FIELDWORK #3: SARAH LAKEHAL-AYAT, RAMADAN AND AND EID-AL-FITR IN AMERICA

Who: Sarah Lakehal-Ayat, my sister, who is 28, is a pharmacist at the University of Michigan hospital. She grew up in a Muslim household in Rochester, New York with one sister, me, a younger brother and two parents who were both born and raised in Algeria. Sarah remembers what it was like to grow up in the United States, with all her extended family still living in Algeria, predominantly a Christian country, celebrating Ramadan and Eid.

What: Fasting Ramadan and celebrating Eid during the Holy Month of Islam

I started fasting seriously fasting in high school. We used to wake up at a regular time because since it was the winter months the days were shorter. I would go to school, then swim practice, then go home, do my homework and then break my fast. But it seemed like it was integrated into the day and it felt normal. Because of family tradition, mom would cook burek, soup, meats, desserts, and other dishes. As the days got longer though it was harder to fast. In the mornings I would wake up around 5 am, maybe eat a waffle, then go back to bed until I had school that morning. I would actually feel okay, it was a little hard until lunch time, but after that I would be fine. I usually would be doing homework to get my mind off food during lunch. What was hard about swimming and fasting was not being able to drink water but other than that I surprisingly was fine. You know when you put your mind to it you just seem to be okay. I actually did better in school and got higher grades during Ramadan than when I wasn’t fasting, which was very surprising. I don’t know if it was because I wasn’t focusing on food but I think it was because I didn’t have the fatigue after eating. I also like fasting in America rather than Algeria because in U.S. it’s easy to keep your mind busy with work and school.

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1 This example is the second half of the Fieldwork Topic Option #3 which only deals with one of the required two informants.
2 This short description of my sister’s familial history applies to the Varieties of Analysis #1.
3 This is discussion explains what and how my sister celebrated Ramadan and Eid when she was younger which applies to Varieties of Analysis #3.
where in Algeria everything is closed and there’s nothing to do during the day. However, the thing I do miss is being with family which is a huge part of Ramadan.\footnote{The entire account applies to Varieties of Analysis #5 as my mother discusses her personal experience with this holiday, especially including the differences between the holiday in America and Algeria.} For Eid we always went to the mosque to pray, and sometimes I would have to go to school, then call everyone back in Algeria, open up presents, and then have a delicious dinner and desserts.

**When:** Sarah explains her favorite memories of Ramadan during sophomore and junior year of high school around the age of fifteen during the winter months, in November and December.

**Where:** Sarah talked about fasting in Rochester, NY and practiced the faith of Ramadan and Eid at home, school, and the mosque.

**Why:** To Sarah, Ramadan is time for self-discipline and reflection. Sarah quotes “self-reflection is the most important to me because I feel as if it brings me closer to the religion of Islam”. The fast is intended to bring the faithful closer to God, also known as Allah, and to remind them of the suffering of those less fortunate. It’s seen as a way to physically and spiritually purify oneself. Muslims often donate to charities and feed the hungry during Ramadan. Sarah also says it’s a wonderful time to go to mosques, volunteer, and be with family.
FIELDWORK #3: FIRDOUS LAKEHAL-AYAT, RAMADAN AND EID-AL-FITR IN ALGERIA

Who: Firdous Lakehal-Ayat, my mother, was born and raised in Skikda, Algeria where she practiced the religion of Islam. She currently is the Medical Program Director at a university in Rochester, New York. She grew up with three brothers and one sister. From a young age, my mother remembers celebrating the holiest month in the Islamic Calendar, Ramadan, followed by the biggest holiday of the year, Eid-Al-Fitr.

What: Ramadan is one of the holiest month in the Islamic Calendar. Muslims starting from age of puberty are required to fast for at least 29 days from sunrise to sunset. During that time, no consumption of food or drink are allowed. However, my mother claims remembering the month growing up and how fun it was in Algeria.

It was a time where families eat together to break the fast. When our fathers will go for prayers after sundown and following the food intake, us children use to go play outside or visit family and eat a lot of sweets. During Ramadan, it was fun both during the day and at night time. During the day, all the shops are open with a lot of merchandise around for people to buy like meat, chicken, fish, vegetables, fruits and lots of desserts. People would buy a multitude of things to take to their families. The smell of food and cooking was wonderful. Streets will be jammed and people excited. The nights after dinner were even more exciting. People will go out walking or driving. The streets will be decorated with wonderful lightings. More shopping again this time for clothing. A lot of wonderful noise and smell. What a wonderful month to remember where everyone is nice to each other. We also went to see movies then late at night or before sunrise, then we were

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5 This example is half of the Fieldwork Topic Option #3 which only deals with one of the required two informants.
6 This is discussion explains what and how my mother, Firdous, celebrated Ramadan and Eid when she was younger applies to Varieties of Analysis #3.
7 The explanation of people’s traditions and how they would celebrate this holiday applies to Varieties of Analysis #2.
woken up for breakfast. My mother cooked for the big meal after sundown. This was the time when really learned how to cook, like soups and a traditional food called burek. A few minutes before dinner, we would wait outside on the terrace to hear the call of the imam saying “Allah Akbar”, which indicated the time to eat. These festivities took place throughout the holy month. However, the best part was the end of the fast which is called Eid El-Fitr. The morning following the end of Ramadan, we would all go to the mosque for prayers in the morning usually with our whole family. We all would be dressed in new clothes, with my favorite colors, and shining shoes and celebrate the end of the holy month for two days. After prayers, we will visit our relatives. We are usually served sweets and then given money. It was a lot of fun. I do remember all these days vividly and couldn’t wait for the next year.

**When:** My mother talked about her favorite memories of Ramadan and Eid which took place during the spring around her teenage years, starting at the age of twelve until her twenties.

**Where:** Firdous would celebrate Ramadan and Eid with her family back home in Skikda, Algeria at her house, relative’s homes, and the mosque.

**Why:** Ramadan to my mom is the period of the highest spiritual endeavor. My mom feels closest to the teachings of Allah, which in Arabic is God. By not eating and drinking the whole day, she explains how she put herself, and others practicing the faith, in a position where we will give more weight to non material things in favor of the more meaningful things in life such being pious, respectful and appreciative all the privileges given throughout the year except during Ramadan. It’s a time where she donates the money, that she would usually use to buy food for lunch, to the less fortunate. Moreover, it is also a month where we get closer to not only our families, but also neighbors and overall people.

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8 The entire account applies to Varieties of Analysis #5 as my mother discusses her personal experience with this holiday, including gifts my mother got such as new clothes and shoes.