

Narrator: Suriyaan Hussein  
Interviewer: Laura Prahash  
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Laura Prahash: Alright! Um, my name is Laura Prahash, it's Thursday the 7th of May 2020 in California, or Friday the 8th of May for me in New Zealand. Today I'll be interviewing Suriyaan Hussein via Zoom call for the UCSD Race and Oral History project.

LP: Could you please read out the paragraph I sent you?

Suriyaan Hussein: Yes, let me open it.

[pause]

SH: Ok, I don't see it

SH: I don't see anything in the chat right now. could you send it again?

LP: One second.

SH: Ok. I the interviewee Suriyaan Hussein, hereby trans, transfer to the University the rights to publish, duplicate and otherwise use the recordings, and trans, and transcribed interviews and any photographs and or videotaped footage taken during the interview. This includes publication rights in print and electronic form, such as on the Internet, the right to rebroadcast the interview or portions thereof, and perm and permission to transfer the interview to future media.

LP: Cool, thank you. Alright. Could you please state your full name, and your date and place of birth?

SH: Uh Suriyaan, uh Hussein.

LP: Mhmm

SH: And my uh place, and uh the other one?

LP: Date of birth

SH: 5 12, 1999, and Columbus, Ohio

LP: Cool. Could you tell me your ethnic background, and where you are currently based?

SH: I live in San Diego California, and my family originated from uh, Somalia. Both my parents are born and raised in Somalia.

(1:50)

LP: Awesome. So on that note, could you tell me a bit about your family or family history?

SH: Um, uh, both my mom and my dad are from Somalia, both Somalis. And what I, what I know of that is that they did leave due to the civil war in Somalia. And they came to America to find a better life and to escape that war.

LP: Mhmm. So when, do you know like what year your parents came to the US, and did they come straight to Southern California?

SH: Uh, I don't know what year they came but I do know they have like, they got married in Ohio and had me in Ohio.

LP: Mhmm.

SH: So I do know they met in Ohio and moved over to here, like I think in 2001, 2002.

LP: Mhmm. Um, how do you think they dealt with the process of migration, like do you know if they experienced culture shock?

SH: Yeah definitely, like they still, they still are, like they say so much things are different, like they say raising kids here is so different to raising kids in Somalia. [unclear] They talk about how they were raised differently and how over there, it's, it's not as, especially today with technology, [unclear] America it's a whole different country. It's like, they're like, they're going, it's like their first time, themselves, like even though it's their first time having kids in general, it feels like it's a whole new experience for them, different compared to [pause] how they were raised.

(03:23)

LP: Alright. So, um, can you tell me about any family traditions or customs that like your parents have kept with them?

SH: Um, I know a lot of our customs go through, like go through our religious, our religion cuz we're Muslim and uh one of them, that's the Ramadan, how [unclear] Muslims in a group fast together and I guess like you guys [unclear] our two holidays, and that's like, that's when, the, that, that unity of and, the food, the food I think is the biggest part of the culture that came with them because I do know how to make some of the food, so yeah, and the clothing, they still wear the same clothing as they would in Somalia.

LP: Cool. So, what's something that, like, that is, do you, sorry. What's something you think is cool or unique about your culture, like something you enjoy?

SH: Ummm, that I enjoy, I think, cuz I really enjoy, uh is the food, and just like how errybody comes to the family, and we don't, like if I just see a Somali on the streets, I'll say "What's up" to them, or even if it's like, uh, we have like a get-together, errybody really comes together and like, it's, like my six cousins or like my fifth or fourth cousin will be someone kinda like a sibling to me.

LP: Mmm. Cool. On that note, do you have any siblings?

SH: I have one.

LP: Ok. Um, and you mentioned about the food, like is there, is it something that you enjoy like eating, or like you enjoy making, or just the process of like getting together?

SH: Uh both. I enjoy making the food, cuz I help my mom sometimes, I also enjoy eating it, cuz there's like a big variety each of them, and also like the meats, the sweets, the rice, the pasta, all of it, I li- I like it.

LP: What's, can you tell me what your favourite dish is? Or-

SH: You probably might've heard of it, it's called sambusa.

LP: Mhmm!

SH: It's like-

LP: What is it?

SH: If uh If it's like, it's like called sambusa. I'd mimic it to like a, like a tortilla, it's in a triangle shape, has meat inside of it, and it's not so much to eat but it's like, it's very common to have, for us to eat. Like um

LP: I think I've had them before, they're actually really good.

SH: Yeah, the triangle ones. Yeah.

LP: And on the opposite end, like what's something that your parents, your family, or your community do that you don't like?

SH: Don't like?

LP: If anything.

SH: Uh [pause] I mean it's not really I don't like, but I do [unclear] since I did come growing up, I mean it's not big or anything because they were like quite new to the country, maybe like helping me with different like English homework, or helping me with social studies, or subjects that they weren't familiar with, I had to kinda go ask my tutors [unclear]

(06:30)

LP: So, you mentioned earlier about Ramadan, and since we're currently celebrating it right now, could you tell us a little bit more about that? And what does that look like when you participate?

SH: Uh, since this whole COVID thing going on it's different this year, (Mhmm) and I'll tell you about the regular Ramadan what it's about, and usually what we do is we fast for 30 days and the fasting is basically where when the sun first comes up, you don't eat food until the sun goes down, and then you repeat the cycle for 30 days and in those 30 days you're supposed to be close to the religion, break bad habits, stop doing bad things that you might've usually do, and then just like come in close with your religion. So I mean, it's a, it's a, it's a lovely thing cuz that's when, that's more time, the most time where everybody will come to the mosque and a lot of times people will be like, that's that's we we we consider that's like the holiest month of the year

LP: Mmm. So how does that look different this year because of COVID-19?

SH: Uhh, because usually we do stay home for Ramadan a lot, but since um we're um, we go to...we're going to, we're going to the mosque a lot going to the mosque a lot during ramadan, we pray nightly prayers we pray during the day but now all of that is ruined now, because we can't, we can't leave the house because the mosques are all closed

LP: Mmm. So does this mean you guys are praying from home instead?

SH: Yeah, we- we still try to pray from home, but [pause] I mean the whole point is to kinda come together, as a you know, to have that, to pray like more as in a group cuz that's what's recommended. But yeah, we still we still do we still do pray at home, a lot of us.

(08:20)

LP: Uh, let's go on a slightly different tack. So, could you tell me, like, a bit about yourself? Like, what are you interested in, what are your hobbies?

SH: Uhh, myself, well, my free time and most time either working out, playing video games, or play basketball? And that's a lot of uh and also about myself is that I do go to school right now, and I'm studying Speech Pathology, I'm a Communications major.

LP: Sweet. Sooo, could you tell me more about your experiences at school? Like, that could be high school, elementary school, college.

SH: Uhhmm, [pause] I went to school in San Diego all throughout, nowhere else, uhh, other than that, I mean I went to school called Preuss, and the high school called Preuss and now i'm going to a school called Mesa, and i'm hopefully trying to transfer to SDSU, like next year.

LP: So, you mentioned earlier about like, having to ask tutors for help with like schoolwork and stuff.

SH: Mhmm

LP: Did you feel like [pause] that put you [pause], like, how do you feel like that set you apart versus like other students in terms of like...

SH: Uh, I mean

LP: Do you know what I mean?

SH: Minorities had the same problem so I knew i wasn't like /that/ different, like I had, I had cousins and my friends from different backgrounds who had the same problem, so I wasn't too surprised, but at the same time it was kinda frustrating, but at the time I was used to it and it was [unclear] I didn't even notice it at one point anymore. I would simply ask for help from my school or something, so it wasn't it wasn't that bad.

(10:14)

LP: Ok, so, um how's college been like for you so far? You mention you study speech pathology, any reason why?

SH: Yeah, college has been good, I mean it's a lot of, it's a lot of viewing yourself, if you don't have no one here's not really no one telling you go do [unclear], like high school, middle school so I mean, that's the biggest thing in difference? [pause] But yeah, it's not too bad, uh, I mean, right now I've been taking a lot of classes to boost my GPA to go hopefully I'll transfer next year, by the end of the year.

LP: And, what was your choice for studying speech pathology?

SH: Umm, [pause] kinda cause I wanna uh, my aunt first introduced me to it, and then now I kinda really enjoy and lot looking through it [unclear] interested a bit, because you do get to help people, uh, a lot of kids, and people that have strokes, kids and also kids [pause] with speech impediments and problems they have with speeching, with speaking. [long pause] That's a bit of where my interest came from.

LP: Cool. Aside from UWEAST, are you involved with any other clubs, or organisations, or groups?

SH: Ummm, nah, not new groups, I think like the only group I've been, I've been with them for a while, since I was in middle school or maybe even elementary school, but uh, any other groups? Not that I can think of right now, no.

(11:49)

LP: Alright. So on UWEAST, could you tell us like what UWEAST is? Like, what is it short for, what do they do?

SH: It stands for United Women of East Africa, and the reason it's women because they [unclear] are like one of the ones that started the group, so like we were based off uh, I don't know I think my mom was also part of it, like based off a lot of people who came together around a common, they wanted like a common safe space for their kids, and for the community. And so they've been, like they do things such as tutoring, they help fund basketball events, they help um things for girls, boys, older people [pause] basically everyone. And they help with families also, not just kids. So there's [unclear] Somalis too.

LP: Um, what, what's your affiliation with the organisation?

SH: I came in as someone that used to be used to be in the program, I used to get tutored, I used to go to events and on field trips and all that, and now I've started working with them and helping run the basketball league and sometimes helping with tutoring. Also, help them with different events, recruitment, that's one big thing - I help bring new kids, bring some of the boys that I know into the programme.

LP: So, do you mostly bring in other kids from like around your community, where you live, or?

SH: Uh, yeah, I suppose, uh, mostly but a lot are like, that's one thing I do a lot, is that I do bring, I do call up some say like high school kids that would not come out usually, or some people my age that usually stay home, that don't when they like, when someone that, when someone they know calls them up, they're more likely to come than someone they don't, so that's my job.

LP: So, how and when did you find out about the organisation? I think you mentioned earlier that you found out when you were a child?

SH: Yeah, I think my mom was uh, was in the early, when it first first started. So it was like uh, um, so it was her that I like, I kinda heard about all these new programmes opening up, so that's when I first kinda heard it, and then ever since I just knew about it.

LP: And, what do you think about UWEAST? Like do you like it?

SH: A hundred percent. I think, I [unclear] now looking at it now [unclear] we don't really have the main, like we still have programs running through Zoom, so now looking at it as, we don't have anything going on in the duration, like I think there's this big gap in our community, a big hole, because a lot of the time that's when kids come together that's why a lot of people tell me "When is it going to open up", so it's a much needed thing in our community, that's what I think right now.

(14:42)

LP: Cool. Um, so that ties into my next question, and we talked about how UWEAST is affected by COVID-19, but how has your everyday life been affected?

SH: Well, I mean school for one. Working out, I can't work out anymore, uh, the whole thing is Ramadan, I can't do Ramadan, a lot of the times I can't see I can't go out with my parents, I can't work in the house if I wanted to, my brother's graduation just got cancelled, so his highschool, he was a senior, so both for me and a lot of people I know as well, so yeah. I mean it's just like, this is just like a big stop, this is this is like a timeout in like everyday life.

LP: So what does a normal day look like for you now?

SH: Honestly now, what I would what I would do is like, most times I wake up, and then um, I wake up, I do homework, check if I have an assignment to do, handle that, and by usually 7:30 that's when we break our fast, I'll eat until like 8:10 maybe, and after that I'll usually just check my phone and I'll hop on I'll hop on video games until I go to sleep. And I and I workout towards the end, right before I knock out. And I eat my food again, right before the sun goes up, and I start Ramadan all over, start fasting.

LP: And you, mentioned that UWEAST right now was having a big gap because of the COVID-19 situation. How has the way that you interact with it changed? Are you still contacting people?

SH: Oh yeah, uh, I mean most (clears throat) Part of my job was to bring more, to recruit more people, uh, cuz like in our community we still have meetings with uh a lot of the kids, and like Faiza will ask me to bring a lot of the boys to help um to come on over and help, a lot of the boys to bring them into the meetings, cuz we still have meetings, we still have like groups every two weeks checkups and stuff and that's my, part of my job, is to help bring in more and more kids, because I love kids.

(17:06)

LP: Um, what's your favourite thing to do now in lockdown?

SH: Honestly, workout and play video games. Those two. I can't, I can't really play basketball anymore cuz the courts are closed, working out and playing basketball, working out and playing video games

LP: And what have you learnt as a result of being stuck at home, like it could be a skill, it could be like something like an idea

SH: Um [pause] A lesson that I learnt that I kinda already knew is the fact that like don't take things for granted, with a lot of people, they don't like, a lot of people don't wanna go to school, or they don't want they don't want a lot of things, but now [unclear] they don't have all this so easily like accessible to them, they're missing stuff out, like they're missing out on going to school, missing out on going outside, interacting with people. Honestly, don't take the small things for granted.

(18:03)

LP: So, I wanted to go back to something that's come up a lot in your answers. It seems like you're quite passionate about community and fellowship with other people. Um [pause] could you tell me more about that?

SH: The whole community thing?

LP: Yeah, or just like, you seem to be quite community oriented like

SH: I mean yeah, I mean, I think I think I just comes from me being in other people's shoes once, cuz personally I don't like to just stay at home and just do nothing, cuz a lot of the things I [unclear] basketball league, or like people coming out to the, the hall, a big part of, the reason I do a lot is is cuz it's just, it's something to do, and it's better, I like, I like, I like ki- I'd rather kids do that than like something they can get in trouble for. So um, cuz I was in it once, as a kid, it was it was it was it would've been easy for me to do something dumb, or do something that could've gotten me in trouble, or something that I would've regret. But I mean the hall did help in me not like, not making those dumb choices.

LP: Cool. So-

SH: Yeah, that's one of the reasons I think I'm so, I [unclear] for the community so much

LP: And, when you're involved in the community, is that mostly other Somalis, or like other people from different ethnicities?

SH: East Africans. I mean a big portion that I know are Somalis, that's that's usually, I say usually but I do know other East Africans such as Sudanese people, Ethiopians, Eritreans, and like, you know, and in general those those three races are also, but we're not considered a somali group like, like the name is United Women of East Africa, but more East Africans in general.

LP: Cool. Mmm, [pause] just thinking [pause] So, if we go back to what you were [pause] talking about with your parents and adjusting and stuff, do you think that UWEAST has affected your, like how has UWEAST affected your family beyond just you?

SH: Uh my brother is also in the program, my mom works for them, so I think, uh, it helped to bring an anchor to the family also, so we could like, pay for bills, and also not like, I mean, since she does interact with people that are not only Somali, I could say maybe it helped her like kind of get in tune with uh with this country even more.

(20:46)

LP: Cool. Um, so [pause]. What do you, this is kind of more abstract, but like, um, what do you think it means to be, like, American, as somebody with immigrant parents and very immersed in this other culture, what does that -

SH: Um [pause], I don't really know [unclear] like the whole thing with the American Dream and being American in general. It's kinda confusing but I mean what I've got from it now being born and raised here, is I guess, in America I guess, what everybody [unclear] is a hard-working citizen, a law-abid, like a law-abiding citizen, which is ironic but [pause] I mean just someone who works for their, for their goals and their dreams. I consider that the ideal American citizen.

LP: And, how do you think [pause] after the whole COVID-19 is settling done, or maybe it's not - like how do you think your community is going to adapt over the coming months?

SH: I think, I think the community like and the world in general, a lot of things is gonna change, like cuz now I mean, small things, from people how they interact together, to how we go about things now on, like in terms of hygiene and such, that'll definitely change. But, so I think for our community definitely we might have to, since we took a break from a lot of the things we did, we might have to get, it might take us a little bit to just get back in tune, to get back and stuff

(22:34)

LP: Cool. Um, now if we turn back to you, do you know what you want to do in the future? Like not necessarily career and such, but like your future

SH: Ummm, well obviously getting my career job started, ideally start a family, make money, and then like provide for my kids, my family.

LP: Cool

SH: [unclear] or just in general just making enough to provide for myself and my parents, and to, and yeah.

LP: Cool. And, would that [pause], would a future career see you be in the line of speech pathology, like that sort of-

SH: Yeah. [pause] or like, it's what one of my one of my teachers did tell me that you know a lot of times you wanna do something, like you might, you like, you might have the whole 'oh I'll major in something' but you might go somewhere you might go down a path you don't even know.

LP: Mm.

SH: So I mean, I'm just gonna I'll take wherever my major takes me, but my goal now is that I'm doing speech pathology.

LP: Cool. And have you felt supported by your family or community regarding your like plans?

SH: Uh yeah of course, my parents have always supported me. [pause] And [unclear] get an education.

LP: So, was going to college something that you wanted or something they wanted or both?

SH: Uh, I'd say both.

(24:12)

LP: Um [pause] What's something you would want to tell other people, like whether in your community, your peers ,or like the US, um, as we go through this pandemic, like what's something you'd want people to know?

SH: Um [pause]. Maybe to listen to the government? I mean cuz I think one of the problems that the US is having now is a lot of people aren't listening and they're just going out and causing more and more trouble and more and more um [pause] problems when they choose to go out. like you see like people are rioting, talking about they gonna open they wanna open up the streets, they wanna open up uh everything but they're just being, to me it looks like people are just being selfish.

LP: Does that make you feel unsafe? Like-

SH: Yeah, I mean. Eventually we're going to have to move around outside. I don't like, realistically speaking I don't know if the, this pandemic is going to go away any time soon. So, I'm just I'm just trying to say that, so my house and their house [unclear] if they don't take this serious

LP: Cool. Um, that's basically it. Is there anything you'd like to add before we finish up, like anything else you wanna talk about?

SH: Um, I mean if you have any more questions, not off the top of my head but if you have any questions I'll, if you have any last minute questions I'll answer those

LP: Knew I took some before, hmm

[long pause]

(25:48)

LP: Oh, when, cuz you mentioned that your mom was involved in the sort of towards the starting of UWEAST

SH: Mhmm

LP: Um, and um, so wait your parents met in Ohio? So did they come to the US

SH: Uh, what I know, what I know, they could've met in Somalia? I don't really ask them so much about it, but I do know they got married I think in '99, in Ohio.

LP: Ah ok. Um [long pause] So, oh. Do you have extended family here?

SH: Like you mean like other cousins, aunts and uncles? Yeah, definitely

LP: Cool. And you guys are all settled in like the same area, or in Ohio?

SH: Uh well, um, in, you in school in UCSD, correct?

LP: Mhmm

SH: And yeah that's like, that's like more north San Diego. So if you go, if you were to go down South, that's where a lot of, a lot of Somalis live. There's some of them up North, but a lot of my family lives in the South, towards the towards the border. Not right towards the border, but close towards the border, like in the middle.

LP: Like....

SH: It's called like City Heights. The area is called City Heights. That's where that's where the where the whole, that's where the East African um UWEAST all started from too. Like we're all based in City Heights, that's where a lot of my family lives [unclear]

LP: Um cool So, there's a strong, like, East African community there

SH: Yeahhhh errybday yeah [pause] yeah, errybody, like East San Diego where we take a big like, a lot of people claim that too, like that's where we're from. [pause] Like I- yeah.

LP: Sorry you were saying?

SH: Yeah cuz like people do come from like, people live in like the north, northern areas but i think the biggest Somali population is in [pause] in East Afr- is East San Diego. [pause] But there's a lot, that's where a lot of like, there's a lot of like, there's a lot of comfortable house - not a lot, but we have good three, three different or four different house, housing units that are like meant for errybody but majority is Somalis who live in 'em.

(27:55)

LP: Do you think that's, because there's so many Somalis around, do you think that's helped with [pause] the sense of community?

SH: Yeah, a hundred percent. Like those areas, like, like there's a block we have called Littleton, like errybody in Littleton is Somali. [long pause] It's fun, but, errybody knows that's that's the area you see a lot of Somali shops, coffee shops, um, like [unclear] shops, to like fashion places, restaurants, are like, are all in that area.

LP: Cool. Um, with all this Somali, like, people and culture around, do you feel, like, in touch with like being Somali?

SH: Yeah a hundred percent. But, I mean one thing I wanna work on is my speaking skills, cuz like I do know that I mean I could speak better, but that'll come in time.

LP: Cool. Hmm, I think that's basically all I had yeah.

SH: Sounds good. Anything else, anything else you want me to do? Or is that it?

LP: Nah, good. Thank you for your time today.

SH: Yeah. Thank you for interviewing

LP: Great, so I will, wait let me stop the recording.