

**Race and Oral Histories In San Diego, UC San Diego**

**Interviewer: DENGXIAOYU SHI**

**Interviewee: Layla Ali**

**Date: May 31st, 2020**

**Location: Zoom**

**Sub collection: Race and Oral History Course, Spring 2020**

**Length of Interview: 00:18:37**

L: Okay. I, the interviewee, Layla — do I need to put my name, right? Hello?

D: Yes, please.

L: Okay. Layla Ali. I transfer to the university the right to publish, duplicate, or otherwise use the recording and transcribe the interview. And any photographs or videotapes taken during the interview is used for publication, print and electronic from search engines on the Internet. Okay, is there any picture with us? If I don't want this to happen.

D: I mean, it's ok. The library only wants the audio. If you don't want the pictures you can only delete that part from the paragraph and read the other ones.

L: Okay. And permission to transfer the interview to further media. Okay.

D: I can delete the photographs part and resend you the paragraph, and you can read it again. Does that sound okay?

L: It's okay. I want to finish this because I want to go to pray. Just let you do it.

D: Okay. Let's get started. My name is Dengxiaoyu Shi. Today is May the 15th, 2020. I am interviewing Layla through zoom call for the UCSD recent oral history project. Can you please state your full name, date of birth, and place of birth please?

L: Do I need to tell you my date of birth? My name's Layla Ali. I am born in Ethiopia, which is in the eastern part of Africa.

D: What kind of place is that?

L: What do you mean, what kind of place?

D: How do you feel about your homeland? Geographic features and personal feelings. Anything you wanna share.

L: It's a place found in the horn Africa. It's a little middle east country. It has many cultures. You have different languages, different religions, and also different tribes. In Ethiopia there used to be a king. Long time ago, it's governed by a king. It's never been colonized. It's the only [?] country that's never been colonized.

D: That is really cool. Okay, first I am going to tell you why I decided to do this oral history. Then could you tell me why you do you agree to be interviewed? If that sounds okay?

L: Yeah. As long as it doesn't hurt me. But if it maybe helps people, I don't mind to be interviewed.

D: Okay. I decided to do this oral history mainly because it is interesting to me. I am trying to learn something I have never learned before. Because I am Asian, as what you can see from my picture in the interview. I am Asian and I was born in China. So I do not know anything about the American cultures, ethnical studies, or your homeland. Because these are something that are so far that I have never known. That's why I decided to do this oral history. Could you tell me why you agreed to be interviewed?

L: Why I agreed to be interviewed? Because, when you come from a community, really, I don't for know what purpose this is, but I don't think it's bad. If it teaches people, if my interview helps others, I mean, I don't mind to be interviewed.

D: That's really nice. Alright, let's move on to the next part. Could you please introduce your family to me?

L: Yeah. Sure, you want to hear their names or what?

D: You don't need to tell me the name. You can just need to tell me, like, if you have a grandpa that's still alive.

L: No, I don't have a grandpa or grandma. Even I don't have my mom or my dad. They all passed away. I have a brother — I have four brothers and one sister. I have many nieces and nephews and cousins. And here I have my two daughters and my husband.

D: Ok, that's a really big family.

L: Yeah. I am the youngest of my family. All my siblings are older than me. Each of them has four or five children, and we are a really big family. It's being blessed. I have really beautiful nieces and nephews. Mostly from the family are girls — I have many nieces.

D: That's a lovely — large family. Ok, is there anything else you would like to talk about? Regarding why did your family or you come here?

L: Actually, the government in Ethiopia isn't good. Because of that reason, I came from the country and I stayed here. Most African governments are not good, you know. There are so many corruptions and so many things.

D: Okay. I am going to move on to the next part. How do you think immigration changed yourself in lifestyle? Personal lifestyle or family lifestyle.

L: Everything. It changed everything. Of course it changes. When you see your friends back home, you just regret why did I come and I wish I could live a good thing in the country. You regret. Isn't it a bad country? Is it a good country? But some people live there and they have a better life than you right here. When you see good things here, when you see the life over there, if they succeed, they can live happily. If you work and [?], if you do business. Before I came, in my country, there weren't many universities. You have to be the greatest to go to college. There's a lack of private colleges. Right now there are a lot of private colleges and you can pay and learn. But that time, if you don't have the highest rank, you cannot go to a university. I am not educated, which is bad. Then I came here. I came as an asylee. When I came here, it was really

hard. Because if you are an asylee, you don't have anything. You don't have the permission to work. You are illegal until you get the paper — the work permit or something. I had to go through many things which was very, very hard. You have to pay a lot to get the paper. Sometimes there's [?]. You have to go through so many long processes. You have to go to court. A lot of these. And after that you have nothing. It takes me more than two years to get my paper to be legal here, to get the work permit and to work. [?] I married and I had kids. It's good. It's not great, but it's ok. This is life.

D: Is there any special habit that you used to hold but not anymore? Or used to be held by your family but not by you or your daughter anymore?

L: You mean, a hobby or something?

D: Habits, traditions, everything. Anything you would like to mention. It's ok if you can't think of any.

L: Of course. Every country has tradition. In Ethiopia, the tradition is a [?]. we have different things. But here, I know my tradition, but my children don't because they don't live in my country which is bad. I used have a hobby. I liked to garden. I used to plant flowers when I was young. Right now, I don't have a house. I have a really small apartment. I don't have a backyard or anything. We have a small balcony. I tried my best to put some plants but my dream was to have a big back yard and nice gardens. Just a dream.

D: Yeah. Alright. Let's talk a little bit about the community? What is your relationship with your [?]?

L: The community is a part of my house. I feel that much. Because I always go there at least twice a week. If there is anything besides the regular schedule, I go. I used to work there, so I used to more often. I go cooking or participate in cooking. We cook when we have orders. If someone orders food, we cook. It is like my house. When I go there, I go to the kitchen. We are like friends. Whoever works there, whoever is there, we talk and we laugh. There is always tea. I come for a cup of tea to drink. It's like my house. The people who work there are like my family.

If I need help, they can me — whatever help I need. Sometimes when there is paperwork I don't understand. They are nice people. The community is like my house.

D: That is really nice. This is the last part of this interview. How are you feeling recently regarding the corona virus situation? Because we are in the history right now. This whole interview will be stored and kept in the library as part of the history. So how are you feeling recently regarding the corona virus?

L: The corona virus [?] is so scary. I freaked out. It's something very much to be worried. But the first time I was so much worried, I didn't want to go to work. I've been off a week — I was relaxing. Then I said "I have to go back to work". What makes you bothered is something like, if you have a mask, it [?] your eyes when you walk. I feel like I'm deaf when I go to the store. Sometime I don't know what I am doing. This drives me crazy. Sometimes I think to myself what I can do is to be calm. I have to take it anyway. Even though I'm in anxiety and scared.

D: What are some difficulties that you are facing right now that you would like to mention?

L: I'm telling myself it is okay. I don't want to put myself in [?]. I don't want to [?]. I'm thinking positive. Otherwise I could get crazy. When it hits the news, when this thing will go away? God knows about it. I have to take it. I have to just take care as the best I can, and everybody take care of them. It's so scary, you don't know how you get it. I just pray, pray to god to protect everybody. I don't know what to say.