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Salem, Fatima Naik

Salem, Fatima Naik Interview: Bronx African American History Project
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Interviewer: Karima Zuru

Interviewee: Fatima Nail Salem

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Karima Zuru (KZ): Today is December 10th, we are interviewing Fatima Salem originally from Algeria but she lived in France before moving to United States. She is going to tell us about her background. This interview will be conducted in French. So, Fatima, good morning,

Fatima Nail Salem (FS): Good morning

KZ: Tell us about your childhood, where you come from, your family and where you grow up, as well as about your time in France?

FS: I am like other rabea¹ family of my country. I was in 1978 and grew up in the in Paris region especially in Trappes-en-yvelines commune, part of Bois-de-l'Etang town until I was thirteen years old. After late thirteen to fourteen years old, my parents moved to Villier-de-Bel because I had at that time a uncle that lived near there. So, we moved to Villier-de-Bel and I finally grew up between both towns, Bois-de-l'Etang and Villier-de-Bel. I came from a family that is very traditionalist as well as Algerian nationalist.

KZ: From region of Algeria are your parents?

FS: They are from Kabylie Badaja. So I am like other ladies that have grown up in France with parents that are not only originally from Babyliie but also that have always kept their culture and origin.

KZ: At what age your parents went to France?

FS: My father went to France at his youngest age and he even grows up in France. I think my father was in France when he was ten years old. My mother went to France when she got married to my father. Indeed, the arrival of my mother in France was very complicated because my father didn't want her to be there. My aunt was the person who did all the necessary paper work for my mother trip to France in 1970 through a family reunification act took by French administration at that period. Finally she was able to travel and came to Ordie. It was from Ordie that my mother came to join us in the town of Bois-de-l'Etang. She was between sixteen and seventeen years old when she came to France, it was just after she got married with my father.

KZ: How many sisters and brothers were at your house?

¹ Rabea is a slang word used in French suburbs to characterize the Arabs lived in France, It comes from inversion of the pronunciation of the word "Arabe" in French

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FS: Of course, at the beginning zero. Later my mother got five kids. Since came to France, she always take care of kids, in other words she was doing a babysitter job, job that she got authorization from DAS.

KZ: Explain us what mean DAS?

FS: DAS is governmental organization that helps the kids of low income families as well as the orphans' kids. DAS focused on the kids that have lost their parents and the kids that their parents are not in a situation to support them. In addition to the care of her baby that just had at that time, she stated also take care of kids under DAS administration. Before she gave birth to the new born, I had already another little sister named Lidia. After Lidia, the little new born Pascaline that is my little sister too because she was taken care by my mother after she got authorization from the DAS. The new born Pascaline's parents not only abandoned her but also committed acts that conducted them to Jail. It was like that Pascaline was adopted by my mother.

KZ: From where is Pascaline?

FS: She is originally from Ghana, she never been there but she went twice for visit in Algeria. She speaks a fluent Arab language. So, she is like us

KZ: Was Pascaline, the only kid that your mother adopted from DAS's children?

FS: There was also one French born kid named Laura that is a retardate kid at her birth. Even though she is not physically retardate kid, she is mentally because the expectations of her mentally growth could not exceed the age of fourteen years old. She was born at Bisangram maternity and was adopted by my mother. She is like other kids that are closely tied to people. She was born with effect of alcohol addiction as well as the use of drugs such as heroine by her mother. Those were the reasons that at her birth she had many problems. She was even in critical conditions; she was hospitalized almost two months after her birth, during that time all of us in the hospital to visit her. When out of hospital, it will be noticed that she suffered enough but she was so adorable kid. My mother liked to miss us than to miss her.

KZ: How your parents got the DAS's children for adoption? Is it easier to get?

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FS: Before my mother used to say that she will never adopt French and Black born kids. That is what some people always said but the reality sometimes makes things appear differently. Since it noticed by DAS administration that my parents got married for long time and they didn't have any issue, add to the rightful character between the community as well as at their workplace, they had a home and children, they were not used drugs and psychologically were alright, the DAS administration came to the conclusion that they had all requirements that were needed for children adoption. Later, they took all the necessary tests that are needed by the DAS as well other government offices workers relating to adoption of children. After passing successfully the tests of the DAS workers, the adoption became easier for them to get because after the tests, the also passed with success the most important procedure consisting of a visit of the home of the people that candidate for adoption. Also all the kids my parents adopted are the ones that the parents abandoned. It was very difficult for Pascaline and Laura that is retardate. The DAS officials were also very complicated because when they heard Pascaline called my mother "maman"² it was difficult at the beginning but later things came naturally to normal.

KZ: Between you and others adopted sisters, was it easier to cohabite? There wasn't any kind of jealousy between your sisters and others that are coming from elsewhere?

FS: I don't think so, we were already a big family and the jealousy was out of the family.

KZ: How many people were in your family?

FS: Five kids naturally from my parents. But in the big family there are many kids with who we played and had many pictures in which we are together. It wasn't an issue because we consider that they are our sisters that were born from the same parents. The only issue was that when we got out and you presented them as sisters, people already have something to say such as why you ladies are Arab, Pascaline is black, and Laura is white? For sure you ladies are sisters from the same parents? Many bla, bla, bla³ from people are asking. But truly speaking, it wasn't a problem in the area where we lived due to the fact the people there know about their adoption. Until now anywhere we go we continue consistently to consider them as our sisters

KZ: What you father was doing as job?

² Maman means mother in French

³ Bla, bla, bla is used to refer to nonsensically things

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FS: In the earing or collier field

KZ: And what you were doing at your youngest age in Paris?

FS: I was going to school like others young ladies of my age. But as you know some priorities changed things, I was so good in French language when I was at mid high school in France and I was selected to enter the prestigious Appolinaire. Appolinaire is a school that only students with merit entered after passing the enrollment tests. Being selected will be able to have a scholarship from companies. I spoke to my parents about that opportunity but they didn't support the idea because for them maybe I was too young at the time to really make a decision about what I wanted to be. Finally I lost that opportunity that came to me, unfortunately. However I earned my accounting degree at Garge College, where I hold a professional diploma in accounting.

KZ: Besides the classes, what activities you were doing in Paris?

FS: In the Yvelines, at my young age I stated leaning Karate until the age of four when I left there. So later, I did Karate for ten years.

KZ: Do you think you should be born as a male?

FS: Yes I think so because I hold a black belt in female Karate. I was the third female to earn that in the Yvelines region. I then left Yvelines region when I was ten years old with extremely love for Karate. Unfortunately, when we moved to Villier-de-Bel, the training place was so far and mother didn't want me to go far away from home. So ended up to continue Karate although for sure I liked Karate and I did it for many years, I stopped doing it. I was also a dancer when I was thirteen years old and I danced till I reached twenty-three years old.

KZ: What kind of dance were you interested in?

FS: I was listing to Afro music, Hip Hop, but unfortunately I did not have passion for oriental music. Indeed my passion was Afro, Hip Hop, and Zook⁴ musics.

KZ: Are you thinking that it was your passion for afro and hip hop music that motivated you to be in the United States of America?

⁴ Zook is a music originated from French islands such as Les Antilles, la Martinique, and others

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FS: Yes at the beginning because when I was kid I was influenced by American music especially hip hop through movies, clips, and television program. I started to dress like some hip hop singer and my passion for professional dress disappeared to give place to hip hop singers way of dress. I used to watch clips with my best friends and together, we started to Chatelet, Marrychirslie, and blackichy at afternoon time where we met the DJ Kabel. It was almost fifteen years that he was not singing no more. Regardless that he is not singing now, he was really a figure that was involved in hip hop in France, especially in underground hip hop.

KZ: What you did as work for your living after you graduated in France?

FS: I did everything as job on my way. I was working at the twelve years by helping my mother in cleaning home every Sunday. During vacation period, I helped her for shopping goods for the family. Like everyone does I started working when I was at the school. I worked in McDonald and in supermarkets located where I lived. I was at that time seventeen years old when I used to work on the following days, Saturday, Sunday and the Wednesdays afternoons. I did many jobs from cashier, cleaner, security guard; just say everything that was opened. I did not keep a job for long because I was so young that I could not keep a job for a long term. I did all kind of works, just said I did everything.

KZ: That meant that you were not lazy?

FS: Yes of course, I am not seeing myself as female compared to my sister

KZ: Are you the elder or what place you are occupying in your family?

FS: I am the second child. I have my grand sister that is always serious and got a good job at the airport that was near where we lived. I did also an hostess job with her and that was very interesting. That meant that I did hostess job too at the airport, for French companies and in others occasional events like during concerts.

KZ: Were you able to visit Algeria although you were really occupied for doing many things?

FS: Yes, Algeria is my home country even though it seems difficult to go every year, I have my home there as well as my grandmother. It is important to go there for three weeks or a month because my parents that worked for my success are from there.

KZ: Were members of your family very attached to religion?

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FS: Yes and no. My mother is very religious

KZ: Which one?

FS: Islam, Muslim, I am an Algerian

KZ: Don't you know that there also Christians in Algeria?

FS: I don't know but Algeria has hundred percent of Muslims. It is the only country that has hundred percent of Muslims.

KZ: There are a few percentages of Christians too?

FS: Very few that you cannot realize but it is when they travel to United States that they become Christians. My mother was Mudjajine

KZ: What means Mudjajine?

FS: My grandfather Lamor was among the army generals that fought war of Algerian independence. So when someone visits Beyard in Algeria, the person will see in the town a big statute of my grandfather. My mother has been since her youngest age was proud of his father because he contributed to the liberation of Algeria. For my mother side, all of us were raised with the idea of Algerian nationalism focusing on language, the culture, the country and everything that goes with the country. She was happy to be Algerian.

KZ: Then did she transpose the Algerian nationalism to her children?

FS: yes, she did transpose to us her happiness to be an Algerian.

KZ: Being an Algerian living in France, how the idea to move from France came in your mind?

FS: At youngest age, I noticed that it will be impossible for me to live in France

KZ: Why?

FS: It's because of the system. The way I was feeling there, was not what I wanted. Also I just wanted to do something different in my life and moved up. According to me, it wasn't possible to affirm myself and I didn't understand why I should do more than others because of my name that is Fatima or because of the area that I lived. That was the case even though I am a hardworking and motivated woman that never had a problem. In

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France, create a personal business is difficult, and there was the same mentality of people in all areas that I lived in France.

KZ: That means you knew you will not stay in France forever, how to idea of United States came to your mind?

FS: First of all, my intention was to go to an Island where I will always see the sun shining. But especially somewhere where I could work, as well as a place where I could be involved in music. Looking forward to find a kind of above place, New York by the way attracted me, not the United States in general, but particularly New York. I had my friend that already was living in New York for long.

KZ: Is your friend from France too?

FS: Yes, Sonia is from Marseilles and was the one told who told to come for a visit in New York, and speedily I told her I would like that. Sonia told me to come for vacation in New York in order to share time together and for sure, she repeated I will like my visit to New York. I responded positively so I came for my first time in New York for vacation. When I was preparing to come I had luggage than what I used to take during my trip to others countries that I visited in the past. My luggage was unprecedented that my mother noticed that and even asked where I am going with that excessive luggage. When I told her I am going for vacation in New York, surprisingly she said these bags, just for a little time of vacation.

KZ: At that where Sonia was living?

FS: Williamsburg in Brooklyn

KZ: How old were you when Sonia invented for vacation?

FS: It was in 2002 and that year especially in December I was twenty-six years old

KZ: The 09/11 event did not negatively impact your decision to arrive in New York?

FS: I can say yes and no because I was working at the airport and I can say the event traumatized people in Europe countries more than here. Before I came here I had a sister that was working at French Customs services that was complaining about her job. In addition to my Algerian look, things are not really working as it supposed and it got worse.

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KZ: Why did you use your Algerian passport for your travel to New York?

FS: It was because I had six months visa for United States in already. First of all, I was undecided and later I noticed that if I wanted to use the French passport, I needed to wait for a month in order to establish my French passport because I didn't have it that time. So I called the American Embassy to find out if I can get a visa in France with my Algerian passport, the response was positive, I sent the passport to the Embassy and things were alright.

KZ: Tell us what happened when you came to Sonia?

FS: I visited Sonia and I discovered New York

KZ: What was your impression for the first time?

FS: Yes for the first time, the geographical aspect was impressive due to the fact that it was a beautiful aspect of New York that I discovered. However, I wasn't surprised because I used to see also beautiful places in Paris too. The dimension of the city was for me fantastic as well as the spirit of the New Yorkers was totally different. Soon as possible at my arrival day, at evening time I went out with Sonia in a bar where techno music was at stake and people were well dressed compared to me that was in sportswear. Well-dressed people have talked to me regardless that I didn't dress well. It was a passionate and agreeable evening because it was a place where all kinds of social classes interact and have fun together. This kind of occasion in which you meet different social categories of people without social class distinction is rare in France. I also noticed that here you must be a hard worker person and for sure Sonia is someone that works hard.

KZ: Did you already notice that you need to be a hard worker person soon as you came to vacation?

FS: Of course, I knew my friend Sonia as hard worker. But unfortunately during my first week, the electricity service was interrupted in her apartment for non-payment of the bill. It means that without payment there will not be electricity restoration, and without a rent payment there will not an apartment. In fact you need to work here in order to survive. What is good here is that if you work hard, you will get a reward through payment as well as appreciation. In France even though you do more it is with nothing as reward and you will not get also a promotion for doing more.

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KZ: It means that here you work hard but you are not exploited?

FS: I think so. In France although you work hard, it is very to get a promotion, so you are in obligation to keep the same position for long. If was in France at this time, for sure I will be at the same position more than ten years, but here this is not the case.

KZ: Do you think here people get promoting although they started at the bottom line?

FS: Here, the employers appreciate the employees according to their hard work regardless your personality.

KZ: How long it took you to make your mind that you will stay?

FS: At the beginning I decided to be here for three weeks, and then from tree weeks I extended my journey to a month. At meantime I did a lot of work with Sonia because she needs someone to do something and I helped her. I liked working with her, I changed my decision to go back after a month and decided to stay before the end of six months visa. Before the six months expiration of my visa, I met my future husband.

KZ: Your future husband that was an American?

FS: Yes, he is an American. His father is from Turkish and his mother is a Porto Rican. He was raised by his mother.

KZ: Did you meet him during your vacation period?

FS: Yes during my vacation time. The first time we met we appreciated each other and went too fast because I was thinking to stay only for six months as predicted. So I was working in order to shop for what I will need when back to Paris, but I ended liking my job, found more opportunities and became comfortable. Things went too fast especially with my future husband who decided to be engaged with me and soon we decided to get married.

KZ: How long it took to decide to get married?

FS: We decided that between few months

KZ: Don't you think it was very fast?

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FS: Truly speaking I didn't want it like that because my intention was focused on religious marriage celebration.

KZ: Is your husband a Muslim too?

FS: Yes he is a Muslim. I told him that after six months period in United States I will be in illegal status here. The appropriate option will to go back to France and establish my French passport or after six months I will move to him and continue working here in order to be comfortable with him. From that point all of us came to the agreement to get married there.

KZ: There, where?

FS: In United States especially in New York where we got married administratively in the front of friends that we invented at City Hall for the event.

KZ: At City Hall in New York?

FS: Yes at City Hall where we got married in February and in June I returned to Paris where I celebrated the marriage event with my family.

KZ: Although the marriage was quick celebrated, did that helped to fix your status in United States?

FS: Yes of course but it was a really marriage and just to legalize my immigration status. For fact I got from that marriage a baby.

KZ: You lived with Sonia, and before you and your husband got an apartment you lived with your husband family in Bronx, what part of Bronx it was?

FS: In Castle Hill where there is a Porto Rican people concentration

KZ: Tell us about your time in Castle Hill?

FS: Castle hill is a place where there is a high number of Latino. I appreciated the area because it is like where I used to live in France. People in that community know each other, they are very simple, and all family members live together. Although, at that time there were more people living in my husband's family, it wasn't a big deal for me. The Porto

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Rican people are like people from Antilles in France, they like to have fun by drinking, singing, dancing, they are always happy, and are also involve in religious activities.

KZ: Were you secured in Bronx, especially in Castle Hill as African from Algeria?

FS: I will say yes because my physique and my personality contributed to that. First of all, people think I am Latina until I started speaking French. While I didn't dress in French way I use to dress like everyone living in the area. It was when I start speaking French that people asked me if I am from France. I usually responded that I am from North Africa because realized that saying North Africa is better than saying I am from France due fact that some people think here that French people are very rich.

KZ: How was your relationship with the American family at the beginning regarding the culture, language, and others things?

FS: Very difficult

KZ: Explain why it was difficult?

FS: I finally realized that were different. Referring to my origin, I came from a family that faced many problems, however all members of my family were closely tied. Here, it is another situation. At first glance, it is easy to state that family members are closely tied. But it not as it seems because it is not easy for me in Castle Hill as it will be for me in France to take my kid to my mother in law. They weren't able to give that kind of service that my mother or my husband's mother will passionately offer me if I was in France. Here, the idea is that my family is my family, Even though we are related we just meet on Christmas day and say Merry Christmas to each other. I think compare to I am come from not only that behavior is not kind but also it is very disrespectful. Disrespectful because it is considers as an insult to my personality to the point that I have a fear for my child. I knew that the family like my child, and they aren't going to harm him but we don't think about it now because we grew up sometimes with our family mistakes and also sometimes that mistakes have impact on us. So far, my kid will have a half part of his personality from my husband's family way to see things that is why I have a fear already for him. I didn't know about the culture before I got him, it was when I got my baby that I really realized it.

KZ: When did you get your child?

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FS: My child is year and half

KZ: What is his name?

FS: Shaheed

KZ: Before having your child, you and your husband moved to Harlem, it was which area of Harlem?

FS: Spanish Harlem

KZ: why Spanish Harlem?

FS: Because I knew the area and I liked the area. In addition, I know the landlord of the building. All the above conditions have contributed to make easier to move to Spanish Harlem.

KZ: How both of you found the couple life experience, work and business?

FS: At the beginning it was very hard, we didn't have many things needed for couple life and the ones we had were also limited. I continued working in the restaurant and my husband worked as a chef in a school with little income that was nothing for us to covers the high cost of life in New York. Really, all of us suffered at the beginning of our couple life. However, as I knew already I am here to do something, I need to it so I didn't give up until fortunately I found an opportunity and decided to jump on it.

KZ: what opportunity?

FS: I knew a friend that had an organic restaurant. I started liking the place, the concept, and the food. I loved the place and one day he told me he wanted to sell the place. Of course, I didn't have money in order be a potential candidate buyer, I didn't even have anything. How to buy a place when I didn't have money but I worked in that place and the owner was a friend, so I didn't give up from my idea of buying that restaurant. I came up with an idea by telling the owner that listen I don't have money but I will go it. For me, it will be important to keep the restaurant concept with a long term idea to open another restaurant somewhere but at meantime I focused my plan to find someone that will take care of the place.

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KZ: which kind of restaurant was it?

FS: It was a Jamaican restaurant but we added some French food on the menu list. French weren't much; it was also an organic restaurant in which a small portion of food was served to clients. Just say it was a Jamaican and French culinary but it was more Jamaican than French. The restaurant concept was already good, the only thing that I needed to do was to ameliorate it to be more effective. I did find out that it was something that I could put in profit, so I came to a decision that it was a great chance for me.

KZ: You and your husband didn't have money when you found the opportunity, how did you managed?

FS: I said to the owner at the beginning that listen Mark, his name is Mark, why wouldn't you hire another manager or why not let me work for as manager for a month? I knew for sure that I would be able to save for him in a month at least five to ten thousand dollars. I guaranteed him that I could make the place better and I was the kind of person that Mark was looking for at that time. A quickly checked his restaurant menu and the menu list showed three kinds of appetizers and three types of main meals. I also checked the ingredients that were used for the sauces and I came out with the idea to ameliorate the ingredients of the sauces in French style by replacing the avocado by juice and other things.

KZ: What the price of the restaurant when you bought it?

FS: It was seventy five thousand dollars

KZ: How did you pay for it? Was it through payment plan?

FS: The first month I gave to the owner ten thousand dollars. Later, every month I used to give him something from my profit, all the payments took me almost a year, especially eleven months to be fully paid.

KZ: Did he agree for that kind of deal?

FS: He didn't have a choice because Mark was someone that was tired of the place, I came at the right moment and I did play the right game that helped to have the place. Mark couldn't sell the place to someone else because he didn't have the accounting book keeping of the cost and the revenue. Here, no one else can buy it because the buyer always focused on many things such as the company tax file and other things, but he didn't keep anything

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in this matter. For me I didn't mind because I knew that I will change the name and of course added some other products. Surely, I knew it will work so that I didn't worry about the rest of things that will really be requested by a buyer f a place in New York.

KZ: What your husband said after you got the idea?

FS: My husband didn't say much

KZ: When you African woman were in frontline, what your husband really did?

FS: He helped me because for the first payment of ten thousand dollars, he contributed with five thousand dollars and I completed the rest haft part of ten thousand dollars. He went to all his family members to collect the rest of five thousand dollars because his income wasn't enough for to be able to have the five thousand dollars within a month.

KZ: couldn't he be chef in your restaurant?

FS: he could but I didn't like that option and also as a chef in a school there are things that he couldn't really do in the restaurant. We kept all the workers that were worked there before I bought the place such as the line cookers and it took a week to make a transition by showing them other new menus list. In a week, everything was ready so we started and I reiterated my promise to the owner that I will give him something every end of the month. All of us agreed and both of us were satisfied for the deal.

KZ: You bought one restaurant and another one near the first one, explain us how?

FS: the restaurant was small and near there was a bar. It was important for us to try to buy the bar because we needed more space. If not another restaurant very close to us will take advantage of buying the bar. So it came to be the case it will be very difficult for us. So it was a strategic place for us. But when the opportunity of the second place came out I was under the payment plan of the first place, so it was very difficult and until now I'm still is under the payment plan of the second place. I will not say that with evidence that it was easy but with the God grace, we are moving forward.

KZ: what means to be a business owner in New York?

FS: For me there is no difference like daily thing we used to do. Here there is no difference but the owner have much headache because he or her don't have much sleep du fact that

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the owner always received calls regarding many things related to the restaurant. I thanked God that I am self-employed and I am happy for that. I am not in obligation to there at any specific given time. I can choose to be there at seven, eight, or nine o'clock even though often I prefer to be there at eight. I have more responsibilities. That was what I wanted and that I found. I am happy although it is a tough job.

KZ: Five years ago, you came in vacation and you ended up getting married, having a child as well as a business, was that the intention that motivated you to come here?

FS: No, I just came for vacation. I wanted to see concerts.

KZ: what your family said when you decided to live here?

FS: They were afraid at the beginning as all Arabs in France will think that you will end up in Guantanamo. But my mother found out that I was happy and successfully here, so that my family members came for visit. They noticed at their arrival that everything was alright and I also went to France with my husband.

KZ: Your family worked with you, explain us?

FS: Of course, all my family worked with me. First of all I like to work with people that I know. My brother came, and then my sister followed, both worked with me. I also had many friends that worked for me too. I did that anytime that there was an opportunity to do so because I know where I am coming from and If I live here today I don't need to forget the practices of the areas where I'm coming from. So anytime that someone wants to come here and I am in situation to do something such as help to the person, I am always tried to do it.

KZ: Can you tell us about couple life with an American husband regarding to the communication and understanding each other?

FS: Very complicated day to day and I thought my mother was right. The more you become older, the more you try to be closed to your culture. It will be easy for someone who wasn't attached to the original culture. However, if the person is a nationalist and due to the fact I had a child it was more difficult because the other side is not seeing things the way I see, and any adjustment from my husband to way of seeing things seems difficult for him. So usually there is a lack of something because I want my child to have that part of

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culture that is important even though I live in United States, I came from France. I know as Algerian living in France it is difficult to keep your culture and it will be very difficult to keep here. For example, yesterday was Laheed⁵, I would like my son to know what that means when growing up. Here I am afraid although I grew up in France I know that Laheed is very important because I knew all of that from my family. Here it is very difficult to do that due to the fact that I do not have my mother to help me. That is the reason that I am afraid day to day although I am returning time to time to my origin and that is something in me that comes which is important for me here to translate my family culture to my kids.

KZ: How would you try to keep the relationship between your culture and your religion in this country?

FS: Often I travel to France and also I have many people from France and Algeria that live here. I have my cousin Dublette that live and always take care of my son. On Fridays, I read the Coran, fasting during Ramadan and Islamic cultural events. I try to teach to my child something even though he is too little to know everything so far, the most important is to let him know the direction that he should follow later. Any way there will be no other directions than that.

KZ: Do you plan to stay here for the rest of your life or what is your future plan?

FS: No, I don't think that I will not stay for the rest of your life. Now I just want to have a good business in New York. I like New York and truly speaking I like New York. Concerning my son I am so happy for him to be here and it is a luck for him too because New York is a great place for kids to decide what they are going to be such artists or musicians. New York is also a place of a best education as well a place where people have a great mentality. In addition to that, kids in New York have at early age the idea about what they will be in the future such as musicians, famous actors, they have also at their disposal the schools that teach everything such as the study of the Coran, in one word, they have everything. The system is not restricted like where I come from which is a place where you need to choose one or another. I want to say that where I come from if you want to learn the Coran, you need to go to Muslims school and you meet there only Muslims. In contrast, here if you go to Muslims schools like the one that is in Brooklyn, you see there different

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⁵ Laheed is a Muslims holiday celebration

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people from different religions such as Jews and Christians. It is a school where someone can learn Arab as well takes courses in Arab. I think this is a great thing because besides the Arab classes someone that is interested in music can also takes music course at meantime. My son now does many things and that kind of opportunity is not offer in France. By referring to New York as a place of great mentality, I mean all goods things that attract people are here like music and others hobbies. So I have confidence that my son will benefit from this opportunity, and that is good for him.

KZ: Can you talk about what you plan for future?

FS: It is very cold here and time goes faster here that I wouldn't work like that for all my life. With the will as well the grace of God if I achieve earlier my plan to buy home in France and in Bleide⁶, I would like to live in tropical region where I will enjoy the daily sun shining. I will come often to New York but not to live.

KZ: What level of education do you want your son to reach?

FS: I would like my child to start the elementary school in New York and when he will reach the age of eight years old, he will continue his study in France. He will be here for his first years of education because I saw here too some schools that he can go to.

KZ: What about the school you saw in New York?

FS: When I first came here, I gave classes in to children. Here the parents have the option to enroll their kids in expensive schools and the parents in the case are super rich to cover the tuition or some of them in public schools and the problem in that second option is that at the ten years old, the kids enrolled in public aren't able to read. So, I would like French high school but my family is opposed because French schools are selective. My experience in France during the elementary school wasn't bad at all.

KZ: Do you think it will be possible to live in France with your husband, when you have a restaurant in New York?

FS: My husband is like other American that dream to be or to live in France. During vacation in France, we eat the French baguette, Brie cheese, and the red vine all day long and he always like this kind of foods. While I cannot oblige him to live in France, I would

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⁶ Bleide is a French slang word means the home town of a given immigrant living in France

like to send my child there. If my son will be finally send to France, I will be there with him from classes' period to the end of classes, a period that I will come back to New York for vacation. In addition, I can come to New York any time it seems possible such as during French holidays. I know that for the first years we will share the responsibilities but I don't yet how we will do because my son is only eighteen month. We will start talking about that when he will have three years old. For sure, my focus is to see my son continuing his study in France later.

KZ: To conclude, what would you tell us about your experience of New York?

FS: New York is great town

KZ: It is not about the town; tell us about you experience in New York?

FS: It is a place of opportunities, you can do everything and importantly I lean here that it is possible to reach a goal without having anything at the start point. Here you need to work and if you want really to be better off in your life; I mean if someone wants to get a better life trough work, the person needs to come to New York. On the contrast, if you lazy, there is no point to come to New York, and it will better for the person to stay in France because it is very difficult here. There are many things available as works for people here, and that can be noticed at all corners of a street in New York. Even though you don't have money on you, you know that you can get money if you decide that you can do it by working hard. This optimistic mind gives energy to everyone living here when the person wakes up in the morning that he can have something in the pocket at the end of day.

KZ: United States and especially New York is it different from Africa and France, places where you come from? Are there some limitations?

FS: Exactly, it is not possible there but here is easy to make even though when you wake up in the morning you do not have anything in your hands, you end your day by earning something. That can happen only in New York where people have the same mentality and I feel that I am really in New York as Algerian coming from France that has made New York a hometown compare to Paris. Also people always help me have a feeling that I am at home so I am true feeling that I am at home. Here someone can be successful regardless the distinction based on origin, color, name and whatever. And this kind of conception is needs to be appreciated.

KZ: Thanks Fatima for your testimony, your experience in New York and good luck for everything

FS: You welcome