



Number of Interview:

Date: October 5, 2019

Gender: Female

Name: Yasmine Mohammed Ahmed

Country of Origin: Sudan

Year of Immigration: Born in the US

Abstract: Yasmine is a 26-year old graduate with a bachelors in sociology from University Wisconsin Milwaukee. Her real passion though is makeup. She is now a makeup artist in Milwaukee, and is part of the female art collective **Fanana Banana**, formed for Muslim and minority artists. She was born in Arlington, Virginia before her family moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She identifies as Sudanese American although she has never been to Sudan. She never grew up particularly religious but has always spent her life in Muslim communities. Only in the past two years has she really begun to embrace and grow in her Muslim identity. She describes herself as the strongest person she knows and is proud to say that she is growing each day. Though she is strong, she contributes her strength to the racism she has faced not only in American society but in her Muslim community as well. Although not from Sudan herself, she gains her strength from the people she tries to empower back home in Sudan through organized protests and raising awareness. Her connection to her homeland is rooted in her fight for Sudanese and Muslim people both in Sudan and America.

Key Themes: Sudan, University, Racism, Islamophobia, Makeup, Protest, Awareness

I: I: So, Let's start. I guess my first question for you is what is your name and your age?

R: (Laughs) My full name?

I: Yeah

R: (Laughs) My name is Yasmine Mohammed Ahmed and both of those are my last name (laughs) I'm 26 and what else.

I: Oh, that's it

R: Oh, ok

I: So then are you currently in school? If so where and when do you graduate?

R: Umm no, I graduated from UW Milwaukee last year majoring in sociology.

I: And then These are just general questions by the way so we will go more into depth later in the interview.

R: Sure

I: Are you currently employed? Do you have any hobbies?

R: Well makeup is also a hobby. I like to read. I like playing the sims. Laughs

I: Oh, that's a good one

R: I guess naps because I'm like always tired I don't actually sleep I just survive off of naps at this point. That's about it I'm kind a boring. I don't have that many hobbies.

I: Are you married at all?

R: No, I'm single and not ready to mingle.

I: Ok

R: Not ready in case you guys didn't hear that

I: Got it because I did not hear that. (laughs together) Do you have any siblings?

R: I have a sister laughs an older sister a lot older her name is Fetima and I have a younger brother his name is Khalid he's 21. Oh, and my sister is 39.

I: Yeah, I have a sister whose much older than I am too. Did you grow up in Milwaukee?

R: So yeah but I was actually born in Arlington, Virginia. And then my dad decided hey let's ruin your life and move to Milwaukee so that's what we did and then actually we moved around a lot once we moved to Milwaukee. I ended up going to like 3 4 other schools before I actually even hi to middle school. So yeah after I started middle school, I ended up going to Salaam School on the south side and we stayed put for once in our lives. SO, I guess technically yeah. I found myself in Milwaukee basically so technically.

I: So that goes into my second question. How would you say your experience as a Muslim woman is different there compared to in Milwaukee or other places you've been before Milwaukee?

R: Umm well I guess I'm a woman now and I've been in Milwaukee this entire time. I mean Obviously I've traveled. But Milwaukee's pretty small so it's easier to run into Muslims versus when I go back to the DMV area DC Maryland Virginia, I don't really run into other Muslims there. Umm so maybe that. I don't know how to ... I don't think it would be different or it is that different because I haven't experienced my life in other places that much.

I: I thought that was a good answer

R: Thank you ha-ha

I: I was kind of shocked because I thought the DMV had a large Muslim population.

R: They do, but it's such a big area that its actually hard. I think one time I went to the Mall and saw a Muslim lady and was like "oh hey what's up" (laughs) but that's about it. I mean there are a lot it's a pretty good majority. Maybe like the areas I go to like where my sister lives it's harder. But yeah Milwaukee is pretty small compared to there.

I: Now these questions are more about your childhood or nostalgia. What are some places or buildings like your home, school, mosque, etc. that you spent a lot of time in as a child? What is your fondest memory of these spaces?

R: Umm, well again Milwaukee is small and like the Muslim community is continuing to grow but as a kid there's was really only one place, I spent that was the ISM on the southside because one that was my school and it was just where all the Muslims used to go. So, we used to have youth night in the school in the basement. Other places I could think of is friends' houses but that's about it.

I: How did you feel being Muslim in these spaces? So, like I guess you were your most comfortable or do you feel it was best for you to only be in these spaces

R: As a kid? Well no, I feel like when your Muslim or Arab your parents only take you to certain places or where they know you would be safe at or where they are comfortable taking you. So, if

you aren't at your friend or family's house you are at the Masjid. I used to work at the Masjid and I would have little kids in my room from 6 months to like 15 years old. So, it's like safe haven so obviously I felt comfortable or somewhat comfortable.

I: Have you ever experienced islamophobia as a child or growing up?

R: Well to be honest I don't think so but I have experienced racism. You know when you grow up and your like wow that was a racist moment but I don't think I have ever experienced islamophobia even as an adult. I mean it's possible why I'm not getting some jobs, because I've been applying and I've had interviews and I'm like did I not get it because I'm clearly Muslim but it's been nothing that clearly and obvious so

I: How would you identify yourself? For example, Muslim, American, woman.

R: I would just identify myself as Muslim, woman, and black because when you see me those are the first three things you see. That's how I would identify myself. You know when you have to check your race and stuff, I always put 2 or more because technically I am North African but North African would be considered in the white category. But then also and I'm part native American and I'm also actually black like black American but then I'm also African American, so I'm like okay well I don't know what to put. So, I always put 2 or more or if I'm lazy I just put black.

I: Yeah that makes sense. I get the confusion marking white would seem off.

R: And it like yeah, I don't see it well dig a little deeper

I: Which culture or cultures do you most identify with?

R: I would say American because I was born here and also my mom is American, she was born here. Yeah, I definitely don't or I don't know sometimes I feel Arab or SuDANese I don't know why I said it like that Sudanese but sometimes I don't, because I feel like I didn't really grow up in that culture. On my dad's side, he is the only person in his family who is in America. So, I feel like a lot of other families a lot of other families have like multiple people from their side of the family in the same city or the same country at least so you grow up a certain way but I didn't. Since we moved from the DMV area it was just me my mom my dad and my brother. My sister didn't leave Maryland. She didn't want to. SO, it was just us. Granted I did grow up with other kids who were Sudanese but at the time I was growing up there weren't many Sudanese families here. Even the kids I think there were 5 of us and even now in my age group it's still just us. There aren't any people our age. Well I'm 26 so and there's no one I can think of offhand that are new within the last 10 years who are Sudanese and in my age group. We all grew up together.

I: So, does that mean you have never been back to Sudan?

R: Yeah No I didn't. I'm lowkey not interested to be honest. Because like It's just weird like okay here I am in this new country where I don't know anybody like that. Yeah, I'll probably feel comfortable because I don't know it is familiar but I don't know anybody.

I: Was there ever a time that you didn't identify as Muslim or wanted to hide that part of your identity?

R: No actually I've always been comfortable with my identity with my religion. I've never been ashamed of it. It's probably because I'm black because I just blend in really. I don't really stand out that much.

I: So, has there ever been a time, well I guess not that you had a hard time navigating between your two identities of being Muslim and American?

R: No, I mean I go in certain parts of Wisconsin and I feel a little weird but that's with anybody because again it's such a segregated state and city and where sometimes you go some places and I'm just like "let me hurry up and get out of here before something happens" but no I have never felt any type of way. I don't remember if that was the question or not

I: No, you answered well. What is some advice you would give your younger self?

R: Oh ok

R: Advice I would give my younger self, even though there's so much pressure on you and like people are trying to make you do things you don't want to do just don't do it. I'm referring to this as my younger self because after high school I took a gap year and I only went to college because my dad would not leave me alone. Then I got to a point in college where I was like "Ugg let me just do something so I can finish and I graduate" because I just don't care anymore but now I'm like well okay I actually need a job but I don't want these jobs or I would also say try to find a math tutor. My younger self as a high school and up. Well high school yeah, I guess I was decent at math I'm a c in math My dad went to school for computer engineering or something with computers that involves a lot of math. I did not get that gene. He could just look at stuff "Oh this is the answer" I can't do that. I need to use math way and type it in so they can give me the answer.

I: What language or languages was spoken at home?

R: Umm mostly English just because my dad was trying to learn English. Arabic a little but mostly on his end. But I don't remember anything. I did take classes in middle school; I took classes in college but when somebody is mostly speaking English to you or the fact that its quicker you just forget.

I: Do you ever wish you spoke Arabic?

R: Absolutely, all the time it's so annoying. Oddly, I could read and write Arabic. I can somewhat understand but I just don't always know what I'm saying or what people are saying to me. And it's especially weird the fact that I could read and write it but a lot of people who speak it cannot read and write it. I definitely wish I did. Sometimes I think even at 26 I would try to learn it but like where's the time. I would love my future kids to learn it for sure.

I: What is your favorite food?

R: To list one, I would say my favorite Sudanese food would be asida. I don't know how the heck to explain it. Do you know what Fufu? It is similar to that, the dough and then they make some type of sauce. I've never made that but I've made gurasa and I've made bamia. Gurasa is a type of bread and you pour the batter into a pan and supposed to be super thin. It's easy but it's super hard to not make it doughy. Bamia is a stew but actually I decided like two days ago that I don't like bamia. I think it's because it has okra. And I'm like I don't know if I'm a fan of this anymore. I think it's because my dad has become lazy with his cooking because he came home and brought leftovers from someone and it was good. I was like "this is nothing like the one you made before." (laughs) I like basbousa, that's a Semolina cake, that's one of the only deserts I like, because Arab desserts for some reason everything has cheese. It's weird to me I don't want sweet cheese unless it's cheesecake. One of my other favorite Arab foods is doalma, which is stuffed grape leaves. They put rice or rice and meat in grape leaves. It's really good. It's not the same, but if you go to Oakland gyros, they have grape leaves. Or you could ask the girl in your class to make or bring you some Doali. (laughs)

I: How would you describe your religious life?

R: In progress, I feel because I didn't grow up religious at all. Once I started going to Salaam school I learned more about my religion but I feel like within the last two years I'm really becoming more well I wouldn't say more religious, but my faith is constantly growing and I'm trying to be a better Muslim each and every day but times are hard though Chuckles.

I: So, does that mean you didn't wear a hijab growing up?

R: Not until I started Salaam school because once you reach a certain age it's just mandatory but I didn't permanently start to wear it until I was 22 the summer whatever 4 years from the summer of 2015.

I: So, do you attend the Mosque regularly?

R: No, actually the last time I was praying in the Masjid I had a classmate die from I believe it was a heart attack. That was the one of the last times I prayed in the Masjid. I think it's just a comfort level the masjid I grew up in I just kind of feel, I'm trying to find the right words. I don't know there are just a lot of things that just make me uncomfortable like the things that they do and I just don't feel. I don't really know what the word is and I really wish I could think of it but

when you've been in a community for so long and you see how people who are in charge operate, and you see and hear things it just kind of makes you want to stay away from those people. I think that's why well actually that's why I stopped going but also, it's a 30-minute drive.

I: Yeah, I feel you. That's how I felt about the Church I attended. There were just certain things I didn't agree with it wasn't really the faith but the people that has kept me away.

R: Yeah. Yeah, I feel like I got that opinion recently. Between 2014 and 2017 like I said I was working at the Masjid and iwi was supervising kids in my specific class I had 7 to 11 year old girls. I would hear things and see things I didn't agree with. With this whole like Sudan protest, the few I have been putting together this year

I: I will actually ask you more about your protests later.

R: Oh, ok cool

I: Where or when do you feel your most empowered?

R: Where?

I: Yes, where and when?

R: I feel most empowered I guess in my house because I could be myself 100% but I guess that also answers the when part. Also, when I am able to speak my mind and yeah be myself again. I feel like (pause) I feel like for a while I wasn't able to be myself. I don't think I really figured myself out until my senior year of high school. The transition from going to an Islamic school to an all-girls high school. I went to St. Joan and it was a culture shock for me because honestly, I had only been around other Muslim people up until that time so going from that to that I was like Ok. So, I always kept to myself. I didn't really talk to anybody. I didn't really make any friends who weren't Muslim until the end of my junior year and all the friends I had in high school were people who I met in middle school who happened to be there. So, whenever I am able to be myself is when I am most empowered.

I: Could I ask you why you felt that you couldn't be yourself?

R: I just felt that people were so judgmental. A lot of them hadn't been around other Muslim people. Granted there were like 400 people max which is small compared to a lot of schools but I could still hear things, and see things so if you're talking about me or talking about people I know or Muslims in general I am gonna feel some type of way. Like I remember one specific time this girl who went overseas and then she came back and she was pregnant and married and I remember this girl outside who said "look at them, they're always judging us and here she is pregnant." I was like Ok or one time this girl it was like the third week of school and it's been



three weeks and she kept asking me for paper. It was like, you're in a school how do you not have paper. So, she asked me for paper of course this and I made a sound I just let out a sigh because I am tired of you doing this at this point. And she said "if you don't want to give me paper you don't have to." Basically, she yelled at me. She was a little rough around the edges. And then a couple weeks later she walked past me with her friend and said I can't stand that girl with the du-rag and I didn't know if she was talking about me because I had a scarf on not a durag and then I realized that people don't like me. It wasn't a big deal but if I don't feel comfortable around you aren't going to get to know me

I: Yeah that definitely shows their ignorance?

R: Yeah (points to her hijab) this is my durag (laughs)

I: Going off the empowered question. When or where do you feel your smallest or less powerful.

R: Probably in like job interviews. Or when there is something, I want but I don't have much control over it. Also maybe like in airports too

I: Who or what inspires you the most?

R: I would say myself maybe. I have an interesting childhood with toxic parents I feel like a which a lot of us do have but no one likes to admit it. Growing up and constantly moving around and I don't know I feel like I've been through a lot mentally so to see that I am still here and still pushing that's inspiring to me. Umm what? I'm not sure what? I'm still trying to figure that out, I guess. I guess people around who are like me.

I: These questions are more about your cultural clothing. DO you have any cultural clothing?

R: I don't have any Sudanese clothing, its cute, I would want it. One of the reasons I don't have it is because it's just my dad. Usually you get your clothing from your mom or your grandma and I don't have that. I have abaya's that I have gotten on my own.

R: My mom is black, native American, and possibly French she's some type of European but we think is French. and then my dad is Sudanese

R: My major was psychology and it didn't work out because I mentally was not there and then I realized wow I really don't want to be here this is not for me, I don't want to be here, I don't like school. Well actually not that's not true I love school I don't like doing homework or doing test. I could write the hell out of a paper or act like I know something but I don't want to do the work. So, I got to the point where I was like I need a certain grade to keep going in this and I wasn't getting it so I was like what's next. Well after psychology you can switch to sociology without changing anything really so that's how I ended up with sociology.

I: Is there any job that you really want or that you are working towards that has something to do

with sociology?

R: A job that I really want Once I decided that I was gonna go with sociology I was really into wanting to become a counselor for asylum seekers and refugees umm and I still do I would hope that would happen. I'm trying to find something where I could I guess to get to that level. I mentioned at the beginning of this interview or beforehand that I did an educational interview with a woman named Mary at Lutheran Social Services who does work with refugees. Umm but I'm still pretty cool with my makeup career taking off because I like, I love makeup. Also, I would to have my own (Laughs) I'm all over the place. I would also love to have my own beauty brand; makeup body care I think that would be amazing. Ultimately, I would like to work for myself. About 2 years ago when I was working for Aurora that I don't like working for people and I want to work by myself.

I: Has your parents influenced your career choice at all?

R: Yeah, I would say mostly my mom because I you know you get to a certain point where you notice things in your parents like dang you must of have had a crappy childhood. And then I was like OMG you really did have a crappy child hood. And then one day I had this project when I was still a psych major to do an interview on someone or do like this case report. I did do a case report on my mom she was perfect. And I diagnosed her as mildly depressed and I got an A on that. Laughs

I: How did she feel? Did you know that you did that?

R: She did. We sat for an hour and half answering all these the case report was about 50 pages it was ridiculous, but then I learned more about my mom. And her childhood her upbringing and her parents. But my dad not so much. I didn't want to go to school and I realized certain things about myself by him pressuring me.

I: How did you get involved in Fanana Banana?

R: I got involved in Fanana Banana because it actually, I technically grew up with one of the founders. That was Amal or Mila Hakim. We went to the same middle school together and then we went to the same high school. And then we randomly became close well not that close but we talk often because we have a thing for Kevitas, it's a probiotic drink and I was like listen I love that (laughs) and then we were talking about flavors and I told her listen "if you want to go and find all the flavors, go to Whole Foods because they have a whole wall" and yeah It just went on from there. I also know all her sisters. We all went to the same middle school and high school and then I went to college with her older sister. For the other cofounder, Nayfa I met her through working at the Masjid actually My first year I think was her first year as I well but I stayed for the next couple of years and she didn't. Also, her younger sister ended up being in our room as well so. And then I guess Amal was always a fan of my work which thanks Amal that's great and

she's like "hey do you want to join, you're the only creative makeup artist basically that I know right now. I'm grateful that was awesome"

I: So how long have you been doing makeup?

R: I've been doing makeup. well what do you mean. On other people? On myself? When did I get into it?

I: Both I guess.

R: Well I got into makeup when I was 15. I didn't have acne but I didn't have the best skin because skincare wasn't a thing ten years ago. So, I was like well ok I will just put makeup over it. I wasn't great but it was something. And it evolved and I think maybe (pause) 2016 I realized I was actually really good at makeup. So, after that I did 100 days of makeup starting in 2017 where you do your makeup for 100 days and let me tell you (chuckles) it was stressful and after that it kind of just grew. And people are like do my makeup for me and I'm like well alright book me.

I: I was actually wondering about this earlier. Do your parents agree or support your makeup career?

R: Oh yeah, they do. They never bought me anything I've always bought my own makeup or everything I have I've always got myself. The only things my parents ever paid for me was my rent or mortgage and that's been since I was 19. oh, and my car. My dad bought that. He works with cars so we got it for cheap. Other than that, I have always, I guess, bought it on my own so they never really had a choice. "So long as I don't have to pay for it, I don't care what you do."

I: That's good that they support it, I wasn't too sure especially since your parents really wanted you in college.

R: My mom didn't even care about me going to school my dad did. My mom was like do something. Get a job, go to school, do something.

I: What do you love most about being an MUA?

R: My favorite thing about being a makeup artist is ha-ha I was going to say MU. My favorite thing is just that you could be creative. I love the end results. You know beginning to middle a mess, and you never know. But once you get to end your like "oh my god." I think that with all my clients and in my head, I'm thinking this might not turn out right but at the end it always does because I know what I'm doing.

I: Yeah, it's always about the process.

R: Even at the end I'm always amazed by myself and the fact that I created that.

I: How do you navigate between American beauty standards and your faith?

R: Well (pause) I don't know I feel that I just do me at all times. I don't really care, I guess. Faith wise I mean, there are a lot of people out there that say "oh, you shouldn't be wearing makeup to beautify yourself, that is against your religion. You're supposed to be modest" but at the end of the day you should be keeping your opinion to yourself because that is also a part of your faith. Granted you may think what I'm doing is wrong but...

I: No judgement?

R: Yeah, no judgement and that would be something I would I have to deal with not you. You're actually not giving me any advice but making me feel bad, well not me but some people because it's a thing. US beauty standards, I guess the hijab is trendy right now, I don't know. (laughs)

I: Yeah, I have seen so many videos on YouTube of different hijab scarf tutorials and different styles.

R: Yeah, I've tried that but I don't have the head shape for it. Well I have the head shape I have a lot of hair so it distorts my head shape.

I: Yeah. So, I went to this art show last year, because I am an art minor and the show was called "I Contain Multitudes." All the artists were Muslim women and most of them originally were doctors and professors and dropped everything and chose art. So, what would "I contain Multitudes" mean to you, the phrase I mean?

R: Yeah. What is it called again? I'm sorry.

I: I contain Multitudes.

R: I contain multitudes. I mean you basically said it yourself and a lot of us, our parents are on us to go to school, you know, be a doctor, be a lawyer. Which I mean, yeah, I went to school because I didn't know any other artists. Like at the time when I started school, like makeup wasn't what it is today. But I've always been artsy. I've always been creative, which is another reason why I didn't want to like spend another four years, five years in school. So just, I'm more than just like what my degree has. I'm a, I'm a person, I'm an artist, I'm a writer, I can sing, I can do all these things. I'm not just my job. Yeah. That's what it would mean to me.

I: That was a good answer

R: Thank you.

I: Would you consider yourself a feminist?

R: I don't know. I feel like that's such a controversial word right now. I'm all about women. I'm a woman, but I'm all about being a black woman too because it's hard out here.

I: I think that's also a part of the whole. I contain multitudes idea. You are not just a Muslim or a woman. You have to go through being a black woman as well. Now these questions are more about marriage but I remember you said you were not ready to marry.

R: I don't know. I'm in between, but I meet so many, I meet so many guys and they're all trash. It really amazes me. It's like, how's that possible? Yeah. And they make me not ready, but I would say I am ready. I'm just not accepting to anymore trash.

I: Of course, you have standards. How do you think women are viewed in your culture? Do you think it should change?

R: Um, well what do you mean from like outside in or just uh?

I: Yeah why not both.

R: I feel like people on the outside of like the article of the Arab culture or like the Sudanese culture, they think like we're oppressed and that it's our religion doing that. But it is the culture. Like there's so much like macho, like, Oh, I want to be like the ruler over my woman or my sister and she can't do this and she can't do that. Or even like, uh, over the summer and this girl was killed like an honor killing because she was hanging out with her fiancé, but family members were talking crap and her own father and her brother end up killing her. So, I feel like people view us as weak when we're strong and you know, it's a shame that we still have to deal with stuff like this, whether that we be like in the, in our culture or outside of our culture, just women in general. Like, it's so sad to like see that men just trying to like, I dunno, I don't even know the word

I: Control?

R: Yeah, control and dictate what we do when we're our own person.

I: When choosing a partner what's the importance of their culture or religion to you? Is there any importance at all?

R: So when I was younger I used to say like, you know, I don't really care if the guy's like Muslim, but I definitely do now as I, I guess the, one of the things that's most important to me is that he's Muslim because I didn't grow up knowing my religion. Everything I know, I basically learned about my religion on my own because my dad isn't religious at all. My mom is not Muslim, she's just, she just believes in God. So, it's very important to me that my future spouse is Muslim. Culturally, I don't care. I'm pretty open but yeah, I would want them to be Muslim.

I: Have you ever been to any Muslim weddings? What were they like?

R: They're all like depend on the culture. But I mean a lot of them are pretty grand. I would say. Some of the more grand ones I've been to where like Desi Indian those ones. because they like three days they dance, like they have like performances and they dance and it's like, Ooh, this is a lot. Yeah. Um, with like Arab, uh, weddings that I've been to, um, I feel like they're a little more chill. But yeah, I like it. I definitely like the Desi ones better. Um, and I've also been to like regular American weddings, which I don't, I don't really like or enjoy it's like, okay, this is kind of boring. Yeah. Um, also I feel like with Desi and Arab weddings, like they're always indoors and I'm an indoor type of girl with everyone else, you never what it's going to be.

I: When you get married, would you want a grand wedding like that?

R: And actually no. Um, I don't want a wedding at all. Um, just because I feel like with weddings you're trying to, I guess appease people by inviting them. And that's not the type of person I am. I've never been that type of person. And I would want that to reflect in my wedding as well. And I want it to be something that's intimate with people who know me and I know them. Um, I always say 50 people max, but even that's a lot. Maybe 25 people max. And as far as like a wedding, I don't really want to do that. We can just have like close friends and family at the house and then I just want to eat. Um, recently I've thought that, okay, well I'll still get a dress because I want to take pictures. (laughs)

I: A good photo op moment?

R: Yeah, I want to, I want to do pictures. But yeah, I definitely don't want a wedding or especially not anything grand, like let's save it for the future.

I: Do you think your parents want you to have a wedding?

R: Uh, I don't think my dad cares actually. My mom though a little bit, only because my sister didn't have a wedding. She got married at a courthouse. I'm like, mom, listen, unless you plan on paying for this, which I won't let you do, we're not having a wedding. I think like one of my fears is my, or whoever I marry, I'm scared that their family will pressure them to, for us to have a wedding. And I just, I really don't want that because I don't know, I feel like I won't participate in and be like, yeah, I'm going to invite, so, and so. I feel like also with our weddings, you don't invite a specific person, you got to invite their whole family and that's just not, that's not for me. Yeah.

I: What other characteristics do you look for in a partner?

R: Respect's always the first one honestly. Guys are wild. Um, respect and I guess a sense of humor. Because if I, if you'd like can get my jokes, I, well I don't even call them jokes because I just talk and people think I'm funny, but if you just get me and who I am, then like we can like go from there. After I find out like you're respectful and you used to get me and then I look for whether you know how to communicate and comprehend what I'm communicating to you. Um, loyalty, honesty, and I'm not sure what else. Someone just asked me this today and I wrote a whole paragraph, but honestly, I don't, it was a guy, he's like, what are you looking for in your ideal spouse? Like these things. (phone chimes) and that's him right now. (laughs)

He was like, "Oh, you just described me." And I was like, yeah, (sarcastically) when I saw you, those are the things I was thinking. He looks like he has those qualities. But yeah, loyalty, honesty, communication, comprehension, sense of humor, respect, obviously be Muslim (pause). Have goals and be ambitious. because I remember like the first guy, I ever talked to you, which I wasn't considering him. I was 22. He was 28. That's a little, you know. That's a lot. Um, he just had no goals. He just came to the US and was working at a restaurant and now he drives Uber. Like it's, it's been like five years. He has a degree. He's just not doing anything with it.

I: Well he for sure wasn't the one.

R: Oh, I know there were things I found out after he started talking, I was like, great. Dodged a bullet over there.

I: Okay so now these questions are about your parents. More so your dad since he immigrated to the US. So, did your parents go to school or college?

R: Sure. Um, my dad went to school for computer engineering for well didn't finish his last year. He had to end up leaving because he needed to take care of his family, um, overseas. And he continues to do that to this day. Crazy to me. Um, but the economy is different in Sudan. That's why one of the reasons like the protests were happening, um, for my mom, she went to school for nursing. Um, and that's where she currently works as and yeah. Um, I don't know, school wasn't really that big on my mom's side. I can't really think of anybody who, I have a cousin who actually graduated college and one of my other cousins, she went for a couple of years, but she just works brilliant. School wasn't like a big thing in my family. Um, you just figure it out. Like my aunt used to have a government job, which, what the heck, but I mean it's possible. My sister works for the government. Um, her husband, he actually graduated a couple years ago. Like he works in IT, so that's pretty cool. I know you asked about parents but ha-ha.

I: Oh no worries it's okay. So how long has your dad been living in the US?

R: uh, my dad came to America in somewhere between 87' and 89'. I don't know, it was his

passport thing was in Arabic and sometimes like the Arabic numbers, like look a little, especially when they're from back then, so I can't tell, but I want to say between 87' and 89'. Um, and when he came, he actually was in New York first and eventually he was in DC. Um, I was born in Arlington actually, and it's 10 minutes from DC, where we live, you can see the Washington monument. So, and then at some point while he was in Arlington, he met my mom because my mom used to hang out in DC. He had a car and she was like, she was walking, he was like, "Hey, do you need a ride? And then that first week they met, he gave her apartment. He like for his apartment. My mom was like, which is so dumb. because like I could've just robbed him. And I was like, but you didn't. And that's what matters. Yeah. No, that's the type of guy my dad is honestly like if he can help you out, he'll help you out. Yeah.

I: I remember you mentioned your dad was the only one to come to the US. Why is that?

R: He moved here for school, which is funny cause he didn't finish college. But that's the reason he moved here, I don't know if he was ever gonna go back or anything.

I: How do you think your parents would identify themselves?

R: What do you mean?

I: Well, you know earlier how I asked you the question of your identity? How do you see yourself? Well how do you think your parents, especially how your dad sees himself. Your dad being an immigrant, opinion of himself could be influenced by how he thinks the world sees him or like with your mom. How does your mom see herself? Seeing that she married a Muslim man but is not Muslim? Obviously, a man.

R: Yeah, probably for my dad. I don't know. Uh, that's a good question. How would he identify himself? As from my mom. A woman, a mom. Um, but I don't know how my dad would identify himself. Probably a Muslim man. I would probably have to explain that to him. Dad, how do you, how do you identify yourself?

I: Do your parents participate in any cultural or religious activities, organizations, or others?

R: My mom tried fasting. She'll try like every once in a while, but it's a no for her. Um, my dad, yeah. Um, he's actually diabetic so he doesn't fast anymore. But we used to, um, within the last three years he became diabetic.

I: How did your dad make a living when he first moved to the US?

R: Oh, he used to drive cabs. Yeah. And then when we came to Milwaukee, he was driving cabs



too. That's why he knows things so well. I'll be like, "hey, I'm by this and this," because I don't know my streets. I just know how to get places. And he'd be like, Oh you're, you're here. I'm like, okay, I don't know what that means and he will tell me to go on a certain street? I'm like, I don't know what that is

I: Yeah, I completely understand that because I googled the address to this place and didn't know what it was until I saw that it was by Baskin Robbins and I'm like oh okay

R: Yeah. Same cause uh, I went to Cosi over there and plus, I mean I've been driving up in port Washington Brown deer because I lived in Menominee, falls off silver spring and Pilgrim. So, I was like okay well just take Brown Deer down because I don't want to drive on silver spring. It's wild over there. Oh wait. Yeah. So sorry to go back to your question. Yeah, he drove cabs and then eventually there's this hotel in Arlington called Dolly Madison. I'm not sure if it's still there. I think it's still there because we went a couple of years ago but I don't think it's called Dolly Madison anymore. It's something else. But he was the manager at one point and I don't know what happened.

I: What kind of jobs did they work before he immigrated?

R: I think he just did like work around there like land. That's like, I've never asked him that question before and he probably has like the typical story, like every foreign parent. Like I used to walk miles and miles to go here and there and I'm like okay. But uh, I'm not sure what he used to do. I never asked that before. That's a really good question because he was born in 62, he came here in 80 something. He wasn't that young. I don't know, wow. I'll have to ask because I have no idea. Honestly.

I: How does your life differ from your dad's experience in the US.

R: How does my life differ from my dad's like when he was my age? Like are we including the fact that this was the eighties and we're now in like 2020 basically? Well, for one technology, uh two, I guess. Um, I, I, what's the word, what does the word I'm experienced? I don't want to say experiencing, but that's the only word I can make. I'm experiencing other cultures and different types of people who come from like different walks of life, have different backgrounds, interests, uh, sexualities. Because I'm sure that's not something he experienced or ever had to like really figure out until he came to America. Like, Oh, okay. Yeah. So, I would say that, um, and I'm more open to different people as well. Not saying he isn't, but he had to I guess more so learn how to do that where I'm just like, Oh, okay, well I was born into this world, so it's automatic for me. Um, what else? I guess things are just easier to obtain versus back then and in a completely different country like Sudan. Yeah, and then everybody else is a lot more open and I guess expressive versus in the 80s and in Sudan or in an Islamic country. So, yeah.

I: Do you believe his experience as a Muslim has differed from yours?

R: Um, I sorry, cause your question could go either way. His experience as a Muslim, like when he was still in Sudan or do you mean once he moved here.

I: Once he moved here, well I guess both in Sudan and here.

R: I was um, well for, I think they're different. Like if he was still in Sudan because it's an Islamic country, everybody speaks basically Arabic or English. So, it was just easier versus when he came to America and he had to, I guess, find a sense of community, and a home and a Masjid, and other people be relate to, which is so where's your mind? Because, I mean, let's say I move out of state, that's something I would have to figure out and have to deal with. It might be a little bit easier because we do have technology. I could just Google it versus him having to possibly, I don't know, walk into a restaurant, see somebody and be like, "Hey, you're Muslim, I'm Muslim," 'Like where do you go?'"

I: Do you think your father struggled with finding community especially Sudanese community in DC.

R: No, I don't think so. Uh, so when he first came, he was in New York, and he was driving cabs, so probably not, everybody drives cabs. It probably wasn't hard. And the DMV area that he was in, um, the specific area had a lot of, has, because I've been, has a lot of foreign people. There's even this like strip mall, it's called Leesburg Pike. Um, and it's nothing but like Arab restaurants or African restaurants. So, like they have Yemeni, Ethiopian, Eritrean. And it's like all people that he knows. So, I don't really think he ever had to. Um, and yeah, it's pretty diverse, but I feel like it was if he in that specific area that he was in he definitely knew what he was doing. Because even when we went together like a couple of years ago, like down the road was his best friend's mechanic shop and he was so happy, they were so happy to see each other. It was like such a touching moment. But yeah, it's like once you find an area that you feel comfortable in, yeah. You just stay there.

I: In what ways if any have political events in your parents or grandparent's homeland affected you?

R: Specifically, my dad's side, because my mom is American. Um, I would say it affected me in the sense that uh, like for example, when there was the travel ban, what was that like a year ago or more? Yeah, we've had, we had like family friends who were just going there because like their parents died or they just went for vacation who couldn't come back right away and like it took them a month. So, my dad ends up having to stop what he was doing to like figure that out and take over. (Her eyes begin to tear up) I'm sorry. It's been, it's been a lot. Um, and then I guess

having to worry about your family's safety and knowing that you can't exactly do anything. I mean we were talking about the economy over there. There was one point where my grandma was sick, something that you just go to the doctor and get it taken care of and she couldn't do that. They had to fly her to Egypt to get something small taken care of because the doctors were on strike there because of what was going on. And then, um, within the last year, once the riots and protests started coming out again, he had to worry about his family's safety and his friend's safety, um, sending more money because the economy was, is terrible. And I mean it affected me in a sense that I just felt bad for him, I guess. Because I don't really have that much of a connection to Sudan, but I'm Sudanese. So, I mean I feel something at the end of day cause it's still something I'm a part of. So, I just felt obligated to, I guess, do all I can to spread awareness, especially in Milwaukee or Wisconsin in general. Because this compared to a lot of like let's say like Desi or Palestinians, the Sudanese community is small compared to that. So, it was important for me to, I guess, to raise awareness and get the word out. Like here's what's happening, here's what you can do.

I: What are some things you believe people should know about the current crisis in Sudan?

R: Um, well that every day is a trying day. Because granted they've come to an agreement between the military and um, the people wanting to I guess rule together if not the people ruling themselves and being a dictatorship, sorry, not a dictatorship, but democracy. It's important to raise awareness on how we can lead, rebuild and I guess come together and to not let this be another failed African country.

I: How do you get your information about what's going on in Sudan?

R: Uh, mostly through Twitter and Instagram actually. Yeah, I would say those two. Things happen there, but I feel like my dad doesn't exactly communicate. He's not, yeah, he's not the best communicator honestly. It's like talking to a brick wall sometimes. So for me, Twitter and Instagram, um, there's a specific journalist, I get my information from her name is [ ] and it's just quicker because like a lot of the young people in Sudan do have access to internet and they do tweet out or send information so you can see what's going on. Especially, um, over the summer where they had the media block-out like people are risking their lives just to like send out information and send videos and saying this is what is happening. Because people were lying saying, Oh, none of this happened. But we definitely saw it.

I: Yeah, now there is proof. So now these are the closing questions.

R: Yeah, sure.

I: Is there anything else you would like to add or want people to know about Sudan, yourself

R: Uh, myself, I don't know. I wouldn't be able to tell you because I have no idea. Um, about Sudan. I mean, yeah, let's not let this be another failed African country. Sudan has so much potential. It's on the Nile. It could be, it could basically be Dubai, but it's not because they're black. They're in Africa. Like they have sanctions put on them. They're not bound down like a lot of these other countries did. Not saying that was bad because I mean I'm sure it took all, it took a lot for everything to happen the way it did.

I: Also, I remembered a question I wanted to ask you during the interview.

R: Yeah. I don't know. It's okay. Take your time.

I: Do you feel that your experience as a black Muslim woman is different from other Muslims? Have you ever experienced discrimination from other Muslims?

R: Oh yeah, absolutely. When we first started, I said that like I've never experienced Islamophobia, but I've definitely experienced racism. Specifically, the first time I noticed I was actually in the Masjid and we had like a sleepover thing and my dad was a little bit late picking me up and this lady said to me, "Oh, you know, the, the Masjid on the North side accepts homeless people." I was like 12, no, somewhere, I was like 13, 14, 15 years old. And I'm like "okay, this is why I'm here, but thank you." And she kept saying it and I'm like, "OK. um, and I was like, dang, that's messed up. Um, and then I guess something I can definitely like, that definitely frustrates me now is while this year I've put on three protests for Sudan and I've sent out information to our local Muslim organizations and they were not shared. And that frustrated the heck out of me and I went on a little Twitter rant about this, but my thing is that it feels like is you only care about money. You only care about certain groups because when it was for Palestine, you were shoving it down our throats, like, come to this protest, here's what you can do. We're collecting stuff so we can send it back. And then recently, there's things going on in Kashmir between Pakistan and India and we're all getting like tweets and I mean, not tweet, sorry, we're all getting flyers and emails about it and it's like, okay, well when I was doing this, I was sending all types of flyers and information. I was doing all types of emails sending to this group and this person, you weren't sharing any of that. And I don't know, I feel like they've, this specific group or this organization has like a lot to figure out in regards to other races and other communities because I've experienced racism. There has been like, there's students there who have experienced racism or bigotry or have had things said to them. Um, I have a friend who used to work there and she literally had to have a teaching moment of why you can't say the N word. And it's like that's their favorite thing to do, just to yell out the N word. Like this is what we're not gonna do like, and sorry, I like lost my place. But basically, if we're supposed to be like one and together, you know, show like you are in solidarity with us, you know, like make us feel comfortable.

I: Speaking of that, are there any particular services or resources that you think the AMWRRRI

should provide to meet the needs of communities to which you belong?

R: So, I didn't look at the website. I don't know if you want me to like answer this question later when I get the chance

I: or just resources that you use at all. It doesn't even have to be for the website.

R: Why am I drawing a blank right now? I mean I Lutheran soul stairs is the one that comes to mind just because like I know somebody there, like I know the type of work she does.

I: Um, well what about Fanana Banana. I think that would be a good organization.

R: Oh, I didn't know it wasn't on there and Oh I guess, that's strange. I feel like everybody knows what it is. Word has spread. But yeah, that actually would be good because again, like we talked about like the, what's that, multitudes? What was the word you use? Yeah, there are a lot of people who are secretly artists and we just don't know because they're busy. I don't know just with one specific thing. Um, so yeah, Fanana would be a good idea. Yeah, I don't know. I think, I think I would have to answer this question for you later because I can't think of anything. My mind is drawing a blank and I definitely know some things with like not off the top of my head.

I: That's okay. No worries. Do you have any other family or friends you think we should interview?

R: Yeah. Did you talk to Mila Hakim or Amal?

I: I did. I actually reached out to her, but we weren't able to set anything up.

R: Okay. You talked to Nayfa too?

I: I haven't.

R: Okay. Uh, well, I don't know. She's busy but try reaching out to her too. I would say Jamila Esmar only because like she lives in Palestine now, but she grew up here as well. But she also grew up in New Jersey too and she taught at the ISM and she's a science major but she's not, I don't know if you're looking specifically for artists but Oh, okay.

I: Um, no it doesn't matter.

R: Who else? Maybe Mila's sister, Aya Azzam she's a videographer. Sorry. I could probably like give you, did you guys like to exchange information? I don't know. I feel like a lot of us like grew up here in yeah. But yeah, he couldn't get in touch with Amal then Nayfa maybe cause she's the other co-founder of Fanana. Aya is a good one possibly. I really can't think of anybody

else. I'm sorry. But if I do, I'll send the information along.

I: Do you have any letters, old photographs, notes, documents, diplomas that you think will help us understand your family history? If so, could we borrow a copy?

R: No, my family history is wild. Like there's nothing that with it. My family history is like the weirdest, which is why I want people to understand me and be open because that's how my family is. We just been through a lot. Our family dynamic is weird.

I: That was my last question for you. Thanks so much.

R: Yeah, no problem. Yeah. And if you like want to follow up or anything because I feel like some questions I could have added more, but I don't know because I don't like talking in person like that. I feel kind of awkward.

I: I completely get it. It's so much harder to answer questions in person. It can get awkward. I definitely felt awkward at first.

R: Yeah, no, you were fine. You were good. And this is your first interview. I thought you did good.

I: Yeah, thanks that made me feel better. If I could contact you again after too. Yeah, that's fine. If you have any questions for me too.

R: Okay. Yeah. And then don't forget if you want me to like elaborate on something when you listen back. I'm just taking care of my mom right now, so I got nothing going on two months. Yeah, it was, but I mean I breezed through. They were easy questions. They weren't difficult. It, I mean, unless it was like super specific.

Follow up Questions:

I: What are some resources you think would be great to add to the website?

R: SACW- which stands for Sudan American Community of Wisconsin

Found Exhibit- Another artist community

And other people that would be great to interview is Salam her email is @salamfatayer@gmail.com and Aya Azzam.