

Race and Oral History 2020
Interview with Professor Mohamed Abumaye
Interviewer: Jaffet Emmanuel Garcia

Interviewer: Okay and umm I was actually really excited when they told me I was going to get to interview someone from city heights who is interested in all the issues in City Heights because i was actually raised there so umm I actually googled your thesis and I kind of skimmed through it and saw like the

Prof Mohamed: Hahaha

Interviewer: There was some really interesting stuff there so I guess to start off I would like to hear more about you and like who you are and what made you pursue researching City Heights out of all places in San Diego

Prof Mohamed: Mmm yeah you know uh I mean I really chose City Heights as a research cite because it has the largest Somali refugee community in California and one of the largest refugee communities in the country as well right and for me you know I come from a refugee background so I myself am a refugee, a somalian refugee and so I really wanted to do research in the community and research that was empowering for the community so I was really interested in my idea of research for activism for engaging in community issues so I was really deeply involved with the um East African cultural center in Fairmount Avenue and working with community activism and issues affecting-but also City Heights has a large immigrant community as well and a lot of people who mobilize, a lot of working class communities all living close to each other so it's a really great place to think about how do we challenge white supremacy and capitalism and all these structural issues

Interviewer: Yeah I absolutely agree, I spent a little time at Mid City CAN volunteering there and you see like you're- I think a lot of times when you're in City Heights you don't realize how much organizing actually goes on until you kind of seek it out but uh yeah it was actually one of the funnest things I've done seeing the empowerment of people because as you said a lot of times when you see these events going on in the world you almost feel like white supremacy and all these horrible ideas are gaining so much ground while we're losing power so its very interesting. My follow up question would have to be: What is your relationship with City Heights ? And what you feel like Okay there's something here that I have to- this isn't right, what made you say I want to research this and I want to do this

Prof Mohamed: Hmm yeah I think that's a good question, I think a lot of it is that when I was living in City Heights um it was really based on my own experience so one thing that I remember when I was living in City Heights is justy seeing all the police, the constant police presence and

in many ways right- being pulled over a lot by the police and really just you know and I was a Phd student at UCSD and you know I lived on campus for the first couple of years and then I

moved to City Heights and when I was in La Jolla- rarely saw police on that campus and just here in City Heights it seems like they are almost an Army and so just seeing the differences in experiences and that is when I got really interested in the topic of policing, police violence and like policing in City Heights and you know just seeing the overwhelming, everyday you're driving by you're seeing 4-5 cop cars pulling over one-usually person of color right? And so that's really what got me interested in that topic right, for my dissertation. The policing- and over policing of City Heights

Interviewer: Oh yeah, oh go ahead, sorry

Interviewer: I absolutely agree and even in your thesis the whole- how you analyze how a tank of war actually ends up being basically gifted to the San Diego Police Department is just-blew my mind and I absolutely dealt with- because I am of Mexican descent but they've told me that I look of all different kinds of- you know, they've told me I look middle eastern, South American, they've said everything except- Oh you look Mexican. But um I had to deal with getting pulled over constantly on fairmount cause I used to go to Monroe Clark and they would be like, a police officer would see walking a backpack and they've actually stopped and checked me at least 3 times and I was thinking well how come this doesn't happen to any of my friends- I don't wanna you know- like some of my white friends how come this doesn't happen to them and I guess at that young age you don't realize that there's something not right there. But um yeah I absolutely agree that there's a lot of things wrong with the policing in City Heights.

Prof Mohamed: It's racial profiling, that's why it never happened to your white friends

Interviewer: Let me see

(Interview Abruptly Cuts off and Picks up in middle of a story being told by interviewee)

Prof. Mohamed: And this is the time they were doing curfew, curfew laws and curfew checks. And their saying 'What are you doing out here? You're not supposed to be out here at a certain time. We need to see your ID.' and you know, the first thing they said is 'get in the van' and you know I said 'I'm not gonna get in the van' Like it's in the middle of the night, and you know, I've learned from my only students to never trust the police because you don't know what they'll do to you (yeah), and I said 'I'm not gonna get in the van', they asked for an ID and they just saw us walking with three young black people walking and they assumed something was wrong, and we showed them our ID's and it turns out I was not a minor, I think they were doing curfew sweeps.

Interviewer: I got caught by those- yeah I got caught by those also a few times also.

Prof. Mohamed: Yeah! I know exactly but I was like I bet you if we were three young looking white people, like they would not have approached us that way. And even if they did approach us, they would have been much more respectful, they wouldn't have cut us off, and they wouldn't have asked us to get in the van, right? So I think that's really one of the things that stands out with how aggressive, and how demeaning they are to the people of color.

Interviewer: Absolutely I actually-I got caught a block away from my house. It was only a few minutes until ten, and I remember that I think I might've been a block away from home and they pulled me over, and the police officers told me to 'come here' and I said 'well ok he wants to say something' and they just handcuffed me and i'm just like '...well you said come here-' he's like 'yeah come here you would have walked and I wasn't going to chase you but you know, it's a curfew sweep so you have to go to the police station.' and I was like 'this is ridiculous! I live right there, let me go!' and he's like 'I'm sorry I can't do that' and I'm like are you serious?' it was a lot of stories like that and yeah I can go on and on about City heights, the many times I felt profiled and discriminated but I mean this interview is about you, so.Yeah.

Prof. Mohamed: Wow. It's pretty interesting, right? My research talks about it as my thesis but you know people don't really talk about the trauma of those kinds of police encounters right? Imagine being a young teenager being handcuffed taken to the police station- that must've been a traumatic experience. You know, that you have, and it can a lasting impact so no one talks about like, you know the trauma, the PTSD, the trauma that comes with experiencing so much police violence, and like how it can trigger you know, if your just walking in your neighborhood, in a coffee shop, and you see a police officer right? The fear that stands still right? You know, that is an experience no teenager should have or go through, being handcuffed.

Interviewer: Yeah cause I mean like let's say you really are breaking a law of being out too late is it really necessary to go through a whole process to make someone feel like their a criminal, just because they were a few minutes late? Getting home (exactly), yeah.

Prof. Mohamed: Exactly and you know this is when like racial disparities really come into play because if you were a white person right? They're going to do curfew sweeps. Maybe they wouldn't have handcuffed you. Maybe they would have asked you politely to come, maybe they would have placed you in the passenger seat of the car, right? And driven you home but you know the difference in the treatment is where institutional racism comes in right? This is where it becomes a problem because it's folks of color who are being seen as criminals all the time. Even

if you haven't committed a crime right, where that's really kind of- it really shows the clear disparities in policing.

Interviewer: Would you say that there's been any improvements in policing as far as the relationship between law enforcement and minority-community in City heights, or you just haven't seen it yet? What would be your take on that?

Prof. Mohamed: You know, I think I would rephrase that question differently. I think that even though it's not about improving the relationships between communities of color and the police, I think it's really finding ways to hold police accountable for instances of racial discrimination of police violence and of harassment and really you know, like fully understanding of what is the function and what is role of police enforcing crime so is policing communities of color maintaining boundaries and distances, that's why you see police so heavily present in City Heights. But such a limited presence in La Jolla, because who lives there? I think It's not about policing the communities of color, It really becomes to the question of, really tackling the issue of institutional racism and it goes beyond police, it's about addressing the racial disparities in the criminal justice system, in terms of who get arrested, who gets charged, what kind of sentences people get, the biases, all levels of the criminal justice system, and I don't think it's gotten better, I think it's gotten worse. (Wow.) In the sense of the police becoming more militarized in San Diego, and all around the country in with the role of border patrol, a very militarized border, and the attacks on immigrants, undocumented and documented, the war on terror, I think this example has gotten worse really as you look a couple of months ago in San Diego, I mean City Heights, they have these surveillance cameras (Oh yeah) that was instituted and that was part of how to conquer terrors. And they're going to use these surveillance cameras mostly with (facial recognition? I read about that yeah) facial recognition. That would make racial profiling worse (oh yeah that would make it so bad). Surveillance cameras will be where people of color live, they have them in La Jolla, they have them in City heights, next to moss, where a somali community goes, so it's like the technology, surveillance has gotten more advanced and therefore it means like the instances of racism and instutional discrimination are going to get worse so will surveillance.

Interviewer: Oh absolutely. Well, I've read about that- well it was an attempt to implement that kind of technology into police, right until police cameras, but that tool of the police camera was supposed to be for more accountability, to hold the police officers accountable not to make people feel even more oppressed, and just spied on. When I read that, that's totally undermining the whole point of the camera. Why would you try to implement that kind of technology but yeah it's terrible. Okay- oh this is an interesting question. What three words would you use to describe City heights?

Prof. Mohamed: Oh that's a good question, one word is resilient, I think the community has been through so much from the 1990's, with the renewal project, the war on drugs, the assaults on communities of color, to the war on terror, to all these to even contemporary moments of what's happening in City heights with gentrification (yeah), People being priced out of their communities, being more pushed out, but the community has remained resilient has built up initiatives. So I'd say resilient, I would say interconnected, what's so interesting about City Heights is that unlike a lot of neighborhoods who are segregated by race or by ethnicity, in City heights you see Vietnamese community members, Mexican community members, Somali, Afghanie, Salvadorian, all living in the same apartment complex. Like, all living next to each other and that's rare actually in the United States, so how interconnected all these communities of color are. You know, how they live so close to each other, how much they share with each other, go to school together, so I think interconnected, and I think the final word I would say is possibilities, City heights has so much possibilities for what it could be in the future, for what a city of neighborhoods that actually provides resources for people of color look like, that actually based on social justice and equity, so that's a few words I'd use.

Interviewer: Yeah those are very three beautiful words and I absolutely agree with you . My time living in City heights, I met easily the most diverse group of people I've met now I live in National city so there's more like, people like latinos you know, and City heights is more like-it's a boiling pot of different cultures and it's actually very beautiful to be there and I actually miss it a lot and everytime I drive by I get kind of emotional just by thinking about how much I miss being there, but I mean as you get older you kinda have to rent your own room, you can't live with your mom anymore so.

Prof. Mohamed: Yeah, I live in Mira mesa now so I definitely miss it as well.

Interviewer:(How is Mira mesa? I've never really-)

Prof. Mohamed: It's good, it's a nice neighborhood, it's a middle-class suburb, mostly a large filipino community there, a large south asian community as well, it's historically known as a historically filipino neighborhood, I like it but I would definitely prefer City heights. Not a lot of somalis in Mira mesa at all really, so it's like I miss being in the community in that way. But it's closer to my job at Cal state.

Interviewer: Absolutely and how would you say how drastic is the difference between policing in Mira mesa and City heights?

Prof. Mohamed: Oh, you know I'm writing about this right now because I'm turning my visitation into a book, so i'm finalizing the book and I'm writing about this, you know, everyone talks about violence, but no one talks about the sounds of police violence, like what does police

violence sound like? You always see the images, but not the sounds. In City Heights, you see the sounds of police violence. Every night, you hear the sirens, you hear the helicopters, right? These sounds are so prevailing in the neighborhood, right? Whereas in Mira Mesa at night, you don't hear any sounds! There are no police sirens going off, you have no helicopters roaming, or looking for suspects, right? Like, it's a huge distinction in how people get treated in Mira Mesa, vs how the people in City Heights get treated in the sounds of police violence are absent, so I think that's a very big distinction that I've noticed. and I haven't been pulled over and harassed by the police (yeah) since I moved to Mira Mesa so it's all providing me some (peace of mind) protection and relief.

Interviewer: Yeah that's a very interesting subject, the sounds because it's absolutely true that at night in City Heights you usually hear police officers are always down the University Avenue area, They're just racing down there, you go outside and you see like the helicopter with the light looking for someone and it's just you don't understand how that kind of stays in your mind until you get older and realize like wow I'm studying in La Jolla as well And you don't see any of that here, like you just see very little long Stretches of Road, it's just quiet and it's not because La Jolla doesn't have suffer from crimes it's- just the presence isn't there as much as in City Heights, absolutely.

Prof. Mohamed: Yeah, and also who lives in La Jolla? That's a distinction, who lives in Mira Mesa. It's like in La Jolla, the police exist to protect the people, in City Heights the police exist to occupy the community, to harass the community, to control people because who lives in City Heights is mostly poor marginalized immigrant people of color; who lives in La Jolla is mostly upper middle class, wealthy communities even if their committing crimes, the treatment is very different and this is where institutional racism is structural racism it's not one police officer, it's not an individual person, it's an institution all the way up from the city level of government, to the police department, to the police chief, to how even neighborhoods are constructed, funding, La Jolla has better grocery stores, better and cleaner roads, the schools are better for the kids, this is a huge and for a country built off of democracy and equality, it's showing that where you're born and where you live determines your life chances, not just what you can do. So I think that's the really big difference you see in what is the role of police in La Jolla, In La Jolla they use it to protect people who live there, In City Heights they just occupy and control the people who live there and the best example I could say is police brings huge issues my first year at UCSD a group of white students. And they were saying to me 'oh yeah, don't go to City Heights cause that's the ghetto' and I was very angry because for me it was like you think City Heights is dangerous because there's a large presence of people of color, You know your problem is not with City Heights your problem is you think badly of the people there- Yeah, exactly so I'm not going to co-sign your racism, like it's institutional racism at every level.

Interviewer: I absolutely agree and well I had kind of a culture shock when I transferred from San Diego City College to UCSD for the same reason that you know, you think about college, and you think like 'oh you know i'm gonna study, i'm gonna do good, and maybe go party and have a good time' and then I get there and I realize that the- how can I explain it- that I don't know if it's a law that they implemented, that greek life can't exist in La jolla because the older voters that live there have actually passed a law that says tha-t I forgot I think it's an old law that says that men and women can't be living together in a sort of fraternity-sorority format, and I heard somewhere that oh yeah like that's a law, that's why you don't see that sort of thing happening around here. And I was actually like How much control do these people want? Already own the environment, there is rarely any police here, they probably are the ones that choose how many are around this area So that's why it's so calm And you don't see anything crazy like in City Heights where you see 5 or 6 police officers driving by at night trying to catch the youth. But yeah in La Jolla you feel- They can call it freedom but I still feel It's so uptight It's so controlled and you can feel like even if you were to do one thing wrong like you could easily get ratted out by someone there and you'd be in trouble so it's.

Prof. Mohamed: Yeah, you know I think your story brings up a bit like; who is La Jolla for? So La jolla is for certain groups of people you know, even the founder of UC systems he built it in La jolla because he wanted the university to be far away from where people of color live, he wanted it to be exclusive, he didn't want students of color to go there, the only way the university was organized and structured, and you know, the public transportation so like, he knew it would be a long drive of people who lived in places like Southeast or City Heights to go to UCSD like he lived there. But if you think about La jolla, it's mostly upper-middle class, white, community and upper class folks so like, if in those spaces, even in La jolla it's supposed to be- because the US is one of the most segregated countries in the world, In these kinds of spaces, they don't want working class of people of color there, right? Because what can cause people of color are only supposed to be in La jolla if they only work for the people who live there, if they're baristas, if they're housekeepers, if they're staff workers, but to be a resident? They don't want you there. So that's why like, who's La jolla for and when you look at La jolla i'm imagining La Jolla was going to like around campus as a student there, going through like Trader Joe's, going to some of the markets and places, people are even going to the malls, people always mistook me for someone who worked there, the counter would ask me like 'Hey where can I find something like this?' and I was like 'Why do you assume I work here?, that I can't be a customer?' and the person was like 'oh you're a person of color, obviously you're not a resident here you must be-' that daily experience of racism, that's why in my project I write about that- I know!! It's such a common experience. For people of color who go to UCSD right?

Interviewer: Yeah I can feel my blood boiling as I hear this like oh my god-yeah like even me I had an experience where I went to best buy by UCSD there's like a ross, then there's a best buy and there's- what else is there it's maybe like a mile away from UCSD and I had this experience

where I was gonna buy a laptop actually I picked it up and I could immediately see a lot of the staff just kinda looking at me and I saw one of the staff nudge one of his staff and whispered to him 'keep an eye on that one' I was thinking like oh my god I had my UCSD sweater on and everything and I was like you really think that a student from UCSD, whatever that means, I mean it doesn't really mean anything but you really think I'm here to steal this because I'm a person of color like wow- I'm actually using the laptop I bought that day but i'm never gonna forget that experience because I thought, you know maybe just the fact that I go to this school will earn me a little more respect but now I see that day I learned that no- some people their always gonna hold their judgement of you regardless of what you do or where you are and it's sad that made me very disappointed just being in that area.

Prof. Mohamed: Yeah I know, exactly. You know, I think this is how we think about racism. And what it means to be because even if you are a UCSD student, Like who gets recognized as a student, who gets read as a student. So like if you're a person of color, You might not be seen as a student because you might be seen as a criminal, I'll give you the best example; I was at UCSD my first year And you know how they have student police? The police walking around campus? I was literally a couple steps from the hall that I lived in, graduate housing and, One of the student police asked me 'What are you doing on this campus?' And I had my backpack and she was like 'I need to see your ID.' because she assumed I wasn't a student, that I couldn't be on campus. First of all, anybody can be on campus, it's a public institution but like she assumed I was an outsider, that I didn't belong, and I literally live right next door and had to show her my student ID right, and I was like 'You know, white students- you could be a white person on campus and no one will question your presence there' even if your a student or a professor there but to people of color, they don't think you belong in a elite university, you don't belong in this space.

Interviewer: Absolutely there's people that like walk their dogs and I'm pretty sure that even go to UCSD they just walk as if any other Street in San Diego where they don't get bothered and it's and its very that's heartbreaking to hear that because at the of the day we went to that Institution but I mean it's the truth, yeah. Okay, let me see. Besides your current job now what was your first job?

Prof. Mohamed: Ooh- that's, my first ever job in high school was at wetzel's pretzels, not sure if that's familiar with you. So yeah, wetzel's pretzels, but I got laid off after like, two weeks but that was my first work experience.

Interviewer: First work experience- mine was in Jack in the Box so you gotta start somewhere. I'm going to move on a little more to the Coronavirus pandemic and how it's shown some of the shortcomings that our current system has with regards to socio-economic problems for minorities so now to start off, What if anything has this pandemic revealed about our social economic problems?

Prof. Mohamed: You know, it's revealed a lot about inequities in this country, I can even speak from my own family experience, my dad was laid off, a lot of my relatives have been laid off or can't find jobs, the pandemic is showing like it's exposing inequity, who are people working at these jobs in retail? Low-way shops, it was mostly people of color, mostly black, and latinx communities and these marginalized communities so if you look at unemployment data, latinx is like at 19%, black unemployment is at 15%, and all the other racial groups just by unemployment alone, the recession you've seen how deeply how these communities have been impacted. In cities like Chicago, the death rate of 17% COVID-19 deaths were black people and only about 30% of the population, and that's because the way people live, in black communities, in places like Chicago, segregated, over-crowded, housing projects where people are stacked on each other, many of the essential workers that work in grocery stores are mostly black and latinx, you see the health disparities, people not having health care, people not getting access to health care, therefore developing chronic conditions. Not only is it showing the inequalities, but it's making it worse, because this recession that's happening because of COVID-19 is disproportionately impacting working class communities of color just like the last recession in terms of who's getting laid off, many working class don't own homes, so they have no capital, no savings, and just being devastated by this so you're seeing huge, not in terms of who's dying from COVID-19, being disproportionately of color but also like the economic impacts of it is falling on communities of color in really, really profound ways, the other day I was reading an article that was saying that like the gains that black people have made since last recession is that employment in terms of generating wealth have just been completely destroyed in the past couple of months, all the gains that they'd made, and we don't know how much longer this will last and how much deep this recession will be so you're going to see the inequities most likely will get worse.

Interviewer: And it's a vicious cycle I believe because when you have people that are desperate to feed their families and it's going to lead them to I mean it would maybe lead anyone resort to things that aren't legal and then that starts a cycle where okay well if this group is doing all these crimes and obviously we need to have more law enforcement there but they don't see the root that is this problems are you talking about and it's just it's terrible like that I didn't know that I didn't know that statistic about the gains but that's that's that's that's horrendous and then also what I have noticed personally I have a lot friends we are 24/25, I'm one of the few of my friends has actually moved out of their house, but I have a few friends that their in debt, their college students they never qualify for that stimulus payment simply because they live with their parents and their parents claim them as a dependent and I think that's absolutely ridiculous how you can also goes to show who you really trying to help because obviously these minority communities we're more- we don't start off with the silver spoon in our mouths so sometimes we need a little more help from our parents or peers and you're basically saying okay well your

parents obviously have enough money for you you're not going to need any help so we're not to give you anything yeah.

Prof. Mohamed: Exactly, and I think that's exposing as well to have a really good plan with college dependence being denied so if your parents are wealthy, middle-class and they have income, then of of course you don't need the 1200\$, your living conditions are really great but if your a working class student of color, your parents are struggling financially, your living conditions are cramped and crowded, like the 1200\$ stimulus check is not just important for you, but also for your family, for your entire household because you all can barely get by, assuming all dependents have the same experience, same Economic experience is completely the best example of what is like, you know color-blind racism; like this policy was not meant to be racist, it's meant to give everyone resources but it disproportionately impacted students of color who are coming from families or people don't have- their family barely has any money and they needed a stimulus check, so if both your parents are lawyers, and you live in a nice house, then yeah you don't need the stimulus check as much right? And it's exposing you even further cause people are locked at home, people's living conditions right, if you live in a big house with your family, you can live comfortably during the COVID-19, but if you're living in a two-bedroom and there's six of you in the house, there's one bathroom and it reveals the inequity, that not everybody is going this coronavirus similarly but for me, my mom lives in a one bedroom, or three bedroom and one bathroom right? My sister's there, my brother's there, my other sister and you know, everyone being forced in such a tight spaces in section eight housing and it's crowded, it's cramped, for students even, you don't have a space to study, any privacy, you don't have your own like zone, your learning becomes different, how can you study and do your homework if you don't have a desk, you don't have a room to study, so three people are sharing a room and one bathroom.

Interviewer: Yeah. I think and also it's a little- I feel really kind of grinds my inside this when you hear these these comments by the welfare off to say to all 'we're all in this together', 'we're going to push through' or you hear them complaining like Ellen said 'being in my house is like a prison' when she lives in a huge mansion like what are you talking about it's like what are you talking about we're not on the same boat you're in the yacht and I'm in a raft like what is going on with these and it shows how delusional some of the people that unfortunately a lot of our youth and our people look up to and it's like you're really looking up to this person who somehow thinks that everybody's going through the same struggles same problems that's that's like the view the government has everyone which is absolutely wrong and they know it's wrong but it's so obtuse- let me ask a question that'll make you happy. What is something that makes you happy in these difficult times?

Prof. Mohamed: Uh, that's a good question. It's kinda hard to find one exact answer, it's a really stressful situation uhm- for me I would say probably- widely enough, at my job I have more

freetime now than I normally did, so being able to like connect with my relatives and my family, being able to call them often, staying in touch with people, zooming with friends and family, I've gotten more opportunities to read novels, getting back into reading, getting back into literature, so those are some of the things that have made me happy. I think for me I would say happy, but I would say like I'm optimistic because you know, this COVID-19- once it's all over, kinda what I plan to do is see the inequities and disparities fully jump in and once we open up start organizing, start doing community work- we can't go back to the same normal you know? Like we need to challenge a lot of these racial disparities and inequities so that we have things like universal healthcare, we have things like expanded pay sick leave, all these different things so I wanna get out there and just start organizing and really being like this COVID-19 has exposed some problems we have in our society, we gotta organize, even stuff relating to undocumented immigrants, resources for that, but yeah the possibilities for the future is kinda what makes me happy like what we can do once this is over. Because so many people are becoming politicized, and radicalized.

Interviewer: It's almost like this is just with the election year that is right now, it's almost like throwing fuel on everything that might have not felt like 'oh like politics doesn't involve me it doesn't affect me' like now it's going to affect you probably way more than since 2008 I'd say so I think I also agree that it's going to be interesting to see hopefully our communities mobilized like never before because I mean my candidate but I was rooting for- didn't make it so I mean the partially it's just that I think to win an election you need support from the extremes and you also need to be centrist and I mean now it's just going to be- there's never been this many good reasons to mobilize I feel antipathy to organize but yeah. I absolutely agree with your answer. What world do you hope your children will get to inherit?

Prof. Mohamed: You know, I think that's a really good question. Been thinking a lot about that actually, you know, I think-not even my children just future generations. A world without white supremacy, a world where a person is not defined by the color of their skin, a world where the poor are given basic sources and essentials rather than a world with- all the things that we talk about right? A world without patriarchy, a world without homophobia, a world where a person can live, and realize their full potential, in fact, we are fighting today against these injustices we can build in our world. We may not see it in our lifetimes, same way the civil rights movement, many of the activists didn't see the fruits of that labor in their life, none of us would be here doing what we are doing if it wasn't for the sacrifices they made and so like I would want my future children, generations, to inherit the world without any of those, also a world without capitalism too, a world where a person's worth isn't determined by money, where people are given the basic necessities and where shelter is not seen as a privilege but as a universal right- and healthcare too, all these different things, food as well.

Interviewer: Yeah absolutely I agree with your answer, also it's beautiful. Let's see- how has Coronavirus affected your work and or volunteering?

Prof. Mohamed: It's made it really hard to work mostly because of everything that it's been going on with things happening all around the world, but also even in my own family there's so many people laid off, so it's hard to focus, to find meaning in work, I mean I used to do a lot of volunteering on my campus, working with students of color, working with them via zoom, and MECHA and mentoring students of color like I really miss that aspect of the work. The best example is your TA Adriana, she's my former student and mentee, I love finding first generation students from families going to college, working with them, believing in them, giving them my energy because I was the first child in my family to go to college too, and I come from a working class family so like, just doing that work, I miss mentoring, I miss helping people, I miss working with students of color, like making them believe in themselves, so I definitely miss that aspect of volunteering because of that, so I was doing a lot of that on my campus and now the campus is closed, you know, so. I can't even see my students anymore, from via Zoom and my students are going- like this is the time they need their mentors the most because they're all going through really horrible situations with their families and I can't even see them. So I wanna be there to help them and give them advice and suggestions and support.

Interviewer: Yeah a lot of the students definitely sometimes school is our escape because I came from a broken home so for me going to school was almost specially High School I mean I wasn't doing very well but it was one of the things that and it was able to clear your mind and sometimes I mean students will have that anymore so they need that kind of mentoring and help one another absolutely.

Prof. Mohamed: Yeah I know, I'm very similar, I come from a very broken home too, and school was my escape I loved to teach at school it allowed me to escape really violent home situations, and to see like my younger siblings, their stuck at home and home isn't always a safe place for most people, you know it can be really toxic, it can be very violent, it can be abusive so now people are stuck at home. I can't even imagine the kind of abuses in terms of what all people are going through, for me it was like I think I really feel for all those folks who are in these kinds of spaces and even for my own siblings; one's 14 and the other one's 10 she loves school because it's the only time she can use to escape from home for a period of time, and all the abuse and now she's stuck there. 24/7, so I definitely understand that and even the living conditions in one bathroom, you don't have a lot of space, the utensils are broken, there's- at least in my home growing up there's cockroaches, it's not comfortable space to live in let alone being there 24/7.

Interviewer: Yeah. absolutely, I can't- like for example I have family in Mexico and since they implemented the stay-at-home order over there, there's been about 250 or so cases of women killed because their husbands are abusing substances and it just gets violent and it just goes to

show that not only is- I mean find that the financial problems are going to cost- are going to cause people to just abuse substances and take out anger on the wrong people and it's just going to be I think it's going to be horrifying the final toll of the damage done thanks to this pandemic especially on our minority communities because like you said if you're living have you living well off you're doing well I mean it shouldn't really affect you anywhere near at the degree that it will to minority families so.

Prof. Mohamed: Right, no, exactly. I gotta briefly say, I am so proud of Adriana. Like I am so proud of you have no idea, like she was my student! (I know she's very awesome) She's super awesome! And you know this is the problem completely tangential but super important this is why we need more faculty of color, because there's this really bright brilliant student of color and you have all these white faculty and none of them see the potential of the students, none of them can relate to the students, none of them can see their humanity, even in my own campus, the faculty of color were like incredibly tiny minority right? Like what would happen to Adriana if she didn't have faculty of color to have to mentor her, support her, or see something in her that bright or believe in her and I think this is why we really are for ethnic studies but we need to push for more faculty of color right. To really change the institution because I could relate to her right? These white faculty can't, they can't relate to her, they don't understand what it's like being a first-generation student, what it's like to be from a working class family, or struggle, but they have power over you nonetheless and who do they decide to write letters for? I'm so proud of her seeing her, cause I knew she could be anything she wanted to, and do anything she wanted to, it's a matter of when she has people, (the right help.)

Interviewer: Yeah I think a lot of the- sadly there has been a lot of unused potential out there there's a lot of people of color that are willing- they're willing to fight and said trying to bring these changes that are needed in society but they just never have a mentor help like you were to Adriana and it's just very sad to look at but there's a few instances where they turn their lives around and then get to work but there's been a lot of time, there's been a lot of youth that even I've met and they just say who I'd like to help out but I just don't know where to start and it's just it just goes to show that I'm not trying to say there's a conspiracy here but if there's not a lot of faculty maybe it's because some people don't want change? or maybe it's just-

Prof. Mohamed: I'm on the faculty side so I'm seeing it like if their hiring committee, you know who hires faculty is other faculty so got this all white half of searching committees, hiring committees, and they only hire white people, over and over That's why faculty still remain white. Even if you have one faculty, on the Searching committee you're going to get outvoted, also These white faculty see faculty of color as a threat to some of them and they want to maintain their power. Looking at the whole institution, it needs to change. Diversity, equity, inversion, and all of these need to be essential but yeah it is a conspiracy to plot faculty of color from entering these because they have the power to change the University policy. Procedures,

And universities tend to be white supremacist spaces and again So many people are they tend to keep it that way.

Interviewer: Absolutely. the campus that we attended was just the way that the faculty- to just the way that the school is built so there's no real Central area that could bring protest, you can just feel it.

Prof. Mohamed: I remember my first year, PhD student sociology in the PhD program there was a white professor he said to me 'Hey Muhammad the whole reason you got into the PhD program is because you're black' and I'm just here hearing a professor tell me that, and this is who I have to engage with, they didn't see anything in me they just saw me as a token, a statistic. They didn't see my potential, they didn't see my humanity, then again they have all the power to determine what happens and I was so desperate for faculty of color So I ended up searching and I couldn't find any, there are so few. And it's so unfair to the faculty of color because they have so many students Of color running to their offices. Cause It's not enough that and they get overworked and it's like hire more of them if you really stand for equity, the University of Missouri students stood in protest and told the University because the Students were calling out racism, And they wanted 10% black faculty and the University said for the next 5 years we won't expect nothing less, we want The Faculty demographic to reflect on the student demographics. I mean in Cal State San Marcos, people of color faculty makeup 70% of the demographic, yet 70 percent of the faculty are white, so that's not the right demographic at all.

Interviewer: Yeah then it begs the question of who's making these choices but I mean now you're telling me that these committees are very controlled and they are very selective and they know what they're looking for so so there's no coincidence that 70% of the faculties white and it's mainly a minority school and it's just it's sad it's actually very sad to think about if your students aren't we are the future if you're teaching students that us minorities aren't good enough you're showing that only a white person can be staffed like what the what message does that give off to the Future generations and it's just very damaging I believe. I'm sorry I'm taking a lot of your time, alright, This is going to be just going back to City Heights a little bit. What is your utopic version for City Heights?

Prof. Mohamed: Number 1, get rid of that police station, I mean, politically I believe in abolition, police abolition, prison abolition, racism abolition, even this country hasn't had police for long, police are still a new invention, disarming the police, like in Japan, the police are not armed, but also things like in City Heights, having quality education, for the children that live there, like guaranteed, change the school funding and school funding formula, every student can go to a high quality elementary, middle, high school, with great teachers, well resource and staff. I would say guaranteed housing, all people who live there, quality housing, not for those in little condition, for those who are documented and undocumented, refugee or citizen these are some of

the ways we can make City heights better, an environmental sustainable committee, there's a lot of things that have gender equity programs in City heights, LGBT friendly resources and programs, have more Community-based programs and initiatives. Still allow for communities to get together and to build, also number one have Makers and creators be the People that live there instead of these Politicians and elected officials And I think the people that know best what to do with City Heights are the people that live there. People who live in the- violence and under resource and impacts of these policies.

Interviewer: Absolutely, take one of the most unfair things about communities of minorities in low income in general is the fact that I didn't notice until I wrote a paper thing back in high school that the way schools are funded is real estate tax so if you live in a very wealthy area, your schools going to look amazing but if you look if you live in an area like City Heights just going to have these very torn down underfunded with like textbooks ripped and it's things about the way that things are funded in this country and overall because I mean we talked about City Heights but this is nationwide and it's extremely frustrating absolutely. I think my last question is going to be what would be your advice for somebody trying to become more organized and more involved in their community?

Prof. Mohamed: I would say for someone who wants to become more organized and involved with the community, realize that you're not alone. I think for so many POC, we experience- what got me into organizing is- some experience of older spaces, I'll tell you like a very brief story, when I was like around sixteen, I'm a high school student, I was one of the few black students in a mostly white high school and I get into a school fight. You know, I mean a lot of kids can get in school fights, it was a white student that was bullying me and calling me the n-word and deeply racist towards me, the teachers didn't believe me, so I get in a fight, i'm the only student who got arrested for the school fight. So the school resource officer arrests me, I'm sixteen, i'm minor, he books me, the kid's the one that presses charges, he presses charges, the whole time he thinks i'm a gang member, he asked me what gang i'm in, I said i'm not in any gangs, and so just like seeing like ok there's this white student I got in a fight with two weeks ago, and all he got was a suspension, so to see that difference and so for me like I always felt alone and all this discrimination I was experiencing, only to realize that there's people like look like you who have experienced racial discrimination and we have more power in numbers, the strength in numbers in community then there is individually because we are going against the state, we are going against the institutions, we are going against people, that have so much power and that the power we have is our members, and the ability to organize with people who experience the same thing your experiencing but also have like similar visions for what they want to do to realize that the problem is not you, as a POC, the problem is the institution, it's these policies, organizations so like realizing that there's strength in numbers, and for me like I'm part of the California faculty union, and we do a lot of work against anti-racism, and social justice, and so like being involved

with all these activists, faculty of color, organizing, I think that's what's given me so much inspiration.

Interviewer: That's a very good answer because also when I in City heights I was invited by one of my neighbors actually she works at Mid City Can and I was thinking like you're interested in that and I said to myself you know like I think one of the things that most of the things that most just likes interest from organizing is the fact that you're living in it you're in the struggle like sometimes either you don't know how to do you have to walk to school or you just have all these other problem is that you don't realize that people actually fighting to make changes to make your life better but you're still struggling in that life that you can't even think about how will they be if I tried to join these organizations in cause you're still struggling you're never really think about all going to be going to City council meeting or getting involved, and the people that do get involved are the ones that are keeping the status quo, I think. Yeah it's very- I think it's enlightening to see other people organize, and I thank you for being an organizer. Especially for city heights. My beloved city, it's great.

Prof. Mohamed: You know for me I love city heights. like organizing is so important because you know, I get very angry about the injustices that happen, and they're not just abstract for me, I've lived in them so for me it was like I lived in a refugee camp when I was about five almost ten, you know, and in some of the worst living conditions you can imagine in Kenya, and you can imagine who would believe that today I could be a college professor that was unimaginable coming from that. People never leave the refugee camps, they get stuck there forever and people who live in those camps do nothing to deserve that. This happened to people because of US imperialism and all these policies and the only thing people did was just be born into these unfair living conditions and granted- I could have been like 'hey I made it out' 'I got a middle class life now' but it was like 'no I made it out and now I have the resources and skills, I'm going to use that to advocate for my people who are still living in those conditions who are still being treated like their less than human' you know, and fight for a world where a person doesn't have to live in attempt. So that for me is like, my story is used for 'oh look he did it, he made it, why don't you work hard like he did?' (That's not the point, the whole point is give back to the community because a lot of people-) there's also a reason why there's one of me in the world or two of me, like how many somali professors do you think there are in the whole country? Five! (Wow) there's a reason why there's a majority of people in poverty to this day right, and only one or two people make it out it's not about hard work, (if you escape, it means something's wrong) it's a system designed to keep people from achieving, and realizing their full human potential and I want to topple these systems and make people realize their full potential so that's why for me I will never stop being committed to the issue of social justice.

Prof. Mohamed: Oh that's beautiful, absolutely. Because that is a true statistic that only around 5- (yeah pretty much, I'm pretty sure about somali professors amounts are very small in the state

of California I think the whole state of California I was the first Somali professor) Wow! I feel lucky to be talking to you- I feel luckier to be talking to you (and my friend Ugbi, she's got a job as- she's a second Somali professor but I mean, that's just crazy right to have Somali people and that shows like how much barriers there are for people)

Interviewer: I feel lucky but at the same time just horrified like how is that true?! That's so wrong! Wow. I mean, at this point, I can just say thank you for this interview, I really appreciate it and I feel lucky that Adriana pointed me out to you and thank you I really enjoyed it, I'm gonna have fun actually publishing this and sharing this story out, because I absolutely believe this needs to be heard, and just thank you so much.

Prof. Mohamed: No, of course it's a pleasure meeting you too and you know if you ever need any help, or anything, you think about grad school, feel free to contact me like I really believe in mentoring students of color, so feel free to reach out if you need anything.)

Interviewer: Oh thank you so much.

Prof. Mohamed: No, of course and one final thing is, if you ever see Adriana, tell her I am so proud of her

Interviewer: Alright

Prof. Mohamed: Like I am so immensely proud of her

Interviewer: Hopefully I will but I mean this pandemic- I'm gonna see her probably during a TA meeting but yeah I'll tell her

Prof. Mohamed: just tell her like 'Mohamed is so proud of you'

Interviewer: I will. Thank you so much!

Prof. Mohamed: Nice meeting you

Interviewer: Nice meeting you too!
Thank you, take care