



## Oral History Project Interview

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

Interview Number: CG 1.00

Date: 03/12/ 2021

Gender: Female

Name: "Sariah"

Country of Origin: Jordan

Year of Immigration: 2010

**Abstract:** Sariah (name changed for confidentiality) is a 17-year-old college undergraduate student at the Milwaukee Area Technical College who was originally born in Jordan, before her family eventually settled in Wisconsin. She identifies as a second-generation Muslim Palestinian immigrant. Even though she has lived in the United States since 2<sup>nd</sup> grade she embraces her Jordanian and Palestinian culture more than the American culture but allows them to collide. Through continuing to embrace her culture, her religion and her decision to wear the hijab, Sariah hopes her children will learn to embrace who they are and doesn't want to let her culture die out because it is an important part of who they are. She has had very welcoming experiences in the United States by her surrounding community but continues to keep a close-knit circle of Arab community members consisting of only her family and her best friend.

**Key Themes:** Racism, cultural differences, adaptation, career goals, education, religion

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

I: Hi, so I'm Cindy it's so nice to meet you! I just wanted to say thank you for taking the time to interview with me about your experiences as a Muslim woman in the U.S, I really appreciate it.

R: Yeah, of course I'm happy to be doing this.

I: So, first off, we're just going to off with some general questions about your background.

R: Ok, sounds good.

I: What is your name, age and level of education.

R: My name is Sariah, I am 17 and I turn 18 in May. I finished high school early, so now I'm in my first year of college. I've always lived in Wisconsin, I go to MATC studying nursing prerequisites and will be transferring to UWM for undergraduate hopefully.

I: When you were growing up, where did you go to school (K-12): public schools, community schools, such as Salam School, or private/ religious schools?

R: Um, through k-2<sup>nd</sup> grade I went to school in Jordan, but my dad was working here (U.S) so he didn't have to go through 2 different countries we moved here. I went (school names omitted for confidentiality)

I: Tell me about places and buildings where you spent a lot of time during your childhood.

R: Well, home is Jordan. I'd spend a lot of time playing with other kids outside in my neighborhood, but here I didn't really have those connections with anyone. I didn't really spend my time anywhere except home and school.

I: Um...do you feel like, like um do these places feel like home for you, like once you were in Wisconsin or did you feel like something was missing?

R: Um, honestly the only home like if somebody asked me where is your home, I'd probably say Jordan because that's where I remember most of my childhood because you know all the neighbors would be out and we'd be all playing together. Here? No, not really.

I: Right. And then so for here in Wisconsin tell me about how you felt about being Muslim in these different spaces and how did you feel like you expressed your Muslim identity different in these places?

R: Ok, so back home everyone was basically Muslim like majority, but here when I came here nobody really knew I was Muslim because I didn't have my scarf on until like junior year. And honestly it was normal like everyone was so sweet about it. I mean the community that I live in is great, so I didn't really have trouble with that, but yeah. Did that answer your question?

I: Yeah.

R: If it doesn't just let me know.

I: No, yeah. And then you said you didn't start wearing your scarf until junior year of high school? So, like last year?

R: Yeah. And I surround myself around like really great people, but from like all different races, ethnicities and they're all so great.

I: That's awesome! I feel like I've like met people who definitely had different experiences just growing up here, but ugh I was going to ask a question...

R: Honestly, over here I would say that I like to surround myself more around like American...well, yeah Americans besides my best friend because I don't really like to mix myself with the Arab community here. I feel like two different people.

I: Ok. Right, right. That's what I was going to ask is there, so is there a reason, like personal reason why you didn't wear your scarf until junior year? Or was it just like random?

R: Umm... no I mean you're supposed to wear it when you get your period, but my parents are not really that strict. And they were just like ok you wear it whenever you feel comfortable wearing it and my whole family was wearing it before all of my older cousins, I'm one of the youngest so I was like you know what okay I think it is time for me to wear it and it was kinda scary for me at first, but then I put it on and it was completely fine. So, it's just kind of my choice you know.

I: Right. And then this question is just, did you ever serve in the US military or did you plan to?

R: No.

I: And then are you currently employed, which includes working outside of the home, if so what's your job?

R: Um, I'm not employed like taxes wise, I babysit.

I: Ok

R: yeah.

I: And then are you married?

R: Noo [chuckles].

I: [laughs] I just have to ask it.

R: Actually, my mom doesn't like want me to get married until I'm done with college, I've worked for like two years.

I: Ok.

R: Yeahhh, she's very modern not old fashioned.

I: That's what I was going to say do you feel like your parents are more modernized?

R: Yeah, for sure. I feel like after we moved here, we've kind of um collided, with American culture we still have our Arab culture, but like they're not very Arab culture, you know.

I: Right, right. And then you don't have children?

R: No.

I: Okay and then this one's, hmm more like...how do you identify yourself?

R: As in, religion?

I: That's the thing, like you can make whatever you want of this question, some people see themselves in terms of their religion or culture, nationality and so forth so it's just kind of like...

R: Do you want me to just list all of them, what I see myself as?

I: Yeah.

R: Ok, I see myself as Muslim, 100% I wear the scarf. I grew up Muslim, my whole family is Muslim. Um, I see myself as not American even though I am a U.S Citizen, but I was born in Jordan and that's like everything that I think about, but my family is from Palestine and I've never been to Palestine, so Jordanian for sure. And then my race, I mean they should have middle eastern as a race, but I would say white.

I: Okay.

R: Even though if you search it up, I'm supposed to say I'm Asian, but I mean come on.

I: [chuckles] So you identify more with the Muslim culture?

R: Yeah, for sure.

I: Do you feel the way you identify yourself changes with where you are or the place that you are and if yes, how?

R: No, I mean. You mean like in school and all that stuff?

I: Mhmm.

R: No, I mean I always identify myself as Muslim whether I'm in school, outside, you know. Does that answer your question? Let me know if it doesn't.

I: Um no, that's fine. The next question is are there places where you feel your best and most successfully express your identity, why?

R: Umm, honestly probably right now as soon as I like finish high school because I feel like high school is a time where you know you're not truly yourself. So, probably when I start college and I'm outside of high school.

I: And then what traditions of your religion or culture do you practice?

R: Umm, well I practice more my Palestinian culture, um which is like you know Henna..henna tattoos and also thobes, debka. Debka is like a dance, thobes are just a cultural dress I mean if you search it up. You probably know what it is or from Mandy you'd probably know what it is.

I: Do you use like food recipes from your parents or grandparents or are there any food restrictions that you follow?

R: Food recipes? Unfortunately, no and it's kind of sad. Like I wish I had gotten something from my grandma, but for like religious reasons I can't have pork or like gelatin..oh and alcohol! Or like any sort of drugs too that's like, anything that can impact my body in any way...in a negative way I can't have that. And that's kind of like hard for like a teenager throughout high school because you know high schoolers, they'll like drink and doing all sorts of drugs which happened a lot at my school. I'd walk into the stall and I'd see this girl hitting a cart and it's kind of hard staying away from that as a teenager.

I: Right, I can imagine that being hard, so how do you stop yourself from not drinking or coming to it? Like what stops you?

R: Well, yeah parents like, my mom is super strict with that stuff we are not allowed to smoke. Hookah is like very cultural like a lot of Arabs do it, but my mom has never associated us with that, so I feel like that's one way out of it. And then for drinking that's just like a no no for me, you know like an absolute no.

I: In what way if any do you participate in cultural or religious activities?

R: Well, last year my junior year I was in a group called VIP, which is a Muslim girls youth program, but like I was one of the leaders in that and basically what we did was we brought girls together from our community and we like had lectures, we went out together and I participate in a lot of lectures like I go to them, a lot of them are outside of VIP. Also, I go to the mosque you know to pray usually, not always, but in Ramadan...Do you know Ramadan?

I: Mhm no.

R: I was assuming you'd know because you know Mandy, well Ramadan is basically this one month of the year where Muslims fast, fasting where you stop eating at sunrise and you eat at sunset for 30 days straight. So, when it's that time I go to the mosque every single night and we would pray and it would take like two hours sometimes even more, but for me two hours because I don't stay that long.

I: Mhmm. Oh, so people would stay longer?

R: Yeah, there's people who would stay there until like 4 in the morning just praying constantly.

I: So, going off of that how would you describe your religious life?

R: My religious life, umm I mean I don't pray five times a day which is what I'm supposed to do, but I try my best to pray as much as I can and I do wear the headscarf, I do try my best to dress modestly, I wouldn't say I'm perfect, but I mean ..yeah. It's, I'm the same as the people around me you know.

I: Right, yeah. So, who mostly does the cooking in your household?

R: Oh, my mom almost like every day and my dad works. My mom is a stay at home mom she finished high school, but she didn't go to college, she got married pretty young.

I: And then what language or languages do you speak?

R: Ok, I speak Arabic and English, but my English is stronger than my Arabic because I did move here when I was really young.

I: Right.

R: So those too.

I: Do you speak Arabic with your parents?

R: Yeah, well my parents both of them understand English. The majority of the time I do speak English with them but also a lot of the time they'll be like "ok you need to start speaking Arabic" and I'll start speaking Arabic with them because they know that I'm losing it.

I: Yeah, it's like the same thing with me and my parents because I speak Spanish with them and they're like you need to speak it more because it's getting rough.

R: Right you'll lose it and I don't want that because I feel like that's a whole piece of me you know.

I: Yeah, right! Um, what are your connections with your parents or grandparents' homeland? Like your connections now.

R: Umm, my parents' homeland I mean it's Palestine but both of them, my mom's never been to Palestine, but you know we're from Palestine. Um, but my mom has never been, I've never been, none of my siblings except my brother has gone and I'm pretty sure my dad has gone, so I don't really have connections to like Palestine, but Jordan on the other hand I love that place and I haven't gone in 8 years, but like my whole family has just because I didn't want to for a while, but now I'm dying to go. I feel like also I got older and I'm like "oh my god I miss all my family there." But yeah, we're going this summer and I'm so stoked!

I: Oh my god that's exciting!

R: yeah, like 8 years later probably even more.

I: Yeah, I can't imagine, the last time I visited Mexico was a year ago, so 8 years is a long time. So, do you have relatives that you stay in contact with there? Or not really?

R: Yeah, I have both my grandmas on both my mom and dad's side died and my grandpa on my dad's side dies, but my grandpa on my mom's side is still alive and he lives in Jordan with my uncles, so I stay in touch with them whenever my mom is on the phone I'll like talk to them. I have cousins there and I don't really stay in touch with all of them I feel like because of the language difference I just wouldn't be able to communicate with them as easily except for one of them. She's come here before, so she knows some English so that's how I communicate with her.

I: So, that's what I was going to say do you ever try to get your family over there to come here? Or like come visit, come live here or are you like no?

R: See, they can't.

I: Like if they could you know.

R: OH! If they could they would! 100%.

I: Do you read the newspaper? The daily newspaper?

R: For Jordan?

I: Like here.

R: Oh no, never. I honestly stay updated with political stuff or you know anything through social media.

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

R: Well. when I was in Jordan, I could never go to Palestine because, well not political events because they didn't do anything. But you know the Israel Palestine conflict? Do you know anything about that?

I: Mhmm.

R: Yeah, so because they're Palestinian my grandparents and I lived in Jordan. I was technically Palestinian I could never go to Palestine, but when I moved here, and I became a U.S citizen that's when I could move there. So, I guess that's one thing.

I: Have you ever tried taking action on any of these situations even though you're here?

R: Uhhh, no I was pretty young, so I didn't know what I was doing. I actually just found out about that like a week ago that I could never go there, but yeah, I mean I can now.

I: So, where do you go to get all your information on this? Like on the conflicts and staying up to date?

R: My parents. If it's about like my country back home, then it's my parents.

I: And then how would you describe your political participation in the U.S? Like do you vote? If you do in what elections do you vote?

R: I can't vote right now...

I: Oh right! you're 17!

R: But I like I think it's very serious. Like I think it's amazing that we have a voice here in the U.S because we don't have that back home, you know. We have a king and then we have Palestine, whose president is Israeli, so you don't, we don't really have a voice there. So, I try to like to encourage everyone that can vote, to vote. Like my sister I told her "go vote, go vote," but she never ended up going. And I think that like this election especially was so important because it was like trump and Biden you know.

I: Right, it was close!

R: Yeah.

I: How have your mosque and/or Islamic center responded to the calls for social justice raised by the Black Lives Matter movement?

R: Honestly, I haven't heard it, I'm sure they have. Actually there's this program it's called Ice & Core and it's connected to my mosque ISM and they had like live streams where they sat down for three hours and they were encouraging both men and women, they call them brothers and sisters to take action, to go on social media, you know to take a stand. And I personally have.



I: Okay, in what ways if any have you shown solidarity with Black Lives Matter?

R: So, I did tik tok for a while and I posted like videos about the Black Lives Matter movement and everything that was going on to make people aware. I also posted on my Instagram and was like “yo nobody is talking about this.”

I: That’s awesome! I still have not gotten the hang of TikTok.

R: It’s amazing, but you don’t want to download it.

I: What do you think Muslim communities in the U.S should be doing with regard to social justice, so that can be racism, islamophobia, violence against Muslims.

R: What they should do?

I: Yeah.

R: I mean honestly right now they can’t really have any events in person, so I feel like what they did on the livestream that was amazing you know and there’s a lot of people on there, like over one hundred. Actually, I should also add that they had a little fundraiser through this website where people would donate money and they would give it to those in need through everything that was going on with the movement.

I: Were you here when 9/11 happened?

R: Noo, didn’t that happen in 2002? But, no none of my family was here when 9/11 happened.

I: Has anyone in your family had a bad experience here? Like where they were maybe targeted once you guys got here?

R: Umm, so yeahh when you wear a scarf there’s always going to be people that are you know starring at you. My cousin, we were at pick and save and I wasn’t wearing a scarf at this time, but she was, and I swear to you this lady would not stop starring at her and she was just like glaring and giving her the dirtiest looks. Then my cousin was like is there a problem and she was like “noo,” but she had the biggest attitude. I don’t know if my sister has had any problems, but I can ask her if you want?

I: Yeah if you want!

R: So, the question was..?

I: If you’ve ever experienced racism or felt targeted?

R: yeah, sure I would say only once when I was in high school I was in gym class and you know I wear the scarf on my head. So. There’s this kid who was telling everyone she should take off the scarf, she looked way better before she started wearing the scarf and she looks so stupid with

her scarf on and then one of my cousins was actually in that class and he told this other girl and this other girl told my friend. And my friend then came and told me that this kid was saying that about me! He was saying that like I hate to say this word, but that I looked retarded with my scarf on!

I: That's insane!!

R: Yeah, this was my junior year of high school.

I: Thank you, I appreciate you sharing!

R: Alright, what's next.

I: Do you feel like you have a support system here if so what and who Is your support system?

R: Umm, for sure no one from school! Probably my best friend and my family because those are the only people that I'm around you know and..I really don't talk to anyone, when I tell you I have one best friend and no other friends like I'm so deadass about that!

I: Why do you feel that way?

R: Well, if I ever have any problems with anything, my sister she's a big sister, so she will always defend me or talk to me, calm me down with all of that and like my best friend like you know best friends! Like if my sister ever sees that I'm changing for the worse she'll sit me down and she'll be like "Yo, what is going on with you!" and she'll talk to me. My mom will too and also my aunt, I have an aunt that's super young who is 30 and she's pretty cool, so she'll understand us, and she'll always talk to me if she needs anything or if I need anything.

I: That's cool though. Well, so that's all from that section, so first off thank you for being open and sharing your experiences overall and now this one we're moving onto marriage questions even though you're not married. But In your culture how are women viewed and what is their typical role? And how are men viewed as well?

R: Okay, well cultural is different than religious. In our culture women are viewed as babymakers and you know chefs, maids, that's cultural. Religiously on the other hand, women are viewed as being respected. Culture wise women have to clean cook, the Arab culture says we're supposed to stay home with the kids whereas men are working and getting the money for the house, but because in my family we don't really go by that. We collided with the American culture where women are supposed to get educated, in our family they don't want us to get engaged or married before getting our education they want us to make sure we're more stable. Now, they're more open minded and aware that one day something might happen to the husband, how is she going to be responsible for herself, you know. You have to look at it from different perspectives.

I: Right. Thank you so much! What are some ways in which you balance faith and your American identity or American life?

R: Umm, faith? How I balance it is through my parents, you know I was born Muslim and I was raised Muslim and around all Muslims. My mom actually wouldn't let me hangout like around Americans outside of school because of the influence so I feel like that's one way, with my mom that I've been able to balance faith. I feel like there's a lot of things we're against in my religion such as the LGBTQ community.. no not against, but they're not supportive of the community. So, to me as a future nurse I feel like I don't really judge, and it just depends on the way a family is educated. Like understand that these are humans and I should respect them, so if I'm around my family I'll say yeah I'm not really supportive, but I wouldn't judge.

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

R: I don't drink and that's good for me. I don't smoke, I don't do drugs because that's super against my religion, so I feel like that's one way it has influenced me. And also, not dating. Dating is against our religion because what we believe is that god doesn't want us to get hurt because it really hurts when you get broken up with.

I: Oh, wow I didn't know that. So, you don't date?

R: Yeah.

I: Ok, what does marriage mean to you?

R: Ok, so I would say that its kinds of is a must for me. My dream is to be a mom and have a big family because I was born into a big family, I have like 500 cousins. I feel like that's why it's a must for me and I really wouldn't want to stay single my whole life, so it's a must for me.

I: What are the first characteristics you'd look for in a husband?

R: Probably religious, but not too religious kind of like me. Umm very cultured and that he be Palestinian. You know how I was telling you I love Jordan a lot? I'm more into the Palestinian culture.

I: Ok. What's the biggest difference between the cultures?

R: Jordan, I feel like they just don't have many cultural things. Like we have our thobes, debka, you know just kind of like that fun stuff and I want my kids to be very educated about our culture the way that I am. I want to pass that on, so they can pass that on to their kids because I don't want that to die.

I: Mhmm. Would education, income or social class for your husband in the future contribute to your decision or your parents' decision?

R: Yeah. Income, yes because I probably sound like a horrible person, but I don't want to be living my life, you know I'm working I'm studying really hard and I want to become a nurse. I wouldn't want to marry someone that's poor because then that's ruining my life. I don't want to sound like a bad person you know.

I: No, that's fair, that's fair! Would you move because of marriage or relocating because of marriage? Or is that something you wouldn't consider at all?

R: I probably would end up doing it, if it's with the right person, but I am so attached to my family that I could never think about leaving. Maybe like later on when we have kids, but not right away. Like my sister is getting married to someone that is overseas and he's coming here because she's not going to move. We have very closer connections with our family.

I: So, do you feel like is it custom for people in your family or your community to get married younger?

R: Umm, a lot of people, well back then it was like you get married at 16 or else you expired, that was the mindset, but now if a girl gets married young it's like "oh my god what are her parents thinking, what is she thinking oh my gosh her education!" So, it's not the same right now people want their kids to finish their education, to work, to be stable so that if her husband turns out to be shi\*ty or something happens then she can lift herself up on her own. But there are few people who do get married pretty young, like 19,20.

I: How open are your parents when it comes to marriage outside your religious or national group?

R: Religion, zero like if they're not Muslim I can't marry them. Um, but for nationality they want him to be Palestinian, but it's not a must, but I want it.

I: Do you know anyone who has married outside of their religious group?

R: Yes, I do. My friends brother married his wife who is white, and she was Christian, but she did convert to Islam. All the people I know they converted to Islam for their husband. Like my cousins' husband, his brother he married a white woman and she was also Christian, but she converted.

I: I was going to ask if you realize or saw any cultural barriers?

R: The two I just told you about, no because they were so fascinated with the culture, they did their research and loved it. For them, not really. My mom's friend got married to this Albanian girl and she's Christian, she didn't convert and she doesn't go into the Palestinian culture like she'll wear thobes or henna when she goes to weddings with her husband, but she holds onto her culture a lot and she tries to stay away from the Palestinian culture.

I: Okay. These questions changed, but why did you choose to go into nursing?

R: Um, because my sister did it and I would test her before she had quizzes and I was like OH! This is pretty cool! And also, I'm a very soft person and I want to go into labor and delivery, I love babies and I feel like that's so amazing to say I gave birth to this child and that's a big deal for me.

I: Umm, would you consider marrying a person younger than you?

R: No, I just I don't know why but I would consider them as weak. If it's a couple months it's fine, but if it's a year or two then no. What about you, now I want to know you?

I: Mhmm, probably not but I think it's more of, not an authority thing but I just wouldn't want to be older, which is so weird. Would you consider marrying a person born and raised outside of the united states?

R: Yes, as long as they're Palestinian.

I: When it comes to marriage, who makes most of the decisions?

R: Oh, like when we're married? This gal! because that's how my mom was, she makes most of the decisions, she's like very dominant and she's very strong and I love that about her. I see woman that are so scared of their husbands and that's so unhealthy, which I've seen so much especially in the Arab culture where men are more dominant, and they make most of the decisions. My mom has the final word over the daughters, but for my brother it's my dad.

I: You kind of touched on this, but what do you think about dating?

R: Personally, in my family my sister met her fiancé through dating and as much as it's against our religion I believe that there's a right way to do it. So, I would do it personally to meet the right person and my parents are fine with that. You don't make out, kiss and stuff like that you just get to know them, but it's better than your parents being like here "marry him."

I: Um, do you think that the internet/Facebook and social media made it easier for people to meet their future spouse?

R: Yeah, through Instagram, snapchat that's how my sister met her future fiancé they met through Instagram and he lives in Palestine. They've actually been talking for so long it's probably been like four years.

I: Oh, wow that is a long time! Do you think community events/weddings are places were people tend to see a potential spouse and proceed from there?

R: Yes, weddings for like..this is going to sound so bad, but a lot of moms in like Arab communities will bring their daughters to wedding so that another mother will see her and be like "oh I want her for my son", it happens a lot! I personally think that's so sick, you're literally like "oh here's my daughter."

I: Were your parents married In Jordan?

R: Yes.

I: So, do you see any difference with marriages in America vs in Jordan?

R: No, because the way we do it back home is the way we do it here. Americans will have weddings with like 60 people you know, and my cousins wedding had almost like 900 people. Minimum for an Arab wedding is like 400 people.

I: Oh wow, that's a lot! So, a family which has more than one daughter, which would be you do you think marriage restrictions and processes are different between the oldest daughter and the youngest daughter?

R: Noo, honestly there's no difference in that.

I: In what way if any do you think boys should be raised differently than girls?

R: None...haha nah I'm just kidding. Well here in the Arab culture men are more free to do what they want. This is kind of sad and they mess up and something bad goes wrong in the community it doesn't really matter as much as it would or a girl because then everyone would be talking about it. For a girl it's like a scar for the rest of her life, it's really scary.

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

R: Same as my dad, he's not controlling, not too religious, doesn't say "oh you can't wear that." Also, someone who's like stable.

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

R: Ummm, all of them. Like the whole Palestinian culture, we wear thobes, scarves, they told me you can wear it whenever you want you just have to wear it eventually because it's a part of our religion. They kept thobes, debka pretty much all of their culture and just kind of mixed it in with the American culture as well.

I: Ok, so now that you wear the scarf does that mean you wear it forever now or just when you want to?

R: No, I wear it forever. Yeah, I can show my hair in front of my brother, my dad, my uncles, my cousins I can't but I do anyway. It's cause you can marry them, but we don't do that, so I don't wear it in front of them. That's what I mean by we kind of mixed the American culture into it, well not American culture, but not very cultured with the scarf.

I: Um, did your parents ever encourage you to work or did they discourage you to work?

R: They encouraged me so much to work. They want me to work right now, but I just don't want to because of school, but in the future 100%, it's not even a choice like you have to, I have to finish my education before I get marries and if I don't want to work after that, that's fine, but they're like you have to finish your education.

I: I love that though, that's a good way to look at it. Um when did you first start to drive?

R: Um, well I failed my driver's test, but my third time I passed and got my license in august and my parents still don't let me drive because they're scared.

I: How would you describe your parent's involvement in your education?

R: very involved, my parents care so much about my grades, it's crazy. They have PowerSchool on their phone so every time a grade went in, they'd text me and my mom would text me "Why did you get a C on your test, didn't you study for it?" but yeah.

I: Do they expect straight A's or are they more lenient.

R: Not straight A's, but they expect good grades like a 3.5, 3.6 GPA you know.

I: Right, which is doable. In what ways if any did your parents influence your choice of a career or major in college.

R: They didn't actually, they told me to do my own research. They said do your own research and you figure out what you want to do and because my sister was doing nursing, I did some research on nursing and I found out that it was super interesting and all that so I went into it. My dad really wanted me to be a lawyer he was like you have such a strong personality; you could be a lawyer, but he was like okay it's up to you.

I: Right that was my parents too, they really wanted me to go into immigration law. All right, so in school or college, were you involved in religious or culture organizations?

R: Um, in high school, I was involved in VIP. I told you about it, um, Muslim girls youth club.

I: Hmm. All right. So now that's the last question for that section. Now we're just gonna go into talking about your parents. So, um, just tell me a little bit about like who your parents are. Um, first, can I write both of their first and last names down?

R: Yeah, my mom's first name is Lubna and her last name is Ibrahim. Okay. Okay. And my dad's last name or first name is Ghassan and his last name is Jaber.

I: Okay. And then you can just go ahead and talk about them, like a little about them.

R: Yeah. Okay. Well, my dad's from Palestine. My mom's also from Palestine, but like two different villages. My mom's from a village, um, called Nablus and my dad's from a village called Betin, which I'm obviously from, cause he's from there and they both lived in Jordan and my dad came here when he was pretty young and he, um, went to college and he also was working with his dad. They were building a gas station together. Okay. Um, and, uh, what do I say? My mom's 41 and my dad is 46, turning 47. I believe. What else can I say?

I: Is that, did you say anything about your mom?

R: Yeah, my mom's 41 and she also lived in Jordan and she went to high school, but she didn't go to college.

I: Okay. So, um, as of right now, like what's their current status? Like, I know you said your mom's a stay at home mom, but they're still working, right?

R: Yeah. My mom's a stay at home mom. My dad is an accountant.

I: Dang. That's cool. They make bank!

R: Yeah. He's like been begging me to be an accountant actually. Like yeah. He convinced my brother to do accounting, so my brother's doing accounting and then he's going to go and he's going to become a pilot after. Yeah.

I: That's cool though. I studied accounting my freshman year and then I was like no. I was like, I cannot do this for the rest of my life, which can happen with any career.

R: You just gotta be patient and you have to like get used to like repeating the same process and not being bored of it.

I: Mhmm. And then do you know at what age they immigrated? Sorry.

R: My mom, she has always lived in Jordan. And then let me think when I was in second grade, my mom's 41 right now. So, I've been here for like 11 years. So about 30 years old? Yeah. She came here. My dad probably like in his teen years though.

I: And then I know we talked about your mom's level of education, but what about your dad?

R: My dad, um, finished high school. He did four years, um, to get his accounting degree.

I: And he went to school here or?

R: Yeah, he went to school here. Um, I believe he took classes at MATC and UWM, but, I'm not 100% sure.

I: Hmm. So, how do you think your parents identify themselves?

R: Religion?

I: Um, yeah, like cultural, religious aspects,

R: Religion, race, cultural Palestinian.

I: So, you see your parents more as like overall, claiming their Palestinian culture. Like not necessarily not the American culture?



R: Not the American culture. I would say for me, American culture since I've lived here like 11 years, but for them Palestinian culture, Jordanian culture for my mom, but just Palestinian for my dad.

I: Do you like, do your parents often talk about back home, like their Homeland or not really?

R: Like they want to go back?

I: Yeah. Like do they just ever like talk about it? Like whether they want to go back or if they like miss things from there?

R: Um, my mom or, well, my dad doesn't really have anything there anymore. His whole family's here. Um, he does talk about how beautiful it is. My mom's just like, Oh, like days there were like so nice. Cause she was young there, you know, those were childhood, but not really, like she said, she wouldn't want to go back.

I: Um, did any of your grandparents immigrate to the us?

R: My grandpa did from my dad's side.

I: Um, and then is he still alive?

R: No.

I: Um, like, I don't know how close you were with him, but do you know, like his reasoning behind immigrating?

R: Um, I know that it's to like, get a good job. And he did, it was for, he built a gas station here. His family and education.

I: I don't know like how informed you are on like the differences and money-making, but do they make more money here than they would be back home?

R: Yeah, 100%. There's a lot of poverty there. Um, my grandpa came here for like his kid's education, but my uncle was going to go and to become a biomedical engineer. Um, after his dad died, he couldn't because he needed to work and make money for his family.

I: Um, was your grandpa working? Like, do you know what he was working in back when he was in his homeland?

R: I mean he had his own little business; he had a restaurant.

I: Oh, that's cool. Okay. So, he had a business over there and then another business here, a businessman.

R: Yeah!

I: So, we talked about cultural clothing. What was the clothing?

R: We have, um, thawbs for girls and then we have like debka outfits for men, but like, they don't really have a name for them.

I: When do you usually wear these?

R: Um, there's this, um, pre wedding party. It's called a henna. We wear them at that time, but like here in Jordan, the men would wear their thawbs, but here they just wear like a suit and a tie.

I: Okay. Um, how do you feel when you wear them and like, what does the traditional clothing mean to you?

R: Um, I love them. They're so pretty. And it's just, it just means to me like that it's part of my culture and, you know, it's been going on for like decades and I just, I love them because I've seen like, even pictures of like my great-grandparents wearing them and like, people like my grandma would make them by hand.

I: That's insane! Um, because I imagine they're very like detailed. Right. Um, does religion play a role in your choice of clothing?

R: No. I mean, you're supposed to wear like a shirt up to your knees and then pants that are like, you know, cover your ankle or you're supposed to have your ankles covered. But for me, I mean, that doesn't really matter to me or my family. Okay. Yeah. Just a headscarf will do.

I: And then do you know if your mother wore these traditional, like clothing?

R: Yeah. She has pictures from her henna that she did. Like I said, it's a pre wedding thing. So, you do it a day before the wedding a day or two. She has pictures of that and she wears them right now. She's like, I swear we have like 30 of them in this house.

I: Um, where do you guys like get these from?

R: Um, so you could get these handmade, which costs like a thousand dollars. I got mine handmade before, but I was literally like 14. I don't even know what my parents were thinking. Yeah. And then, um, also you could just like get them shipped from overseas.

I: Mm, yeah. Dang. Um, all right. So now we're going to go into the questions about like your perceptions and beliefs towards disability. Um, so do you think people with disabilities can lead lives that are as fulfilling as people without disabilities?

R: Well, it depends on what kind of disability.

I: Hm. Okay. Just unpack that. Like you just speak what you're thinking when it comes to disabilities.

R: Well, I feel like there's like severe disabilities and then there's like some that are not supposed to be here. Like I know people with disabilities, like I know these two girls with autism, one of them, her autism is not as severe and I just know she could like go on with life, get married, you know, have children and she'd be a great mom. Um, and I feel like that had a lot to do with her therapy sessions, but I know this other girl where like, it's, it's like really severe and she, she still wears diapers and she's really like, she's 13 and it really just depends on like how severe it is. Hm. Does that make sense?

I: Yeah. No. Yeah, it does. Um, do you feel some of these topics are considered like taboo to talk about in most Arab and or Muslim families? And if, yes, why do you think that's the case?

R: We talk about them, it's normal. Yeah. Cause we have, um, like two people in our family that have autism, not in my family, but like in a Jaber family they'll have autism. We have someone with down syndrome. Do you mean disabilities? Like only mental disabilities?

I: It can be either or.

R: Yeah, but no it's normal and actually like I want it to be an occupational therapist. Before I wanted to become a nurse. Yeah. Cause like, I just, I just would love to care for people like that, but I did an internship and I hated it because it just wore you out so much.

I: Yeah! Do you think there's like different perceptions? Um, when it comes to disabilities that are females with disabilities versus men with disabilities in the Arab culture?

R: In the Arab culture? In my family, like, no, but probably in the Arab culture, they would have a mindset of "oh these people will never get married, you know they can't go on with life. They're always going to be living with their parents.

I: Right. So that was the last question for that section. And now, um, we're going to talk about like COVID 19 and just like its impacts. How has the outbreak of the COVID virus affected you personally in terms of your financial, social and health situations?

R: Okay. So, for my family financial, it hasn't really affected because, um, my dad owns his own business accounting and um, he just kept it open. He still had his work done. It's not like he always needed people to come in to keep his business going so that not at all, but it's financially and what?

I: Social and health situations.

R: Health. Um, we all got it, but our symptoms were not very severe in my family. Um, so that was also fine for us. Thank God. Um, but I didn't have someone close to me, you know, die or anything, but just the fact, like, especially at the beginning of COVID where everyone was like in quarantine in March, um, everyone was so scared of it and a lot and my aunt got it and we were all like terrified. Cause she's like old, she has a lot of health problems and it's just scary, but she was okay. And I've had like, some of my friends, parents die it was actually really sad, but my main family, nothing really impacted us. Actually, there was like one impact. It was that my

sister was supposed to have her engagement this summer, but she couldn't because of COVID and I was supposed to go see my family. I haven't seen them in like nine years!

I: It's crazy. And we're coming up on the one-year anniversary of COVID and like it's still here.

R: Literally, I mean, honestly, I'm shocked that they already came out with a vaccine. It usually takes like two, three years.

I: Um, well, like I'm I know they say it's like not a hundred percent effective but it's something. So how has the outbreak of the virus affected the way you conduct yourself with people close to you? Like your friends and family, family that lives here and family that lives in other countries,

R: What do you mean by conduct myself? Like how I see them?

I: Like just the way you are with them, you know.

R: I feel like I'm going to make you like write the most lame, like essay, but it like, hasn't really affected me because like, I, I did quarantine for like a good two months where like the first time I went out, I was like, Whoa, this is what air smells like. But after that, like I just went on with my life. I was like, you know what? I got to get used to this. And I went and I saw my family and it was just fine. And like I still go see them. Yeah.

I: Yeah. So, do you live with your parents or no?

R: Yeah.

I: You do? Do you ever find yourself getting agitated cause you're home a lot more or no? Um,

R: During quarantine, my dad was still going to work. He was still going to his office though. We didn't really see much of him cause he comes back really late and he works seven days a week. But for my mom, I would say no, because she would leave the house to like, get like stuff, you know? And then she'd come home. And I spent a majority of the time just watching movies with my friends, like on the computer Netflix party. Do you know? But yeah. And my family, like they, I, we actually told her, we were like, we can't stay next to each other for like that long before, like we all kill each other. So, what we do is like, sometimes like we'll make a puzzle, but like, we don't really like, hang out that much. I honestly, I loved quarantine so much. Me and my family always talked about that. It was like really nice because it set like a mood.

I: Yeah. Not going to lie. Yeah. My roommates and I were talking about that and we were like, because today was national Marquette day and it's like a day where everyone parties and we were like, it's, COVID we're not going out or anything, but like you just see all these people out there, like partying on campus and I'm like, Oh my God, like, what are you guys doing? But Hm. How do you connect or communicate with family and friends who don't live in your house?

R: Um, if they're like close by then, I'll just go over. Um, we talk on the phone, we text each other. I'm really close with my family here. Um, but I have family in St. Louis, which is six

hours away. Um, we go visit them every like couple of months and then I talk to them on FaceTime a lot pretty often. And then my family overseas, whenever my mom's on the phone with them I'll come and I'll say hi, but yeah, not too close with them back home.

I: Um, are there any apps that you began to use or like blogs that you started to read? When the outbreak or when the pandemic hit?

R: Yeah. Tik TOK was really fun, it kept me really busy. Um, Netflix, I use that a lot. YouTube. I was on there because you really had nothing to do except be on your phone. Um, yeah, I'd say Netflix Tik TOK, FaceTime. I was on FaceTime with my friend, Oh my God one time we were legit on FaceTime for like 28 hours and we didn't end it. Yeah. We were watching shows together. It was so nice.

I: That's fun! In what ways, if any, has the COVID crisis affected your physical and emotional health and have you faced any challenges?

R: So, for physical, I gained six pounds. Um, I was going to the gym constantly and I lost like seven pounds and within like two months, cause I was like grinding and I cut Starbucks off, I cut Dunkin off. All that fattening stuff. I would only sweets like once a week, even though like, I just did it for me, like, cause I was like, okay, you know what? Like I want abs. So, I would like first like start cutting that off. And then when I lost the six pounds, I was like, okay. Time to like, you know, work on muscles. And then we had to quarantine and the gym's closed and you could really only like watch stuff during quarantine and eat. So, I ate a lot and I gained that weight back. And now I'm working on losing it.

I: And then was there any emotional challenges or no, like mental?

R: For me personally, not really. Like sometimes it would be like, oh my God, I got to get out of here. Like, and I feel like I'm literally like choking, like, but I mean like this, everyone, you know, I gotta get outta here. I gotta get back to normal life. But for my sister, she was literally depressed for like a good week until my mom was like, okay, we gotta get back to life before things get worse! Cause we're used to going out like almost every day and being home for like two months just, it was just too hard. We didn't even go on walks.

I: Oh really? Yeah, I feel like that's the only thing that kept me sane because when COVID hit, I was back home, not on campus. So, I was with my parents and like going on walks every day is the only thing that kept me going

R: No at the end of quarantine, me and my friend would go, um, bike riding on this trail and we would go for like two hours.

I: Fresh air really hits different. Um, okay. So COVID-19 wise, has it impacted any of your religious practices or like religious traditions since the pandemic started?

R: Yeah. During, um, quarantine, we had Ramadan, which is where we fast from sunrise to sunset and every night during that month we would go to the mosque and we would pray, like I

told you like 20, we'd pray like 20 times and this year we couldn't do it. So, it was like, it was like a bump for everyone.

I: Has there been, have you attended any like virtual religious activities and like how do you feel about those versus in person?

R: Yeah. So, the mosque that we go to is called ism. They do like live streams. Now, we still can't go back to the mosque. They do live streams and I would always join them, and they would play games and they'd let us join. And then they'd do pop quizzes on like our religion. And they would basically like talk to us about mental health, religiously and stuff to keep us like, you know, going and there was this one incident where this one guy shot himself. I don't know if you've heard of it. Yeah and he recorded it and he posted it online. As soon as he did and everyone was talking about it, um, they started a live stream and they were like brothers and sisters, please, please, if you ever need help, like reach out to us. So, they did that for us and I always join their live streams.

I: That is awesome! Um, have your religious leaders drawn on scriptural or Muslim historical sources to help community members understand and cope with the COVID-19 crisis?

R: I mean, besides the live streams and then just talking about mental health and like how we should like, you know, deal with this whole situation. No, not really. Just the live streams.

I: And then like you personally, do you like use your religious practices or your religion to help you try and cope with COVID? Or are you just kind of like at terms with COVID?

R: No, I'm at terms, like I pray, I like I make drought, which is like, that was that I didn't even know how to say that in English, but just basically prayer, except like we have two different types of prayers.

I: What are those two different types of prayers?

R: Okay. So, the first one is where we pray, um, like standing up. So, have you ever seen a Muslim pray? Basically, it's just more up down, up down and then another one is where we basically blow everything out to god and we basically complain and ask him to please help me with this and yeah!

I: So, like you don't feel the pandemic has impacted or like affected your religious beliefs or faith, right?

R: No.

I: Okay. Um, what was your most uplifting experience since the outbreak of COVID-19 like something happy that happened or something that made you feel hopeful?

R: Hmm. What changed? I feel like I could say a lot, but I just don't remember. I mean, would you count the pandemic as a going on right now?

I: Um, yeah.

R: Okay. Well, I would say that Trump is not president anymore. That was like really great because now Biden lifted the Muslim ban and a lot of people from like other, um, countries like Syria and Iraq and Saudi Arabia, they can come into the United States and it'd be a lot easier. Cause especially cause like my best friend's grandpa, he lives alone in Syria and you know, there's a war there and they cut off electricity and his house was freezing and they've been trying to get their grandpa here, but because of Trump's Muslim ban, they couldn't, but now they're working on it.

I: That's great. Yeah. That's awesome!

R: And by the way, I keep referring to my best friend it's because like our families are like literally like [displays finger crossing to show how close they are]. But, um, my brother's best friends with her brother. Our moms are really close, but yeah.

I: Um, so what is it that you're most looking forward to doing once COVID is officially over

R: Going back home after so long? Like I, like, I literally get so emotional thinking about this. Like nine years later, I'm going to go and I'm going to see my uncles and I'm going to get home and I'm going to just remember, like, I was just telling my best friend about this a couple of days ago. I was like, I'm going to walk into my house and I'm just going to imagine everything the same way that it was. I was like, I'm probably going to be like, so big right now compared to how I see it before, but it's all going to be the same. And I'm so excited!! I can't wait.

I: I know I can't wait for that day. Um, this is just a broad question for you. Like, is there anything else about your history or just like life that you would like to tell me to make it into my report?

R: Mhmm, like what?

I: Um, just anything like anything you can think of? Is there anything you didn't get the chance to say during this interview? If there's nothing that's okay.

R: Yeah. I don't think there's anything.

I: Okay. Um, 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? That was a really long question. Um, so basically my professor works with the Arab and Muslims women's resources and research Institute. So, she's asking, are there any particular services or resources that they should provide to meet the needs of communities to which you belong?

R: Like, like in the United States that would be like, okay. so, I could, I could think of one thing. Um, in high school, you know, I have to pray five times a day and it would be like at six in the

morning at 12 at like 11:45 and then a three and a six and you know, times change. So, then I, when I entered high school, I had this in middle school, but when I entered high school, I was like, yo, I got to pray. Like, do you guys have a prayer room? And they were like huhhh?? And then basically they wouldn't let me pray in school. They were like, you gotta go back to class. And then later I had like told my friend and I told my parents and then my friend she's like, she's like really strong. She has such a strong personality. She went to the office and she was like, this is not right. You know, this is because she used to pray in one of the teacher's rooms, she was really close with. She's like, you guys have to have a prayer room, you have to consider all religions, all that. And then she was like, and if you don't, you know, she's going to have to do something about it. And she couldn't, and then they added a prayer room. They opened this empty room that they could have opened, way before and they made it into a prayer room.

I: That's really cool though. Yeah.

R: So, I think if like all universities or all like places they had this, then it'd be really great.

I: Yeah. I was going to say my high school did not have anything like that, which is cool. Like you said, your middle school had that. Yeah. My middle school had that. And you went to public or private high school?

R: Public!

I: Oh, wow. That's awesome. Um, All right. And then on our last question, um, do you have any letters, old photographs, notes, or any kinds of documents that you think will help us understand your family history better?

R: Um, I have like, I mean, I have like videos of like me, like being back, back home with my cousins and my family. So, there's that, but my aunt has them. Do you want them?

I: Um, it's up to you if you want to share that. Okay.

R: Yeah. Would you be sharing it with like a class or just like?

I: I think I'd just share with my professors.

R: Okay. I'll ask my aunt for it. But that's it.

I: If not, it's totally not a problem.

R: I'll send you a message. I'll ask her and see what she says.

I: Okay, so we finished. Yay! And it was shorter than I thought, but basically, Thank you for interviewing with me. Like my first two people, we just had a lot of mix ups, but it's fine. If you have any other questions, you have my number so please reach out to me, but thank you so much Sariah, I appreciate it, have a good night!!



R: Yes, of course no problem, this was fun! Have a good night!