

**FINDING “HOME” AS A PALESTINIAN-AMERICAN: AN  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF ONE MAN’S LIFE STORY**

by

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For immigrants and refugees, the concept of “home” is seldom a concrete definition, as the question of where “home” is - either in the country of origin or the new country, activates a tension in self-identity. For the Palestinian immigration and refugee experience, the longstanding Arab-Israeli Conflict produces an even more complex tension. The purpose of this study is to explore this tension in a Palestinian-American context. To do so, the research project focuses on an oral history project about Ibrahim Hamide, a restaurateur and human rights activist in Eugene for the past 40 years. The project involved taking participant observation notes prior to the series of interviews, conducting the interviews themselves, coding the interviews for common themes, and then analyzing the information with other works about the Palestinian/Arab American experience. The primary findings of this study indicate that in addition to the challenges of migration, *Orientalism*, a term by Edward Said that means the representation of the Middle East in a stereotyped and colonialist manner, has a major influence on the tension of self-identity. For Hamide, this tension leads him to find solace in a “universal identity,” where spirituality and the learning that takes place after enduring years of displacement and Orientalism (“ethic of cosmopolitan care”) are two key components. Rather than choosing between his two “homes,” he finds a sense of home in a universal realm. The significances of this research are that it sheds light onto post-trauma resilience and serves as documented piece of history for the Eugene community.

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## Table of Contents

Copyright Page .....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Introduction.....	1
Methodology .....	5
<i>Observation Notes</i> .....	5
<i>Oral History Project</i> .....	7
Structure of Thesis .....	9
Historical and Personal Timeline.....	11
The Arab-Israeli Conflict.....	12
Arab-American Immigrants .....	14
CHAPTER 1 .....	16
Life in Palestine: Formation of a Spiritual Identity.....	16
The Qur’an, Ummah, and Morality .....	18
Bethlehem and Palestinian Culture .....	22
CHAPTER 2 .....	25
Transition: The Decision to Immigrate .....	25
The Effects of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War.....	27
Limitations and Recognition of Educational Opportunities .....	31
CHAPTER 3 .....	33
Life in the United States: A Clash of Identities .....	33
Orientalism and Alienation.....	36
<i>Assimilation</i> .....	38
<i>9/11 Attacks</i> .....	46
CHAPTER 4.....	50
Returns to Palestine: Reconstructing a Universal Identity.....	50
Orientalism and Alienation Continues .....	51
An Ethic of Cosmopolitan Care .....	54
Spirituality.....	61
Discussion and Conclusion.....	66
Appendix: Transcription of Oral History Project with Ibrahim Hamide.....	73
Bibliography .....	104

## Introduction

Displacement and conflict are themes that stain the Palestinian narrative. The Israelis' victory during the 1948 War between Israel and Palestine led to the current state of Israel. As a result, approximately 80% of Palestinian citizens were dispossessed from their homes. Nearly two decades later, the 1967 Arab-Israeli War created another dynamic of displacement, as Israel took control of the West Bank, Jerusalem, and Gaza, placing thousands of Palestinians under Israeli occupation. The political circumstances of displacement and statelessness prompted many Palestinians to immigrate to other countries for a better future and "home." Life in the United States provided an alluring alternative for many people in regions of conflict around the world. The largest wave of Palestinian immigrants came to the United States after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War.<sup>1</sup> Like many immigration narratives, life in America was more of a struggle than a place of acceptance for Palestinian immigrants and other Arab/Muslim immigrants. Middle Eastern crises such as the establishment of Israel in 1948, the Arab-Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973, the 1970s Arab oil embargo, the Lebanese Civil War from 1975 to 1990, the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the First Gulf War in the early 1990s, and the American-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003, created negative conceptions of Arab-Americans in the US.<sup>2</sup> These negative conceptions continually dominate Western discourse. In the end, Palestinian immigrants face a denial of

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<sup>1</sup> Kurson, Ken. "Palestinian Americans." *Palestinian Americans*. N.p., n.d. Web. 02 Nov. 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Fadda-Conrey, Carol. *Contemporary Arab-American Literature: Transnational Reconfigurations of Citizenship and Belonging*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. Print.

belonging in both their country of origin and their country of residence. With this narrative of continuing displacement and disorientation, do Palestinian-Americans ever find a sense of “home?”<sup>3</sup>

This thesis will closely analyze the conditions and experiences of Palestinian-Americans during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. One man’s life story is the primary case study to explore these topics: Ibrahim Hamide is a Palestinian-American, a local human rights activist, and the restaurant owner of the popular restaurant, Cafe Soriah, in Eugene, Oregon. Hamide experienced both the 1967 War during his early years in Palestine and anti-Arab discrimination in the United States as an Arab-American. The tension in Hamide’s identity of “home” is an ongoing struggle. Nevertheless, he continually finds comfort and “home” in a universal mindset, a higher philosophical place that derives from spirituality and the aftermath of encountering Orientalism.<sup>4</sup>

The research project will illuminate certain patterns of behavior and focus on specific choices that Hamide has made throughout his lifetime to facilitate a sense of belonging. Respectively, the thesis project will attempt to answer the following questions: What helped Hamide find a sense of belonging, despite the narrative of dispossession and loss? What conditions led to his self-identity? Throughout this thesis, I intermixed his life story with experiences from other Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim Americans. My ability to closely study his life story results from conducting a series of interviews with him as an oral history project, where I spent several months to

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<sup>3</sup> The definition of “home” in the context of the thesis refers to a nontangible space rather than a physical one. Essentially, “home” is a place of comfort, safety, and stability.

<sup>4</sup> A term coined by Edward Said that refers to the representation of the Middle East and its people in a stereotyped and colonialist manner.

transcribe the interviews, coded them for general themes, analyzed them against an existing body of literature on Palestinian immigrants, and engage in follow-up discussions with him in person and email. The completed transcription of the oral history project is attached here as an appendix to my thesis. These interviews incorporate a wide range of his life experiences, including his early childhood and adolescent years in Bethlehem, Palestine, firsthand account of the 1967 war, experience as an international student and eventual US citizen, professional life as a restaurateur and human rights activist, and return visits to Palestine.

My interest in the subject matter originates from my own identity as a second generation Vietnamese-American, whose parents were refugees after the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. Somewhat similar to the Palestinian narrative, the Vietnamese diaspora after 1975 is also a narrative of dispossession and loss. Home is an important term of identity that is often overlooked. Maya Angelou said, “The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned.”<sup>5</sup> This ache resonates with the heart of immigration narrative, as immigrants from various cultural backgrounds face the complexity of replanting their roots. As a second-generation immigrant, I understand this ache quite well. Nevertheless, I realize that I understand very little about the “ache for home” for first-generation immigrants to America, a generation that undoubtedly encountered an even deeper complexity in identity, as they face conflicting pressures to assimilate into a new society and preserve the native cultures that they left behind. Moreover, I also wanted to challenge myself

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<sup>5</sup> Angelou, Maya. *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes*. New York: Random House, 1986. Print.



and explore a culture that is different from my own Asian, Confucian-influenced heritage. The narrative of Palestinians appealed to me the most because of how the Arab-Israeli conflict further complicates their concepts of “home.” My original thesis project was to participate in an internship with the Faculty for Israeli-Palestinian Peace (FFIPP) to work with local Palestinian youth in Israel and the West Bank/Jerusalem areas during the summer of 2014. FFIPP canceled the internship, due to the Gaza War. On the search for another thesis project, I learned that the owner of Café Soriah is a 65-year-old Palestinian-American. As someone who has lived through the historical events of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Hamide undoubtedly had meaningful and fascinating stories to share. Accordingly, the idea of producing an oral history project of an individual in Eugene’s own backyard immediately drew my attention. I no longer had to travel thousands of miles to find a meaningful project.

Now, I am using this thesis project as an opportunity to share the story of a first generation Palestinian-American immigrant. I had no prior interactions with Hamide. As a result, I can approach this project in a critical, non-biased manner. The oral history project is about an individual’s life story, but in order to respect Hamide’s right to privacy and decision to not disclose certain information, it cannot possibly encompass all the details of his life. Therefore, due to the complex and personal nature of the subject matter, the thesis project will neither disclose nor extensively discuss some of his more personal information.

## Methodology

For this research, I used pre-interview observation notes, a carefully planned oral history interview<sup>6</sup> with Hamide, as well as novels and memoirs about other Arab-Americans. These several forms of research approaches and materials, primary and secondary sources, provide a comprehensive and interdisciplinary description and analysis of Hamide's life as a Palestinian-American.

### *Observation Notes*

Several weeks before the first interview with Hamide, I visited his restaurant, Cafe Soriah - a "Eugene favorite for almost 20 years,"<sup>7</sup> as an anonymous patron and spoke to a few members of the community about their interactions with and perspectives of Hamide. I received general comments such as, "He is a very wonderful and kind soul in the community" and "A lot of people know who he is because he has established quite a name for himself here." My observations of his interactions with patrons at Cafe Soriah confirmed these comments. Hamide has a table-side kitchen concept, where he prepares particular dishes in front of patrons. Moreover, he made a concentrated effort to greet each patron who came into the restaurant. Many of the patrons seemed to know him personally, which indicates the personal relations and

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<sup>6</sup> Ritchie, Donald A. *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015. Print.

<sup>7</sup> "Cafe Soriah." *Best Eugene Restaurants*. Local Eats, n.d. Web. 02 Nov. 2015.

positive reputation that he has formed during his time here. Overall, the brief observation notes and informal short interviews with a few members of the community established a picture of someone who is well-known and well-liked in the Eugene community.

At the same time, I also researched numerous publications about Hamide, including a short documentary on his life called, “We Refuse to be Enemies,”<sup>8</sup> as well as his public online lectures on the subjects of human rights and interfaith relations. University of Oregon students and faculty produced “We Refuse to be Enemies,” which appeared on OPB (Oregon Public Broadcast) and received a college Emmy award in the Arts and Entertainment/Cultural Affairs category.<sup>9</sup> The documentary emphasized Hamide’s unyielding faith in human compassion, featuring moments such as bricks thrown through the windows of Cafe Soriah after 9/11, and his friendship with the late Rabbi Myron Kinberg.

Hamide’s nonviolent stance, as well as his experiences with encountering xenophobic representations of Arabs and Muslims, are prevalent themes throughout his public lectures. His lecture during the Human Rights Commission Meeting in Eugene, for instance, briefly introduced his life and struggle as a Palestinian-American immigrant. During the speech, he mentioned a sense of self-conflict about his identity: Is he Palestinian or American? He explained how the tension between the two identities has constantly appeared throughout his life, but he has found a sense of belonging in the

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<sup>8</sup> Luu, Summer and Zuppan, David. "We Refuse To Be Enemies." *Vimeo*. N.p., 13 Dec. 2012. Web. 02 Nov. 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Lacter, Austen. "SOJC Film Students Recognized at Regional Emmys." *School of Journalism and Communication*. N.p., 23 July 2013. Web. 02 Nov. 2015.

meeting of fellow human rights activists, as he finds “so many inspirations” in the room:

Sometimes it depends on the day, sometimes you feel like you don't belong in either culture. Some other days, you feel like you have two homes. The human spirit though, chooses the positive almost 99.9% of the time - except when we're tired and beat up, but when we're not, we choose the positive... Just in this room I have so many inspirations that I wish I could capture them all on a plaque, take them back home [in Palestine], and show that this is my new American family, and I'm very proud of them. I'm very happy to be part of their family that's bigger than the one I left back home.<sup>10</sup>

These publications about Hamide, observation notes, commentary from a few community members, and literature on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Arab-American immigration experience helped contextualize my preparation for the official oral history interview with Hamide.

### *Oral History Project*

During a third visit to Cafe Soriah, I officially introduced myself and the oral history project idea to Hamide. I requested a non-recorded pre-interview with Hamide to discuss the procedures of an oral history project and sought an official approval from him to conduct the series of recorded interviews about his life. We discussed our availabilities via email and agreed on a meeting at Café Soriah before opening hours.

My goal for the recorded interviews was to create a comfortable atmosphere where he could freely discuss his thoughts and reflections, feeling neither limited to particular topics nor pressured with formalities. In other words, I aimed to create a

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<sup>10</sup> Massengill, Hugh. "Immigrant and Human Rights, a Talk by Ibrahim Hamide." YouTube. YouTube, 12 Dec. 2012. Web. 02 Nov. 2015.

casual, informal environment where I, a second-generation immigrant American, am interested in learning about a first-generation immigrant's experiences. I did not have a specific theme or topic in mind at the time, with the belief that they would naturally appear through the conversations. Additionally, in order to avoid fatigue from both sides and establish a sense of organization to the interviews, I divided the interviews into four separate segments that would encompass central parts of his life: *Life in Palestine, Transition Period, Life in the United States, and Returns to Palestine*.

The recording device for the interviews was the AudioNote application for Apple Macbooks. AudioNote synchronizes notes and audio, automatically indexing the interviews. Each note acts as a direct link to the point at which it was recorded, taking the user instantly to what he or she wants to hear.<sup>11</sup> This component eased the transcription process of the interviews later on. The interviews took five hours over the span of two days. After transcribing the interviews, I spent several days to code and take notes of frequent themes. I then took these themes from Hamide's interviews and contextualized them with other recurring themes from memoirs and novels from Arab, Palestinian, and Muslim immigrants in the United States.

I have developed the following argument based on the research findings: Throughout a lifetime of homelessness and displacement, Hamide finds an identity of home within a "universal place," a place that consists of two core components: his spirituality and an "ethic of cosmopolitan care,"<sup>12</sup> after he learned from his Orientalist experiences and endured the challenges of immigration. Hamide's upbringing in

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<sup>11</sup> Luminant Software, INC. "AudioNote - Notepad and Voice Recorder on the App Store." App Store. N.p., n.d. Web. 02 Nov. 2015.

<sup>12</sup> A term that refers to a way out of Orientalism, based on Said's personal revelation in his autobiography *Out of Place*.

Bethlehem, Palestine provided him with a space to form a spiritual identity based on the cultural and religious moral values in the area. Additionally, his family placed tremendous emphasis on pursuing educational success. This spiritual and educational background sets the stage for Hamide's encounters with Orientalism and migration-related struggles. By coming to the US as an international student, he experienced new perspectives beyond Bethlehem. He felt the anger as a human rights activist in the Arab-Israeli conflict, encountered Orientalist discrimination in the US, became alienated as a foreigner, and felt that at times, he was not fully an American citizen. When he visits Palestine, he feels that his "Americanized" persona also does not match with Arab society. In the end, his identity of "home" is difficult to define. To cope with the confusion, he finds solace and comfort in a universal mindset. As mentioned before, this universal mindset has foundations in spiritual comfort and the learning that takes place after one endures Orientalism and displacement.

### Structure of Thesis

To present this argument, the thesis is structured in a chronological manner. This introduction provides a timeline of Hamide's life and major Middle East events that occurred around it, a brief overview of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and a snapshot of Arab-American history in order to provide the context of his story.

The rest of the thesis is divided into two sections and four chapters. Each chapter correlates with a segment of the oral history project interviews with Hamide. The purpose of Section One is to provide the necessary background knowledge to

understand Hamide's specific choices and responses to Orientalist and ostracizing situations. *Chapter 1 – Life in Palestine: Formation of a Spiritual Identity* explores certain components of the Islamic religion as they relate to Hamide's upbringing. The chapter also examines his family's values on educational success. *Chapter 2 – Transition: The Decision to Immigrate* analyzes the circumstances that prompted Hamide's decision to come to the United States. A major motivation was the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, as it exposed his educational limitations if he stayed back in Palestine. With a spiritual background and determination to complete his education in mind, Section One sets the stage for the Hamide's story to unfold.

In Section Two, *Chapter 3 – Life in the United States: A Clash of Identities* explores the shared immigrant narrative of alienation and Edward Said's concept of Orientalism as it impacts Palestinian-Americans, as well as other Arab/Muslim Americans in two sets of circumstances: assimilation and increasing negative stereotypes against Arabs after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The chapter focuses on his life as a Palestinian-American citizen of the United States, including having a family in Eugene, establishing his successful restaurant business, and encountering challenges as an Arab/Muslim in America, especially during the 9/11 terrorist attacks. *Chapter 4- Returns to Palestine: Constructing a Universal Identity* describes Hamide's visits to Palestine, building a more nuanced picture of Hamide's life story. The visits demonstrate that Hamide also does not feel that he completely belongs in Palestine either, for the Israeli government often racially profiles him, even though he has a US passport. Also, the Palestinian community sometimes view him as "too Americanized," and not "Palestinian enough." In other words, he experiences exclusion in Palestine as

well. These visits, both negative and positive, provide Hamide with a deeper self-reflection of himself as a Palestinian-American. Consequently, this self-reflection shapes his ultimate sense of belonging as he shares his experiences and perspectives through peace work/interfaith dialogue. As a result of these experiences, Hamide finds peace for himself as a Palestinian-American in a universal realm of spirituality and a widened perspective of the human experience from a lifetime of enduring Orientalism and alienation. The *Discussion and Conclusion* section of the thesis summarizes the chapters, proposes questions for future research, and elucidates the significance of this project.

Autobiographies, memoirs, and stories from Palestinian- and Arab-Americans are intertwined with Hamide's testimony to provide a comprehensive look at Arab immigration experience in the United States as a whole. The Palestinian-Americans featured in this thesis include Edward Said, Fawaz Turki, Aziz Shihab, Rabab Abdulhadi, as well as other prominent Arab-Americans such as Leila Ahmed, Ihab Habib Hassan, and many others.

For simplicity purposes, the structure of his story formats in a linear fashion; where it explores his life experiences in an orderly manner. In reality though, his life is more of a complex circle than a line, because he undergoes these phases throughout his lifetime. Still closing this circle, he always comes back to the higher, spiritual realm, where belonging for Hamide does not always equate to a specific national space.

### Historical and Personal Timeline



March 17, 1950: Ibrahim Hamide is born in Bethlehem, Palestine

June 5-10, 1967: The Six Day War

October 19, 1968 – March 1969: Hamide is in Switzerland/England

April 1, 1969: Hamide arrives in Eugene

April 2, 1969: Hamide starts studying at the University of Oregon

1987: Palestinians launch the first Intifada (“struggle” or “shaking-off”) against Israeli rule in the West Bank and Gaza. The clashes continue into the early 1990s.

1987: Hamide starts the Interreligious Committee for Peace in the Middle East

June 26, 1993: Café Soriah is established

September 11, 2001: The Islamic terrorist group al-Qaeda attacks the Twin Towers

2001: Hamide starts The Eugene Middle East Peace Group

### The Arab-Israeli Conflict

According to Bickerton and Klausner, Zionism sought to establish a Jewish state. However, the Arabs who lived on this same land had formed their own national identity as Palestinians.<sup>13</sup> As a result, “Zionism and Palestinian nationalism clashed over the ownership of the land, the right for self-determination, and statehood.”<sup>14</sup>

During World War II, six million Jewish people were killed during the Holocaust. The ways to cope with the mass numbers of Jewish refugees were complex, but one of the many suggestions was the United Nations (UN)’s partition plan of

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<sup>13</sup> Jewish social movement for a national homeland that responded to the increasing persecution of Jews and anti-Semitism in Europe

<sup>14</sup> Bickerton, Ian J., and Carla L. Klausner. *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007. Print, 762.

Palestine into two states, one Arab and one Jewish, in 1947. The Palestinians rejected the UN resolution, and the Jewish community proclaimed the establishment of an independent Jewish state in 1948. From that point on, the communal clash evolved into a full-blown war. Israel won the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and expanded its borders beyond those designated by the UN resolution. About 80% of the Palestinian people became refugees and dispersed to neighboring Arab states. Israel's victory in the 1967 War between Israel on one side and Egypt, Jordan, and Syria on the other, brought additional land under Israeli control: Israel annexed East Jerusalem, and the rest of the West Bank and Gaza remains under Israeli occupation, and the Palestinian population was governed by military rule. Since then, a focal component of the conflict is to establish an independent Palestinian state in the parts of Palestine that Israel occupied in 1967: the West Bank, Gaza, with East Jerusalem as the capital of a Palestinian state.

A hindrance to this component derives from Israel's establishment of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and in Arab East Jerusalem. Palestinian resistance to the occupation escalated, and "the Palestinian uprising, the Gulf War in 1991, and the collapse of the Soviet Union were among the main catalysts of the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991, which brought together representatives of Israel, the Palestinians, and neighboring Arab states to negotiate a peaceful settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict."<sup>15</sup> This official peace process was unsuccessful, but there was a secret channel of negotiation in Norway between Israel's Labor government and the Palestine Liberation Organization that led to the Oslo Agreements. These agreements outlined a set of principles that governed an interim period of Palestinian self-rule in the West

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 763.

Bank and Gaza, which were to be implemented in stages and followed by final status negotiations that sought to deal with the most difficult issues of the conflict: the future of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, the status of Jerusalem, the Right of Return for Palestinian refugees, and borders between Israel and a future Palestinian state. The Oslo Agreements provided a sense of hope for stable peace between Israelis and Palestinians. However, with the change of governments in both Israel and Palestine, the peace process slowed down, and the two sides are still in deep disagreement about how to solve each of the final status issues. At this time, the long-standing conflict is still ongoing, and due to the emotional, intractable, and sensitive nature of this conflict, peace appears very difficult to obtain.

#### Arab-American Immigrants

According to the Arab-American National Museum, the first Arabs to immigrate to the United States arrived during the 1880s. These immigrants were mostly Christians from Greater Syria (present-day Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, Jordan and Syria) and came to America to escape the economic hardships due to the decline of the silk industry, which was a basis for their economy. The majority were poor, uneducated, and unskilled. In general, they considered themselves as only temporary settlers in the country, mainly kept to themselves, and established their own churches, clubs, and newspapers. During this time, Arab immigrants were first classified as “Turks,” along with Greeks, Albanians and others, because they came from areas that were ruled by the

Ottoman Empire. The defeat of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I introduced new labels to these immigrants: “Syrians” or “Arabians.”

During World War I, quotas in the number of immigrants to the United States came into place, in order to re-establish the balance of Europeans to their pre-1890s levels. Asians were deemed “undesirable” and the number of new immigrants dropped significantly. As a result, the remaining Arab immigrants aimed to be classified as “Whites,” since this insured they could receive American citizenship. To do so, they worked hard to assimilate, attended citizenship classes, Americanized their names, and did not teach Arabic to children or let them learn about their heritage.

Hamide belonged to the next wave of Arab immigration to America. These immigrants came from all parts of the Arab world, including North Africa. They were predominantly Muslims, relatively well-off, and highly educated professionals. The reason for their decisions to immigrate were due to regional conflicts, such as the creation of Israel and its impact on the surrounding region and civil wars. These Arab immigrants were politically active. They were keen to participate in American politics from the outset, especially during the era of civil rights in the 1960s. During this time, the questions of minority rights and of multiculturalism were prominent.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The Arab American National Museum. *Arab Americans: An Integral Part of American Society*. Dearborn, MI: Arab American National Museum, n.d. AANM Educational Series. Web. 25 Oct. 2015.

## **SECTION 1**

### **CHAPTER 1**

#### **Life in Palestine: Formation of a Spiritual Identity**

Hamide spent his childhood and adolescent years in Bethlehem, Palestine. He grew up in a family of ten brothers and sisters. The family owned two homes: one in town and one at a farm. They would live on the farm for four months out of the year. His childhood and adolescent years were a typical coming-of-age story: childhood years consisted of excitement to learn and play with friends. Meanwhile, adolescent years included issues that came close to manhood, such as responsibilities, religion, girls, etc. During this age, he wanted to chart his own life, and his future dream was to come back to the farm and help the family.

These years were generally pleasant; however, specific moments have faded from his memory. The most striking memory though, was the Six-Day War in 1967, for it changed the dynamic of his life, dreams about the future, the political situation, mobility, etc. He was 17 at the time and could not fathom the thought that Israel was going to take over the area. On a Monday, when the war broke out, Hamide worked in a factory outside the farm. At about 10am, the radio broadcasted the news to the factory. The owners said, “Hey we’re going to shut it [the factory] down. You better get home or out of here.”<sup>17</sup> He went to his home in the city, where he stayed by himself and listened to the radio. The family home in the city had a basement for a shelter, where he housed his sister and her children, friends, and neighbors. Within a short

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<sup>17</sup> Ibrahim Hamide. Interview by Dawn Le. Transcript. January 27, 2015., 76.

time, he sheltered nearly 30 people in the basement. In the basement, the group had discussions and debates about the progression of the war as they listened to the radio. Questions such as, “What do we do now? Why don’t you men escape? They won’t kill women and children...” to “Should we all go or stay?”<sup>18</sup> emerged from the group. Hamide had to become the decision-maker, because he was the most familiar with the country roads and outskirts, where they could avoid the main roads and soldiers. They decided to go towards the family’s farm. The journey consisted of about five miles of rough terrain. When Hamide had everyone fairly close to the house, he sent someone ahead to tell his father to expect the arrival of a large group of people. Upon hearing the news, his brother brought a couple of mules to carry the children. Hamide described the family’s farm as a “mad house” of other people who also sheltered there from other cities. Everyone only had four to five hours to rest at the house. Then, Hamide led them on a trek of about another five miles east to the mountains for further safety. This particular episode was a traumatic experience that has solidified in his memory.

Other memories, as mentioned before, were mostly pleasant. While he did lose some siblings to childhood diseases, life during this time consisted of uneventful, normal everyday occurrences. While growing up, his parents did not talk about politics in the house. Religion was a more prevalent topic. His parents did not necessarily focus on religious rules, but more on morality. Hamide’s father was an avid reader of the three holy books - the Torah, Bible, and Qur’an. Therefore, Hamide learned about religious tolerance at an early age. Bethlehem is the birthplace of Jesus after all. The

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 77.

cultural circumstances of Palestinian society shaped Hamide's moral outlook, for the community was collective, and everyone depended on one another. Hamide mentioned values such as "You had to look out for your neighbor's house if they aren't there, to be kind to a stranger, to share what you have with others, like orphans and so."<sup>19</sup> After all, the community was all man and animal labor, 100% non-machine. When harvest time came, the neighbors came to help the family with the farm, and the family would do the same with the neighbors' farms. Hence, Hamide grew up in a community of dry farming and no irrigation, where collaborations were vital to the survival of farmers. In the process of living in this cohesive community, Hamide develops a sense of compassion for others and their families. Overall, Hamide believes that the combination of what his parents garnered from religious moral practices and experiences through living in a collective, cohesive environment played a significant role in his upbringing. In this section, I examine the Islamic values on community and the religious setting of Bethlehem in further detail.

### The Qur'an, Ummah, and Morality

Like most religious texts, the Qur'an is complex and subjective. This portion focuses mainly on the social moralities of the Qur'an as it relates to Hamide's upbringing. Hamide states that his father "was not very political. He was more of a hardworking farmer who just spent most of his time trying to fend for his family, trying to get food on the table, making sure that they were safe and successful.... He was

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 78-79.

religious, but my parents were not preachers... They mostly taught us morality, not politics.”<sup>20</sup> The focus on morality rather than religious rigidity is synonymous with a more progressive approach towards Islam. In other words, there is more attention on a “humanist approach” to reading about Islam than a “literalist approach.” According to Abdulla Saeed, “an increasing number of Muslim thinkers in modern times have tried to move away from ideological rigidity, emphasizing instead the essence and core freedom which are conventionally applied in most Muslim societies.”<sup>21</sup> The humanist approach denotes the foundation of Islam as the principle of unity between God and humankind, where piety and personal devotions are key to the ideal Islamic state. This approach places the individual, the Muslim believer, as the conscious actor on the center stage, and therefore, becomes the “humanist approach.” In the words of Kaled Abou El Fadl, the Qur’an does not specify a particular form of government. As a direct challenge to the literalist reading of Islam, the reading especially adopted by extreme Islamist groups, El Fadl insists on the importance of “justice, consultative government, mercy, and compassion [as] essential values for Muslim policy.”<sup>22</sup> By focusing less on religious rigidity and more on values, Hamide’s parents impart a humanist approach for Hamide to focus on these core values, which in turn, gave him a basis for gaining a deeper understanding of humanity and finding a universal identity of “home” in the future.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>21</sup> Akbarzadeh, Shahram, and Benjamin MacQueen. *Islam and Human Rights in Practice: Perspectives across the Ummah*. London: Routledge, 2008. Print. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 3-4.



A central concept in the Qur'an that captures the communal aspect of the humanist approach is "ummah." As mentioned before, Hamide grew up with religious teachings in an agrarian, communal environment. Ummah is an Arabic word meaning "nation" or "community." The concept is different from another term called "Sha'b," which defines a nation as solely a place with common ancestry or geography. Hence, ummah has a more profound meaning that includes a supra-national community with a common history. According to Mathewson, there are a total of sixty-two times that ummah appears in the Qur'an. The use of the ummah in the Qur'an usually refers to ethical, linguistic, or religious bodies of people who are subject to the divine plan of salvation. The meaning of the term ummah transforms throughout the chronology of the Qur'an, as it becomes more exclusive to Muslims. Before it refers exclusively to Muslims, the ummah encompasses Jewish and Christian communities as one with the Muslims and refers to them as the "People of the Book." The Constitution of Medina supplements this notion, as it declares all members of the ummah, regardless of religion, to be of "one ummah." In these passages of the Qur'an, ummah can refer to a unity of humankind through the shared beliefs of the monotheistic religions.<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, the meaning of ummah contains many universal themes of tolerance and compassion, as it includes both Jewish and Christian communities until it becomes exclusionary. Hamide shared his passion for interfaith understanding as he recalled his father's affection for the three holy books:

He was very interested in the holy books, the Torah, Bible, Quran – those were his real loves. He wanted to know more about them. Strangely enough, in the last 10 years, those books are almost strictly what I have been reading [chuckles]

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<sup>23</sup> Denny, Frederick Mathewson. *Community and Salvation; the Meaning of the Ummah in the Qur'an*. Chicago: n.p., 1974. Print.

myself. Those three books, I want to understand more about them. They're three of the finest books there are in this world, and I lack in depth understanding of them, so I have been attempting, and I feel like I am light years away, but I am still attempting to understand them. I enjoy reading novels, political books, and so on, but those three books are what have been keeping me interested in the last 10 years.<sup>24</sup>

By expressing his continued interest in the holy books, Hamide illustrates a deep compassion for interfaith learning. This piece is important, because it conveys his unchanging spiritual identity despite the many passing events throughout his lifetime.

Ummah is one of the more specific examples of the humanist approach in reading the Qur'an, but the Islamic religion as a whole encompasses recurring themes of compassion and humanity. Leila Ahmed explains in *A Border Passage*, that "after a lifetime of meeting and talking with Muslims from all over the world, I find that this Islam [humanist approach] is one of the common varieties - perhaps even the common or garden variety - of the religion. It is the Islam not only of women but of ordinary folk generally, as opposed to the Islam of sheikhs, ayatollahs, mullahs, and clerics."<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, she explains that people read the Qur'an, like other religious books, repeatedly. She states that as one reads the Qur'an over a lifetime, "its recurring themes, ideas, words, and permeating spirit, appearing now in this passage, now in that: mercy, justice, peace, compassion, humanity, fairness, kindness, truthfulness, charity, mercy, justice. And yet it is exactly these recurring themes and this permeating spirit that are for the most part left out of the medieval texts or smothered and buried under a welter of 'abstruse learning.'"<sup>26</sup> In other words, the humanist approach focuses on the

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<sup>24</sup> Ibrahim Hamide. Interview by Dawn Le. Transcript. January 27, 2015., 80.

<sup>25</sup> Ahmed, Leila. *A Border Passage: From Cairo to America--a Woman's Journey*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999. Print. 126.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

simple and essential reading of the Islamic religion instead of the rigidity or “abstruse learning.” Hamide exhibits Islam’s grounding concepts such as compassion, humanity, and peace in this chapter. He states that even as a child and adolescent, “my future dream was never a selfish one, such as what am I going to be; it was always how can I help my parents, brothers, and so on.”<sup>27</sup> Another instance of Hamide’s humanist approach towards Islam is his role as a young decision-maker when the 1967 War broke out. Keeping everyone together during the dangerous circumstances was always a focal point of his decisions: “I was the one who basically advocated that we either all go, or we all stay. My logic was that we had no way to connect to one another, since we didn’t have cell phones, email, etc. back then. So, if we left women behind, the men would be worried sick about them and vice versa – I thought that it would be a recipe for disaster to have men whimpering and women feeling the same way.”<sup>28</sup> Overall, similar responses of communal care and compassion also appear later throughout his lifetime, whether subconsciously or consciously, as he encounters feelings of displacement, Orientalism, and confusion of “home” in the future. The humanist approach is vital to keep in mind, because references to Hamide’s “spiritual identity” in the thesis refer back to this particular reading of the Qur’an.

### Bethlehem and Palestinian Culture

The previous section on the Qur’an illustrates the importance of interfaith learning in Islam as it relates to Hamide’s upbringing. This section further highlights on interfaith

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<sup>27</sup> Ibrahim Hamide. Interview by Dawn Le. Transcript. January 27, 2015., 76.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 79.

values through an examination of the culture in Bethlehem and Palestine as a whole. According to Margaret K. Nydell, the “Levant” identifies countries of the eastern Mediterranean Sea, which includes Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine. Jordan and Iraq are geographically included in the Levant, but not ethnically. People in the Levant are from the same Semitic origin, descended from indigenous inhabitants of the region from the Neolithic times. Palestinians, in particular, are one of the most homogeneous groups in the Arab world. Approximately 98% of Palestinians are Sunni Muslim and 2% are Christian. The 52,000 Christians in Palestine are concentrated in East Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Ramallah. Meanwhile, the economy of Palestine is not self-sustaining, due to the restrictions of land access in the Israeli-controlled areas, export limitations, and relatively small private sector growth. The year 2008 provided an increase in both security and economic performances, although the entire country still relies on donor aid from the US, the European Union, and other nations. Education, on the other hand, is a thriving sector. Literacy in Palestine is 98%, which is the highest in the Arab world. Education is above average, but subject to disruptions because of political-related events. Palestinian women have many advocacy groups, and their legal status is improving. The recent Palestinian Labor law and Social Status Law are mostly gender-sensitive, specifying equal rights for women.<sup>29</sup> The farming culture, high literacy level, and relatively progressive society of Palestine for women establishes a somewhat more liberal setting for Hamide’s childhood and adolescent years.

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<sup>29</sup> Nydell, Margaret K. *Understanding Arabs: A Contemporary Guide to Arab Society*. Boston, MA: Nicholas Brealey Pub., 2012. Print.

The city of Bethlehem has a Muslim majority, but also a significant number of Palestinian Christians. Tourism is the chief economic sector, as Christians often come to Bethlehem during the Christmas season to pursue a pilgrimage to the Church of the Nativity. More than 20% of the current working population in Palestine is in the tourism industry. Tourism accounts for approximately 65% of the city's economy, and the city receives more than two million visitors every year. Additionally, Rachel's Tomb is an important Jewish holy site located at the northern entrance of the city. Hamide mentions that he would sometimes try to have brief conversations with tourists as they passed through the city: "... our knowledge was 100% from school, some people would tell us stories, and some tourists – though our communication was very short with them of course, because of language barriers and secondly, their times were short. They would have to leave an hour later for travel plans, briefly ask us to take pictures, and go on the bus to get out of here."<sup>30</sup> The Church of the Nativity, Rachel's Tomb, and the Muslim population residing in the area brings another glimpse of an interfaith setting during Hamide's upbringing. By growing up in this environment, Hamide was able to develop tolerance and open-mindedness for all religions. Hamide is astonished by the false stereotype that all Palestinian Muslims have animosity towards other religions such as Christianity: "It's absurd for some people to think that I, as a Muslim 'hate Christians and Jews.' How can that be? Bethlehem is the birthplace of Jesus Christ!"<sup>31</sup>

Essentially, his family's focus on a humanist approach towards Islam, the concepts of compassion and ummah in the Qur'an, the interfaith setting of Bethlehem,

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<sup>30</sup> Ibrahim Hamide. Interview by Dawn Le. Transcript. January 27, 2015., 82.

<sup>31</sup> Ibrahim. Hamide, personal communication, April 30, 2015

and the relatively educated culture of Palestine form a basis for Hamide's spiritual identity. Another essential part for Hamide to a universal identity is his openness and determination to pursue educational success. As described in this chapter, his upbringing already gave him a setting to learn and become more welcoming of the world outside of Bethlehem, Palestine.

The next chapter builds on this notion, as the 1967 War revealed Hamide's limitations if he remained in the country and, subsequently, further fueled his desire for education.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Transition: The Decision to Immigrate**

The 1967 War marked a turning point in Hamide's life, as it signaled his decision to study abroad and immigrate. Hamide mentioned three additional reasons for his decision: He was about 17 during that period, and for him, it was time to look at the next stage after high school; secondly, "opportunities in that area were neither numerous before nor after the war, and they did not become better;"<sup>32</sup> finally, staying in Palestine would mean that he would have to live under occupation, which was not a "palatable" thought for him.

Before coming to the United States, he spent time with his brother in Switzerland and England. Since he had not yet received his acceptance from the University of Oregon, he wished to use his brother's assistance to facilitate communications, considering that having communications from Europe to America was easier than

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<sup>32</sup> Ibrahim Hamide. Interview by Dawn Le. Transcript. January 27, 2015., 72.

having communications from the Middle East to America. Hamide was only about eight-years-old when he last saw his brother; after ten years, many changes had occurred. In order to recognize Hamide, his brother sent a beige, pinstripe suit for Hamide to wear at the airport.

Prior to landing in Switzerland, Hamide never traveled beyond Bethlehem and the surrounding areas. He stated that his “Knowledge of the world was extremely limited.”<sup>33</sup> His brother would share some information about the world, but this was limited because the communication between his brother with him before his departure and the family usually came in the form of a handwritten letter, which would take months to reach Palestine from Switzerland. Even a simple phone call was difficult to accomplish. In Bethlehem, a shopkeeper had a phone. To make a phone call, Hamide’s brother had to call the shopkeeper first. Then, the shopkeeper would send someone down to the house to bring one of the family members to come retrieve the message.

When Hamide arrived at Geneva, the system, the language, and culture bewildered him. Hamide had to learn how to navigate through a completely new environment. His brother had a wife and three-year-old daughter. Hamide mentioned that his niece played a large part in his acculturation to this new environment, as she taught him nursery rhymes and corrected his accent. Newspapers, television, and radios gave him a brand new view of the world. Plus, Geneva was an international city, so he met people from different places and listened to their stories. He also went to England with his brother for a couple of months. Overall, Hamide enjoyed the freedom of a

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 76.

large city and all that it had to offer: “There were no soldiers, no machine guns, cultural taboos, prohibitions. The borders suddenly expanded,”<sup>34</sup> and he felt completely free.

### The Effects of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War

The 1967 War undoubtedly left behind a traumatic experience for Palestinians. As described in Chapter 1, Hamide has vivid memories of the war. Even more so, it played a significant role in his decision to chart a life outside of Palestine, a decision that would define the rest of his future life as a Palestinian-American. A striking aspect about Hamide is that he did not develop psychological issues that often result from trauma. In Roney Srour’s case study about Palestinian children living in a multi-traumatic environment, a stable home and family environment are key to preventing such psychological issues.<sup>35</sup> “More research that is recent shows that a well-functioning family and stable emotional relationships with one parent at least can enhance children’s wellbeing in a stressful environment... strong positive attachment to their families and the ability of the parents to protect the children’s sense of stability, permanence and competence help the children to cope better with traumatic events.”<sup>36</sup> Hamide had a very stable and supportive home environment, as demonstrated with his parents’ emphasis on education, religious morality, and mother’s support. Hamide stated, “Mothers’ hearts tend to be very tender towards the children, so they don’t always put restrictions on them, such as telling them that they must go get a degree and

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>35</sup> Srour, Roney W. "Children Living Under a Multi-traumatic Environment: The Palestinian Case." *Psychiatry Related Science* 42.2 (2005): 88-95. Web.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 91.



come back here. As much as they may have wanted that to happen though, they were more persistent on the children's hopes and dreams."<sup>37</sup>

According to Srour's study, the stable environment allows an individual to cope with traumatic situations in the future. Srour states that "Most children living in a normal, loving and sensitive environment develop a secure working model (representation) of the world that he/she is projected by his parents (and later by other social systems) in addition to other beliefs, attitudes and expectations about how the world works, which can alarm him when there is impending danger."<sup>38</sup> As a result, "These beliefs create the representation of the self as safe and strong in addition to a sense of being in control over one's own environment."<sup>39</sup> This representation of a safe world is called "good world assumption," as labeled by Janoff-Bulman. Hamide transcended this representation when he heard that a war would begin:

I was 17 and very idealistic, so I was having a really hard thinking that Israel was going to take over the area. I couldn't accept it mentally, because I thought it was morally wrong, to have all the Arab nations be deprived and Israel would be victorious in defeating Egypt's and Jordan's armies. So, I do remember that national pride in a 17 year old...<sup>40</sup>

In the face of the traumatic event, "The child who has been directly exposed... has had the opportunity to test his ability and gain strength on his own," where "he may have been able to face the danger and surpass it peacefully by internalizing it so he is less afraid/anxious."<sup>41</sup> Essentially, the "good world assumption" acts a stronger filter for an individual's encounters with traumatic situations. On the other hand, if the child does

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<sup>37</sup> Ibrahim Hamide. Interview by Dawn Le. Transcript. January 27, 2015., 77.

<sup>38</sup> Srour, Roney W. "Children Living Under a Multi-traumatic Environment: The Palestinian Case." *Psychiatry Related Science* 42.2 (2005): 92. Web.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>40</sup> Ibrahim Hamide. Interview by Dawn Le. Transcript. January 27, 2015., 78.

<sup>41</sup> Srour, Roney W. "Children Living Under a Multi-traumatic Environment: The Palestinian Case." *Psychiatry Related Science* 42.2 (2005): 88. Web.

not come from a stable home environment, he or she becomes more prone to disorders such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The particular traumatic event becomes greater than the child's ability to comprehend it, and "His psyche could not attribute any meaning to the overwhelming experience taking place, so he starts to believe that the reality is really dangerous." The child may develop thoughts that he cannot control anything, "not even [his] emotions or body."<sup>42</sup>

Overall, when a person's "good world assumption" is positive, the surprise is more difficult to comprehend. However, he or she can develop "flexible, and realistic beliefs toward the world." Foa and Rigges claim that negative beliefs toward the world, on the other hand, make the person more vulnerable to PTSD because the trauma corroborates his/her beliefs."<sup>43</sup> The "good world assumption" in Hamide helped him cope with the trauma of his experiences during the war. Nonetheless, this concept is not that simple. Even though the pain of this experience did not necessarily lead him to PTSD, it still signaled an identity of conflict within Hamide. He has feelings of anger and indignation that typically follow victims of war, as well as sharing the same sentiments with Palestinians in their collective narrative of displacement. Section Two of the thesis will provide a deeper analysis on these aspects. For the purpose of this chapter though, the concept of a "good world assumption" is important to mention because it indicates why and how Hamide's particular responses may be different from the reactions of many other Palestinians in the same position. Fawaz Turki, for example, is a Palestinian-American political activist that had a less stable upbringing

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 90.

than Hamide, which may have had an influence on why he harbors extreme viewpoints in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

## Limitations and Recognition of Educational Opportunities

As stated above, Hamide described three central reasons for his decision to immigrate: at 17-years-old, he needed to look for the next stage after high school, there were limited educational opportunities in the area with no clear signs of future improvement, and the thought of living under Israeli occupation was not palatable for him. Collectively, these reasons instilled a recognition of limitations on educational success for him if he remained in Palestine. Coincidentally, this recognition also occurred during the same time as the 1967 War, which instilled an even stronger determination for Hamide to pursue educational success elsewhere. Hamide's narrow knowledge of the world at the time was partly due to communication barriers, as he explained how the slow pace of handwritten letters, the inconvenience of phone calls, and limited access to televisions, magazines, and radios prevented him from understanding about the outside world. Other instances of his limitations included the culture shock of staying with his brother in Switzerland and England, as well as his niece's introduction to Western nursery rhymes and corrections to her uncle's accent. Hamide stated, "...we really didn't have any windows for us to look through to see what the world looked like. This also included the eastern world too, like India, Vietnam, Pakistan, China. We had very little knowledge about them. We didn't have means. That's what kind of kid I was. I was a product of that society."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibrahim Hamide. Interview by Dawn Le. Transcript. January 27, 2015., 82.

As mentioned before, Hamide's family placed a high priority on education. He explained that this priority stemmed primarily from his parents' limitations on their own upbringings:

...since they had a 4th grade education, they knew the value of education. They were both very smart people, and their 4th grade education was not a reflection on their intelligence, but more of a reflection on their times and what was needed for the family. My father read at a college level, and he loved reading. His dream was that we all get degrees... fortunately, most of us ended up with college degrees- which is remarkable, because they could not afford to give us all educations, so we had to bootstrap ourselves. It's great when parents see the value of education, because it bears fruit for generations to come.<sup>45</sup>

The dream of Hamide's parents for their children to become educationally successful aligns closely with the immigrant narrative, as one of the many focuses of individuals' decisions to immigrate is to work towards a better life for themselves and their children. This dream contributed to Hamide's "good world assumption" persona, which gave him ample opportunity and support to study in the United States.

Above all, the combination of a spiritual identity based on a humanist interpretation of the Qur'an and the interfaith setting of Bethlehem, Palestine, the "good world assumption" concept, and his determination for a more promising educational future lays the framework for understanding Hamide's journey towards a universal identity. Section Two explores this journey in greater detail, as it encompasses his struggles with Orientalism and feelings of displacement in the United States, as well as the continuation of these feelings when he revisits Palestine throughout his lifetime.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 77.

## **SECTION TWO**

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **Life in the United States: A Clash of Identities**

Hamide has resided in Eugene, Oregon for the past 40 years, which constitutes the longest portion of his life. When he left England to come to the University of Oregon, Hamide's brother had friends who hosted him for a short while in Portland and Eugene. After living with the friends though, Hamide was on his own and suddenly had to immerse in college life during the late 1960s. A cultural revolution occurred during this time, where "hippies and pot, bare feet, free love, demonstrations, and politics."<sup>46</sup> There was a constant beehive of political activities. Hamide became very political too, speaking out about Arab-Israeli issues, Vietnam, and race relations. The Arab-Israeli War in particular, was still fresh, as the discussions of imperialism and post-colonization emerged in classrooms. Along with the cultural revolution, Hamide had to cope with language barriers, for his English was not strong at the time. He also had financial difficulties. His brother only gave him enough funds for the first term of school. He had to work two or three jobs to earn enough for the next term. Also, tuition continually increased.

The tremendous amount of distractions from his education was not normal to him. He felt that the "norm" of simply "learning" and "studying hard at school" was not a luxury that he had. Accordingly, he expressed a deep wish to start this period of his life again. As he grew older though, he realized that learning was incomplete in the way that schools teach, because "learning by the heart" and a "greater wisdom that is

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 85.

not purely intellectual” were topics that he felt schools did not cover enough. Life and religious books, though, did cover these topics for Hamide. This thought gave him a sense of solace, as he expressed that he did not “miss out on too much by being alone and not being on campus.” He also said, “Now, I attempt every morning to learn through my intellect, mind, and ear,” to work on a spiritual growth of education.<sup>47</sup>

The distractions also pulled him away from student groups on campus, such as international groups and Arab student unions. Hamide mentioned that assimilation, in particular, was a major distraction. He often told himself, “You’re not living back home, why are you trying to recreate that life [via participating in Arab cultural activities]? You’re in America now, try to be an American and do what America has to offer.” Hamide desired to “belong and not to be different;” he wished to “know what the 4th of July is about, Easter, baseball, apple pies, hot dogs...” He would learn to “play basketball, watch baseball, go to picnics, and learn more about what Americans do.”<sup>48</sup> At the same time though, his color, name, and language prevented him from achieving his aspirations of assimilation. He tried to minimize his Arab identity as much as possible.

The desire to assimilate increased after he married and received his citizenship. He felt that he was now “a citizen of this country and needed to act like one.”<sup>49</sup> Hamide also recognized that the chances of going back to Palestine, especially after the birth of his daughter, were remote. Furthermore, the idea of living under occupation was still definitely not an appealing option for him. Hence, these

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 88.

circumstances prompted him to establish roots in the United States. The tension of belonging to his country of birth and his current country of residence never went away. Hamide described this tension in a general sense:

You go through different emotional and intellectual phases of sometimes feeling like you are an American, and sometimes that you're still a Palestinian, and at times you're some of each, and sometimes you feel like you're more one way than the other; sometimes I feel like I have two homes, sometimes I feel like I don't belong in either place and that I don't fit. You're always going to be an outsider with how you look, and you feel like you're not an original native - you're an immigrant, you'll always look like an immigrant.<sup>50</sup>

After the Iranian hostage situation and the 9/11 attacks, he felt even more of this tension. People called him multiple discriminatory names, even though he was not Iranian, but looked close enough to pass for one. He received comments such as, "Hey foreigner, go back to where you came from!" During 9/11, Hamide had two bricks and a smoke bomb thrown through the window of his restaurant. While people called him names, he also had people who sent him supportive cards. He commented, "So, I had both responses from the community that I lived in. You feel both the discrimination and hatred, but you also feel kindness and welcoming. So, you just deal with whatever. You have to process through your mind, your heart, emotions, and move on."<sup>51</sup>

Hamide also built a network of personal connections through his restaurant and activism in the community. He remarked that hard work and passion for his work were instrumental to building his success and reputation. As mentioned before, he had a much publicized friendship with a local rabbi named Myron Kinberg. He described the friendship as "organic," meaning that he did not become friends to make any sort of public statement, such as boasting how an Arab Muslim and Jew could be

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 89.



friends. Instead, he emphasized that the friendship was one that “grew naturally” and will remain a significant part of his life.

### Orientalism and Alienation

Edward Said’s term, *Orientalism*, is one of the overriding theme that emerges throughout the experiences of Arab and Palestinian immigrants. According to Said’s *Orientalism*, the term describes the idea of how the “Other” (non-western cultures) is depicted through the lens of the West:

The Orient that appears in Orientalism, then, is a system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later, Western empire.... The Orient is the stage on which the whole East is confined. On this stage will appear the figures whose role it is to represent the larger whole from which they emanate. The Orient then seems to be, not an unlimited extension beyond the familiar European world, but rather a closed field, a theatrical stage affixed to Europe.<sup>52</sup>

Through “a system of representations,” the West depicts the East as undeveloped and “traditional,” presenting a picture of the Orient as a culture to be studied, depicted, and reproduced. In the process, the Western society is presented as developed, rational, and superior. Orientalism emerges in instances such as the “War on Terror,” where hate crimes, such as the bricks thrown at Café Soriah, became more prevalent as the Arab/Muslim identity became more and more associated with the term “terrorism” in Western media.

According to Carol Fadda-Conrey, the changing geopolitical landscape resulting from crises such as “the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, the Arab-Israeli

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<sup>52</sup> Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage, 1979. Print. 5.

wars of 1967 and 1973, the 1970s Arab oil embargo, the Lebanese civil war from 1975 to 1990 and its aftermath, the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the First Gulf War in the early 1990s, as well as the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003, respectively,” have contributed to the rise of “negative conceptualizations of Arab-Americans in the US, ones that are deeply entrenched in the binary logics of Orientalist discourse.”<sup>53</sup> This logic motivates “derogatory and essentialist stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims, replete with lascivious Arab sheikhs, villains, harem girls, and belly dancers, become the shared vocabulary to reify the vast differences between a ‘civilized’ US culture on the one hand and a ‘barbaric’ and backward Arab and Muslim landscape on the other hand.”<sup>54</sup> As summarized by Fadda-Conrey, the Orientalist discourse becomes prevalent in a highly tense period during the US-Middle Eastern relations. This time period shaped the entire 60 years of Hamide’s life as a Palestinian born in Bethlehem, an international student at an American university, an immigrant to the US, and ultimately, the Palestinian-American citizen that he is to this day.

Furthermore, Orientalism persists in the realm of Arab American literature. Wail S. Hassan states that “individual writers have negotiated historical, ideological, and discursive conditions in ways that vary according to education, profession, gender, national origin, political ideology, and personal temperament, as well as family, class, and religious background... The diversity is reflected in the widely divergent approaches to the problems of Orientalism and cultural translation.”<sup>55</sup> Despite the

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<sup>53</sup> Fadda-Conrey, Carol. *Contemporary Arab-American Literature: Transnational Reconfigurations of Citizenship and Belonging*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. Print. 2.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>55</sup> Hassan, Wail S. *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature*. New York: Oxford UP, 2011. Print.

diversity, however, Hassan noted that “Arab immigrant writers since the late nineteenth century have all had to contend with Orientalist stereotypes and prejudices that surface in step with changes in domestic climate and political developments abroad.”<sup>56</sup> Again, Arab-American writers face the challenge of mediating between the “dominant discourse of Orientalism” that defines their identity in their country of residence. Orientalism, along with immigration challenges, becomes a platform for the tension for the identity of “home” for Palestinian Americans. According to the interviews with Hamide, the tension appears the most through two prominent parts of his life: The process of assimilation and the events of and responses to 9/11. The following segments will take a closer look at Hamide’s tension with Orientalism and alienation during these two periods.

### *Assimilation*

Arab-American writers such as Albert Ameen Rihani, Kahlil Gibran, Abraham Mitrie Rihbany, and George Haddad sought to improve America’s understanding of the Middle East from an Arab point of view. These writers did not explicitly describe their struggles with the Orientalist ideas of the West, but generally aimed to share their own challenges as immigrants. An Arab-American author from Syria, Salom Rizk, was one of the earliest to display a sense of anguish in his identity. In *Syrian Yankee*, he wrote about his false hopes and common disillusionments about America, which are common among immigrants from regions of conflict. His thoughts of America were idealistic:

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 4.

“The US is not like Syria. It [US] is really a country like heaven... the land of hope... the land of peace... the land of contentment... the land of liberty... the land of brotherhood... the land of plenty...”<sup>57</sup> Upon arriving in Iowa to join his relatives, Rizk worked with limited English at a slaughterhouse, where he quickly received hostility from other workers who called him, “a foreigner.” He desperately desired to become an American and expressed his disappointment. Rizk stated, “I forget how many stages of descent are in Dante’s *Inferno*, but there aren’t as many as there are in a packing plant... I actually wondered if this was America, the America I had dreamed so much about, the land I was ready to give my soul to come to.”<sup>58</sup> He cursed at being born in Syria, as he believed that his foreignness created “such contempt, ridicule, and abuse.”<sup>59</sup> He spent the rest of the memoir to prove his worthiness as an American. Once again, this strive to become “more American” is very common amongst immigrants and refugees who have just arrived to the US, especially from conflict-torn countries. When Hamide tried to avoid as much of the Arab cultural activities on college as possible in order to “assimilate” and “be more American,” he also shares this common desire, “There were Arab Student Unions, so there were certain activities that attracted me, like international nights or picnics... But my other life off campus started to pull me away. I started to find less time. One of those major things was assimilation... I wanted to belong and not to be different... I tried not to be different, to not stick out.”<sup>60</sup>

Like Rizk, Hamide received contempt and ridicule due to his skin color and accent, which showed that no matter what, he could never be American “enough.” As

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<sup>57</sup> Rizk, Salom. *Syrian Yankee*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran, 1943. Print. 71-72.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>60</sup> Ibrahim Hamide. Interview by Dawn Le. Transcript. February 3, 2015., 87.

explained before, others accused him of being a “foreigner” and to “go back to where [he] came from.” Consequently, he had a strong desire to minimize his “Arab-ness.” He remarked that he disliked some parts of Arab culture, such as “a disregard for punctuality, hot-headedness, [lack of] women’s rights issues, etc.” Hamide states that he is “not happy about that part of Arab culture, but loved America, for there were differences in freedom, mobility, openness- just multifaceted flavors.” He “wanted to be a good community member and help; something that couldn’t be done in Palestine.”<sup>61</sup>

The desire to become more “American” and less “foreign” easily creates tensions in immigrant identities. For Palestinian-Americans in particular, the Arab-Israeli issue intensifies this tension even further. During decades after 1948, the question of representation for the Palestinians was one of survival and existence. In regards to Orientalism, Hassan argues that “if Orientalism denied the identity of Arabs through stereotype, Zionism is a particular mutation of Orientalism that negated the very existence of Palestinians...,”<sup>62</sup> especially after the Six Day War of 1967, where there was heightened anti-Arab racism in the US. Along with his desire to become more American, Hamide also felt upset about the discrimination: “I started to work on the Arab-Israeli issues in the 1960s, starting my path of human rights activism. It was a means of showing anger, and also I felt that I still had an obligation to my family. I wanted people to understand, because I felt like there was a lack of understanding, from bias in the media, all of that.”<sup>63</sup> As demonstrated in Hamide’s earlier life in the US,

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<sup>61</sup> Ibrahim. Hamide, personal communication, April 30, 2015

<sup>62</sup> Hassan, Wail S. *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature*. New York: Oxford UP, 2011. Print. 113.

<sup>63</sup> Ibrahim Hamide. Interview by Dawn Le. Transcript. February 3, 2015., 87.

there is tension between his desire to assimilation and an obligation to fight Orientalist attitudes in the US, especially regarding the Arab-Israeli issue. The hardships of finding an identity between his country of origin and country of residence are neverending.

Before Edward Said, Fawaz Turki was the first and best known Palestinian-American activist who wrote about this particular Palestinian-American tension. He wrote three memoirs in his lifetime that documented his experiences as a survivor of the Nakba<sup>64</sup> and eventual US citizen: *The Disinherited: Journal of a Palestinian Exile*, *Soul in exile: Lives of a Palestinian Revolutionary*, and *Exile's Return: The Making of a Palestinian American*. In contrast with Said, who came from an affluent upbringing, Turki was the child of a poor grocer from Haifa. He was only eight-years-old during the Nakba, and fled by foot with thousands of other refugees. Turki grew up in a refugee camp and on the streets of Beirut, where he was dependent on scholarships for his formal education. He became politically active as a teenager during the 1950s, became a farmhand in the Australian Outback, a hippie in South Asia during the 1960s, then a bohemian writer in Paris, Boston, and Washington DC ,where he has lived since the mid- 1970s. Because of that tempestuous life, not to mention his fiery temperament, the anguish of homelessness and exile is painfully and dramatically captured in Turki's three memoirs. They chronicle his wrestling with his sense of identity and role in the Palestinian movement.

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<sup>64</sup> The 1948 Palestinian exodus. The term refers to the period of war itself and the events affecting Palestinians shortly afterwards, from 1947 to 1949.

His first two memoirs focused on his anger about the conditions of Palestinians by the Israelis and the West, as he framed his discourse in Fanonian,<sup>65</sup> Third-Worldist terms. For instance, he writes about the struggle in *The Disinherited: Journal of a Palestinian Exile*:

In a way, all that I have written on the preceding pages is really a journal. My own and the journal of thousands of Palestinians like myself who grew up in the Middle East over the last two decades. I have written it to satisfy myself and those who want to know that our struggle has not been merely for a place in the sun and a standard of living, but a struggle for dignity and national identity.<sup>66</sup>

His memoir captures the Palestinian narrative of loss and struggle for a national identity - a narrative that powerfully dramatizes the trails of Palestinian exile and “the crushing historical burden it lays upon the individual.”<sup>67</sup> The last memoir, *Exile’s Return: The Making of a Palestinian American*, however, provided a more personal perspective of own struggle in identity, rather than a collective national indignation like the first two memoirs. He writes that an Arab can never escape the struggle:

We see it in the spectacle of an Arab who seemingly possess all the attributes of modernity - who has a university degree, works in a high-tech office, speaks several languages, travels extensively, and appears normal to the naked eye – but once you scratch beneath that veneer, you find him infected with the germ of traditionalism. He is convinced that he has made the leap into modernity already; that his transformation is not shallow and superficial; that he is not a mere caricature, a Westernized Arab... Neo-backward Arabs, like alcoholics, will continue to deny their affliction as long as they can.<sup>68</sup>

By comparing the Arab-American experience to alcoholism, which most likely alludes to his own addiction to alcohol and drugs throughout his lifetime, Turki shows that no

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<sup>65</sup> Refers to the post-colonial work of Frantz Fanon, a physician and psychiatrist

<sup>66</sup> Turki, Fawaz. *The Disinherited: Journal of a Palestinian Exile*. New York: Monthly Review, 1972. Print. 149.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>68</sup> Turki, Fawaz. *Exile's Return: The Making of a Palestinian American*. New York: Free, 1994. Print. 117.

matter how “modern” an Arab may seem, he or she can never escape the Orientalist brand of the Arab identity, even if they “deny their affliction.” Hamide presents nearly all the characteristics of this “modernity.” He has a university degree from the US and a successful restaurant. Despite these achievements, he is still discriminated against (i.e. bricks thrown through his window, anti-Arab hate comments, etc.) as an Arab-American. Overall, Turki displays a hardship for Arab-Americans, and especially Palestinian-Americans, to find a sense of belonging anywhere. Hamide reflected on how this tension never really changes:

...it never goes away... Even though I’ve been here for so many years, people still would ask me, “where are you from?” I go, “wait a minute, I’ve been here for 45 years - I’m from here!” Then they would go, “I mean, you have an accent, you look different, where are you from?” So, you’re always going to be an outsider with how you look, and you feel like you’re not an original native - you’re an immigrant, you’ll always look like an immigrant.<sup>69</sup>

Hamide’s tension demonstrates how assimilation for him was never a straightforward process. In fact, assimilation is contradictory and messy. He did share a common immigrant desire to become more American, but at the same time he felt an obligation to his Palestinian roots. To complicate the tension even further, he sometimes feels ashamed of both his Arab identity and new American identity. As described, his desire to assimilate to American culture prompted him to have a disregard for “Arab-ness.” However, despite his admiration for some parts of American culture such as freedom of expression, he did not have high regards for Americans at times either.

Aziz Shihab writes about how the Palestinian-American narrative is different from other Arab-American narratives. Essentially, Palestinian-American autobiographies rarely display the sentimental effusions about coming to America that

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<sup>69</sup> Ibrahim Hamide. Interview by Dawn Le. Transcript. February 3, 2015., 88.



are typical of immigrant autobiographies of other ethnicities. On the contrary, coming to America for Palestinian-Americans is often a mixed blessing, fraught with the pain of dispossession and complicated by frustration and anger over US support for Israel. On the one hand, for example, Shihab declares that “coming to the United States was the greatest gift from God,” and that he “feels sad for the people who were not equally blessed.”<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, he posed a dilemma between his two inescapable circumstances: “To live obediently in a country that helped make me a refugee in the first place, while pretending it is the ‘greatest home’ for justice in the world,” or to go back to Palestine to “live miserably under Israeli occupation and possibly die fighting injustice.”<sup>71</sup> Shihab “chose the lesser of two evils.” He further accentuates this matter in an Orientalist situation: “But I was boiling inside to find out that convincing even one American of the truth of what had happened to my people and my homeland was quickly and continuously generated by press coverage portraying my victimized brothers as terrorists.”<sup>72</sup> By explaining this specific dilemma, he further illuminates the same Palestinian-American narrative of loss and struggle. At the end of the narrative, he confesses that “when the US Immigration official said, ‘welcome home,’ he did not feel that the United States was his home.”<sup>73</sup> According to Yvonne Hassad, “such contradictions bespeak the conflicted feelings of those forced out of their homeland.”<sup>74</sup> Thus, the concept of home in the Palestinian American autobiography is “provisional,

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<sup>70</sup> Shihab, Aziz. *Does the Land Remember Me?: A Memoir of Palestine*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 2007. Print. 1.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>74</sup> Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck. *Becoming American?: The Forging of Arab and Muslim Identity in Pluralist America*. Waco, TX: Baylor UP, 2011. Print. 95.

fraught with anger and guilt, bitterness and nostalgia, hope and frustration, neither stable nor taken for granted.”<sup>75</sup>

When asked about his thoughts of Shihab’s description of the Palestinian-American identity, Hamide wholeheartedly believed that it was a perfect summary of his own tension in identity. Again, the tension is contradictory, never straightforward: “I definitely had to choose the lesser of the two evils. It wasn’t like I loved America completely. I saw flaws in the US, just as I saw flaws in my own Arab culture. For me, the narrow viewpoints of some Americans made me realize that America was not completely perfect as I had thought.” Along with Shihab’s story of the US Immigration official who said, “welcome home,” Hamide also shared a story about how he also did not feel that the United States was his home. Recently, he tried to call his family in Palestine. Strangely, no one answered his phone calls. He tried again, and finally, his niece picked up the phone:

Hamide: “Hello! How are you?”

Niece: “I’m good, uncle. How are you?”

Hamide: “I’m doing well, thank you! How is everyone else?”

Niece: “I’m good, uncle. How are you?”

Hamide: “I said I’m good...”

Niece: “I’m good, uncle. How are you?”

Hamide: “Okay, I don’t think this is you, is it?”

Niece: “I’m good, uncle. How are you?”<sup>76</sup>

Immediately, Hamide realized that the FBI had been listening to his phone conversations, and there was glitch on this particular phone call. He said, “Can you believe it? It’s my own country spying on me!”<sup>77</sup> From such examples, he expressed the difficulties in calling the United States his home. These stories of heightened

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>76</sup> Ibrahim Hamide, personal communication, April 30, 2015

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

security and hysteria of Arab terrorists were common during Hamide's lifetime, but they became even more prominent after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

### *9/11 Attacks*

The attacks of 9/11 did not mark the first or the only event that fostered reductive perceptions about Arab-Americans in the US. Instead, they are relatively new additions to the longstanding history of national and international crises with the Middle East. The event, however, did mark intense changes in domestic and foreign US policies, such as the formation of the USA Patriot Act, the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System, and the Department of Homeland Security. These changes, as well as the mobilization of extreme US military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, created even more negative depictions of Arab identities as they exist in the Arab world, as well as in the US. Nadine Naber specify 9/11 as “a turning point of histories of anti-Arab racism in the United States ... in that representations of ‘terrorism’ and ‘Islamic fundamentalism’ have increasingly replaced other representations (that is, the rich Arab oil sheikh, belly-dancers, and harem girls) and have become more fervently deployed in anti-Arab state policies and everyday patterns of engagement than ever before.”<sup>78</sup>

With that said, the impact of 9/11 on Arab-Americans is important to explore because it creates a more intense conflict for Hamide to find a sense of belonging in the US. Rabab Abdulhadi's essay, “Where is Home? Fragmented Lives, Border Crossings, and the Politics of Exile,” reflects on the themes of Palestinian exile and the

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<sup>78</sup> Naber, Nadine Christine. *Arab America: Gender, Cultural Politics, and Activism*. New York: New York UP, 2012. Print. 141.

construction of individual and collective Palestinian identities in the US in the light of 9/11. Creating two interconnected narratives, in the first she describes her attempts (as a Muslim Arab) to navigate and survive the closed-off boundaries of New York City in the hours following the 9/11 attacks. In the other narrative, she replicates the same concerns from the geographical vantage point of the Israeli-controlled Palestinian territories. In both cases, Abdulhadi portrays Arabs and Muslims as a besieged and monitored group, even if the contexts of such positioning might seem dissonant at first glance. Abdulhadi states “my split lives are on a collision course again: I feel like such a traitor for passing. But wouldn’t it be better to pass today? Do I want to identify with ‘them’ [meaning Arabs]? Do I want to escape guilt-by-association, the fate of my fellow Arabs, Palestinians, and Muslims? Should I renege on my roots?”<sup>79</sup> These questions and musings not only underscore the volatile nature of Arab-American citizenship and belonging in the US, but they also point to the shifting qualities of homes and homelands. Hamide commented that during the post 9/11 period, a group of people threw bricks into Café Soriah because they knew that the owner was Arab, and thus, a “terrorist enemy.” This hate crime is a demonstration of how Muslims and Arabs are “a besieged and monitored group,” as the perpetrators felt the need to monitor and punish the Arabs in the community. Abdulhadi is a light-skinned Arab that could “pass” as an Anglo US citizen. Hamide did not necessary think about “passing,” but he did feel the strong urge to prove himself as a “good Arab” and show that “good foreigners are also good people.”<sup>80</sup> The need to do so stems from the sudden duty to

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<sup>79</sup> Abdulhadi, R. "Where Is Home? Fragmented Lives, Border Crossings, and the Politics of Exile." *Radical History Review* 2003.86 (2003): 74. Web.

<sup>80</sup> Ibrahim Hamide, personal communication, April 30, 2015

protect his family from similar hate crimes. Hamide's brother, for example, was terrified to use his Palestinian ID in the US. For Hamide, this unforeseen commitment to defend himself and his family made the US less of a safe place for "home."

This same sense of shifting homes and loss is also present in the novel, *Once in a Promised Land*, by Laila Halaby. In the novel, a couple named Salwa (who is revealed to be of Palestinian descent) and Jassim live a "predictable, well-ordered American life." However, their lives take a sharp turn for the worse after a series of escalating events (triggered in part by 9/11) leave them physically and spiritually broken. Against a post 9/11 backdrop, the couple becomes deeply self-conscious of their Arab identities. Towards the end of the novel, Salwa solemnly declared her identity: "Palestinian by blood, Jordanian by residence, and American by citizenship."<sup>81</sup> She eventually retains no sense of true belonging to any country. Essentially she lost her sense of identity after 9/11. Salwa and Jassim are examples of the post-9/11 Arab-American struggle in identity. Like many Palestinian-Americans, Hamide felt lost in Palestine due to the conflict and occupation, but the heightened Arab discrimination after 9/11 in the US also reawakened this same feeling of loss. He does not feel a sense of true belonging to any country:

... during 2001, I felt a sudden feeling of "sticking out." They start looking at you with a different look, then you are reminded pretty clearly that you are not Joe Smith - you don't have blue eyes, blonde hair; you look like something else - you look like the enemy - sort of how the Japanese felt during Pearl Harbor, when they were rounded up and put into camps. I mean, it didn't go that far with me. I did have two bricks thrown at the window and a smoke bomb thrown into my restaurant, people calling me names...<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Halaby, Laila. *Once in a Promised Land: A Novel*. Boston: Beacon, 2007. Print. 70.

<sup>82</sup> Ibrahim Hamide. Interview by Dawn Le. Transcript. January 27, 2015., 88.

As shown through both the assimilation period and an even more intense period of the 9/11 era in Hamide's life, he continues to feel that he does not fully belong in the United States. Even so, Hamide has found ways to cope with this sense of belonging, especially through spiritual means and the learning that took place after experiencing years of Orientalist discrimination and exclusion as an immigrant.

The next chapter will discuss more about these coping mechanisms. First though, the chapter begins with an examination of his visits back to Palestine. These visits encompass his journey towards finding a home, as they also create a space that challenges his identity.

## CHAPTER 4

### Returns to Palestine: Reconstructing a Universal Identity

Hamide does not remember the particular years of his visits back to Palestine. He remembers that there were periods that he went back every three years or so, but once he started the business, it became more difficult for him leave for an extended period. Vacation time became more valuable. Therefore, he would often have to choose between going to another country for two weeks to take care of himself and relax or going back home. Of course, there were certain times he had to go back for family emergency situations, such as when his father fell ill in 1995. Although he does not clearly remember the particular years, he does notice that family and political conditions in Palestine were different with each visit. He does not have fond memories of his visits to Palestine, because of the interrogations, security issues, and continued tensions in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Hamide saw that the issue did not get better, but only got worse. He becomes disappointed when he sees this progression, “because there have been many attempts such as Camp David, Oslo, and others to try to remedy the situation.” Positions on both sides are also becoming more rigid and conservative. Hamide said, “More of the conservative, right wing parties are taking hold of this situation, and the chances for peace and reconciliation are becoming more dim all the time – that can’t help, but make you feel sad.”<sup>83</sup>

Along with the dimness of a solution for the Arab-Israeli issue, Hamide experienced firsthand violations of his own human rights during the security proceedings in Israel, even though he holds a US passport. He shared his experience of

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 98.

being strip-searched at the Israeli airport and the feelings of desolation to see his family's life under occupation. Additionally, most of the people in Palestine view him as "Americanized," and consequently, not really "Palestinian." Like in the US, he also does not feel that he fully belongs in Palestine either.

### Orientalism and Alienation Continues

Outside of the US, Hamide could not escape from the chains of Orientalism and alienation. Instead, his "otherness" became more prominent in Palestine, both in terms of the political conflict and his American identity. The story of Aliyah in Susan Muaddi Darraj's short-story collection, *The Inheritance of Exile*, is an illustration of how a Palestinian-American may not feel like he or she belongs in Palestine either, due to the changes of identity when one lives in the US. Aliyah recounts a return journey to the West Bank. She is a second-generation Palestinian-American who travels to Ramallah. Instead of embodying a tangible version of her parents' memories, this Arab homeland comes to represent her family's traumatic and scarred history of loss and tragedy. Rather than discovery or reclamation, Aliyah's return visit immerses her in a space pervaded by loss. She says, "So I wasn't going to the home Baba had been born in. I never could return to that because it had been replaced by a walled-in city to which my dark skin and last name denied me access."<sup>84</sup> The systematic measures that prevent Aliyah, despite her American passport, from fulfilling a veritable homecoming

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<sup>84</sup> Darraj, Susan Muaddi. *The Inheritance of Exile: Stories from South Philly*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2007. Print. 70.



leads her to perceive that there is no space for her among Palestinian friends and family in Ramallah. Her return journey to Palestine and her arrival in the US generates a reassessment of both her rootedness in Palestine, instilled in her since childhood, and her unmistakable American identity. She finds no space to call her own.

Hamide also encounters this “lack of space” during his visits to Palestine, especially when he is constantly taken out of the line at the Israeli security check areas due to his skin color and name, despite having an American passport. He shared a vivid memory of a security check procedure with an Israeli security officer:

I got stripped search by a security person in a little booth where he asked me to strip completely with a detector between my armpits and legs, and I got furious... I said, “you are dehumanizing me - you are being nasty and mean, then he says, “no no, I’m just doing my job, don’t be embarrassed, I’m just a man like you. Then I say, “no you’re not, you’re not like me. I’m a man, you’re a robot. “You just take orders, and you put metal detectors here - what do you think I’m hiding, and where do you think I’m hiding it?” He says, “Oh it’s orders.” Then I go, “See see, you are mindlessly following orders. I have a conscience, you don’t have a conscience.” I was really pissed. Then, he took my money as he was running out of arguments, then he took it to the light and was sort of proud of himself. Then he goes, “you know why I’m doing this... The terrorists and PLO write special codes on this and special ink that doesn’t show, and when I put it to the special light it shows.” Then I say, “Oh woow. How impressive [sarcastically]. Look, I paid foreign tuition at the University of Oregon. I’m an educated Palestinian, not a dumb Palestinian, so don’t pull that stuff on me.”<sup>85</sup>

Hamide’s “dehumanizing” and “furious” experience provides a personal insight into the resolute security measures of the Israeli government, even if security meant profiling individuals of Arab descent. The extreme concern with security, “terrorists,” and “PLO special codes” is another example of how Arabs are a “besieged and monitored” group. In the argument with the Israeli security officer, Hamide adds, “... You see, I was born

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<sup>85</sup> Ibrahim Hamide. Interview by Dawn Le. Transcript. February 3, 2015., 101.

over those hills in Bethlehem, and my father was born there, so was his father and so forth, and I come here to my land and you search me, and you're not even from here? [the security officer was born outside of Israel] How do you feel about that? Don't you feel a dichotomy?"<sup>86</sup> Hamide's frustration parallels a shared struggle with Ailyah, as she feels that could never truly return to "the home Baba had been born in," because her "dark skin and last name denied [her] access." Hamide also recounts another similar experience when he went to back to Palestine with his daughter:

... I told her, "look, they're going to take us out of the lineup, take us through and interrogate us – asking, "who packed your bags," why are you here, etc. and ask separate questions. Then, her, being born here, rolled her eyes said, "Dad, you're just being paranoid. They're not going to do that." Then sure enough, they did exactly what I just told her... this is with American passports, so it's never a pleasant visit. I know they do this under the name of security, and I don't blame them for being security conscious, but I also believe that some of it is plain harassment... You feel the degrading looks, they feel that you're an enemy... even if you're a grey-haired old man or a little girl that's 12 years old... You start violating my human rights at that time, including when you already searched everything I have, including my body?... So it's never pleasant, and you see your family and the conditions that they live under, so that really makes you sad - it comes home with you.<sup>87</sup>

As described, Hamide's visits were never pleasant and often fraught with another direct example of Orientalist discrimination. Hamide added that his daughter, who "has never been political in her life," is upset to see how "the Palestinians, the family especially, are treated – how they can't go to Jerusalem, can't do this- that, schools shut down, homes can be raided, all the human rights violation."<sup>88</sup> The "degrading looks," "plain harassment," and the conditions that his family live under, collectively construct a place where he no longer feels like he belongs in his country of origin.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 101.

Although the Israeli occupation played a major part in creating this place for Hamide, he also encountered Palestinians who ostracized him for being “too American.” Whenever he shared his perspective on certain subjects, other Palestinians sometimes criticized him for having too “Americanized” views. Additionally, Hamide recalled a story about a taxi ride conversation with the Palestinian driver that showed he he could never be “Palestinian enough.” The driver asked him, “Your Arabic is pretty good, where are you from?” Irritated, Hamide explained that he “was from here.”<sup>89</sup> Hence, Hamide experiences a dual sense of neither belonging in the US nor Palestine, as a result of Orientalism, displacement, and migration.

The culmination of all these life experiences led to him search for another “home” - a universal “home.” An ethic of cosmopolitan care and spirituality are the two components that create this sense of home for Hamide. The next two segments of the chapter will examine how Hamide copes with Orientalism and exclusion with these two essential components.

### An Ethic of Cosmopolitan Care

The transnational paradigm of return becomes a concept of rearrival, where short-term returns to original homelands ultimately lead to the assessment and reclaiming of the US terrain. In other words, when Arab-Americans return to an Arab country and come back to the US, they gain new self-understandings of their Arab

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<sup>89</sup> Massengill, Hugh. "Immigrant and Human Rights, a Talk by Ibrahim Hamide." *YouTube*. YouTube, 12 Dec. 2012. Web. 02 Nov. 2015.

identity. According to Fadda-Conrey, “instead of being depoliticized and nostalgic or demonized and Othered by virtue of their religious and cultural ties the Arab world, Arab-Americans use the awareness and knowledge they gain on their return visits to the Arab homeland to develop a type of vision that transcends monolithic and mononational modes of belonging in the US.”<sup>90</sup> Through such discursive interventions, Arab-Americans develop a language of transnational belonging and citizenship that holds specific, yet complex understandings of Arab-American identities.<sup>91</sup>

In Ailyah’s case, the splitting of Arab-American identities into separate spheres is countered to the easy sense of belonging that overcomes her while sitting inside the Dome of the Rock, which she had previously only seen in “crowning pictures of Jerusalem.” Aliyah grew up in a Christian family in South Philadelphia’s small Palestinian community. Religious, as well as class divisions, are poignantly visible within this community, despite her mother’s mantra, “Our [Arabs’/Palestinians’] religion doesn’t matter here... In America, our water comes in from the same pipe and our sewage exists from the same pipe- here we are all the same...”<sup>92</sup> Sitting quietly and breathing in the scent of musk” upon being invited by a Muslim Palestinian woman to enter the mosque, Aliyah feels that she is “finally inside the picture.”<sup>93</sup> Her mental replay of this experience when she comes back in the US relays a particularly significant amount of rearrival for Aliyah. This particular experience directly interrogates and problematizes the inseparable link often made in the US between

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<sup>90</sup> Fadda-Conrey, Carol. *Contemporary Arab-American Literature: Transnational Reconfigurations of Citizenship and Belonging*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. Print. 67.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>92</sup> Darraj, Susan Muaddi. *The Inheritance of Exile: Stories from South Philly*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2007. Print. 58.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

national and cultural belonging on the one hand and religious identity on the other hand, by which Arab equals Muslim equals un-American. Through Aliyah's observation of and reflection of the Muslim women praying inside Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock mosque, she is able to disengage herself from the class and religion based forms of identification that shape her Arab-American community's connections to Palestine. "Remembering that day in the mosque, the orderliness of the service and the unison of female prayer"<sup>94</sup> becomes a key moment in Aliyah's reformulation of her Palestinian-American identity beyond the binary constructs of a mononational identity. Her revisionary perspective toward what she had traditionally understood as constituting home and homeland, as defined primarily by a Christian Palestinian-American household, alters within the actual space of Palestine, specifically in Jerusalem. Aliyah states, "there was a power there [in the Dome of the Rock] that I identified with - it had been the first time I felt comfortable in Palestine."<sup>95</sup>

Aliyah witnessed the multifaceted nature of her Arab identity and became more comfortable with the ambiguity. The class and religion based forms of identification from Aliyah's Christian Palestinian-American community in Philadelphia echoes the US hegemonic understandings of Arab-American identities as a monolithic and homogeneous entity. By entering the Dome of the Rock, she finally felt a sense of freedom from the labels and saw her identity as more complex than the narrow characterizations that US society gave to her. She no longer delineated the differences amongst various religious and cultural iterations of Arab-American, and specifically Palestinian-American identities to further distinguish and separate Arab from American

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 73.

identities. Rather, her return journey to Palestine and arrival in the US enable her to formulate a more fluid, complex, and transnational enactment of the two seemingly incompatible parts of her Arab-American identity.

Aliyah's revelation came from this one experience at the Dome of the Rock. For Hamide, his revelation comes from his many visits to Palestine and back to the US again. Each of these times, he comes back to redefine his identity. Hamide realized that injustice and bigotry existed in all cultures, not one or the other:

Some people threw bricks, but there were also folks who offered a haven for safety. They [brick-throwers, anti-Arab individuals] were a minority, as the overwhelming majority [people in the community] was positive. So, you have to be cognizant - It's not difficult to stay positive, because they outweigh the negative. There are more people who cared and showed their care than hatred - just by that virtue alone. Secondly, I can find that own bigotry in my culture. It's not an American phenomenon, it's a human phenomenon. In my culture, you have things like "oh, this guy is from another part of country, we don't respect them as much, trust them" etc. So, this is a human condition, and you realize that it exists everywhere.<sup>96</sup>

Hamide's ability to reframe his experiences of othering – being Orientalized in the US and being othered in the region he was born and raised – into a wider picture of the human phenomenon illustrates a state of self-actualization. After enduring discrimination, statelessness, and hopelessness for many years, he finds a safe haven with this perspective. This perspective is best summarized as an "ethic of cosmopolitan care," which according to Said's autobiography, was a personal way for him to chart out of Orientalism. Again, an important note to remember is that Hamide is not always in this state of peace, but he continually feels anger at the Arab-Israeli situation. The

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<sup>96</sup> Ibrahim Hamide. Interview by Dawn Le. Transcript. February 3, 2015., 89.

anger though, often comes back to this perspective, where he feels at peace and at “home.”

As mentioned before, the “conclusion” of Hamide’s perpetual tension in identity always comes back to an eventual state of “home” in the universal realm. According to Hassan, the “conclusion” throughout the various works of Arab American literature results in a sense of subjectivity and multifaceted identity of oneself: Alameddine’s affirmation of Edward Said’s idea of the self as “a cluster of flowing currents” rather than “a solid self,” and the notion that “no one today is purely one thing.”<sup>97</sup>

These reflections on identity represent some of the consequences of Said’s critique of Orientalist discourse. The fluid and open-ended concept of subjectivity he purposes undermines discourses of “unitary identity, which are always constructed through mechanisms of differentiation, opposition, and discrimination, and frequently manifested in myriad forms of racism, culturalism, and nationalism.”<sup>98</sup> The idea of “universal citizen” embraces multifaceted forms of identities, where association with only one nation state, or “unitary identity,” becomes less important. This realm of human rights and global citizenship becomes a crucial point of Hamide’s self-identification as neither solely “Palestinian” nor “American,” but as a world citizen with “a cluster of flowing currents.” Like the Arab American writers, the comfort of “subjectivity” becomes a common destination after longstanding tensions in defining identity from the Orientalist structures of “nationalism” and “differentiation.”

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<sup>97</sup> Hassan, Wail S. *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature*. New York: Oxford UP, 2011. Print. 220.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

This tension and consequent revelation of self-identity appears in life of Said himself. The chapter, “Edward Said and the Clash of Identities” from *Intimate Strangers* by Andreea Deciu Ritvoi, reveals some of his own encounters with conflicts in identity as a Palestinian American. At times, he increasingly identifies more as a Palestinian. His autobiography, *Out of Place*, for example, “reads like a novel by Charles Dickens. It is first and foremost a story of victimization, all the more moving as the victim is a child and the aggressors are all adults. Said’s strategy of defamiliarization in the memoir is the Victorian trope of the “critical child,” whose pure and thus accurate percept of the world demystifies and reveals a hidden political reality: the repression of Palestinians.”<sup>99</sup> The “victimization” as a “repressed” Palestinian-American displays a sense of empathy with Oriental victims, particularly Palestinians, of the West. Yet at other times, he also acknowledges that he is also American, where he formed his intellectual formation in Western teachings: “... I know as well as any educated Western non-Jew can know, what anti-Semitism has meant for the Jews, especially in this century. Consequently I can understand the intertwined terror and exaltation out of which Zionism has been nourished, and I think I can at least grasp the meaning of Israel for Jews, and even for the enlightened Western liberal.”<sup>100</sup> Ultimately, he acknowledges that he is both “Palestinian” and “American.” He also mentions that he is an Arab Palestinian, in addition to a Western thinker: “And yet, because I am Arab Palestinian, I can also see and feel other things - and it is these things that complicate matters considerably, that cause me also to focus on Zionism’s

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<sup>99</sup> Ritivoi, Andreea D. *Intimate Strangers : Arendt, Marcuse, Solzhenitsyn, and Said in American Political Discourse*. New York, NY: Columbia UP, 2014. Print. 235.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.



*other* aspects. The result it, I think, worth describing, not because what I think is so crucial, but because it is useful to see the same phenomenon in two complementary ways, not normally associated with each other.”<sup>101</sup> This concept of subjectivity and openness is also identifiable in his more “cosmopolitan” concept of identity, as Ritvo mentions how he would at times, critique “the very idea of national ties” and “exhort post-nationalism and exile as superior political attitudes conducive to peace and universal respect for others.”<sup>102</sup>

Regarding the Arab-Israeli issue, Hamide mentions that he became less extreme than before, as he becomes more receptive to different perspectives on the issue:

You know, sometimes in these situations, I feel like I’m more on this camp than that camp, but as I have worked on the Arab-Israeli conflict many times with different groups, my position has been more moderate, realizing that taking different camps doesn’t solve the issue, just makes it worse. One has to be near the fence to be able to see both sides more clearly. It’s not like one side has a point and the other one doesn’t, they have their arguments, and they’re legitimate.<sup>103</sup>

The Arab-Israeli conflict is longstanding and daunting. Peace seems difficult to obtain, and scholars involved in this issue often feel hopeless about the situation. Hamide’s coping mechanism with the daunting nature of the conflict is to find a place of neutrality:

You start to look for a place where you’re comfortable, and the fence at a lot of times is not a comfortable place. My place of comfort is human rights and justice, so I don’t care who it falls to, it doesn’t know Arabs or Jews, justice is justice. If there are human rights that are not being respected, then they need to be respected. It’s that simple. So if Palestinians are not respecting the rights of the Israelis, they need to respect that, and if the Israelis are not respecting the rights of the Palestinians, then they need to respect that. So that’s my position

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 223

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 206

<sup>103</sup> Ibrahim Hamide. Interview by Dawn Le. Transcript. February 3, 2015., 97.

now. So I'm less angry, and passionate, thinking that "We have to do this, we are right and they are wrong." Now, I'm more baseline on human rights.<sup>104</sup>

Hamide's "place of comfort" in "human rights and justice" is another example of how he now embraces a more cosmopolitan identity and finds peace with the tumultuous nature of the Palestinian narrative. Said and Hamide share the same feelings of frustration and anger at Orientalism, yet eventually find a place of comfort in the ethic of cosmopolitan care. For Hamide in particular, universal identity also extends to his spirituality, as his religious values described in Chapter 1 often emerges throughout his life as a safe haven for him.

### Spirituality

There is a multitude of literature on whether or not spirituality and religion are beneficial, harmful, or irrelevant to health. Studies that show how spirituality is beneficial demonstrate that "although the effect sizes are moderate, there typically are links between religious practices and reduced onset of physical and mental illnesses, reduced mortality, and likelihood of recovery from or adjustment to physical and mental illness."<sup>105</sup> According to this particular study, "the three mechanisms underlying these relationships include increasingly healthy behaviors, social support, and a sense of coherence or meaning."<sup>106</sup> Spirituality is a persistent theme that resurfaces throughout the oral history interviews with Hamide. He spoke about spirituality with consistent

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 98

<sup>105</sup> Linda K. George, David B. Larson, Harold G. Koenig, and Michael E. McCullough (2000). *Spirituality and Health: What We Know, What We Need to Know*. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*: Vol. 19, No. 1, pp. 102-116.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 106.

and positive references that highlight the three mechanisms of “healthy behaviors, social support, and a sense of coherence and meaning.”<sup>107</sup>

In regards to the Arab-Israeli situation, Hamide’s finds the meaning of “justice” through a religious pair of lens:

The golden rule is this- “Would you accept it if you were in their position. No? Well then you’re at fault.” So that’s how I see it now, it’s justice like God, Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed says. When the Rabbi was asked to summarize the Torah, he said, basically “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” He says that this statement summarizes the whole Torah - the rest is commentary. Well, if that’s the whole Torah, and Jesus and Islam and all those three say the same thing, then that is justice - why are you not following that? Why do you want that land and not giving it to them, why do you want political freedom, but not for them? Do you accept to switch places? If not, then you’re not being just. So, that’s how I see the situation.<sup>108</sup>

By looking at religion as a point of reference to cope with the turbulent nature of the political conflict, Hamide manifests a place of comfort in a higher realm than reality. Furthermore, he not only uses Islamic virtues to place a point of reference to the situation, but he includes the other Abrahamic religions as well. Spirituality is a prominent coping mechanism to his encounters with Orientalism and alienation as a foreigner, as he formed multiple interfaith dialogue groups in the US. The stories of his interfaith dialogue include his famous friendship with the late Kinberg:

... he, another gentleman of the Christian faith, Don Clark, and I - the three of us started an organization of dialogue about the Middle East issues, Arab-Israeli relations, and especially the religious points of view. We call it the Interreligious Committee in the Middle East. That also helped to cement our relationship, where we would speak in front of groups about the topic and our relationship grew... I met his wife and his family, and I had a very sacred dinner at their house. I also ended up catering his only son’s Bar Mitzvah, a very significant event in a Jewish person’s life at a Synagogue. So it was really big - huge for the Rabbi to have a Palestinian Muslim come in and cater his son’s Bar

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>108</sup> Ibrahim Hamide. Interview by Dawn Le. Transcript. February 3, 2015., 99.

Mitzvah. It opened a lot of eyes in the community. Then, his son came and worked for me while studying at the university...”<sup>109</sup>

Hamide emphasized that the friendship was aside from the Arab-Israeli issue, meaning that it was not meant as a statement of any kind. He said that the friendship was not a display for the community to say “oh my god, isn’t that wonderful? Two enemies are friends.” Hamide believed that the genuineness of the friendship created a lasting impact of him, Kinberg, and the community: “There were some things that we disagreed on, but we generally agreed on civility and the respect of others’ opinions - not having to agree with the other person to like them. I think that it was this understanding between us that made a big impact on the community. His picture is in my office and home, not because I want to tell people about it, but because I loved that man.”<sup>110</sup> Hamide’s work in interfaith dialogues demonstrated a deep commitment to spiritual learning, growth, and education for the community. Moreover, Hamide’s strong friendship with Kinberg and the unnecessary need to intellectualize it are examples of how his spirituality paved the way for “social support.” His overall business philosophy is another major example of how he relied on the religious value of communal care: “Cafe Soriah has been here for 22 years, and all the respect that we get in this town day after day, week after week, and year after year, was because we kept working very hard in delivering a good product in a good way - fashioned with good service, honesty, and integrity.”<sup>111</sup> He commented that these values were a direct result of his religious and cultural upbringing:

Hospitality is the main thing... You know, that eastern hospitality, the respect for guests, elders, and for food itself - it can’t be wasted because it’s very precious.

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 91.

That's how you show people that you care about them - you feed them, that's part of my culture... You know, just giving food out without care is not part of how I grew up. I can't get rid of that cultural norm, and I don't want to get rid of it... You gotta have that attitude, because it's an honor to carry on a tradition that you believe in - providing care and nourishment for people. That's something that God smiles at, and so, it's fulfilling to your mind and to your heart and spirit. You feel like you don't have to be a brain surgeon to feel respect for what you do, because what you're doing is also important, and God smiles on it. You feel very honored and blessed to have a job where you can display your heart, your soul, your culture, your labor of love and creativity - all of that...<sup>112</sup>

Again, Hamide referenced God as a positive influence on his ability to carry out the restaurant business during the past 40 years. He also stated that he does not want to “get rid of that cultural norm” of hospitality, indicting the importance of his religious upbringing discussed in Chapter 1. The longevity of his restaurant business and commendable reputation in the community illustrates how his cultural and religious upbringing continues to be a place of solace for Hamide, despite his hardships with Orientalism and feelings of exclusion as a foreigner.

The oral history project interviews ended with a hopeful note about finding “home.” As demonstrated in the following passage, “home” for Hamide does not necessarily equate to any geographical territory:

I personally became against flags. I don't like to belong to this flag or that flag. The flag of God is the only flag for me, and God created the whole universe... I don't think that I need to have a specific territory as my home. I believe that America could be my home just as back home could be my home. My home is where my heart is, not where I was born... I feel I am lucky, like I have two homes, and at times there is a sadness because I feel like I don't belong in either place... So I feel like I'm in no man's land, but I also can rise above that and say, “you know what, it is no man's and, it belongs to God and I belong anywhere.”<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 91-92.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 102-103

Hamide's flagless, higher realm, non-territorial definition of home indicates an ultimate sense of stability the identity of a global citizen. As described in the thesis so far, "home" in a universal setting provides him with the essential coping mechanism against the Palestinian narrative of loss. He emphasized that this coping mechanism is still an ongoing process, as he endures tension in his identity each day. However, he remains determined to "replenish" his "heart" through spiritual means:

... I don't want it to be filled with anger, hatred, mistrust, because I live with it all the time, because I sleep with it, wake up with it, have it with me all the time, I don't want somebody else to tell me how that heart should be except for myself, and hopefully, that can derive from what I put in there from higher places, not from the government of Israel or the government of Palestine, America, etc., but from something that's from a higher place than any government can ever aspire to be, but from the goodness, the teachings of Jesus, teachings of Moses, teachings of Mohammed, teachings of Martin Luther King, the great teachers - where love conquers hate. That's what I would like to have in my heart, so whenever I find some spots, I try to clean it out and put something good in there. Like when I'm ill, I try to replace it with health. You know, it's a lifelong process. It's not like my heart is perfect, it needs constant care and updates. It needs constant nurture. So here I go! [laughs] I continue on that trail.<sup>114</sup>

Hamide's "lifelong process" is a philosophical home of universal comfort, with spirituality and the ethic of cosmopolitan care as two core elements. He has endured the Orientalist discrimination and alienation in many forms, realizing his own limitations to change circumstances, embracing those that he can change, and using spirituality and the ethic of cosmopolitan care to guide him through the process. Indeed, Hamide is an example of Palestinian-American who has found a "home," despite the Palestinian narrative of loss and disposition.

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 103.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The Palestinian narrative is a tale of continuing displacement and disorientation. If the definition of home means “a safe place to go and not be questioned,” then do Palestinian-Americans ever find a sense of “home?” Of course, the experiences of Palestinian-Americans are unique, depending on the individual’s own environment, history, and outlook. For Ibrahim Hamide, he found a place of comfort and identity of “home” within a universal space, a space that consists of two main factors: the “ethic of cosmopolitan care” and his spirituality. The latter formed during Hamide’s upbringing in Bethlehem, Palestine. His family’s focus on Islamic moralities, religious tolerance, communal care, as well as educational success, built a solid foundation for Hamide’s positive future responses towards the challenges of dispossession, migration, and Orientalism. By experiencing discrimination and sharing his story through numerous venues such as interfaith dialogues, he developed an ethic of cosmopolitan care and a deeper sense of empathy for the human condition as whole. Combined, these two essential factors form Hamide’s universal identity of home, a place “without flags,” and “with God’s law” as the central authority. Hamide has shown that despite the Palestinian narrative of displacement, he can still come “home.”

This thesis project portrays one story of a Palestinian-American whose life experiences mostly occurred in the small town of Eugene, Oregon. The impact of the environment on an individual’s identity of home is an interesting question for future research, for it could provide a more nuanced picture of the Palestinian immigrant experience. For example, would an experience in a larger, metropolitan city have an impact on his views? Another question to consider is the magnitude of Orientalism in a

particular environment. For instance, Orientalist attitudes predominantly occur in Western nations like the US, as portrayed in media and academia. What might the experiences of Palestinian immigrants be like in non-Western nations, such as East Asia or Latin America? Would a Palestinian-American like Hamide feel the same impacts of exclusion in these areas? Conducting the same study for a second generation Palestinian-American immigrant is also an interesting area to explore, because it could provide a deeper insight into intergenerational differences. Indeed, research questions for the Palestinian immigrant experience are numerous, due to the complex nature of the diverse narratives. For Hamide's own experience at least, his life story not only contributes to the existing body of research on the Palestinian immigrant experience, but it also left some valuable learning reflections on my part.

As I reflect back on the thesis, I learned several key points, including the importance of an individual's upbringing, the strength of religion as a moral compass, and how a widened perspective of the world can shape one's identity and consequently, propel his or her advocacy towards social change. Hamide's attainment in finding a home offers a hopeful message for the immigration and refugee experience. The process towards such a state is not simple. However, Hamide's family and religious background demonstrates that an individual's upbringing has the potential to foster a solid foundation to help ease the challenges of migration. The "good world assumption" and "humanist approach" towards Islam are two important ideals that cushioned Hamide's struggles, such as assimilation. Assimilation is one of the shared hardships of the immigration narrative, and often, the process is chaotic. As Shihab and Hamide mentioned before, the choice between "the lesser of the two evils" adds another



political layer of chaos to the process for Palestinian-Americans. Despite these challenges, Hamide embraces the idea of “endurance,” rendering the values of a “good world assumption” from his upbringing. He states, “I go to Vietnam, and I would have to learn that culture, food, customs, and they would look at me like I’m a stranger, so I would have to endure something. But you know what, even in my own home, I endure something. So it really isn’t anything abnormal – it’s your ability to tolerate and endure what you want to endure.”<sup>115</sup>

Along with endurance, the thesis illustrated the importance of spirituality in Hamide’s life. Spirituality is an area that I admittedly do not understand enough. In fact, I often hear more negative comments than positive ones about religion in today’s media and films. While the debate between the benefits or disadvantages of religion is a highly controversial subject, Hamide’s experiences reveal a powerful story about religion as a healing mechanism and moral compass. To supplement Hamide’s story, there are several examples that portray a positive light on religion: Christian values of “peace” and “compassion” had a strong influence on the nonviolent Civil Rights movement and Martin Luther King Jr.’s teachings, as seen through gospel music and King’s several references to “God” in his speeches; Mohandas “Mahatma” Gandhi took the religious principle of “Ahimsa” (doing no harm) from his Jain neighbors, and from it developed his own famous principle of Satyagraha, later on in his life. Satyagraha, in Gandhi’s words, is “Truth (satya) implies love, and firmness (agraha) engenders and therefore serves as a synonym for force... that is to say, the Force which is born of Truth and Love or non-violence;”<sup>116</sup> individuals who dedicated their lives towards

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>116</sup> "Mohandas 'Mahatma' Gandhi." BBC News. BBC, n.d. Web. 15 Nov. 2015.

building the great cathedrals in Chartres, Beauvais, and other European cities generally did not seek recognition from the public, but found solace in believing that “God” would recognize their labor. Overall, stories of how religion serves as a coping mechanism and moral compass are bountiful. Hamide is no different, as he embodies these same moral ideals for humanity.

Additionally, as Hamide’s “ethic of cosmopolitan care” indicates, a widened perspective of the world cannot go understated as a potent device for self-reflection and an individual’s dedication to social change. Often, storytelling is the individual’s form of action to instigate changes in society. By enduring the challenges and sharing his cumulative experiences through various means, such as interfaith dialogues, human rights activism, and this thesis project, Hamide practices the art of storytelling.

Jonathan Gottschall, writer of the *Storytelling Animal* states, “Story, in other words, continues to fulfill its ancient function of binding society by reinforcing a set of common values and strengthening the ties of common culture... Story is the grease and glue of society: by encouraging us to behave well, story reduces social friction while uniting people around common values.”<sup>117</sup> Hamide is cognizant of the fact that he cannot change society by himself. He states that he cannot “eradicate poverty, ignorance, bigotry... all of that stuff that I disagree with... one thing I can learn is that I am still responsible to myself and to God. That’s why I assume responsibility to realize that I can change it, and if the other person does the same, then changes can happen and

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<sup>117</sup> Gottschall, Jonathan. *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012. Print.

have happened throughout history.”<sup>118</sup> Indeed, storytelling is a vital first step towards social change.

In the end, I hope that readers can garner several points of significances from this thesis: Post-trauma resilience, awareness of society’s Orientalism, and the values of intergenerational learning. First of all, his story gives insight into post-trauma resilience. After the Holocaust, many Jewish survivors remained silent about their traumatic experiences as a defense mechanism against revisiting painful memories. In the 1980s and 1990s, the aging survivors began to share their stories as a healing and empowering process. Elie Wiesel, the Jewish writer, humanitarian, and Boston University professor, gained public attention for bearing witness to the Holocaust. By sharing his story through short novels such as *Night*, *Day*, and *Dawn*, Wiesel displays a similar phenomenon to Said’s ethic of cosmopolitan care. In *Day*, he writes “Man carries his fiercest enemy within himself. Hell isn’t others. It’s ourselves. Hell is the running fever that makes you feel cold.” Wiesel placed this phrase in the third novel of the trilogy. By placing it at the end, he conveys a deeper sense of self-reflection and decreased indignation at the world, despite the atrocities of the past. He brings these understandings into his stories and shares them with the world as a healing process. Hamide’s own reflections on his life are also similar resolutions for his conflict in identity. The act of “replenishing his heart” is the ultimate weapon when facing the “fiercest enemy within himself.”

Orientalism is a friend of this enemy. In a time of continued racism against Arabs, Orientalism is important subject matter to understand. Hamide’s struggle with

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<sup>118</sup> Ibrahim Hamide. Interview by Dawn Le. Transcript. February 3, 2015., 86.

Orientalism provides a capacity for self-awareness of society's subconscious and conscious racism. As immigration debates and terrorist attacks flood news sources, individual stories become secondary. Understanding the Orientalism, challenges of migration, and hardships of displacement are vital for shielding against ignorance and developing a sense of empathy.

Alongside the topic of empathy, I enjoyed the intergenerational learning that took place as a result of my conversations with Hamide. The many technological and geographical changes have caused generations to distance more from one another. Another "us v. them" dichotomy emerges from such changes, as older and younger generations often view one another in an apathetic and mistrustful light. Of course, generational gaps existed before, but there has been little effort to close this gap. I felt that this project provided me with a small step to somewhat shorten this gap. Hamide is a first generation Palestinian-American, while I am a second generation Vietnamese-American. We are seemingly different in terms of age, experience, and culture, but we conducted our conversations with mutual respect. During many moments in our conversations, I felt that I was speaking with a living piece of history. Learning from someone who has seen the events that occurred in history books was exciting and humbling at the same time. Our mutual respect during these conversations gave us an opportunity to break down generational barriers.

While post-trauma resilience, the importance of continuing conversations on Orientalism, and intergenerational learning are all significant factors of this project, the ultimate hallmark is that it documents a powerful life story. Ibrahim Hamide's story is a celebration of overcoming a shared Palestinian narrative of loss and gaining the

resilience to find “home.” Indeed, I hope that this project can become a useful document to learn about the Palestinian immigrant experience. Above all though, I hope this thesis project reveals that beyond romantic ambiance and piquant cuisine of Café Soriah, there exists a powerful story about the owner’s humility and endurance. Referencing back to some of his words at end of the oral history project, the world is indeed his home, something that he had to “garner” and “work on himself.”<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Ibrahim Hamide. Interview by Dawn Le. Transcript. February 3, 2015., 105.

## Appendix: Transcription of Oral History Project with Ibrahim Hamide

### Section: Life in Palestine

Interviewer: Dawn Le  
Interviewee: Ibrahim Hamide  
Date: 1/27/2015  
Setting: Cafe Soriah  
Transcriber: Dawn Le

[Transcriber's note: Filler words (i.e. "uhs" and "ums"), repeated words, and the interviewer's backchanneling have not been transcribed for the purposes of readability.]

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*Interviewer initials: [DL]*

*Interviewee initials: [IH]*

DL: I know that you spent your childhood and the majority of your adolescence in Bethlehem. To start off, could you tell me a little bit more about the general setting of Bethlehem during that time?

IH: Sure. It was peaceful and people knew each other. School years had their own flavor - you get to be in school, meet other kids, learn to read and write. It was an exciting time for a person of 6 or 7 years old. I grew up in a big family, where it was very loving and tight knit; everyone cared for each other. We were blessed with two homes - one was on the farm, so 4 months of the year, we would move there. That was really exciting for us kids especially, because school would be out, and the farm would offer so much room to explore, which kids of that age loved to do. Also, you feel like you're contributing to the family in a way, because everyone had to work - including 6 - 8 year olds. We had fruits, vegetables, animals such as sheep, chickens, and goats. It was a very lively time on the farm. Of course, as any other kid, life evolves, and when you become close to manhood than you are to childhood, other issues come into focus - from responsibilities, religion, girls, you know - that whole thing. Friendships also became very big and important. Peers and friends my age became as important as family to me. Also, you start to dream of charting your life and what your future would be and what kind of preparations you need to have to have a successful future. For me, that was always helping my family. My dream was never a selfish one, such as what am I going to be; it was always, how can I help my parents, brothers and so on. Then, in 1967, the war

broke out, and that just totally changed things - to how one dreams about the future, the political situation, mobility, you name it. The war just created a whole new dynamic. When it broke out in June 1967 to October 1968, were the periods that I lived under occupation, and then I left home.

DL: I see. In regards to the family dynamic, I understand that from other publications about you, you also had a very big family - about 10 brothers and sisters?

IH: She had six boys and six girls, but four of the girls did not survive childbirth.

DL: Yes, that's right. In those same publications, they mentioned that your parents wanted all the children to become educated and return back to the farm.

IH: Right, that was my father's dream, more so than my mother's. Mothers' hearts tend to be very tender towards the children, so they don't always put restrictions on them, such as telling them that they must go get a degree and come back here. As much as they may have wanted that to happen though, they were more persuasive on the children's hopes and dreams. But overall, they both emphasized heavily on education. Especially since they had a 4th grade education, they knew the value of education. They were both very smart people, and their 4th grade education was not a reflection on their intelligence, but more of a reflection on their times and what was needed for the family. My father read at a college level, and he loved reading. His dream was that we all get degrees, come back to the farm and develop it while serving as lawyers, doctors, or other professionals. Well fortunately, most of us ended up with college degrees- which is remarkable, because they could not afford to give us all educations, so we had to bootstrap ourselves. It's great when parents see the value of education, because it bears fruit for generations to come.

DL: Yes, definitely. So it seems that before the 1967 war, you were more lenient on your father's dream of coming back to the farm, but then afterwards, your course seemed to have changed?

IH: Well yes, part of it was for chronological reasons, meaning that it was time for me to look at the next stage after high school. Secondly, the opportunities in that area were neither as numerous before nor after the war, and they did not get any better. Thirdly, I would have had to live under occupation - something that was not palatable for me

then and not palatable for me now. Those were three important reasons that lead me to want to immigrate.

DL: Oh, I was under the assumption that your older brother was the one who influenced your decision to study abroad? That's what I infer from the publications, at least.

IH: I do credit my brother a lot. I also think that if I didn't have a brother, and I applied for a visa and the University of Oregon, I would have gotten in. But I think that's where it was crucial, he offered me the opportunity.

DL: I see. Oh, since we're on the "Life in Palestine" section, we should try to hold off on further information about your brother and the transition process until the next section. Could you tell me more about any striking memories during your childhood and adolescence years that you remember?

IH: Of course, the war itself was memorable. I was 17 and very idealistic, so I was having a really hard time thinking that Israel was going to take over the area. I couldn't accept it mentally, because I thought it was morally wrong, to have all the Arab nations be deprived and Israel would be victorious in defeating Egypt's and Jordan's armies. So, I do remember that national pride in a 17-year-old, and also the fear of what would happen: Would they come in and slaughter people? How would they rule us? What would happen to our freedoms? During the war itself, I happened to be the only one because it was in June so the family would assume our normal migration to the farm - except for me. I was working in a factory outside the farm, and so when the war happened on a Monday at about 10am, the radio was broadcasting the news in the factory. The owners said, "hey we're going to shut it [the factory] down. You better get home or out of here." so I went to my home in the city, where I was staying by myself and glued myself to the radio; There were no television sets. Things developed pretty quickly throughout the day. We had a shelter, though it wasn't designed that way, but could be used as one in the basement of our home. Suddenly, bombing started to hit Bethlehem. I also had a sister with children living there. She and her family were worried, and so were the neighbors, friends, etc. Within a short time, I sheltered nearly 30 people in the basement. As the day went on, there were debates and discussions on what was going on within that basement, as they listened to the radio about the progression of the war. The Israeli army was on the outskirts of town. Truths and rumors came in - Truth, as in news about one of the first



casualties, and rumors sprang up like spring grass in war - rumors of the Israeli army killing people placed a lot of fear in the discussion. We asked questions ranging from "What do we do now? Why don't you men escape? They won't kill women and children..." to "Should we all go or all stay?" Anyhow, and "where will we go?" is another question. That discussion was a pretty vivid memory. Having that, and being 17, I suddenly become the decision-maker for people younger and older than I am. Children, women, and older people were at my mercy, because I would lead them, since I knew the country roads and outskirts, as we wanted to avoid the main roads and soldiers. They wanted to know the way to my dad's farm, and since I was the only one familiar with how to get there, I became a main voice in that discussion. I was the one that basically advocated we either all go, or we all stay. My logic was that we had no way to connect to one another, since we didn't have cell phones, email, etc. back then. So, if we left women behind, the men would be worried sick about them and vice versa - I thought that it would be a recipe for disaster, to have men whimpering and women feeling the same way. I had the same dilemma, where my best friend came up to see me from his house to see if I was alright. When I walked him back, I could see the bombs, as well as dodged bombs myself. I wanted to see what his family decided to do, so I caravanned and took them to safety to the farm. As we walked by my friend Sam's house, carrying kids on my back and one on my arm, I shouted to Sam to see if he was there. He was, and he told me that his father was a sergeant for the police force and had a basement downstairs to put his family. He was sitting outside with a machine gun, saying that whoever was going to come in to hurt his family, he was going to gun them with every bullet he had. I started crying and saying "you don't have a chance, don't that." Then he said, "well, that's what my dad said." Meanwhile, those people that I was leading, who was ahead of me, asked, "which way?" So, I had to hustle and take the lead again. It was five miles of rough terrain. When I had them pretty close to the house, and I sent someone ahead to tell my dad to expect a group of people coming. Upon hearing the news, he brought a couple of mules to carry the children and took us to the house, where it was just a mad house of other people who also sheltered at our home from other cities. We only had a short time to rest - a few 4-5 hours or so. Then, I led them on a trek five miles east to the mountains to be safe. That whole episode was a traumatic experience that I remember well and will remain in my memories. The rest of them, during my childhood/adolescent years, are mostly pleasant. You know, school years, friends, having little adventures, and seeing some of my younger siblings, that kind of stuff. It

was not very eventful. I did lose some siblings through childhood diseases - those were pretty painful. Other than that though, by various standards, childhood was generally great.

DL: Wonderful. There is just one question that I would like to ask before we end this section. During this time, there were a lot of events going within the Arab-Israeli conflict, of course. You grew up towards the beginning of it during the 1948 war, to the formation of the PLO, and of course, the 1967 war. Did your parents ever talk about politics within the house?

IH: Not really, he was not very political. He was more of a hardworking farmer who just spent most of his time trying to fend for his family, trying to get food on the table, making sure that they were safe and successful. He would tell us some stories of memories after WW1 when he was a young kid and the Ottoman Empire, but those were more of stories rather than a political commentary. He was religious, but my parents were not preachers. They did not make us do anything religiously, like "you have to pray," and whatnot. They mostly taught us morality, not politics.

DL: I see. On that topic, you also mentioned that your father read a lot of books. Did he have a favorite that he would share with you?

IH: You know, he didn't read as much as he would like to, because he had to work a lot, but he was very interested in the holy books, the Torah, Bible, Quran - those were his real loves. He wanted to know more about them. Strangely enough, in the last 10 years, those books are almost strictly what I have been reading [chuckles] myself. Those 3 books, I want to understand more of. They're three of the finest books there are in this world, and I lack in depth understanding of them, so I have been attempting, and I feel like I am light years away, but I am still attempting to understand them. I enjoy reading novels, political books, and so on, but those three books are what have been keeping interested in the last 10 years.

DL: Right. Then overall, do you think that's where your parents' lessons of morality comes from - the holy books?

IH: Very much so. Both were learned from the holy books and also what was equally important is that my family came from a society that depended on one another. You had to look out for your neighbor's house if they aren't there, to be kind to

a stranger, to share what you have with others, like orphans and so. So it was probably a combination of both religious and social morality. During the farm for instance, the farm was 100% non machine, there were no machines on the farm, so it was all man and animal labor. When we would harvest, there were only few days in the year when we could crush the wheat, so the neighbors would come help us, and when we were finished, we would come over to help them, and so on and so forth. It was dry farming, no irrigation, just collaboration and helping each other were vital for the survival of farmers. In doing so, you start caring for each other and everyone's families. It became a very cohesive community. I think that what they taught us is a combination from what they garnered from religious practice, what parents taught them in terms of morality, and what they experienced during that time by living that kind of life.

DL: Great. Well, I think that we have covered quite a bit for this section, in regards to the setting of everything and so forth. Is there anything else that you'd like to add? Any little stories that you remember for example?

IH: Well, I know that when my older brother left, we felt very sad. What sticks to my memory is that we, as a family, have never been together as a family. My younger brother, oldest brother, and so forth, we as a family unit have never been together in one place. That seems to sadden me a lot of the time.

### **Section: The Transition**

Interviewer: Dawn Le  
Interviewee: Ibrahim Hamide  
Date: 1/27/2015  
Setting: Cafe Soriah  
Transcriber: Dawn Le

[Transcriber's note: Filler words (i.e. "uhs" and "ums"), repeated words, and the interviewer's backchanneling have not been transcribed for the purposes of readability.]

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*Interviewer initials: [DL]*  
*Interviewee initials: [IH]*

IH: I was 18 years old and never been outside of the area. So, my knowledge of the world was extremely limited, extremely small. We did not have televisions, and our education was 100% school education, so most of the knowledge

that I had garnered is from classes and also listening to stories of some people who have traveled. Then again, those stories were essentially limited to just the Middle East, like Syria, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and so forth. There were not many stories of the Western world. Except from maybe my brother though, as he would tell us some things. However, we still understood very little, because communication between us usually meant a handwritten letter, which would take months to get here. That was how people communicated - there were no to very little phones. For instance, there was a shopkeeper who had a phone, so my brother would call the shopkeeper, and the shopkeeper would send someone down to our house to bring one of us to come retrieve the message. So as you can see, communication was very difficult. Our family was very ignorant on what the outside world look like. Again, no television or magazines, and radio was usually local. So our knowledge was 100% from school, some people who tell us stories, and some tourists - though our communication was very short with them of course, because of language barriers and secondly, their times were short. They would have to leave an hour later for travel plans, briefly ask us to take pictures, and go on the bus to get out of here. So, we really didn't have any windows for us to look through to see what the world looked like. This also included the eastern world too, like India, Vietnam, Pakistan, China. We had very little knowledge about them. We didn't have means. That's what kind of kid I was. I was a product of that society. So when I hopped on the plane to Tel Aviv, just the process of getting my visa, and traveling from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv were new to me. I have never been on an airplane before, and my brother was waiting for me in Geneva. There, it was a totally new life. The system, the language, the way people are - everything was brand new. So, I met my brother again with his wife and 3-year-old girl. The little one was a big part of my culturalization into cultural world. She was starting to read at 3 years old and loved books. So, I learned all my nursery rhymes from her - from Winnie the Pooh and all the rest of the nursery rhymes. She also corrected my accent too [laughs]. And of course, I got exposed to all sorts of inputs, from television sets to radios. You start to see other places that you haven't been to through the eyes of news reporters, magazines, and other people too, since Geneva is an international city. I got to meet other people who are from other places and listen to their stories. There was a very huge learning curve. I stayed there 2 or 3 months, and then his company moved to England, and I moved with him. Again, England is another western country, different from Switzerland of course, but western nonetheless. I

landed in a small town, so I got to learn at my own slow pace and then spoke English. I lived there for 4 or 5 months, got to know my brother, and enjoyed the freedom of a big place and all that it had to offer; I just walking around freely - no soldiers, no machine guns, cultural taboos, prohibitions - you could do whatever you wanted to. No one was there to ask "why?" The borders suddenly expanded, where you felt so free. Needless to say, you're just taking all those inputs, and you add them to your life experiences where you start knowing yourself as a person. At that time, I was writing to schools for university acceptance, and the UO was one of the schools that wrote me back and offered an acceptance. Once I received the acceptance, I rode on another airplane, and this time, I was on my own - No one there was here to receive me. It was challenging, but also exciting, because this was where you were controlling your own life now. The US was very different from Europe, as I came during a time of cultural revolution - You know, the hippy movement, smoking pot, and whatnot.

DL: [laughs] That's right, it must have been a big cultural shock. Before we talk about that, I just had some clarification questions about what you've mentioned. You said that you didn't go anywhere else. Did you mean that you didn't go beyond Bethlehem at all, like to other towns?

IH: When I was back home, I basically stayed there. I did go to Jordan, but that's just about it. Jordan is across the river, and I had relatives there. Outside of that, I have never been to Syria, Egypt, Kuwait, or any other neighboring countries.

DL: I see. Another question I had was, why did you decide to go to Switzerland first before coming to America?

IH: Mainly to meet my brother. I was eight when I last saw him, and at that time I was now 18, so 10 years have passed. I haven't had my acceptance yet, so I couldn't come to America straight. And, I figured that during that time, I could use my brother's assistance to facilitate communication, because it's easier to communicate from Europe to America than it is from the Middle East to America.

DL: That makes sense. One of the most memorable stories that I read from the publications about you is that you had to wear a suit in order for your brother to recognize you at the airport?

IH: Ah, I had to wear a suit that he sent me. It fitted me, and he said that if I didn't wear that suit, he probably wouldn't have recognized me [laughs]. Yes, I remember that. It's sort of beige white, pinstripe.

DL: What was your first reaction when you met your brother in so many years.

IH: To be honest, despite the many years that have passed, I still felt a sense of closeness. As mentioned before, our family and it's not untypical - it's actually very much typical in that part of the world, and I'm sure in your part of the world too, where it's very close knit, agrarian type of cultures, they depend on each other. Families care about each other very much. So, there's a tremendous amount of love there. I remember the day he left, I was crying at lunch, and some kid asked what's wrong. I said, "Oh, my brother just left today." So I remember the sadness till this day when he left back home, when he was 17 or 18. That's the most overwhelming feeling. I got to see my brother, and I was one of favorites - or, I like to think that I was [laughs]. He used to stand up for me when my other brothers picked on me. I was very excited to be with him and very proud that he built his own life, that he got a master's degree and worked at Procter and Gamble. I thought that my brother was a big shot. So yes, closeness, pride, excitement - all of that. We caught up on some bonding. There's a 10 year gap between us - that makes it impossible to be close when you're young. He had his friends, and you had yours. We didn't have bonding times other than family time together. Now we're both adults and communicating at a different level outside our home - all of that was very interesting. Now there's a dynamic where he would rely on me to be the man of the family when he had to be gone to work all day for instance, and I would be with his wife and daughter in the meantime, where I felt a sense of responsibility to protect the family.

DL: Given that closeness and new dynamic, I bet it must have been difficult to transition from England to Eugene?

IH: Yeah, but I remember him saying that he had some friends waiting for me in Portland - Alan, and I forgot his wife's name. Knowing that I would come here, he had a family host me, so it cushioned the blow in a sense. His friends picked me up from the Portland airport, spent the night, then took me to the Greyhound bus. Then, his friends in Eugene picked me up and I stayed there for one week, then I joined the dorm. I felt cushioned a little bit, but after a week I was

all alone and just immersed myself in college life - you know, hippies and pot, barefeet, free love, demonstrations, politics - campus was very political- clearly exciting times. There a was constant beehive of political activities. I became very political too - Arab-Israeli Issues, Vietnam, race relations - black and white. Also especially, the Arab-Israeli war was still fresh, the concepts of imperialism for example were being discussed all the time. It was also a cultural revolution - Fathers not liking their sons with long hair, etc. I landed right in the middle of all this. School was totally boring compared to what was happening in society, but I had to adjust to all of this. My English was also pretty weak, and I didn't know that there were advisors to guide me at the time. It was the first day of registration, and I took ill-advised courses. Then by the end of that spring term, I was out of money. My brother gave me enough for just the first term, so I had to work two or three jobs to earn enough for the next term. Also, tuition kept hiking up the following terms. The struggle hasn't quit yet, it just has a different arena. So, I've been pulling on my bootstrap since 1969.

DL: What kind of jobs were they? Did it happen to be part of the restaurant business by any chance? Like bussing tables?

IH: They were odd jobs - food industry, lumber, planting trees, places near the Valley River Center - just any job that would offer me a pay. My first job was \$1.25 an hour.

**Section: Life in the US**

Interviewer: Dawn Le  
Interviewee: Ibrahim Hamide  
Date: 2/3/2015  
Setting: Cafe Soriah  
Transcriber: Dawn Le

[Transcriber's note: Filler words (i.e. "uhs" and "ums"), repeated words, and the interviewer's backchanneling have not been transcribed for the purposes of readability.]

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*Interviewer initials: [DL]*  
*Interviewee initials: [IH]*

DL: Now that we're shifting towards your initial beginnings in the US, let's start from there. Could you tell me more about student life?

IH: Student life - Okay, I mentioned that the social events during that time were more exciting than the events on campus, though campus was pretty exciting because there were demonstrations, political activism, and I got involved in some of that - the Arab-Israeli issue was something I got involved in, not to mention being 18 and being interested in girls and friendships - That, coupled with work where I met people and made some friends, both male and females - some taught me how to play basketball, some I met at work, and that became more important in my life when I played basketball on a weekly basis. And at work, I also met people, including the woman that would become my wife and the mother of my children. Then, I started to impress my bosses at work with my abilities, and they promoted me. My job started to take me away from my school, and you know, being in love - things started to take a life of their own. The summers, I would take on more work, maybe in lumber construction, or whatever. In 1973, I quit school for a while because I had got promoted to manage the Sun River Lounge near Bend. My wife-to-be went with me and moved there too, and then we moved to California. I decided to go back to school to finish up and ended up having a child, and life just went on and on - but life as a student was great. You worked very hard, stayed up all night, cramming for exams, and you would enjoy some classes, some more than others - The social sciences were favorites, like political science. I met great professors, students, became friends with many, including the famous Steve Prefontaine here. I also took speech classes from Norman Page, and he convinced me that I should become a Speech major, because I would be very good at improvising. He called me up one time and I would do a speech, and I still do public speaking. So yeah, school was difficult because I attempted to take on a lot. As a freshman, I even attempted to teach an Arabic class, while taking 16 to 18 credits, working, being new to the language, so my difficulties were multiplied compared to other natives, because it slowed me down in reading. Of course, all the modern learning tools were not available then like they are now. In computer class, for instance, there was only one computer, and you had to wait for your turn to use it. I really never learned how to use the library or ask advisers efficiently, so I was basically new to the learning methodologies here. No one took me by the hand and taught me, no one ushered me, and I didn't know how to navigate. I used the brawn over brain method - work hard study hard, be attentive during lecture time, memorize, pay attention, study a lot - which was a method that I used at home [Palestine]. In some areas, it worked, some not - I did enjoy it though and did just an above average work - that



really hurt my feelers, you know [laughs] - because I always produced high level work back at home. I was so spoiled, very good at school back at home. I lived in the dorms for one term - that was brand new - never lived in dorms before, then had to search living off campus, learning to drive, finding out what transportation to use - how to get to point a to be, etc. Everything was new. So anyhow, I had tremendous amounts of distractions to deal with. A lot of it was distracting to school. That life was not normal to me - the norm being, all I had to do was go to school and learn. That norm was not a luxury that I had. Therefore, I would very much like to do it all over again. I would go to my PhD even, because I knew that I had the intelligence, will, and value in education. I was just not well prepared for it - I didn't know how to learn, no one guided me. I also had financial difficulties. That dream is something that will probably die with me - that wish. I wish that I could go back to learning. It's really not about status or accomplishments, it's about learning. Now, I pursue learning on my own. I enjoy the world of academia very much, so when I get a chance to go to speak to classes or universities, I am invigorated again. My veins are just pulsing with excitement to be on campus. As a I grew older, I realized that learning is incomplete the way schools teach it, because there's also learning by the heart - where the greater wisdom happens that is not purely intellectual - something that schools don't pay enough attention to, but life does, and other books, including religious books, address. So in a way, I'm not feeling like I missed out on too much by being alone and not being on campus. That thought gives me some solace and avenue to pursue learning, and I do try to read every single morning. Most of the times I succeed, some of the times sleep takes over, but almost every morning I try to learn through my intellect, through my mind, and through my heart. I try my best to find learning that causes me spiritual growth.

DL: It's tough to navigate alone as an international student. When you were a student, there wasn't a community to support - like an international community, or a religious community?

IH: No, if there was - it wasn't well-highlighted - I didn't feel like I belonged. There were Arab Student Unions, so there were certain activities that attracted me - like international nights or picnics, where we showed off our cultural heritage through plays, etc. - Those were some things that I got involved in as much as I could. But my other life off campus started to pull me away. I started to

find less time. One of those major things was assimilation. I told myself, "You're not living back home, why are you trying to recreate that life? You're in America now, try to be an American and do what America has to offer." I wanted to belong and not to be different - know what the 4th of July is about, and Easter, and some of the holidays. You know, American culture - apple pies and hot dogs. I tried not to be different, to not stick out. I couldn't help but stick out though, because of my color, my name, and so on, but you wanted to minimize that and balance it out with learning to play basketball, watch baseball, picnics, learn more about what Americans do. Along with that, I got my citizenship after I got married and felt like I am a citizen of this country, and I needed to act like one. I also realized that the chances of going back home, especially after the birth of my daughter, became more remote - so the idea of getting a degree and going back to help the family became out of the horizon, out of distance - Those were the things that caused me to want to establish some roots here, and also occupation continuing made me have less of a desire to live under such conditions. So yeah, those two things were continually impacting me and causing me to think about becoming an American citizen and living here for the rest of my life. I lived as a bachelor for a short enough time, but it was tumultuous, because I took on too much - too much credits, teaching Arabic, working a job or two, also wanting to experience the culture. I didn't want to be like other students who put blinders on and simply get a degree. My younger brother did that - came here and then came back; he didn't want to have anything to do with the culture. I was not one of them. It was an interesting era of my life but it was much bigger than just my being a student, there were other factors and influences pulling on me. Like I said that cultural assimilation, setting roots here, having family, all that stuff.

DL: Right. Usually with immigrants that just came here, they sort of have a tension between trying to assimilate and hanging on to their own roots. Can you tell me more about that tension in your own life during this time?

IH: Well, that one never really changes... maybe a little, but it never goes away. You go through different emotional and intellectual phases of sometimes feeling like you are an American, and sometimes that you're still a Palestinian, and at times you're some of each, and sometimes you feel like you're more one way than the other; sometimes I feel like I have two homes, sometimes I feel like I don't belong in either place and that I don't fit. Even though I've been

here for so many years, people still would ask me, "where are you from?" I go, "wait a minute, I've been here for 45 years - I'm from here!" Then they would go, "I mean, you have an accent, you look different, where are you from?" So, you're always going to be an outsider with how you look, and you feel like you're not an original native - you're an immigrant, you'll always look like an immigrant. It depends, after 2001, I felt more of that and also at different times, such as the Iranian hostage situation. During that event, I was called names, even though I'm not Iranian - although I looked close enough. I get comments like, "Hey foreigner, go back to where you came from!" So, I would still feel hostilities. I felt just about every feeling. I felt welcomed, and like I said, during 2001, I felt a sudden feeling of "sticking out." They start looking at you with a different look, then you are reminded pretty clearly that you are not Joe Smith - you don't have blue eyes, blonde hair; you look like something else - you look like the enemy - sort of how the Japanese felt during Pearl Harbor, when they were rounded up and put into camps. I mean, it didn't go that far with me. I did have two bricks thrown at the window and a smoke bomb thrown into my restaurant, people calling me names, but I also had people sending me cards. So, I had both responses from the community that I lived in. You feel both the discrimination and hatred, but you also feel kindness and welcoming. So, you just deal with whatever. You have to process through your mind, your heart, emotions, and move on.

DL: That's true, even though I was born in this country myself, I still do feel at times when I'm an outsider and whatnot. Though, I've never really experienced anything bricks thrown through my window, but I think that usually when those things happen, the people being victimized generally become more pessimistic or hopeless about humanity. You seem to have a different response though. During one of your interviews, you mentioned that there was a mosque being burnt and you used "good" to describe the people who burnt them instead of you know, angry adjectives. In other words, you try to see the good, humane part of the other side. So for you personally, how do you find that will to find the good in humanity? Where does it come from?

IH: Some people threw bricks, but there were also folks who offered a haven for safety. They were a minority, as the overwhelming majority was positive. So, you have to be cognizant - It's not difficult to stay positive, because they outweigh the negative. There are more people who cared and showed their care than hatred - just by that virtue

alone. Secondly, I can find that own bigotry in my culture. It's not an American phenomenon, it's a human phenomenon. In my culture, you have things like "oh, this guy is from another part of country, we don't respect them as much, trust them" etc. So, this is a human condition, and you realize that it exists everywhere. In a sense, that's depressing, but as you study it, you realize that it mostly stems out of ignorance. Then, you realize that there's a chance that through education, those things can be fixed, they can be changed. Then, as you're older, you start to realize that you have to accept the things that you can't change too. You also learn that you can't change all of them, that if you change one little, two person, 10 people, that's okay - that's good enough, you don't have to change all of humanity; you cannot take on too many. You don't have to be the only hero in the world - just do your part, and you feel okay about yourself. That's part of growing up, realizing that I can't eradicate poverty, ignorance, bigotry - as much as I want to. Sexism, all of that stuff that I disagree with. I can't change them. I can do some of it, but not all. The other part about that is not to throw your hands up in the air and just say, "oh! well, this is how it was like since Adam got put on the earth" - especially after you read the old testament, where you see that wars, suffering, sexism, hatred, etc. existed thousands of years ago. Sometimes, that could lead you to assume disability - "this is the way it is, why should I try?" Well, hopefully if you have a life conscience, it doesn't allow you to do that, because one thing I can learn is that I am still responsible to myself and to God. That's why I assume responsibility to realize that I can change it, and if the other person does the same, then changes can happen and have happened throughout history. It wasn't long ago when women weren't allowed to learn and in some places, there is still that. However, that has changed to somebody who may have lived in that era; it was because of one little pebble at a time, then another little pebble, and another - then suddenly, you have something. So learning all of that, you have gained a sense of maturity, and when you're young, you can't learn all of that - some time has to teach you that.

DL: At the time when you got your citizenship, were married, and had your daughter, was this the time that you developed this thinking - or, you mentioned that it developed over time with experience. Could you maybe describe some experiences that lead you to that thinking?

IH: That thinking is also partly genetics too - as in, it's part of my culture, but it sits dormant in you until the

passing of time activates it. Another part is having a wider scope on life, to see different people, different cultures, and others who are also committed to their belief system that goes opposite to your own - and they're not bad people. In the Arab-Israeli issue that I've dealt with, I met such people - people who totally believe in justice and righteousness that goes against the righteousness that I believe in. So, we end up working on issues that we both agree on. They believe 100% that they're right, and I believe 100% that I'm right; yet, we're headed into a conflict anyway. So, you learn that even though you're thinking you're right, doesn't mean that someone else has the same feelings; also, it doesn't mean that they're wrong, and vice versa. Part of growing up also, was when I had my daughter - that adds a new element, a genetic nature sort of element. Now, you're responsible for an entirely new life that is 100% dependent on you, so that fatherhood/motherhood kind of experience that you have - when you add it to other things - those things become secondary, a back burner. This element becomes first - the tenderness and care that derives from playing with a cute little human being replenishes your hope and dreams, goals, care, all those wonderful things that nature puts in us. So you, as a human being, start changing as well. You're not just bent on conquering on the world, making peace between Arabs and Jews - things like that. You have this other very important thing - a baby that sleeps on your chest. It's that feeling that's indescribable of course, but like I said, adds another element to your existence and the way that you behave.

DL: Great. Going back to the timeline - where you had your daughter and have gotten your citizenship, was this when you started the restaurant business too?

IH: Yeah, pretty close to it. About two years later, I also had another child. I started my first owned restaurant - about 36 years ago or so, and of course that's another element of change that adds to your life, because business is in need of energies, attention, etc. - It takes away from your family, but you're doing it for your family. So yeah, responsibilities come, because they need diapers, milk, medical insurance, this and that - so you feel those pressures, it's not only joy that you feel. Other responsibilities and pressures include going to their plays and soccer games. Then, they start becoming their own people and demand more of you and your time. Life just starts to go faster because they grow up so fast. Starting a business, you go really fast through it, because you get consumed by it. When you're small, you're a one man show - so you're the

owner, cook, bookkeeper, purchaser, waiter, human resource department - everything; you're the one and only. Needless to say, that's a lot of work for one person. Then, you add a half time person when you can afford it. Then, you wait for the business to grow, then you add another person. Anyhow, it essentially becomes another child. It needs your attention and care in order for it to succeed. That took me into a different direction - started that business, another one, both concurrently, that one closed, and opened Soriah 22 years ago. The kids got older and wanted to pave their own paths - get college degrees, their doctorates, etc. You become less involved in their lives, because they want you to be; they want to chart their own lives, they don't want to be identified with your life - they want to be identified with who they are. Of course, they were also born here. So, like with your second generation, they don't have the same depth and same experiences as I do. They moved away to other parts of this country, so you see them two, three, six times a year, so business becomes more centered, because you have to earn a living to pay your mortgage and help them with theirs. So it takes a central role, when you own your own business. It seems more so than when you clock in and clock out, or when it's an eight to five thing. I think that in an entrepreneurial life, you're on 24/7. You go home, and if somebody calls in sick, you come to work for them - or when the dishwashing machine doesn't work, you're called in. It's all you. The buck stops here with me. I can't just go, "well, call the boss," because I am the boss, so it's at my doorstep and I have to deal with it.

DL: Yes, I can see that. I work at Sabai, and I just see Tim and Mon busily running the restaurant everyday.

IH: Ah! I see.

DL: Mon, especially, seems to be at work every single day, and I can't imagine how she does it.

IH: Yes! Definitely! I have a lot of respect for people in this industry, because it's very consuming. You have to be very kind to your customers, offering your products, be welcoming and pleasant, and manage your staff to make sure their egos, issues, school and whatnot are balanced, so that when they come to work they give you their best. Also with providers - where to buy meat and vegetables, and so forth. People who call for your charitable contributions, etc. - you have to manage all of that and have to manage it well, otherwise you can't stand up to other competitions. You know, Mon and Tim have a good reputation.

They are in a good place, but not if they didn't work this hard; they couldn't have this reputation - it's not like you can go to a store and buy a reputation, you have to earn it - the same with respect - that's part of their reputation. Cafe Soriah has been here for 22 years, and all the respect that we get in this town day after day, week after week, and year after year, was because we kept working very hard in delivering a good product in a good way - fashioned with good service, honesty, and integrity. Also, just because you make it to the top once, it's not as big of an accomplishment as staying on the top for many years. So that's why, I, like Mon, am here 50 to 60 hours a week, because that's what it takes. There's no cutting corners; there's no one else that cares about your business like you do, even if they're very good people.

DL: Right. Speaking of fashioning a good product in a certain way, I noticed that the concept of your restaurant is pretty unique. I've never seen the owner come out and cook in front of the patrons - it might be because I have not been to very many restaurants, but is that a common concept or is that something that you came up with?

IH: Oh no, it use to be a more common concept before. There were maybe four or five that did a tableside in this town. But now, I'm the only one in this town who does it - There may be one or two in Portland. It considered old world dining, there used to fancy places in old movies where you would see that they bring a cart to your table and carve the roast, or make a Caesar salad in front of you, toss it - it's becoming prohibitive because it's expensive, dangerous - there are many places here that had third degree burns to customers, because of the alcohol and fire. Many accidents - and the insurance becomes prohibitive. I am the only one in town who does that, and when I'm not here, it does not get done. Sunday and Tuesday nights, I take those out. The steaks, prawns, desserts that I make are in the kitchen, I don't allow anybody else to do it, because of danger. I do not take my customers safety for granted. I know how to do it, I've been doing it for years. I know how to be safe with it, I can trust myself, but I can't trust anybody else. Even before I did that, whenever I got the chance, I would come out to say hello, and visit with people because I've built a lot of relationships. I knew them personally, and when I couldn't, they would go in the kitchen and say "hey, how's it going? Great dinner Ib! Nice to see you!" So, they would seek me out because we would establish relationships over the years, so that's very nice. I'm sure Mon and Tim have regulars, and if Mon is not there, people would come and say,

"where's Mon tonight?" They established these personal relationships. When she used to be at Ta Ra Rin, my daughter - who is 13 now and who we have adopted, was just a little four or five months old. Mon would carry her in the kitchen while we were eating and would take her from one person to another, so that we could eat in peace. So we have known her for a long time. When we go there, we always know that Mon would take good care of us. She would know exactly what we wanted. Also Tim, his niece had worked for me for 10 years here, so I know him from that as well. I know how important it is to establish those relationships, because people trust you when they know you well, when they respect you, and they also bring other people to your restaurant.

DL: It seems like many things have influenced your life path so far - experiences, personal relationships - as you have just mentioned, and so forth. But we haven't really discussed much about how the Palestinian/Arab culture may have also subtly or maybe not so subtly influenced you too. Can you tell about the areas in your life where you think that it did come up? Like maybe the way you do the restaurant?

IH: Well, it does actually become a big part of my business. Hospitality is the main thing. I think it's the same with Mon's case. With Mon - you know, that eastern hospitality, the respect for guests, elders, and for food itself - it can't be wasted because it's very precious. That's how you show people that you care about them - you feed them, that's part of my culture. We didn't have drive-thrus, where people can come in and get their food casually. Food was not a casual thing; food was sustenance - it was precious, ubiquitous. Not everyone had food so those of us that had food, especially good food, felt blessed, lucky, and wealthy, and it was the hospitality of culture, the generosity and the spirit of each person to give the food to people that they care about. The mother would give the food to the child instead of giving it to herself. She would prefer their kids to eat it because she cared about them. When guests come over, you want to give them the best food that you have. From a cultural sense, that's what you did. Generosity and hospitality are very important - it's also for reputation. People would talk badly about you if you were stingy, didn't care about your guests, etc. - it would make you embarrassed and ashamed within your own culture because you broke a tradition of how things were done. That part is not - I mean, I don't feel it here - like I wouldn't feel ashamed, but I feel like the food and hospitality should be tied together. You know, just giving food out without care



is not part of how I grew up. I can't get rid of that cultural norm, and I don't want to get rid of it. I prefer that when I cook for my business or for my family, I don't cook it with carelessness - like, "ugh, let's just get it done and over with." - it's just not how I grew up; it doesn't make sense to me; it's not part of who I am. It's nice that it carries over to what I do, and it makes my job a lot easier, because I don't have to get up every morning feeling dread and saying "Oh no, I have to go to work today." You gotta have that attitude, because it's an honor to carry on a tradition that you believe in - providing care and nourishment for people. That's something that God smiles at, and so, it's fulfilling to your mind and to your heart and spirit. You feel like you don't have to be a brain surgeon to feel respect for what you do, because what you're doing is also important, and God smiles on it. You feel very honored and blessed to have a job where you can display your heart, your soul, your culture, your labor of love and creativity - all of that. You have the chance to put them to light and you have this awesome responsibility, as you see people taking the food that you just made and put it into their body, mouth, system - their most precious possession. Then, you see it nourish them. So if you don't think that's an awesome responsibility, then you don't really have a strong commitment to you what you do. You'll just think of, "oh, how much money am I going to make today? Well that's okay, but not the best way to go about that. If you learn that the best money you make is when God is watching everything you do with honesty and care, then your job is easier on you and you're not getting up, hating to go to work. It's more fulfilling because it involves all of your heart, soul, and labor, and you don't feel less of a human being because you are not a professor, a lawyer, or doctor - something that society has a high status symbol placement for. You don't have to wait for society to praise you; You don't have to wait for an award for a name. If someone says, "oh, but he's a cook" [in a condescending tone], I don't feel degraded, I feel more sorry for whoever makes the statement. I mean, do you know what that means for someone to do a job well, whether it's a cook or window washer, stitches, etc.? If they do it well and with heart, they have fulfilled their job. If the world was filled with doctors and lawyers, well - who's going to feed somebody? Fix their broken car? Plant their flowers for them? We can't all be doctors and lawyers. Who is going to raise the sheep? Bake the bread? Plant vegetables and wheat? Life is that way. You don't have to be one as society views it. That's something you learn for age as well, and from culture. Your job is honorable if you do it in an honorable manner. Even as a doctor, if all he cares

about is to make more money from his clinic, then he's the worst of the worse. He's a cheat, liar, thief. A job does not define your honor, it's the way you do your job that defines your honor or lack of, and you learn that by growing up. Anyhow, that's the most fulfilling part, when you do your job well and with care, and others can see it.

DL: Yes. There's another element that I wanted to touch base on before we wrap up this section. In the documentary, there was a story of your friendship with a local Rabbi, Myron Kinberg. Does that friendship also add another element to how your way of thinking now?

IH: Myron Kinberg became my friend through an interview that we had at a live radio on KLCC by a man that just passed recently - a man named John Cooney. That was my first time meeting Myron. We spent time afterwards having coffee and conversing, and that became the beginning of a longtime friendship before he passed away. After that, he, another gentleman of the Christian faith, Don Clark, and I - the three of us started an organization of dialogue about the Middle East issues, Arab-Israeli relations, and especially the religious points of view. We call it the Interreligious Committee in the Middle East. That also helped to cement our relationship, where we would speak in front of groups about the topic and our relationship grew. He and I liked each other. I met his wife and his family, and I had a very sacred dinner at their house. I also ended up catering his only son's Bar Mitzvah, a very significant event in a Jewish person's life at a Synagogue. So it was really big - huge for the Rabbi to have a Palestinian Muslim come in and cater his son's Bar Mitzvah. It opened a lot of eyes in the community. Then, his son came and worked for me while studying at the university. I also did his daughter's Bat Mitzvah and wedding. He and I also played basketball with one another. So, he and I knew each other on different levels. He also went to visit with my family back home, so we got to know each other through there too. Our friendship was aside from the Arab-Israeli issue or the community. It was not for show so that people could go "oh my god, isn't that wonderful? Two enemies are friends." No, it was simply because he was a kind man with a big heart, and it was a natural, organic growth of a friendship, and not made up for public consumption, I think that's why it made such a big impact on me, him, and the community - more on the community. It was natural to us - it didn't feel weird, fake, or the thought of "oh, but we're enemies" didn't really come up. There were some things that we disagreed on, but we generally agreed on civility and the respect of others' opinions - not having to agree with

the other person to like them. I think that it was this understanding between us that made a big impact on the community. It's the genuineness of the friendship, the organic nature of it - it was not for show. It held up even after he died, as I still keep in touch with his family. When they come into town, they would always look me up. It's not over. His picture is in my office and home, not because I want to tell people about it, but because I loved that man. I genuinely had a care that was natural. I totally didn't love him because he was Jewish or more if he wasn't Jewish - he was simply a nice man that I saw lovable things that invaded my heart and that I didn't have to justify it or intellectualize it - he was just an easy person to like. It was mutual. So people like that, when you cross paths with them, you cherish those memories. He's not the only one that I would cherish, but he was one of them. You cherish it, you value it, whether they are here are not. One of my friends also died about five years ago, and he was like a brother to me; yet all those memories and spirit are very alive and well. Whenever, I think about them it just puts a smile on my face. Myron was just one of those people that earned his way into my heart.

#### **Section: The Returns to Palestine**

Interviewer: Dawn Le  
Interviewee: Ibrahim Hamide  
Date: 2/3/2015  
Setting: Cafe Soriah  
Transcriber: Dawn Le

[Transcriber's note: Filler words (i.e. "uhs" and "ums"), repeated words, and the interviewer's backchanneling have not been transcribed for the purposes of readability.]

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*Interviewer initials: [DL]*  
*Interviewee initials: [IH]*

DL: This section is about the times that you've visited Palestine. Could you tell me about what those trips were like?

IH: I don't think I remember the years. There were some periods that I went maybe every three years or so, but as I started my own business, it became more difficult to leave for an extended period of time. I also started to value vacation time. So, I would have to choose between going to Mexico for two weeks to take care of myself and relax, being

with family, etc., or going back. So I always had to prioritize, saying, "okay, this year we're going to Mexico and then maybe I can go back in three more years." There were some events, like when my father got sick, where we had to go back to see him because we thought that he was on his death bed - in 1995, for instance. I think that I went with my brother, daughter, and brother's family. All of us that could go went. Other times, I went by myself - one time I went with my son, and each time is different because of the years that have passed and also the conditions - family conditions, as well as political conditions. As things became more difficult politically, it became less attractive for me to go - the interrogations and security issues, always having to have your papers with you, being limited to go here and there because of checkpoints - You know, difficulties. So, I did go once at least during the Intifada, I'm not sure if that was 1987 or - I feel ashamed for not knowing - it's just that times seem to run into each other. I think I was by myself at that time, but it was interesting to witness the greatest uprising that the Palestinians have ever had, how Israelis reacted to it, and tensions. This time in late August, after the Gaza War, you could see the tension, extra security - all of that. You can see the progression and how things have not gotten better, they've gotten worse. And it's sad, because there have been so many tries like Camp David, Oslo, and all of these things. But now, you can see more entrenchments in the two different camps - Positions are getting harder. People are going "no, we want all this land," or "no, we will not allow this," - that kind of stuff. More of the conservative, right wing parties are taking hold of this situation, and the chances for peace and reconciliation are becoming more dim all the time - that can't help, but make you sad. You know, sometimes in these situations, you feel like I'm more on this camp than that camp, but as I have worked on the Arab-Israeli conflict many times with different groups, my position has been more moderate, realizing that taking different camps doesn't solve the issue, just makes it worse. One has to be near the fence to be able to see both sides more clearly. It's not like one side has a point and the other one doesn't, they have their arguments, and they're legitimate. You start to look for a place where you're comfortable, and the fence at a lot of times is not a comfortable place. My place of comfort is human rights and justice, so I don't care who it falls to, it doesn't know Arabs or Jews, justice is justice. If there are human rights that are not being respected, then they need to be respected. It's that simple. So if Palestinians are not respecting the rights of the Israelis, they need to respect

that, and if the Israelis are not respecting the rights of the Palestinians, then they need to respect that. So that's my position now. So I'm less angry, and passionate, thinking that "We have to do this, we are right and they are wrong." Now, I'm more baseline on human rights. I don't care who claims righteousness or who claims power. You are in violation of human rights if you don't allow them religious freedoms, travel, etc., then you're at fault. I don't care who you are. It doesn't matter to me - Palestinians or Israelis. If Palestinians are killing innocent people, then they are at fault. That doesn't matter who does it, it's human rights. I'm comfortable with that - comfortable with that position because I am not siding with the Israelis, and I am not siding with the Palestinians - I am siding with justice and human rights. I don't have to react to the events, such as, "oh - this guy shot this guy, and say, "okay, so am I going to switch sides because this guy is wrong and this guy is right?" No, my position is clear. When I see that someone has defended their family and home, they have an internationally recognized right to self-defense. So stop attacking them, stop abusing them. Before you ask them to stop biting you, kicking you, throwing rocks at you, stop attacking them. Before you ask them to stop defending themselves. I follow justice, human rights, and restorative justice, abiding by international laws, Geneva Conventions, Geneva Resolutions, etc. The Palestinians haven't had a state of their own, and negotiations fail and fail on purpose at often times, I believe. They're designed to fail, designed to just have a life of their own to continue to be negotiations, never results. They get frustrated - saying they've negotiated for 20 years, and their situation on the ground has not improved one bit. Meanwhile, you guys took more of our land and built homes for Jews only, so we're going to seek the International Court of Law. We're going to ask for the UN to ask for recognition of the state, and Israel goes, "Well if you do that we're going to stop talking to you." We say, "Well, you've been talking to me you haven't been doing anything. You've been talking and talking - not anything." They'll say, "Well, I haven't succeeded because there's Hamas, and you're not all one unit, and I don't know who to talk to and who's the real boss." So, those guys (PLO, Hamas, etc.) try to come together and make peace, one government, and then they go, "Oh, if you guys talk to those people, we won't talk to you because they're terrorists." So, the political situation is a mess, and it continues to be a mess, whether by design or not. There are many arguments, many different opinions on that - so my position again goes to human rights - We say, "wait a minute, you're taking their

land, that's illegal. They'll say, "Well, God gave it to us 5,000 years ago in the Torah." I'll go, "Well, I'm sorry, we're not ruling with the Torah, we're ruling with human rights here - that's their land. You either buy it from them, but you can't take it by force. Do they have freedom of travel? No, you rule them. Do they have the same freedoms as you have?" The golden rule is this- "Would you accept it if you were in their position. No? Well then you're at fault". So that's how I see it now, it's justice like God, Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed says. When the Rabbi was asked to summarize the Torah, he said, basically "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." He says that this statement summarizes the whole Torah - the rest is commentary. Well, if that's the whole Torah, and Jesus and Islam and all those three say the same thing, then that is justice - why are you not following that? Why do you want that land and not giving it to them, why do you want political freedom, but not for them? Do you accept to switch places? If not, then you're not being just. So, that's how I see the situation.

DL: This perspective, did you develop it from visiting Palestine, reading the news, or books?

IH: No, it's all of that. It's from working, I used to be with the underdog, the abused people, which is a component of justice, but it didn't appear the same way. I was more easily moved to one place or another like chess pieces, but now I found a place where I'm comfortable, that doesn't care what nationality you are, what flag you fly, it cares about justice for human beings - not for Israelis or Palestinians, so I learned it through experience, through living, trying other methodologies, looking at this side or that side, trying to find a political solution, religious solution, trying to understand it from different angles. Since I did find it in religion, according to the Torah, that land some believe that God gave it to them and it can't be negotiated. They're right to give it away - so that totally kills the argument of other people sharing the land. From a historical perspective, the Palestinians have been living there for 1,400 years, so how do you deal with that? It's almost like Native Americans coming to tell the white man, "Look we would like you to leave now - We've been here before you, now you've been here for 200 years, that's enough - now, go away. We were here first." Is that practical? Is that just? So if you apply the same thing with the Arab-Israeli issue: "We [Jews] were there 5,000 years ago, we were thrown out a couple times by the Romans and the Greeks, now we just came back home to reclaim our land. Sorry that you've been here for 1,500 years." So yeah, I feel personally that

religious solution is not viable, especially in Israel where they say the constitution that's not based on the Torah. Israel is generally secular at least in politics, maybe their heart is religious, maybe they all believe that God gave this land and no one else should be here. I don't know, I didn't take a survey of hearts or religious beliefs, but when surveys are taken, only 70% roughly speaking want peace with the Palestinians. Many want to see a two state solution, but facts are that this is not happening. They have been negotiating for 22 years, and it came to nowhere. With every new Israeli gov., rules change, desires change, roles, and with this government, Netanyahu's - many Israelis will tell you, he's not interested in peace. So violations of Palestinians' rights continue to happen everyday. The world just sits there, doesn't do anything about it, and Israel doesn't do anything about, and whenever the Palestinians go to the international organizations for recognitions, Israel and the US vetoes and gets mad, so things look bleak and looks very bad for the Palestinians. I believe without Israel's active desire and participation in assuring the Palestinians have human rights, it will not happen, and I very much don't see that happening with the current government of Israel. At one point, it did come close when Rabin was president of Israel. There was almost a peace accord, and one Israeli came and shot him as he spoke, and killed that perspective. So sometimes it looks like it's destiny or some higher power at work, I'm not really sure, but all those thoughts have come through my thinking, so only time will tell.

DL: That's true. Thank for sharing the insightful views. Going back to the topic of your own travels to Palestine, could you tell me what your first time was like?

IH: I think there was, I'm not sure if it was my first time, but one of the first times at least - I got stripped search by a security person in a little booth where he asked me to strip completely with a detector between my armpits and legs, and I got furious. "WHY ARE YOU doing this?" So he and I, we went through this thing where I said, "you are dehumanizing me - you are being nasty and mean, then he says, "no no, I'm just doing my job, don't be embarrassed, I'm just a man like you. Then I say, "no you're not, you're not like me. I'm a man, you're a robot. "You just take orders, and you put metal detectors here - what do you think I'm hiding, and where do you think I'm hiding it?" He says, "Oh it's orders." Then I go, "See see, you are mindlessly following orders. I have a conscience, you don't have a conscience." I was really pissed. Then, he took my money as he was running out of

arguments, then he took it to the light and was sort of proud of himself. Then he goes, "you know why I'm doing this?" And I said, "No, but I'm afraid you're going to tell me right?" Then he says, "Yes. The terrorists and PLO write special codes on this and special ink that doesn't show, and when I put it to the special light it shows." Then I say, "Oh woow. How impressive [sarcastically]. Look, I paid foreign tuition at the University of Oregon. I'm an educated Palestinian, not a dumb Palestinian, so don't pull that stuff on me." He says, "oh wow - what do you mean?" I said, "Look, if I wanted to smuggle codes for the terrorist PLO organization, why don't I put it inside my head by memory because if I can remember 300 phone numbers, I can remember 2,000 lines of poetry, why can't I remember a code or two or three or four, so how will you check against that?" Then he goes, "well you are a very smart, nice man. I wish I had time after my shift. We can have coffee." I say, "I don't want coffee, I just want you to leave me alone so that I can go to my family. I'm trying to get to them." Anyhow, that left a very strong impression because he and I argued. I say, "how would you feel if you were just coming here to do your flag service to keep your citizenship -" because he was from Sweden or somewhere, I don't remember - "you see, I was born over those hills in Bethlehem, and my father was born there, so was his father and so forth, and I come here to my land and you search me, and you're not even from here? How do you feel about that? Don't you feel a dichotomy?" So, I remember that visit because it made my blood boil. [laughs] Then, I remember another visit where I went with my daughter, where I told her, "look, they're going to take us out of the lineup, take us through and interrogate us - asking, "who packed your bags," why are you here, etc. and ask separate questions. Then, her, being born here, rolled her eyes said, "Dad, you're just being paranoid. They're not going to do that." Then sure enough, they did exactly what I just told her. And even this last time in August, they took us away and interrogated us. Again, this is with American passports, so it's never a pleasant visit. I know they do this under the name of security, and I don't blame them for being security conscious, but I also believe that some of it is plain harassment, so that it makes you not want to go back there because some of them are really stupid questions. You know, like - "why are you going to see your family?" Well, why do people go and see their family? Because they like them? because they miss them? because they're getting old? You know, would you just shut up and leave me alone? Have some respect. Don't harass me. You feel the degrading looks, they feel that you're an enemy, can't be trusted, that you're here to hurt them, even if you're a grey-haired old man or a



little girl that's 12 years old. So you definitely feel picked on. You don't feel that it's legitimate stuff. Some if it is, I'm sure - they search your bags, search your purse, what else can you do - you start interrogating me? You start violating my human rights at that time, including when you already searched everything I have, including my body? What other - how could I be a threat to you - my thoughts? So it's never pleasant, and you see your family and the conditions that they live under, so that really makes you sad - it comes home with you. My 13 year-old daughter who went with us, she's still very annoyed, upset about how unfair the occupation is. She's never been political in her life ever, and now she is upset - the way that the Palestinians, the family especially, are treated, how they can't go to Jerusalem, can't do this - that, schools shut down, homes can be raided, all the human rights violation. So yeah, it's very sad. You see flourishing cities, and you see Palestinian cities, and they're not flourishing. So I come back sad, usually. I see different conditions that Palestinians live compared with how Israelis live, and I feel the injustice, the indignation, and all of that. You can't help them because the biggest things that they need is freedom and human rights, and you can't give that to them. Then of course, the other side is that you get to see them, fill your heart with love and the relationships that you have with your brother and sister, nieces, nephews - so that's the good part. Sad parts are separation walls, how they live, the hatred from both sides. My god, will those people will ever get along? If you look a little further, you can see some positive signs, like Israeli organizations that work for peace, and Palestinian ones, and you see some collaborations, so there are some good things, but the overwhelming conditions are sad, discouraging.

DL: With that said, I talked about the Palestinian immigrant/ refugee experience, the reason why I said refugee is because I read article that it is an honor to be identified as a refugee - have you heard about that?

IH: Yeah, sure. I'm not sure how I feel about that. The reason it is considered an honor is because it shows people's commitment to their homelands, that they never forget, that they won't say "oh, yeah yeah, I am assimilated, I am not refugee. I am Jordanian now, or Lebanese," - that many of them still carry the keys to their homes that they were forced out of in 1948, and their children carried the same message that, "oh, our home was in Jaffa, in some towns that don't exist anymore and were wiped out and rebuilt under new Israeli names. It's where "we have a history and culture,

heritage somewhere else, and we're not here, we're not Jordanians, or Lebanese refugees" - so they have the pride and honor that they know who they are, and they kept their traditional dances, etc. culture, dresses, the way they farm, carried that through and taught identity so that they don't forget who they are. I think that it is very parallel to the Jews, when they live in Austria or Poland or Germany, they taught their children that their heritage is Jewish and that they eat Kosher foods, and that they dreamt for years and years of returning to a promised land. So there is a parallel experience on the Jewish side that they dreamt of returning to their homes. Of course, that is part of the agenda of negotiations, is the fate of refugees, which is one of the most difficult ones, in addition to the status of Jerusalem and some water rights that keep being pushed off to the edge, let's talk about something else because it's easier to deal with than refugee status. The Palestinians feel that the only thing they have to hang on to is their pride in embracing the refugee status, as it gives them something to call their own and that no one can take from them. In some countries of course, they accorded them that status according to law. The Jordanians would have Palestinians as being second citizens, because they don't consider them citizens, but consider them temporary guests. Of course, many arguments come from the Israeli and Jewish side - "Oh, see - they're helping them, and they're brothers. Look at how they still put them in refugee camps." Well, part of it was because the Palestinians wanted to return, they didn't want to assimilate in Syria or Jordan. Secondly, those countries are not very wealthy countries. They can barely take care of their own citizens, you want them to take care of us? And why? Isn't the responsibility on the country that made them refugees? So it is all just finger pointing so that you don't have to take on the responsibility yourself. Very fallacious arguments. You know, "the Saudis are rich, why don't they give them some money." Obviously it's just pointing fingers elsewhere, so that you don't have to point fingers at yourself. Those refugees we were not like the Bedouins in Jordan. We were farmers, tended orange trees and avocado trees, so we tended a different life. Our culture is different, it's not the same as each other. So we are identifiably different with the Saudis, the Jordanians, Syrians, or Lebanese, and everyone is asking us to go away so that we don't have to deal with you. So, some of them still live in refugee camps because the countries could not absorb them. Of course, some of them went up the ladder of education and became ministers, 70% of Jordan is Palestinian, so to say that they didn't help the Palestinians is crazy. The wife of the king is Palestinian, and they've been in every facet,

from engineers to teachers, parliamentarians, etc. They have the same upward mobility that any Jordanian has, and now they don't even have different status in citizenship in their papers. They changed that in certificates, and people started to point out - "See, they discriminate against them." No, they wanted them to not forget their roots and where they came from, so like you said, it was like an honor for them to be a refugee. But there's more pain than honor because they're living in miserable conditions. They become insufferable to whatever the country's political agenda becomes. Recently, they got killed by numbers because they got accused of siding with this or that, and so they're at the mercy at the countries that they live in, so it's not all glamor or glory.

DL: But for you personally, I guess you mentioned that you don't really know how to feel about this, but could you maybe elaborate more on what you think about the idea for yourself?

IH: For myself, there is a real sadness that I can't go back home. That, I cannot if I chose, to be buried with my ancestors, that I am not accorded to the choice. Most likely, I will be denied that choice. So there's a sadness that that choice won't be available to me. I have made a personal choice to abandon nativity, homeland. I feel that the world is my home, and that's something that I had to garner and work on myself. I personally became against flags. I don't like to belong to this flag or that flag. The flag of God is the only flag for me, and God created the whole universe. For some people to carve it, like "this is my territory, my place, don't come near it, etc.," I think it's crazy - I think we haven't figured out a better system, so we use that system, but personally, I don't think that I need to have a specific territory as my home. I believe that America could be my home just as back home could be my home. My home is where my heart is, not where I was born, although there is an affinity for that because your first years of your life - you have memories - but now, I have lived more years here than I have at home, so at times I feel I am lucky, like I have two homes, and at times there is a sadness because I feel like I don't belong in either place. Like, if I go back there I wouldn't fit anywhere because I have changed so much that I would stick out there like a sore thumb. And I feel like that here too, there are some events that I would stick out like a sore thumb again. So I feel like I'm in no man's land, but I also can rise above that and say, "you know what, it is no man's land, it belongs to God and I belong anywhere. I could go live in Vietnam, I could live in Chile, Serbia, I could live anywhere and feel that it's God's land, it's my

land, it doesn't belong to anyone, it belongs to all of us, to humanity, and that's a personal belief that constantly needs nurturing and support. Because if, for instance, I go to live in China, then they will look at me like I'm a foreigner and I don't belong there, but then I would have to deal with that. I go to Vietnam, and I would have to learn that culture, food, customs, and they would look at me like I'm a stranger, so I would have to endure something. But you know what, even in my home, I endure something. So it really isn't anything abnormal - it's your ability to tolerate and endure what you want to endure. There are many Americans that live somewhere else, Mexico or Europe - not because they hate their home, but because they love Mexico, they love Italy, etc., - love the weather, culture, etc. So I am much more that way. The Arab-Israeli issue has not gotten such a hold on me to where it occupies me, and that's one thing that I always try to remember. Just because they occupy my land, they cannot occupy my heart, and my being, my thoughts, and how I act. I will not let anybody except God, love, and good things occupy my heart. I don't want it to be filled with anger, hatred, mistrust, because I live with it all the time, because I sleep with it, wake up with it, have it with me all the time, I don't want somebody else to tell me how that heart should be except for myself, and hopefully, that can derive from what I put in there from higher places, not from the government of Israel or the government of Palestine, America, etc., but from something that's from a higher place than any government can ever aspire to be, but from the goodness, the teachings of Jesus, teachings of Moses, teachings of Mohammed, teachings of Martin Luther King, the great teachers - where love conquers hate. That's what I would like to have in my heart, so whenever I find some spots, I try to clean it out and put something good in there. Like when I'm ill, I try to replace it with health. You know, it's a lifelong process. It's not like my heart is perfect, it needs constant care and updates. It needs constant nurture. So here I go! (laughs). I continue on that trail.

DL: Well, I believe that's a perfect ending to all these interviews. [laughs]

IH: [laughs] Good! I'm very glad to hear that.

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