, I'm struggling with hijab, of course. And I'm trying, and I read Quran, and I try to understand it, I try to educate myself, you know. So, I listen to things, I read things, I ponder things, I think about them, and then I go to this gym. And usually, I mind my business. I go there, I work out— like little things, I'm not that athletic. But then, I started thinking about it, and I would be on a machine or something, just minding my business doing my thing or whatever, and then I would look and there is a guy checking me out. Then it's like, maybe before, because I had this idea of here. It's different, but men are the same everywhere wherever you go. And of course, so when you cover up, it just protects your privacy, your body, your sanctuary, so that's my struggle right now, so yeah [laughs]. But religion is very important to me, you know. Thank God I am at a good place, but I'm much better than I used to be. I understand things much better, I am much happier with where I am except for that thing, which kind of hard because there is the look people give you, also, when you are different, you know. Because people don't understand, so when I have friends who, you know, little problems in getting a job or being accepted, or being, because people don't like different things. She's different, she's different, you know. It means they don't— I'm not saying all people, but generally so and I'm not struggling because of that, it's just my own struggle. I'm not there yet, I wish I can just— it becomes like part of me, and my way of life, but I'm so used to this it's kind of hard to, yeah.

I: Do you attend the mosque on a regular basis?



R: No. no. After my kids have grown, I would go once in a while to the Friday prayer, and lecture. Maybe if there are like events, or something that interests me, I would go attend but not on a regular basis. It's kind of far.

I: How would you describe your political participation the USA? Do you regularly vote? If yes, what elections?

R: Yeah, I was one of the people that voted for Obama, of course [laughs]. I guess it was just like contagious, you know. Everybody was excited and like, yeah. I did vote but I didn't vote this year.

I: Why was that?

R: I don't know, I was just not, it was a political year. I don't know, I just didn't feel as motivated or believed in it really with all my heart. I like to do things one hundred percent when I believe them. When I'm really convinced, I just, I guess I was not one hundred percent, so.

I: Why do you think that is?

R: I don't, I guess it just, I don't know maybe when you say things and you don't do them, or whatever, you lose your credibility a little bit.

I: What does it mean to you to have the right to vote in the USA and to be a citizen?

R: Oh yeah, it's a big thing, yeah. It means a lot to me. It's part of who I am. And it's great, I mean, to be free to vote or not to express your opinion, to be part of it. Yeah, it's huge.

I: What was your political participation like in Morocco? Were you allowed to? How did that work?

R: Well, Morocco, we have a king who has it for a lifetime, of course. There we vote for the parliament, like the senators but it's very corrupt so I wouldn't even vote. I never voted in Morocco.

I: When it comes to candidates from your culture, homeland, or religion, in what ways, if any, does that affect your voting behavior here?

R: Say that again.

I: When it comes to candidates from your culture, homeland, or religion, in what ways, if any, does that affect your voting behavior here?

R: Like you mean if there was candidate here who was from my culture? I don't think it would affect my vote, it has to be for who he is, for what he can give this country, give people. So religion or culture, no I wouldn't vote for those criteria.

I: Have you been involved in any community issues or activities?

R: Yeah, I did a couple things, feed the hungry, and I would help in the mosque when they held an event and they need volunteers, whenever I can.

I: Do you read the daily newspaper?

R: Not really, no. I even like cancelled my cable because it's just so depressing on the news. All the things that are going on in the world, and I usually go to the BBC or World News online and that's where I get my news. Sometimes I will do a little, like here and there things. But that's about it. I used to be a news junkie, but not anymore.

I: How have your interests or hobbies changed since coming here?

R: Yeah, I guess a lot because it's like, you don't have much time here as before, and yeah. But like I said, I also kind of, because I used to read a lot I mean, I have to get that back. I guess with the computer you do more of your things online. What else, travel, I'm still passionate whenever I get a chance, I like to travel. I like nature, I like to go out, I like music, but I'm kind of much more selective now. I like more classical music now, versus like songs, and so what else? And I'm a big thing— my big passion and hobby is cooking, it's still cooking ,I love to cook [laughs]!

I: What kind of foods do you cook?

R: I can pretty much cook anything, but I like to cook Moroccan. I can just like put something together just, yeah I like to cook.

I: What are your favorite Moroccan dishes?

R: What kind of dishes, a lot of them my favorite. my favorite is um I like pastilla, I like couscous, I like tagines.

I: What do those dishes represent to you then?

R: Oh. Represent family, friends, occasions, happiness, joy, generosity, sharing moments, just you know, big part of life [laughs].

I: What are your connections with your homeland?

R: In what way?

I: Have you visited your homeland?

R: Yeah, I go.

I: How often?

R: Just like in the last maybe four years I went there like pretty much every year. The last four years.

I: Do you still have relatives there that you're in contact with?

R: My mom, I have my two sisters. I said one sister, my youngest sister, lives in Denver. Excuse me. But I have my cousins, my aunts, my uncles, my mom.

I: Have you encouraged your family back home to visit or live here?

R: Uh no! Not really. Yeah, but my mom comes to visit. Yeah, I like inviting my friends, you guys are welcome if you want to come visit, it's a beautiful country you need to come check it out. I love it and that's true, it's really like, gosh I mean you— because I told you I take those long trips, and especially California, upstate New York. It's like wow, praise be to God who created this beauty. Have you ever been there?

I: No.

R: Oh my God, it's something else, really. I drove like all the way Sierra, Nevada. we went from Colorado, so we drove through Wyoming which is like barren desert, and kind of really nice.

Differently shaped, rocks and mountains, and new town it's just like plain, just nothing there. And Nevada, you know, and then you go up those Sierra Nevada and it's like, oh my God, really. It's mind boggling, really. It was 2005, and I'm still— that's when I did the trip with my children and then we went to Lake Tahoe, and it's a masterpiece it's, wow! It's like this beautiful lake and twin mountains, and we took that cruise you know, in Lake Tahoe. You see the water, it's like different colors and just this beauty wherever you put your eyes. You want to take it in, and it's like wow! Wow, wow, wow! And then you go down to the Napa Valley, and you go to— I forgot the name of that beach where there are lot of seals— oh you know that wildlife. I like, you see, the nature like hundreds of them, just like covered with seals! And the sand is black, really like this. Black, black. Beautiful, beautiful, volcanic sand or whatever. And then you go down to Sacramento, the old town, you know, like old, old, old. I don't know, maybe I don't remember the years old, Sacramento. So, a lot of history, a lot and San Francisco and the Golden Gate Bridge. A lot of experiences and I just, it really enriches you, you know. And it's like when I meet friends here, Americans, it's like, really? You did that! I never went to New York, I'm like I can't even believe you guys! This is your country it's so beautiful you have to check it out, here I am, I'm a single mom, I have no money, but I just make it happen you know? I really saved and I plan, and I do those things because it's really important. I guess it does change who you are, and then when I went to Mexico, and I saw the Mayan civilization, oh those pyramids, you know have you ever been there?

I: No.

R: Again, me and the kids, we rented a car, and we go just explore [laughs].

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

R: I think just the system itself is— I appreciate it more here it just makes your life so much easier. Where Morocco is still, still, still to this day a lot of bureaucracy, you know. Lot of waste of time, no respect for citizens, really. It's so hard to get anything done. Whereas here it's, you guys, you don't know how lucky you are, really. I'm one of you right now, of course I'm a citizen, and I appreciate it very much.

I: Did you face any political hardships while in Morocco?

R: No, thank God no.

I: Were you in the USA during the Gulf War?

R: No. I came here 1995, so.

I: So then where did you get your information about your homeland?

R: Just online, being in connection with my friends and family.

I: In what ways, if any, did your life or interactions with others change, like interactions with non-Arab or non-Muslim friends, teachers, coworkers?

R: In what way they changed because of what?

I: When you immigrated from Morocco did your interactions change?

R: Not really.

I: Did you ever face difficulties with connecting with people?

R: No, not really. I never had, like I always, like I never experienced discrimination or anything even when, you know September eleventh happened. I mean I heard stories and stuff but personally, thank God, I mean never ever. I think people are wonderful and friendly, I mean what I said earlier about Milwaukee. That's a feeling I got, it just like, people are a little kind of distant and a little cold, and whereas they are like hey how's it going? Whereas here you know just like because I live in Wisconsin in an apartment, people are more to themselves.

I: You were in the USA during September 11?

R: Yes.

I: How were your experiences after 9/11?

R: Yeah, I was like everybody else. Shocked and scared, and you know, all those weird feelings. But I never had any experience of any you know, problems with people, so.

I: With 9/11 how did you feel for your children? And as a Muslim, how did that affect you?

R: Yeah, like I said, like everybody else I shared those feelings of being scared, you know, the unknown. You don't know what's going to happen, so there was that sense of, maybe kind of uncomfortable, maybe a little worried, and it was crazy, you know? It's like all of a sudden you are labeled. You are being a Muslim, like they literally put an equal mark, you know. Muslim equals terrorist, Muslim means bad, Muslim this and that and especially the media its ugh! It was just so, yeah that it affected me. I mean it's like I said, I was worried, I was scared, you know. Wondering what's going to happen. And of course, I felt bad for my brothers and sisters in Islam you know? It's like because it's not fair, and also, I was a little disappointed in a way because again, I go back to the question earlier it's like education means, literally, culturally enlightenment. You are educated, you are supposed to know better, you are from a civilized world. You are supposed to be enlightened, and know better, and here you are, it's like all these Americans are just like, what? So yeah, that kind of feeling.

I: How did you explain it to your children when they asked questions?

R: Oh...I guess I didn't really have to explain much, because again, I was really communicative with them. We talked, so they kind of knew, you know. But they didn't have any bad experiences in school so.

I: Thank you for sharing those experiences, so I'm going to ask a little about cultural clothing. Do you have any traditional or cultural clothing?

R: I do, yeah.

I: Can you explain them to me, the names?

R: The names, in Moroccan, are Caftan and the Jellaba, Jellaba. So, the Caftan is like, just like the traditional dress for women and they have fancy ones for weddings and parties. And traditionally, they are all handmade with gold threads and silk threads, and they are very expensive.

I: What did they look like?

R: They are just like a cloak and long sleeves, kind of. Really long sleeves, and usually have a belt. And Jellaba is also like a long gown and dress with a little hood, but you don't put the hood over your head. It just hangs there and you put it over your clothes to go out. So yes.

I: What do those two things represent then? What is the reasoning for the hood?

R: I mean I think the hood is kind of like for— it started, women used to put it like on their heads like this [Leila mimics putting a hood up on her head], and they put it back and they kind of tied it like this [Leila mimics tying two strings across her neck to keep a hood up], and I need to have pictures and email them to you. And they have light, very light, you could see their features it's not like it's you know, Muslim like very light, very see through. They put like this so you could see only the eyes, like this. So, it's actually from Islam like the hijab, but then with evolution and with like colonization, so the hood came off, and the woman had her hair like, bare so that the hood just hangs there so we stayed. But they don't use it, you know. I guess that's how it, that's where it comes from. Actually, I think I have one in my closet, let me get it. I should get some from my downstairs and take a picture for you.

I: What does the Caftan represent?

R: It represents Morocco. It represents the Moroccan morals, that's Moroccan, that's the traditional dress for women. It represents beauty and femininity, and artwork, and weddings, and joy, and all those things, so yeah.

I: Do they wear them every day?

R: Well, traditional women they use the— not this, this is to go outside, so you can be having your pajamas on, and you want to go outside so you just put this on and if you go visit Morocco, you'd see a lot of women wearing that, it's convenient [laughs]. So, but now it's mainly for weddings and parties and it's like, women are just like, in jeans.

I: How many Jellaba and Caftan do you have?

R: I used to have a lot more, but because they are very expensive to make and I don't use them that much, so yeah. I think I have this one, and I have a couple of Caftans here with me.

I: When do you wear them?

R: You know, if I'm invited to a wedding, or like a party for a newborn or something. Yeah, I would wear them.

I: How do you feel when you wear them?

R: I feel really special, [smiles] yeah.

I: What does the cultural clothing mean to you? Why do they make you feel special?

R: I don't know, because they are connected. Again, with all the things I mentioned just with the nice memories, and just so the feminine side of you, and form a connection, you know. It's beauty, it's handmade, it's beautiful. I'll take a picture of the one I have, and you'll see it's really, I don't know it's, yeah. All the things I said, all of the above [laughs].

I: When you were married did you wear these? What was that process like? What did you wear? The traditions?

R: Yeah, the traditions for a wedding, it's a lot of preparations, so it's a lot of— the bride has to make like— at least back then I mean not as much anymore because as I said it's very expensive— you get all this stuff made. So, you get the fabrics, you go choose the fabric, you go to the people who make them, hand sewn. They take your measurements, you get to choose what kind you want, and then the groom has to get you like, gold, a certain amount of gold and gold jewelry and stuff and. Yeah, then the wedding is for the bride it's like the first day, you have girls. Like you have bachelorette here, so it's all girls. Your friends and family who aren't married and it's like the henna ceremony, so you get your hands and your feet. They have like this really nice, like, queen throne [laughs]. So they sit you there and you're all dressed in greenish, but like decorated with gold, and you have a gold tiara and all the jewels and all the stuff, and they have like decorated tables with all the things that have maybe good omens for your future life, like sugar, like candles, like um eggs for fertility, sugar for sweetness. So there is this lady you hire to special, who knows how to decorate henna and the girls dance and we just, you know, they have their dinner party and stuff. And then Friday is where the contract is signed, and it's our religious ceremony, and then Saturday is the big party where the bride has to change the outfits like seven, eight times. So they are special in Morocco, that's the Moroccan wedding, you can look it up. There are lot of things on Google and YouTube, so there are special women, you hire them,



that's their profession that's what they do. And back then you had to make your clothes, you know, they might have something, but now it's like a wedding planner just like here. Like I told you, they can plan it from A to Z. Like you come as a guest and they dance, so they, you go to the Hammam, which is like a Turkish bath. It has money for purification, so you go to your wedding life, like with purity, so it's like ceremonial. And then you are washed with rose water, and you know, it's very symbolic. Then you go to the salon it's like here, you get your hair done and makeup and stuff and then these people, they take cover once you come. You know you want people who have big homes, or your friends with places, and then they change you in different attires, different colors, in different things with different jewels. Different, like crowns like a queen, [laughs] and you go, you know, people are here, and they invited people so when they have like a special chair with flowers and nice decoration for the bride and the groom and you just sit for a while you greet people. People take pictures with you and then after people dance and out go again, you change. So, it's like [laughs] what they call it– fashion show, yeah. That's the Moroccan way, and then at the end, of course, you change into the European dress, the white dress, that's just to go with your husband. At the very end, you change into that dress, you cut the cake after people have dinner and everything. At the very end, until four in the morning. Yeah, with weddings the party starts at six or seven in the evening all the way until four or five in the morning [laughs] so you put on your white dress, you cut your cake, you say goodbye to your guests, and you get into a nice, decorated limousine or Mercedes, or whatever. And you start your [laughs] wedding, your life, you know [laughs]. A lot of festivities.

I: What kind of role does religion play in cultural clothing? Does it have any meaning at all?

R: I think maybe the length of it, the way it's covered, it's like, the sleeves. And it's all covered maybe that's it.

I: What does that represent?

R: I think just like I said earlier, like a women is is so beautiful, so precious, so it's a sanctity, it's to protect her so.

I: Did your mother wear traditional dress?

R: Uh-huh yeah, a lot of them, yeah.

I: Did she pass them down?

R: Actually, unfortunately, not to me because I'm taller [laughs]. Yeah but, some of them, not all of them, to my sisters and she gave them. In Morocco we don't really have this culture of hanging on to things. I mean, at least in my family it's more of we have the sense of charity so it's like you need to give to other people who don't have any, or who need it more, to use it instead of like saving it for your kids. So yeah.

I: Where did you purchase your cultural clothing?

R: Maybe, Casablanca, Marrakesh. Like the big towns, they have special places, actually. Special— what do they call it's casaria, it's like a suk where they have fabric and merchants and all kinds of them. It's like how can I make a choice? It's so beautiful [laughs].

I: What do you think you'll do with your cultural clothing?

R: Just give it away, really. Again, I mean we don't have that, like, hanging on to things. I guess it's more about experience. Any Caftan is beautiful, so it's not like I need that Caftan to pass it on to my children, no.

I: Okay, I'm just going to wrap it up. Is there anything else about your history you'd like to tell me about?

R: No, I guess we covered it all [laughs].

I: Oh, how did you meet your husband then?

R: How did I meet him? It was like, through family, but then we meet kind of very— just like for dinner, or for like tea, or whatever. It's always people around, and so I didn't really like, spend time with him or travel with him, get to know him so it was very superficial.

I: Why do you think that is, is it a part of cultural and religion?

R: I think its culture, and also its more culture though because I, again, I was not aware of much religion growing up. So it's a lot of culture, yeah and I am from a very traditional family, because Morocco, there are people who aren't traditional. I mean, very few back then, more so right now, so I mean right now you have like open relationships just like here, so.

I: Would you say Morocco most people speak French or Arabic or both?

R: I would say unfortunately, we still have a lot of high, illiteracy in Morocco. So I would say Arabic. French is like, educated people.

I: Why is that?

R: Again, because illiteracy. Education is the big person to teach people who live in village and, who just don't have access to education to go to schools. And even if there is a school, like you will need to travel a few miles before you get there. Like paved roads, so it's kind of hard you know. People who live in cities and towns of course, they're educated but I'm talking about— because Morocco, there is a lot of rural parts in Morocco. Villages and mountains, so yeah, those people, they speak Arabic or Berber. Berber, Arabic, and French, and of course English, German, Spanish, Portuguese, all kinds of languages. But mainly French and Spanish because Morocco was divided between Spain and French. Spain colonized the north and all the way in the south in the Sahara. I don't know if you're aware of the Sahara problem, and France had the middle of Morocco so people in the north, they speak Spanish that's their second language. Whereas the rest of Morocco is French so.

I: Would you say Morocco is defined as being in the Middle East or in Africa or both?

R: No, it's not in Middle East. Our country its Africa. It's North Africa because North Africa is Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya. Egypt is Africa, but it's more towards the Middle East you know, language-wise culture-wise, but Morocco shares characteristics with Algeria and Tunisia, and Europe of course. Because it's, literally you can see Europe from Tangier. When we used to go by boat, it's thirty minutes, or seven miles. Seven miles you cross by ferry, so it's right there. It's closer than Chicago, [laughs] yeah. So, we have a lot of European influence in Morocco.

I: I just want to say thank you so much for your time and sharing your experiences, I really appreciate and am learning so much.

R: Yeah, no problem, thank you.