



## African Immigrants Project

### Interview transcription

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### Alwiya Omar

**Interview date:** December 13, 2000

**Location of interview:**

**Country of origin:** Tanzania (Zanzibar)

**Ethnic group/language group:** no specific ethnic group - father is an Arab from Yemen, her mother is from the Comoros, mixed with Arab blood/Swahili

**Religion:** Muslim

**Profession:** Professor in the African Studies Department at UPenn

**Level of education:** Ph.D.

**Location of residence in Philadelphia:** Lansdowne

*Dr. Omar studied in Kuwait and lived in Madagascar and the Comoros Islands before coming to the United States to do her PhD in Linguistics at Indiana University in 1987. She was married with children at the time, and left both her husband and children in Zanzibar. They joined her several years later. her husband also did his PhD at Indiana. In 1995, the family moved to Philadelphia when she got a job at UPenn.*

*She travels back to Tanzania and Zanzibar frequently, and can imagine moving back there. She thinks, however, that her children would stay in America. Dr. Omar socializes frequently with Tanzanians and is a member of the National Tanzanian Association.*

### Interview Transcription

Interviewer: Leigh Swigart (LS)

Interviewee: Alwiya Omar (AO)

**[START SIDE 1, TAPE 1]**

LS: Your name?

AO: Alwiya Sally Omar.

LS: And you are from what country?

AO: Zanzibar, Tanzania.

LS: So when people ask you, do you say Zanzibar before Tanzania?

AO: Usually, yeah. Yeah.

LS: Do most people --- Have they heard of Zanzibar?

AO: Here in the US?

LS: Yes.

AO: Yeah, I think so. Well, maybe they don't know where the place is.

LS: But they've heard of it. It's sort of like a mythical thing like Timbuktu.

AO: Yeah! [laughs] Hey, Zanzibar Blue [a popular jazz club and restaurant] is here in Philadelphia! So they've heard the word "Zanzibar."

LS: And your ethnic group?

AO: My ethnic group? What do you mean? [laughs]

LS: Like a tribal group. If you are in Tanzania and someone says "What's your ---?"

AO: Yeah, that's the thing. I don't know how to call myself. My father is an Arab from Yemen and my mother is from Zanzibar. She, originally her ancestors are from the Comoro Islands with the African ancestry and Arab mixed.

LS: Oh, your mother's mixed?

AO: The ancestors, yeah, maybe the great-grandmother and great-grandfather. Maybe the great-grandfather was an Arab, married someone from the Comoros. You know, there was intermarriage. There's a lot of intermarriage and so we can say half-Arab and half-African. I don't know which ethnic group you call that.

LS: So people ---

AO: So it's not like the Tanzanian mainland. Zanzibar is different from Tanzanian mainland where you have ethnic groups like wa-Sekuma(?), wa-Nyamwezi, wa-Haya --- All those ethnic groups, in Zanzibar, it's a mix.

LS: And your native language?

AO: Swahili.

LS: So does anyone identify themselves as Swahili?

AO: Like calling themselves Swahili?

LS: Is that considered an ethnic group? It's just a language group?

AO: The word Swahili was used as a cover term to refer to these different languages on the East coast of Africa. So it's rare for people to say they are wa-Swahili, because it's not really an original term that people refer themselves.

LS: Even in Mombasa, they don't say that?

AO: Even in Mombasa, I think. Because we have these different groups. Like in Zanzibar we have the word for "Zanzibar." "Zanzibar" is also a word that was used by maybe Persians to refer to the islands. But we have a local name which is "Unguja." So people from Zanzibar island of Unguja will naturally refer themselves to as wa-Unguja. So ---

LS: So, you say ---

AO: So I can say I am wa-Unguja. Okay? I speak Ki-Unguja. Maybe in a general term, I can say I am Swahili, but Swahili, as I say, it's a term that is not natural, it's invented. It's not natural. Even though we speak the language, but it's --- we --- I speak Ki-Unguja. And in Lamu, for example, island off Kenya, people speak Ki-Yamu or Ki-Lamu and they are wa-Lamu. Do you see that?

LS: But it's still a dialect of Swahili?

AO: It's still the dialect of Swahili, a variety of Swahili that's used. Yeah, we have a lot of different varieties. And so someone from island of Pemba for example, which is a sister island ---- the Zanzibar island are Unguja and Pemba --- they naturally, like it comes naturally: "Who are you? Where from?" "I am from Pemba. I am Pemba. I speak a variety of Swahili which is Ki-Pemba." Do you see that?

LS: Yes.

AO: So it's something like, we are Swahili in maybe, whatever, academic sense, like the way the language, the term is used. It's not because we don't want to be but --- Do you understand what I am trying to say?

LS: No, I understand. I'm interested in what you, in how you identify yourself. Because it doesn't matter what people from the outside are saying.

AO: Right, yeah. So that's is how I would, and everybody usually who come from these different places will say. So they will say, "Yeah, we speak Swahili as our first language."

LS: And if somebody here says, "Are you Swahili?" Do you ---

AO: I can say, "Yes."

LS: You say yes?

AO: Yeah, because that's what is understood, that area is a Swahili-speaking area. But not everybody will say, they will say, "Okay, I --- " Maybe they wouldn't even understand, "Are you Swahili?" You know? It's not usually what people refer to themselves. They will refer to the variety, in more specific. You understand?

LS: Do you find it that almost everybody in the United States has heard of Swahili?

AO: Right.

LS: And do they usually know that it is from East Africa or they just know it's Africa someplace? Are there misconceptions? Do they think that everybody in Africa speaks Swahili?

AO: Yeah, I think --- With Swahili coming from Africa, they think it's anywhere in Africa.

LS: That's interesting, because most people say they speak a language that no one's ever heard of.

AO: "Are you from Africa? They speak Swahili." And, you know, you could be from Senegal! [laughs]

LS: Do you speak any other African languages?

AO: No.

LS: Do you speak Arabic?

AO: I speak Arabic, not fluently, but I can get by. But in Zanzibar, almost everybody just speaks Swahili and not another language because ---

LS: But what percentage of the population has it as a native language? It's probably not that big?

AO: In Zanzibar?

LS: No, not in Zanzibar. In Tanzania.

AO: In Tanzania, no. As a first language?

LS: As a first language.

AO: Maybe five percent.

LS: Is there a policy where they learn it in school?

AO: Right, but people in Tanzania especially, they speak it as a fluent second language. So it's like they are native speakers, but they have another language. The only ---

LS: Because they actually learn it as a subject in school, right?

AO: They learn it as a subject in school.

LS: Does the ---

AO: The medium of instruction --- It is the official national language, it's the medium of instruction in elementary school. It's taught as a subject in secondary school. At the university, we have a whole department of Ki-Swahili. We have an Institute of Ki-Swahili at the University of Dar es Salaam.

LS: It's the language of instruction through primary school?

AO: From Grade 1, Standard 1 to Standard 8, before they go to secondary school. But it's not just in school. They hear it in the street, people speak it to each other, and so kids, before they go to school, they learn their ethnic language and Swahili. Maybe they learn Swahili more than their ethnic language.

LS: Is there a tendency for interethnic couples to speak Swahili so that their kids speak Swahili?

AO: Right, umm-hmm, yeah, yeah.

LS: So things are becoming more and more Swahili ---

AO: Right, more Swahili. And people like academicians at the University of Dar es Salaam are talking about some languages disappearing or dying, because Swahili is used more and more and more and more and everybody speaks --- you know, go to Tanzania anywhere, you can hear, speak Swahili ---

LS: When they enacted that policy, was there resentment on the part of people who were not native Swahili speakers?

AO: No.

LS: Really?

AO: I didn't hear of anyone.

LS: They have such a sort of socialistic kind of policy that everybody sort of participated in that?

AO: Right at that time, Swahili was already ---

LS: It was already ---

AO: It was used, it was already known by everybody. It was the language people used all the time.

LS: They were just formalizing something already in place?

AO: Right, as a natural follow-up of ---

LS: I see. What was your school experience like? You were born in Zanzibar?

AO: Right.

LS: And your father had come over from Yemen to work at something and married your mother?

AO: Yeah, my father came. He was a businessman and his father, in turn, was also a businessman.

LS: Did he come as an adult?

AO: He came as an adult. He came maybe when he was maybe eighteen years old. I am not exactly sure of the dates. He came, and somehow was introduced to my grandfather, my mother's father, because they're all kind of religious people. And they met at somebody's house, at a religious gathering or something like that, and then people like, you know, they match-make, and someone suggested why doesn't my father marry my mother, you know, things like that.

LS: So he was looking? I mean, that was an acceptable thing for an Arab to marry someone from Zanzibar? Or was it that they were both, sort of, are they all, sort of sheriffs(?) or something like that?

AO: It was accepted, because these business man would come and stay two, three years. You know, they come with the monsoon winds, at that time, with their boats, and they stay for awhile, do business, and after two, three years they'll go again home. Some of them, some didn't go home. They stayed. My father would make a point to go back to Yemen, so when the match-making was done, he even didn't know my mother and my mother didn't know him. It was arranged between my grandfather and his friend who knew my father. So it was arranged like that. And so that kind of arrangement was done, and Arabs who came to Zanzibar married like that and stayed, and got kids, and remained in Zanzibar. Others went back. Usually, they were not allowed to take kids with them, and some did. But usually they would go back home.

LS: Did your father go back and forth?

AO: Yeah.

LS: He was gone a lot when you were growing up?

AO: Yeah, he was gone a lot. I think I tried to justify his being gone a lot, is that when his dad, his father left him and he went to Indonesia, he left him as a child and he never returned to Yemen. He lived in Indonesia, married there, settled there, and died there. So I have a feeling that my father didn't want to do what his father did. And he had his mother in Yemen, so he wanted to always go back and visit his mother. And he would always, like, he'll stay two, three years in Zanzibar, and when my older sister was born and then my two brothers were born, he took a picture of him and his daughter and two sons. But my mother couldn't take a picture, you know. It's Arab people and Islamic and all the women has to be covered and cannot be seen, so my mother was never in the picture that he took. So he went the first time, I think after the maybe three, four years, with the picture of his three kids, to show to his mother. He stays there for one year or so, then he came back. So there is a difference in years between the third child and me, like three years because he had to go home and stay there. So he came back, and then he, he, I was born, and then my sister, another sister was born. I was born, I think, and then he took another picture. A family picture, and then he went back and send a picture to his mother, then came back. There're seven of us, and each time there would be a family picture with the siblings and the father.

LS: Did you ever go to Yemen and meet your grandmother?

AO: No, I went to Yemen but I never met my grandmother. My father finally, finally left Tanzania, Zanzibar. He was in Zanzibar, then he went to mainland Tanzania and Dar es Salaam to work, and then he went back to Yemen. He never really acculturated to the way of life of Zanzibar people or Tanzania, in general. He was strict, strictly followed the way he was brought up in Yemen and somehow he couldn't get along with whatever was going on. So he went back to Yemen. So I went to visit him when he was in Yemen, in the village where he was born. I am so glad I wasn't born there. [laughs]

LS: Why? Is it really ---

AO: Oh my God! It's a desert. The place is a desert. It's a historic place, Islamic place where people go and visit the cheikh, these religious, Islamic leaders. It's a village called Mishtanir(?), a town called Tarin(?). And these two towns are very famous in terms of religious readings and Islamic scholars.

Arabic scholars. But the two towns are kind of known. And my father is what people would call Sheriff, like a descendant of Prophet Mohammed. And in Yemen, in this village, there is some kind, also a caste system. It's not Islamic. I think it's just a traditional way of life, where we have the upper class and the upper class are the descendants of the Prophet. And there is the middle class that *guards* the upper class. That's like the origin. Then there is a lower class that work for upper class. Something like that.

LS: There is something like that all over West Africa. And Islam has never been able to get rid of it.

AO: I saw that and I said, "Oh, my gosh! This is ---" And then, these people like my father and his father in turn could not work in that village because they are not supposed to work.

LS: Oh, I see.

AO: So they had to leave to go work some other place. So my grandfather went to work some other place, my father came to Zanzibar to work, and then they would go back home with money and da-da-da, da-da-da --- So that was that. And, of course, it could be hard there to live. It is very hot, very --- when I visited, it was summertime, very, very hot.

LS: Yemen supposed to have one of the lowest literacy rates for women in the world.

AO: Yeah, because they are not allowed to go to school, they will learn --- Of course, they'll learn the Arabic script. They learn how to read the Koran, but they don't go to the formal schools. So they knew how to read and write the script, but not ---

LS: They didn't have any content besides ---

AO: So they wouldn't go out. So one of my brothers who was born in Zanzibar, same mother, same father, in Zanzibar, went to Yemen and settled there actually.

LS: Oh, really?

AO: Yeah, he did. I don't know *what* made him do that. But he did. He married there and has kids there in that village, but had to leave to go to a coastal town because then his daughters could go to school.

[break in tape] My brother's still there. He'll come visit my mother maybe once in four, five years. Just this past summer, he was there in Tanzania, and I was there, and for the first time in years, all of us, the siblings are there with our mother.

LS: Does he seem like a Yemeni now?

AO: Where?

LS: Your brother. Does he seem ---

AO: Yeah! Yeah, he --- [laughs] He speaks Swahili and everything, but he has lived in Yemen for a long time and he kind of sounds a little bit ---

LS: People in Yemen, there is no discrimination against people from the African continent?

AO: I didn't notice that, yeah.

LS: So your brother probably could go and fit in?

AO: Yeah, he was a Yemeni. Because they knew where his father came from, where his grandfather come from, and he was just one of them. Even though when we went he didn't know any Arabic. He had to learn Arabic. [laughs]

LS: What an experience. So you went to school, you started school in Zanzibar ---

AO: In Zanzibar.

LS: And you went into primary school?

AO: I went to primary school in Zanzibar, umm ---

LS: What kind of school was that?

AO: Uhhh ---

LS: Public school?

AO: It's a public school, yeah. Almost everybody went to public school in Zanzibar. There were one or two private, but nobody could afford to go to a private school.

LS: And then after primary school, what happened?

AO: After primary school, I went to a secondary school. Actually, I was one of the best students in my class in the year. So I did --- you know, you do an entrance exam. Instead of doing entrance exam in standard eight, I did entrance exam in standard seven. So then I skipped a year and went to standard nine. That's in secondary school. There are four years of secondary school: standard nine up to standard twelve.

LS: Sounds like the American system.

AO: Yeah, there are twelve. So after you finish twelve, you have an option of going to what they call high school. It's thirteen and fourteen, like preparation to go to college, thirteen and fourteen. It's called form five and form six, also sometimes. But I didn't get that chance to go, didn't get chosen to go because there was --- Oh, another option is to go to teachers training college or to other colleges, technical college or something like that. But when I finished standard twelve, I had to start teaching because we had a lack of teachers at that time.

LS: How old were you?

AO: I was eighteen years old. So I had to start teaching because of lack of teachers.

LS: And you said you had, was this something that the government said you needed ---

AO: Yeah, the government. This was after the revolution in Zanzibar. And people didn't --- the teachers that were there before left, and many people were leaving. We had lots of Europeans teaching in secondary school before, before ---

LS: They wanted to Africanize the system ---

AO: Yeah, after the revolution after the revolution, they left. We had a shortage of teachers, so many people who had completed standard twelve were kind of forced to teach.

LS: And to teach in primary school?

AO: I taught primary school the first year, and then there was a shortage in secondary school so the second year I started teaching in the secondary school. There was not much difference between the first group of students that I taught in secondary school and myself.

LS: And this is all in Zanzibar?

AO: This is in Zanzibar.

LS: So, how long did you do that?

AO: I did that for about five, six years and I really wanted to continue, to go to college but there was no opportunity to go to college because I had to --- still, there was a shortage of teachers and then people were chosen to go to outside to study, to go to the universities, but then there was some kind of, uhh, not everybody got a chance to do that. So a few people, a few students were chosen to go. So fortunately one of my uncles, my mother's kind of brother, not biological brother, but someone who grew up with her in the same house and we regard him as our uncle. And he was actually the one who really saw to it that we studied, you know? That we studied, we did well in school, he would come and check our homework, and, "Have you done your homework? Why are you sleeping at this time when you have your homework?"

LS: Did your mother go to school at all?

AO: My mother went to school for three years.

LS: So does she read?

AO: She reads.

LS: She can read.

AO: She can read, yeah. She went to school because of the fact that her father is one of the founders of a school called Comorian School. So he had to show a good example, and he didn't have a son so he sent my mother.

LS: This is a school for Comorians?

AO: Yeah, a school for Comorians. But then she left before she --- But she knew how to read, she knows how to read and write. So the my uncle who was really, very --- he found education very important --- he found a way where he was able to get a scholarship for me to go to Kuwait, to do my undergraduate. So that was like after six years of teaching.

LS: So at this point you're twenty-four years old.

AO: Yeah. Umm-hmm. Umm-hmm.

LS: So you go. And what did you think about going to Kuwait?

AO: I've never really gone anywhere, except Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam. When my father was in Dar es Salaam, I'd go visit Dar es Salaam, and then before I went to Kuwait, I was a little bit late for the college, you know, college year had started. So I went to Dar es Salaam and waited there for a few months before I really left. So I was in a big city --- like Dar es Salaam is bigger than Zanzibar. But that was like the first time that I really stayed away from home. But I was, of course, with my other uncle who lives in Dar es Salaam. I stayed with him. But going to Kuwait was like a big move.

LS: So you were in Kuwait City?

AO: Kuwait City, yeah. But my uncle came with me up to Nairobi. He said, "Okay, I will accompany you to Nairobi."

LS: So you couldn't even go from Dar es Salaam? Did you go over land to Nairobi or you flew?

AO: I don't know what happened, why we couldn't flew from Dar es Salaam, but the ticket that came from Kuwait, I think, so somehow they arranged it from Nairobi. So we went from Dar es Salaam by bus

to Nairobi, and then my uncle saw me off at the airport in Nairobi. And I went via Cairo and he arranged someone to come to get me at the Cairo Airport, some Zanzibari family that lives in Cairo. So I didn't have any problems at Cairo Airport, and I stayed in Cairo for two days, and then they took me to the airport and I went to Kuwait. Fortunately, there was an official from Kuwait University who was waiting at the Kuwaiti airport. So, I didn't have any problems.

LS: I bet you were scared, though.

AO: Yeah! Plus, I didn't speak Arabic. I knew a few words, but I didn't really know, you know? I knew like to read the Koran and knew some words like, "Assalaam alekum." But I didn't really, I hadn't studied Arabic.

LS: How was your English?

AO: My English was ---

LS: You had gone to secondary school in English ---

AO: Secondary school was in all English, so I was pretty good in English. Writing was, we did a lot of writing, you know, but not speaking. But then I taught in secondary school for several years, so I got a lot of practice using English in teaching.

LS: So when you got there did you have to do a crash course in Arabic?

AO: I took Arabic, yes. I didn't take a crash course, but I did Arabic classes. Arabic, of course, is a language requirement. We had to do that.

LS: And this was before you started your content stuff.

AO: I didn't study in Arabic. I went there and I did English Literature and Linguistics.

LS: Oh, so you did it in English?

AO: Yeah. Studied in English, so I didn't need Arabic for my studies. But I took Arabic as a course and the learnt a lot of Arabic while I was there. I was there for four years, but every summer I would come home.

LS: Did you like it?

AO: Yeah, uh, it, it was --- it was a rich city, so we got everything we wanted. A scholarship took care of everything and took care for a ticket to go back home every summer.

LS: Were there other Zanzibaris there or Tanzanians?

AO: No, there were Kenyans. I was roommates with a couple of Kenyan students. There were people from Oman who originally were from Zanzibar. They were in secondary school, they were not in college. Yeah, there were many Kenyans.

LS: And did you feel like Africans were well accepted in Kuwait? People were friendly? Or did you all form your little group?

AO: We were on campus and it was --- we were all the time together and I didn't make any Kuwaiti friends. So I don't have a Kuwaiti friend.

LS: Because they were kind of closed?

AO: Yes, it was hard for me to make, to make --- I didn't make Kuwait friends. I don't know why. It was, maybe it was just hard. They were not open, coming, you know, like, they see a foreigner and they come and meet with you --- I didn't have that. But I had the Kenyan friends who were already there.

LS: So, after four years, when you finished, what did you do?

AO: When I finished, I came back home. Actually, that's when I wanted to get married. Ahmed and I had met --- we knew each other in Zanzibar, but we really never dated or anything --- but we had eyes on each other and I wanted to say, "Let's get married," but we then didn't get married. We talked about getting married, but then we never did.

LS: So you were in contact while you were in Kuwait?

AO: For many years, we didn't really get in touch. I was in Kuwait and he went to Madagascar, Comoro Islands and Madagascar. And then, maybe in my last year of college, he got my address and we started writing to each other and said, "Okay, let's get married." Or something like that. [laughs] "So, okay, come to Tanzania." And we met in Tanzania, in Dar es Salaam. That was in '78, I return to Tanzania.

LS: So you went back to Dar es Salaam?

AO: Dar es Salaam and we got married and then ---

LS: What did your family think? Did they know who he was?

AO: Yeah, they knew. He was kind of a distant relative. So the family knew him. So my father actually was there in Dar es Salaam, at that time, and he wanted it and he liked --- he wanted it. So my uncle, actually, didn't, my uncle who was very involved with my education.

LS: Why did he not want you to?

AO: He wanted me to continue, to do my Masters, and continue with my PhD right away, because I had already lost some time. And he, he really want that, and I had to just say no.

LS: So you saw each other in Dar es Salaam, and then you went to Zanzibar and you got married.

AO: We did it in Dar es Salaam. Because my mother at that time, and my father, were in Dar es Salaam. My other uncles was there. So, we didn't have to go to ---

LS: And Ahmed's family agreed with the marriage?

AO: Yeah, his uncle was there in Dar es Salaam. So everybody was in Dar es Salaam. And we agreed and [chuckles] it was quick --- we didn't do any kind of a big celebration. It was just the official ceremony, the "sherka"(?).

LS: So you got married and then what did you do?

AO: I went to Madagascar. We went to Madagascar.

LS: Was he going to school there?

AO: Yes, he was at the University of Madagascar and studying the same kind of stuff that I studied: English. English literature.

LS: How long did you stay there?

AO: In Madagascar?

LS: Yes.

AO: Until '81. 1978 to 1981. Three years.

LS: You were there for three years?

AO: Yeah. I taught English there at the American Cultural Center. Ahmed also taught English at the American Cultural Center while he was studying. So, that was our living.

LS: Did you like living --- you were in Antananarivo?

AO: Antananarivo, yeah, yeah.

LS: Did you like it?

AO: Yeah, yeah, and I practiced my French there. I studied French in Kuwait as another language requirement, and then while I was in Madagascar I had a chance to practice. 'Cause when you just study it in school you don't really get a lot of ( ). We didn't get to practice it. So I liked Antananarivo. It was a great experience.

LS: People say it's a beautiful city, but they say it's got terrible pollution.

AO: I didn't notice it at that time, I don't know. But it's, uhh, there was a lot of women doing business stuff and selling things at the market.

LS: Did you have any kids?

AO: My first child.

LS: Dida was born there?

AO: Was not born in Madagascar, it was conceived there. I was pregnant with Dida in Antananarivo, and when it was time to deliver, like two months before, I went to Zanzibar. My mother had already gone back to Zanzibar at that time. It was in 1980 and I had Dida in Zanzibar. And then Ahmed came and we

both returned with Dida to Madagascar. So that was in '80. February 1<sup>st</sup> 1980, Dida was born. But after two months, we went back to Madagascar. And then we li ---

**[END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1**

[START OF SIDE 2, TAPE 1]

LS: And what about Idarousse?

AO: Antananarivo was getting difficult financially. We were not getting enough money to really make ends meet, and politics was changing, and somehow it was not the right place to be. We decided to move. So we moved to the Comoros. I had never been to Comoros. My mother's, maybe, great-grandfather came from the Comoros and moved to Zanzibar, but my grandmother had never been and my grandfather had never been. My mother, also, had never been back to the Comoros. But I wanted to go to see how it was, and Ahmed has relative in Comoros.

LS: He was born there?

AO: He was born in Zanzibar. His uncle moved to --- was in Zanzibar, maybe his family was in Zanzibar and then they went back to the Comoros. I don't know how they were. But he was raised in Zanzibar. He was born and raised in Zanzibar, while his siblings were born and raised in the Comoros Islands, but he lived with his uncle all the time. Until in the early '70s, late '60s when he went back to the Comoros.

LS: What did you think of that? Did you like it?

AO: I didn't.

LS: Why?

AO: I don't want to go there to sleep! I can't go visit. It is a nice beautiful country, but when we were there it was like coming from the frying pan and into the fire. We talk about not getting enough money -- it was worse. We were not getting paid at all. Because we were with the government. We got positions to teach English in secondary schools, government schools, and the government was not paying its employees. So we stayed like two, three months without getting paid. So whatever money we came with from Antananarivo was the one that was helping us. And then, of course, like two months pay, something like that. So that was not a very good experience, and we were not in Moroni, the capital. We were in a village very far, and people are nice. I met very nice people, they were very helpful. I became pregnant with Idarousse, my second child, in Comoros. They were very, very, very helpful and I delivered Idarousse in Comoros. I didn't go back to Zanzibar.

LS: In the clinic or did you go to the capital?

AO: I went to the capital, to Moroni. That's where had it. The nurses and the doctors were very, very good to me. I had check-ups in the village, but I went to Moroni once in a while. And we knew the doctor there and he was very good. And then the midwife was excellent. And so Idarousse was born there. And then when he was two months old, I couldn't take it anymore. I said, "Okay!" My uncle was already a great resource for me, a great support. I was in touch with him, and I say, "I wanna come back." And, of course, he wants people to study, and so --- he knew about a program at the University of Dar es Salaam where I can go do my Masters in Linguistics, and he went, sent in the application form, and all that kind of stuff, so everything was sent, and Dida, Idarousse and I went back to Tanzania. Ahmed had remained behind for awhile, and then he came ---

LS: You went to Dar?

AO: To Dar, right. My uncle was staying in Dar at that time. And I studied. [laughs] I pleased my uncle, somehow. But I wanted also. I thought just having a B.A. was not enough and having an M.A. would work fine. And, uh, so ---

LS: So how long did your Masters program take?

AO: It was like, umm, it took, umm --- it was '80 --- I started in '83 --- Idarousse was born '82 --- I started in '83. It took two years --- '85. And when I was done, I was employed by the University of Dar es Salaam in the Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics. That's when I started teaching. I taught for two years, and then I started to move again. [laughs]

LS: Had Ahmed come back?

LS: Yeah, yeah. He came after just a few months, after we left he came to Dar es Salaam. So we were together. He got a job with the French Cultural Center and he taught French. You know, when he was in Madagascar he learned a lot of French, and so he was able to switch from English to teaching French at the cultural service. And he was kind of the head of the Cultural Center, which was in town. Not --- there were two different centers, and he was part of one center, then he would teach in the evenings. So, it was, you know ---

LS: So what did you --- you just decided that a Masters wasn't enough?

AO: [laughs] Yeah, because at the University of Dar es Salaam they wanted people to have their Ph.D.s to get promotion, like any other universities. And so, luckily enough, there was someone from Indiana University wrote to the University of Dar es Salaam, wrote to someone at the University of Dar es Salaam, saying they are looking for someone who can teach Swahili and who can also do a Ph.D. in linguistics in the Department of Linguistics at Indiana. So it wasn't my intention to write applications to the US. If I was just there, maybe I would just find a program at the university with a link in England, for example, and do ---

LS: That would have been the normal ---

AO: Right, I would have done that. But then this came, and we talked, Ahmed and I, and everybody said, "Okay, why don't you? Why don't you apply? Why don't you write?" You know, I just wrote to this coordinator at Indiana University of the Department of Linguistics, African Language Program, and he said, "Okay." He sent me the application forms and I filled them out and da-da-da and it was accepted and so the university paid for my ticket to come to the US, because I was still employed in the university. And, I suppose, after finishing I had to go back and I did go back and I taught for one year at the University of Dar es Salaam after I completed.

LS: So you went to Indiana and ---

AO: In the meanwhile, I had Mustafa. Mustafa was born in Dar es Salaam and he was a few months old when I came to Indiana. Then, everybody came.

LS: And you left him there?

AO: I left him there. For several --- for a couple of years. I was so bad! But he got a lot of love from everybody, you know? You know, we live --- everybody lives together, my sisters, my cousins.

LS: So he lived in your mother's house?

AO: He was in my mother's house. And Ahmed was there. So, in a couple of years, then Ahmed and everybody were able to come. I visited Tanzania before they came.

LS: That must have been really hard.

AO: It was hard. It was hard. [laughs] What people --- what people do!

LS: I've lived there, and the people who were separated for so long, so I can't really complain about my husband and my son being in Massachusetts. It's not the same thing.

AO: Yeah, we had like two years of --- the kids were with my mother, and had a lot of support, lot of love. My brothers were very supportive. They are still supportive. I have two brothers in Zanzibar right now who are staying with my mother, taking care of my mother, and one of my sisters is there, and they all took care of everybody, you know, they didn't lack of anything ---

LS: Of course not. It just your maternal grief.

AO: Right, yeah.

LS: So when Mustafa finally came back and lived with you, did it take awhile for him to think of you as his mother?

AO: He knew I was his mother from even before. I would go visit, he knew I was his mother. Pictures, and people would talk about me, and he knows that he has other mothers, you know? So, like, my sisters and my cousins are mothers to him. We don't have another word, you'll say "younger mother, older mother."

LS: Right, your sisters are all called "mother."

AO: Right. But he knew I was his mother. He was angry with me the first time I went there and he was crying. [laughs] But then he was fine. He's very sweet and he's very supportive and very dependable. We get along very well.

LS: So how long did it take you to get through the Ph.D. program?

AO: Oh, gosh, that was '87 to '92. But from '89, when everybody came, to '92, we were all together in Bloomington, Indiana. And then in '93 I had to go back to Tanzania, because I promised I would go back. So I went there. But in the meanwhile, Ahmed had started his Ph.D. program in political science. The kids are used to studying in the US and we couldn't afford to have everybody go back, so I went with Mustafa, and Dida followed me later to Tanzania, but couldn't adjust to the school system there.

LS: How old was Mustafa?

AO: That was in '92. Mustafa was five years old.

LS: So it was easier for him?

AO: Yes, it was easier for him. He started school there. [to herself] Did he start school there? [pause] No, five, he was younger than that.

LS: So Dida went and then ---

AO: Went back to Indiana, 'cause she --- Also, I was staying with my nieces, Talha and Alwiya, they were there. And we went back together with them, and then their dad had gone back to Zanzibar. He was in Saudi Arabia,. He's a medical doctor. And now he has his own clinic in Zanzibar. His kids are there, and Talha came back with me this time, 'cause she couldn't fit in the school system there, too. It was hard. So we had to think about their education and how they were so used to this kind of system.

LS: It's really hard.

AO: It was hard. Dida couldn't manage. So we came back and lived at the University of Georgia for one year before coming here to Philadelphia.

LS: So from Dar, you taught for a year, and then you got a one year position in Georgia?

AO: In Georgia.

LS: Everybody went there, too?

AO: Yeah, except Ahmed was working on his Ph.D. in Indiana, but he would make a lot of visits to us in Georgia.

LS: So, what year did you come to Penn?

AO: '95. [doorbell rings] Oh, who's there? [break in tape]

LS: So you were in Georgia and then you find out about the position at Penn. So, you've been here since 1995.

AO: Right.

LS: So, just for the record, tell me what your title is at Penn.

AO: My what?

LS: The title of your position at Penn.

AO: I am the African Language Coordinator and Lecturer in Foreign Languages.

LS: Okay. Have you liked it in Philadelphia?

AO: Actually, I have. When I first came in 1995, I said, "Oh, what is this place?" It's so different from Bloomington, Indiana. [laughs]

LS: And from Athens, Georgia.

AO: And Athens, Georgia. So, at the beginning, I just said, "Oh." It looked darker to me, the houses were looked old to me, the streets looked dirty to me and ---

LS: You were living in West Philadelphia, as well.

AO: Yeah, so I said, "Oh, my gosh. But then, after awhile --- People scared me, "Walk with your eyes behind your head." I was living in West Philadelphia at that time, near Penn. So I was a little bit scared. But after awhile, when you get used to a place, you really get used to it. And you know where you're going and then you're not scared anymore. So I wasn't scared anymore. And the buildings just --- and the city seemed nice. The buildings --- ( ) --- getting used to the buildings --- somehow the streets became cleaner, I don't know. Maybe when I moved in, the students were moving out and had a lot of trash outside there. I don't know. There was a lot of trash outside. But then it cleared up, and the streets were clean, and the houses looked beautiful, after awhile, the structures nice. I didn't like the row housing at the beginning, but then now I look at them and say, "Oh!" They're kind of nice.

LS: Completely different from the Midwest.

AO: Yes, definitely.

LS: So you have something to compare the US to. How does being a foreigner in Kuwait compare to being a foreigner here? Are the experiences different?

AO: I have become more involved with Americans. I have met more Americans here, maybe in the first two or three years I was in Bloomington, Indiana, than when I was in Kuwait. I totally don't have any Kuwaiti friends. I didn't make any Kuwaiti friends. So, umm, I, and I was ---

LS: Is it easier to be a foreigner here than in Kuwait? Do you think? I know you were a student there, so that's kind of a special thing.

AO: I didn't have any problems in Kuwait as a foreigner. So, I didn't, I was taken good care of by the Kuwaiti government. I was given all the things that I needed. I just didn't make Kuwait friends. It didn't matter to me at that time, it didn't matter at all, because I had my friends, I had Kenyan friends. I met Kuwaitis in classes, and we talked, but it was just that. And I met my first American friend in Kuwait, actually, so --- and she was very, very friendly and ( ).

LS: Was she a student?

AO: She came to teach English, in the English program at Kuwait University. And she was with her husband and her child. She kind of adopted us. She wasn't much older than us, but me and my Kenyan friend we would go every weekend go to --- because ( ) to have a family, like, we had to have permission, we were living in a dormitory, and would have to have like a family come, because ( ) and she would come get us. So then things changed. At the second year, actually, maybe I didn't make an effort to have Kuwaiti friends. Somehow I was like in a foreign land, like with Kenyan friends and American friend and Palestinians --- these American friends had Palestinian friends --- and a couple of Kuwaiti friends, but we would meet at their house, at the American house.

LS: What do you like the most about living in the US?

AO: In the US?

LS: Umm-hmm.

AO: (to LS) What I like the most? (to herself) Ummm --- what do I like the most?

LS: What do you like the least? You can start with that if you want to. (AO laughs)

AO: It's just work, work, work. Work all the time. Especially here in Philadelphia, at the University of Pennsylvania, I seem to be working the whole day. I go to work in the morning and my classes are in the evening mostly. I supervise the other languages. I have to visit some of them and they are in the evening. So, it's pretty much like it's the whole day taken. And even if I don't --- for example, I don't, like today I didn't go, I should go later on in the afternoon. But then I don't get to do the things that I want to do. If I just wait until classes begin, then I am behind with a lot of stuff.

LS: You feel kind of overwhelmed?

AO: Right, yeah. So that's what it is, that I ---

LS: Would it be different in Tanzania?

AO: Ummm ---

LS: Let's say if you taught at the University of Dar es Salaam.

AO: Yeah. It would have been different in Indiana, I think, Bloomington, Indiana. I would have been going in the morning, have my classes maybe by the latest at four, and have my evening at home.

LS: Is there something about the way the classes are scheduled here? Why are they scheduled in the evening?

AO: Because they are offered through the College of General Studies, African Languages, and they cater for people who are working who can't --- the course is in the College Of General Studies. But it could be changed. African Languages could be given in the morning, but if they are within a department or African Studies --- I am not sure.

LS: That's the disadvantage of how it's structured.

AO: Yeah. It's the way they're structured. And so that's the thing I didn't like at the beginning. I got used to and I'm now tired.

LS: Aren't you going to look for another Swahili teacher? Is that right?

AO: We have Swahili teachers who come to teach --- like, for the last five years, we've had five teachers. Ahmed was --- taught for a couple of years, but then we each time change, because it is not a full-time position. We don't have graduate assistants, like other universities where --- umm ---

LS: Like what you did.

AO: Like what I did in Indiana. I was the graduate assistant, what they call Associate Instructor. I taught Swahili and I studied and I was part of the program. I was committed to the program. But our language teachers are temporary, have other jobs, have other commitments, and they're not really committed to the program. They come teach. They're doing a wonderful job teaching, but they have other commitments.

LS: It seems like they should make an exception with the Swahili.

AO: I have made a request that at least we should have a full-time person for Swahili, because we having more and more students. And though we have more and more levels of Swahili being taught --- at the beginning when I first came there were only two, three levels. Now we have --- and sometimes it'll just be two levels --- and now we have up to four levels and we have ---

LS: That's impressive. And you have the summer program and everything to justify ---

AO: And we have the summer program, yeah.

LS: Well, I hope that's going to work.

AO: Yes.

LS: If you were offered a job at the University of Dar, or something like that, would you ever consider of going back? Or do you think that it would be hard for you to now teach in Africa?

AO: No, I don't think it's hard for me to teach in Africa. I may think of going back in maybe three or four years time. I am thinking of Mustafa, who is now finishing middle school and still has four years of high school to go through. Because if we get a job at the University of Dar es Salaam and leave now, it's going to be hard on him to adjust to the school system there --- same kind of problem we had with Dida and Idarousse. So we have to think about him, Mustafa, now. So even if I get one at the University of Dar es Salaam, I wouldn't go. But if I get another place here, where the teaching is not in the evening or more, more --- better, I don't know --- better for me in terms of work, work, work, yeah ---

LS: Would you like to go back to Africa sometime?

AO: Yeah. Definitely.

LS: ( ) now that Ahmed's over there ---

AO: (laughs) Definitely I think of my mother, and she's getting older, and I always think of her as very strong, very supportive. I've been thinking of this phrase actually in my mind: "We get our names from our fathers, but our support and strength from our mothers." And I really wanna --- I have made a point to go visit my mother every summer, and I would like to go back, and if possible be with her later on, and that would be in four or five years. It's not now.

LS: So when you think living of here, you think of a period in your life but it's not permanent and you would like to go back?

AO: Right.

LS: What do you think about your kids, though? Do you think that they will stay here?

AO: I think they will wanna stay here and, actually, we just got our permanent residency approved. And, umm ---

LS: Everybody got it?

AO: Yeah!

LS: And Ahmed got it?

AO: Ahmed got it, too.

LS: Oh, congratulations!

AO: Thanks.

LS: But Talha? Did Talha?

AO: Talha didn't. Talha is not ---

LS: She's not part of ---

AO: Part of ---

LS: She's not considered part of ( ).

AO: She's not in my visa and she couldn't be in my visa. She was in my visa when we were in Indiana, but she's not in my visa here, and I couldn't put her in, but I don't know why. But anyway, so --- So if they want to apply for citizenship, they would apply. But I wouldn't. I've kept my Tanzanian nationality and I would want to go back later on. But they may want to --- they pretty much were raised here, you know, and they ---

LS: What do they consider themselves?

AO: They consider themselves as from Tanzania, but they also know they have also learnt a lot of stuff from here and they have --- they think of themselves, I think, as from both places. They have their heritage over there. But they have acquired a lot of stuff, cultural things, from here, and they do those.

You know, they --- like Thanksgiving. Dida came and prepared ( ). I wouldn't have thought of saying, "Okay, let's make turkey." But she has --- they have been exposed to that. In Indiana, we had --- they would go to this --- they have an American grandmother. She would take them and show them how to carve pumpkins, or, you know? So they have done this those kind of things for Halloween, and for Christmas they have decorated ---

LS: But if you move back to Tanzania, will it be hard then to be away from your children?

AO: They will be adults. [laughs]

LS: Well, they will be away from you anyway, probably.

AO: They will be away from me. They'll be in college. Of course, Dida is away and we keep in touch and often we call and she comes visit. It will be harder in Tanzania to visit. So we have to think of a way that we'll always be meeting, if that point comes. I may not be able to go at all. You know, it depends on what I want to do.

LS: Does Ahmed think the same way?

AO: I think so, and that's why maybe he is taking this step of getting this job, where actually he is over there. So I don't know. It just happened.

LS: Do you think there would be anything hard about reintegrating into professional life there after having been in the United States?

AO: It may be, at the beginning. But I don't think I'll have a hard time adjusting. I've been working with people there the last two summers, with the group program abroad, the US Department of Education Advanced Study Leave(?), and I'm working with the University of Dar es Salaam with the Penn in Dar es Salaam program, and I went there and taught Swahili there this past summer, with the program. So, uhh, so, uhh, and, uhh, I don't think that would be a problem.

LS: It would be okay for you to live in Dar and not live in Zanzibar?

AO: Yeah, I've lived in Dar, and it is not that far. I would think of something to do in Zanzibar, like start my own school or something. If I have to develop a school or a center, a learning center, or something, I'll do that in Zanzibar.

LS: And get all the Americans and Europeans and Japanese to come in and study Swahili?

AO: Yeah, that could be, but also I might do something that could help the people in Zanzibar like the school kids. They have a lot of problem these days in Zanzibar because of ---- the educational system, I think, has gone down a little bit, with the language policy, like with teaching Swahili in elementary school and then going to teach English in secondary school, and people don't know English at all. And that kind of --- maybe work, propose something about language, maybe --- I don't know, but it is something we have to think ---

LS: Did you just see on the Internet that there is a big move, there's --- African leaders are being urged to take away all school fees?

AO: Take away all school fees?

LS: Because it's just such an obstacle. And it's keeping the teaching of woman and girls way down.

AO: In Tanzania, we have public schools. You don't have to pay for a lot --- maybe now these private schools are coming up, because the public schools, the education has gone down. We have private schools coming up. And the private school you have to pay. But public schools, we didn't have to pay at all, nothing. But these days, teachers ask --- do tutorials. They call "tuition", in the afternoons. So the kids pay the teachers for ---

LS: Extra help?

AO: Extra help.

LS: And then probably if you don't get extra help, you ---

AO: Yeah, yeah. And then they do that because they are not paid enough. The payment is not --- That was one of the things I was thinking, if I have to go to the University of Dar es Salaam, the payment is not good. That's when I went that one year, went back also, apart from the fact that kids could not adjusting, I wasn't getting enough. I couldn't make ends meet. Again, the same ( ) before ---

LS: Maybe with your experience, you can work for an international agency, or UNICEF, or something on the side, because you have all this experience.

AO: And then when you do something on the side, you don't really do justice to your teaching at the university. You're not concentrating. And that's what many people ---

LS: And that's what many people do. When Peter taught at the University of Dakar, all the English teachers were doing translation and English teaching on the side and they didn't do anything for their students.

AO: Right. So that is the problem. And so what do you do to solve this problem? I don't know. We have to do something.

LS: At least you have a few years 'cause you have to wait for Mustafa ---

AO: Right. It's just that I am thinking of it ---

LS: But that's good. It's interesting that so many people have different ways of thinking about what they're going to do. Let me ask you a little bit about your social circles. Do you tend to associate with a lot of Tanzanians? Here in Philadelphia, I mean.

AO: Yeah. Whenever there is an activity of Tanzanians, we usually go. But those activities do not happen all the time. So, like three or four times a year, I may go to a couple, because maybe the other couple I may not be here or may be busy. So there's like Independence Day, like ---

LS: Did you go see that last week?

AO: Yeah. I helped them get a place at Penn. African Studies kind of co-sponsored.

LS: Were there a lot of people there?

AO: Yeah, about twenty, twenty-five people. Yeah, it was dinner and umm ---

LS: Did you go at the end of the day?

AO: I went at the end of the day because I had to ---

**[END OF SIDE 2, TAPE 1]**

[START OF SIDE 1, TAPE 2]

LS: Do Tanzanians tend to meet at any place in particular in Philadelphia?

AO: We have met at a couple of people's houses a few times. We met at a park one time in the summer for a picnic, and I think two years ago there was an Independence celebration at Penn, also. We had reserved a place, and then this past weekend. So things like that.

LS: So if there's an event like that, since you don't have a formal association, how do you get the word out? A listserv or --- ?

AO: There is one person who has all the addresses of the Tanzanians who are here. Like when we meet at one place the first time, everybody wrote their addresses. And so that person has the addresses and will send out letters. All the ---

LS: Is that the lady whose name ---

AO: Yeah, the lady I gave --- the name I gave you. She will have the phone numbers and then she will call. Usually, I think she calls.

LS: How many Tanzanians do you think are here?

AO: Umm, about, maybe twenty-five, thirty families or more.

LS: Twenty-five or thirty.

AO: Yeah, I have at least some ---

LS: So it's still pretty small.

AO: Yeah, it's small.

LS: And mostly families or are there also ---

AO: Families. Many, most families.

LS: There are also some students?

AO: Yeah, some students, yeah.

LS: So that's a pretty easy group to contact.

AO: Yeah. But there's no listserv, and not many of them have email addresses, because they're not linked maybe with universities --- like students that have email addresses but not everybody.

LS: Do most people kind of think of themselves as being here for awhile and they're going to go home?

Or are some people here to stay permanently? Or are people ---

AO: I haven't talked about that. But some have been here long, so maybe they are already maybe permanent resident or US citizens, I'm not sure. We haven't really talked.

LS: Do you think most Tanzanians tend to fit in here pretty well? Do they feel comfortable in local society, in American society? Or do they always kind of keep their sense of distinctness?

AO: Umm, I don't know about the others. We tend to keep to ourselves here a lot, here in Philadelphia. Maybe different places have different dynamics, social dynamics. Here, it's kind of hard. Everybody is busy, I think. It's hard to make friends. Or maybe my kids have friends, but I haven't made a lot of friends. I met friends from work, like you and Sandra and Lynette. At work, and we are much better friends, I think. We visit each other, you come here, you know ---

LS: But not in the neighbourhood?

AO: Yeah, even though my neighbors, we say "hello" and "hi" and so ---

LS: I'm not sure that that's much different from Americans. I mean, I'm not sure if that's you being Tanzanian, or just that's what Americans are like in the city ---

AO: Yeah, possibly that's just, uhuh ---

LS: ( ) American life.

AO: But here it's different from Bloomington, for example. We have met a lot of people in Bloomington. And it's a maybe smaller place, it depends on the place.

LS: The Midwest is a lot friendlier.

AO: I don't know ---

LS: Well, I grew up in the Midwest and I think it's a lot --- I mean, it's a little bit more relaxed. And also, when you have young kids, sometimes you meet other parents and you have a connection to them ---

AO: Yeah, umm-hmm. Yeah. So I had more friends there then --- more people like --- my kids can say, "Let's call ---" like they call maybe Nancy. They call Nancy and ask how we can prepare this, umm, dinner. Mustafa went to New York the other day and bought a thimble, because he knew that Nancy likes

to collect thimbles. So, you know, things like that, they get --- or they will call and say, "I've called Bloomington to say hello." You know, it's maybe because, as you say, they grew up there and they made their friends and the family --- it was easier to, umm, to ---

LS: Yeah, yeah. I can see that.

AO: --- to meet more people. But it's a little bit hard here.

LS: Do you think most Tanzanians here are constantly in contact with their family back home?

AO: Yeah.

LS: And do they send money?

AO: Yeah, I think so. Yeah. [laughs]

LS: I have never heard an African say they don't send money home.

AO: Yeah. There was one person at the meeting, at the event this weekend. And she said people asked her to donate this, to donate that, and she said, "I'm already donating. I'm sending money home." [laughs] Most people are poor. But, yeah, I think that's something everybody does because they have left maybe their parents there, or their sisters, their brothers, and life is difficult, people are not getting enough money, and usually you tend to send something.

LS: There is no Tanzanian association. Are you a member of any other kind of association, or professional association?

AO: There is a Tanzanian Association. I am in the Tanzanian list.

LS: A national one?

AO: Yeah, a national one where --- you remember you said you couldn't go to the meeting, to the Tanzanian meeting at Nashville?

LS: Yes.

AO: That one. I am in there.

LS: Is that one mostly academics?

AO: Yeah, that one is mostly academics. But there also there is one called “Tanzanet,” and it’s for all, academics, non-academics, for everybody who is from Tanzania and I subscribe to that. I unsubscribed when I went home and I didn’t subscribe back, but I can always get back to ---

LS: And this is people who are just talking about what’s going on ---

AO: Yeah, and if there are problems, we would talk about problems. Like one time there was cholera in Zanzibar and people were talking about how we can send, umm --- There is also a “Zanzinet,” for people from Zanzibar.

LS: So there is Tanzanet and Zanzinet?

AO: Yeah, Tanzanet and Zanzinet. I was in ( ), I unsubscribe, when I went on my ( ), I didn’t subscribe back --- get overwhelmed with email messages. But then, when there is a problem, like for Tanzanet, like if in Tanzania in general there is a problem, people talk about it, and discuss politics, like during the elections, you know ---

LS: Is that nice to have that connection?

AO: Yeah.

LS: Yeah, it’s interesting how so many of these African groups --- if that ( ) wouldn’t even have that technological stuff, then get really organized and have these listservs, it’s umm --- What about --- is there a particular mosque? Do you tend to go to a mosque to pray or do you just pray at home?

AO: I pray at home, but there is a mosque here in Upper Darby, 69<sup>th</sup> Street. There are different mosques in West Philadelphia, like on 43<sup>rd</sup> and Walnut, 45<sup>th</sup> and Walnut. Ahmed would normally go to the mosque and the kids sometimes.

LS: Do they go on Walnut?

AO: The Walnut one, yes. And sometimes, yes, the 69<sup>th</sup> Street. Like Idarousse and --- There is a Tanzanian family around here that we do things together also.

LS: Oh, this is Dina and the kids? She’s American, right?

AO: She’s Tanzanian.

LS: Oh, she’s Tanzanian. I was thinking of the other lady, the one who was doing translation on the ---

AO: That's Naima. She's Kenyan --- she's American, but lived in Kenya for twenty years and was married to a Kenyan. Dina has two sons and sometimes they go to the mosque here with Idarousse and Mustafa. And the first year I was here, in West Philadelphia, I went to the 45<sup>th</sup> and Walnut mosque and Mustafa went to school. There's a school there.

LS: The imam's from where? Saudi Arabia? At 45<sup>th</sup> and Walnut.

AO: From Syria or something. Not Saudi Arabia, I don't think.

LS: There's a new mosque on Girard and 34<sup>th</sup> and the imam is from Ivory Coast. And he actually does the sermon and everything in French.

AO: In French?

LS: I'm assuming that might --- you might like that.

AO: Yeah, I'm still interested in going to that, umm, to the church where they do ( ).

LS: There were more than a hundred people there at that thing last week. You'd like that. He's a neat guy.

So there is no kind of social grouping that comes up when people go to the same mosque?

AO: No, no. Usually, women don't usually go to mosque. Like at home in Zanzibar the women pray at home, so I'm so used to that, so it's not natural for me to say, "Let's go to the mosque."

LS: Oh, I know, I know. I wonder how many women do go to the mosque around here. I never see too many women outside them.

AO: When I was at the 45<sup>th</sup>, I used to go there, there were a lot of --- many women came to the mosque. They came from here, from Upper Darby, actually. I think maybe more women here, in the US, go to mosque than at home.

LS: Well, that's what I wondered. Do you find any particular affinities with African American Muslims here? Do you have connections or is Islam practiced in a different way? Do you tend to find that you are more common with them than Americans who are Christian?

AO: No, I find --- [pause] I didn't find anything different, you know, like at the 45<sup>th</sup> and Walnut there were many African American Muslims there, but I didn't see that they were any different from African Americans who are not Muslims.

LS: What about connections with African Americans? Is that the group that you feel any particular closeness to or they're just like any other Americans?

AO: Like any other Americans.

LS: So you don't see any historic connection that makes you closer to them or ---

AO: Umm, that's kind of a hard question. I don't know. My first American friend I told about, she's African American. We are very, very close. And possibly it's our closeness or friendship started because she is African American and I am African in Kuwait, maybe. That could have been a factor. And we are very close until now. We communicate with each other, we visited her in New Orleans when she was there. Now she is in Minnesota. I visited her there. She is a very close friend of mine.

LS: Did she come for your birthday?

AO: She did. She was here.

LS: And someone else came from Minnesota?

AO: That's Minnesota. She was in New Orleans and then she has moved in Minnesota.

LS: Then I met here.

AO: Yes, she is very, very close. So I don't know if it's because she is African American. She could have been an ---an --- an American American(?), but it happens that she is African American.

LS: Let's talk a little bit about food. [AO laughs] What kind of cooking do you do?

AO: I cook rice everyday. [laughs]

LS: So you cook Tanzanian food?

AO: I cook Tanzanian food and my kids are: "Rice everyday!" I cook Tanzanian, yeah. I tend to cook rice and maybe curry, chicken curry or ---

LS: So your kids --- that's what they want? They like that?

AO: They eat it. They would have preferred maybe macaroni, which I don't make very well. When I do make it, it's not good, so they don't even eat it.

LS: So they like American food?

AO: They like American food, but they eat rice, too, when there's nothing else.

LS: Is there any particular thing --- Where do you find ingredients?

AO: We have a lot of Indian stores here. They sell the spices. Ahmed will always go look for the spices and he likes ---

LS: So the Indian stores over in West Philly and that kind of thing?

AO: Yes. We get cassava, we get green bananas. ( ) like cooking those, too. Coconut milk, we get coconut milk. We get coconut milk at Pathmark and cassava, also, at Pathmark.

LS: In Indiana, did you have a hard time finding those things?

AO: Yeah. We had to go to a special store. There were not that many. We would get frozen cassava in packages, but there were not that many. Here, there are plenty of places where they sell ---

LS: So the food in Zanzibar has really been influenced by Indian food?

AO: Umm, I really don't know if it is an Indian influence or --- but we have spices, a lot of the spices that the Indians use.

LS: I've heard people say that about Mombasa, that the food just is more similar to Indian food, and if it was the Indian Ocean connections.

AO: So it could be an Indian thing. But it's also --- Mombasa or ---

LS: Or it could be just all over there.

AO: Because we grow those spices. And so we use them in our food.

LS: Maybe the Indians got it from you.

AO: I don't know. I cannot really tell. But --- the chapati --- Indians make chapati. We make also the same thing. In Zanzibar, we don't call it chapati, we call it bread. We call it a different kind of bread, a certain kind of bread, another kind of bread. And so we make with wheat flour different kinds of bread, and they look like chapati, Indian chapati. Or with rice we make different kinds of bread, and, umm, so we like making bread with flour with wheat flour and with rice flour. And so, they resemble Indian chapati.

LS: What kind of music do you listen to?

AO: I don't have time to listen to music! I like Tarib music, when the kids put it on, I will listen.

LS: And your kids listen to American music?

AO: And jazz music. I like listening to jazz music, too, so when I drive to Penn and back, I put the 106.1 and I like listening to that. Yeah, and when my kids use the car, they'll have this --- I don't know what --- and it will be loud kind of music from one of those --- [both laugh]

LS: How have you brought up your kids? Obviously, you must want them to have some sort of Tanzanian outlook. How have you tried to do that? Is it hard to do that?

AO: It's kind of hard, but we try. First, they are also Islamic kids. They have to learn the Koran.

LS: How have they done that in the United States?

AO: It's hard. We try to tell them, "Okay, let's sit and do it." We don't have much time. so it doesn't get done very much here, even though we say, "Let's read now, let's do that." But whenever we get a chance, when they go home, for two, three months they will have a teacher come in ---

LS: Oh, so you try to do a kind of crash Koranic course ---

AO: Right. And when they come here, then we'll say, "Okay, let's keep a time to read." And Mustafa has been very good at keeping time to continue reading. Idarousse hasn't has much time, and, umm, he --- [laughs] So, but we encourage them to do that. And also, dress code. Like wearing shorts and very miniskirts. We try ---

LS: You don't allow it?

AO: We try to tell them not to do it, but sometimes it's so difficult. Like, Dida has to run track and has to wear those short --- panties. So, slowly, I wanna --- she is still doing that, but I wanna talk to her, little bit by little bit, that may be she can wear those very tight long ---

LS: Leggings.

AO: Leggings, yeah. Something like that. Maybe she will realize it herself because she's very conscious of being a Muslim, and fasting, and praying.

LS: Does she ---What about at college? Do they have a mosque there?

AO: I think they have a place where they can, and she said that there's a couple of students who are also Muslims, and for awhile they said they were talking, and I don't know how that --- to continue with that -- she will pray at --- in her room. She has ---

LS: Is she fasting? She doesn't have any problem doing that?

AO: She's fasting. She was fine until the other day. She was trying to contact me to say she had a meet and had to compete and should she fast or break the fast, but she wasn't able to contact me. I called later and talked to her, and she said, "I did just one." She didn't want to break the fast, but she took it easy and did one thing, and didn't do a lot. And I told her that you don't have to really force yourself. I usually like to have people not do things that would go against maybe their health, you know. So I told her that if you feel it's going to be very stressful, break the fast and you can make it some other day. And because you have a reason and you are told not to force yourself to do things.

LS: That seems like --- 'cause you don't want them to have a resentment or something.

AO: Right. So if it is very essential that you drink water, do it, and then make it up. Because there's a reason. And otherwise you'll just have to stop competing and ---

LS: But will she tell her coach? Does she explain to her coach?

AO: I am sure she has explained it to her coach.

LS: Okay. Because it must be hard in a school where there aren't a lot of Muslims and people just don't have that conception. And so Mustafa and Idarousse, is he at sort of an age where he's just not, he's thinking about his social life?

AO: Idarousse, yeah. But then the other day something funny happened. We were sitting here, Talha and I, and then I said --- and Idarousse left. It was almost break fast time, it was like 4:30, it was time like in five minutes we will break the fast. And I told Talha, "Do you think Idarousse went to the mosque?" And Talha started laughing, "Ha, ha, ha!" And then he came back and I asked Idarousse, "Did you go to the mosque?" And he said, "Yes." And Talha and I, we laughed because he took an initiative himself. I didn't even tell him to go to the mosque and he know there's a 69<sup>th</sup> Street mosque and Dina's kids go there.

And so he went. And so things like that, I think slowly he is getting into it. And then I think he will also sometimes take the Koran and read, but he just ---

LS: It must be really gratifying.

AO: Yeah!

LS: It must make you feel good. It's probably nice that he's with Dina's kids because ---

AO: Yes, everybody's is doing so they are doing it.

LS: 'Cause they just moved pretty recently from Tanzania.

AO: No, from Tanzania? No. They come from Syracuse. They've been here, they were born here, the kids.

LS: Oh, that's right, that's right.

AO: Naima, the Kenyan, moved with the kids, and it's nice that both families are here, Naima's family and Dina's family, because then we can do a lot of things together, like for, have dinner together maybe one day during Ramadan. And for Eid.

LS: We're going to have an exhibit for this project. The exhibit going to open next fall. It will be visited by a lot of schools groups and mainstream Philadelphia society. Is there anything in particular that you would like to see communicated about the experience of African immigrants or African immigrant life, that you think people ought to know?

AO: Hmm. [pause]

LS: Some people have said things to me --- you're in a different situation, I think, but: "I would like people to know that my being here is to support people and it's a sacrifice. It's not something I would have chosen." Like, that's something that somebody said to me. Do you see what I mean? Or someone else would say, "I would like people to know that we tend to be very highly educated, but our jobs don't always reflect that." You know what I mean? So that certain kind of misconceptions about why people are here --- so that's just to give you an idea of what some people have said.

AO: Hmm. Well, I just feel, I don't know, we're here, we want to learn more about this culture, the people here, and we here to maybe get more education for ourselves and for our kids, but also for our

kids to know, for us to know where we are from and how we can be with both cultures. How we can adjust to the cultures here, and how we can get people here to know more about our cultures, the way we dress, the way we eat, the way we live as an extended family, and how we can support each other, how *we* support each other when we are here, and how we support people back home, too.

**[END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 2]**