

Episode 47: Amalie

****Please check against delivery.****

This transcript is non-verbatim.

F:

What does it mean to be Danish of Palestinian background and spiritual? In this episode, Amalie shares her stories of growing up in Aalborg, a city in Jutland, and her journey in making sense of the world she lives in. Her story is about the importance of self-acceptance and introspection in navigating our lives.

I'm Fumi, this is #OUR_racism, and this is the story of Amalie.

.....
A:

I grew up in Aalborg. It's a nice town. I feel like it's a small town where people know each other. Like everybody knows everybody. So if something happened at a school, the other schools would know. And otherwise, it was pretty like... it was calm, and people did the same thing. Like, Friday night, everybody would be on the same party street and... But otherwise, it was a nice kind of town to grow up in, like nice and quiet, Jutland vibe.

And Aalborg was pretty much a place where I felt that people were very similar, like dressed the same way, talked about [things in] the same way... And this was when I was young, so there wasn't a lot of international people and different kinds of ideas or cultures mixed together. And for me, I grew up feeling very different. First of all, because I was like one of the three Brown girls in my class, and I think also in my school. And [second of all], I was spiritual, and there was no one who was spiritual. So I always felt like I was very different, and I didn't know what it was [that made me feel different]. But I think it led me to a place where I couldn't really mirror myself with other people.

So I feel that a lot of my time, I grew up having a lot of anxiety and just feeling like I didn't fit in. And I was very the "quiet girl". So that was the way I grew up. And I feel that it was very isolating for me, but it was more like a mental state. So it's how I felt when I went to school, and also most of my high school, I like to... it's not because I can't be social, it's just because I prefer to be alone and just be the observer, the observer of what's going on. Because sometimes I feel like I didn't understand this world. I just felt like an alien trapped in this young woman's body and I was like, "What is going on here?"

F:

Amalie reflects upon the question of where and how one may "fit in", quote unquote.

A:

My background is Palestinian, but I was born and raised in Denmark. And the first ten years of my life, it was a very Arabic traditional way I was raised. And after I was ten years old, it was more like modern... there was not so much religion in the home. And I think that's also a part that made me feel different because when I was in this isolated box and feeling weird, I also felt maybe because I'm Brown and other people are not Brown, maybe that's the problem also. So I think that was a part of my identity, of feeling like, "It's because I'm different. That's why [I feel different]. It's because I look different." So it was very on the superficial level at that time.

And yeah, I remember going to... it was like one year of school in tenth grade, because I didn't know what to do after high school... no, not high school, before high school. And then I remember I went to

a school where there were so many Arab people. And it was very like, "Whoa, I'm not used to that." And they started coming, like, people talking Arab to me and stuff like that, and I just remember being, "Yeah... I'm not really used to that." So it was just the experience of... and I only had like one good friend and she was Danish without an ethnic background.¹ And I remember that the Arab people in that school, they were like, "Amalie, you're not that Arab. Like, you are so weird. You're not acting Arab." And it was like an acceptance of, "I'm not being accepted by the Arab people and I'm not feeling... I'm not feeling, like, normal with Danish people." So I was just like a box I couldn't place myself.

And I remember going to a bus... on the way to the bus. And I remember all the Arab people sitting at the back of the bus – not that I'm saying Arabs are this, Arabs are that, it was just like, in that time of my life – and they were speaking negatively about me because... it was just like a bully. I'm being bullied in some kind of way. And I just felt like I'm not really fitting in any boxes.

F:

Amalie shares some stories of racism she experienced growing up in Aalborg.

A:

I remember that there was always some racist comments coming from the teacher. I remember one specific teacher. And it was just like, people were laughing like it was a joke. But it was just like weird for me because it was adults and when you're like ten, teenager years old and... and I was like, "Okay, there's a lot of weird racism comments coming my way," like, "black n*** on the street", or stuff like that. And I was just like laughing with it. But I was like, "This is kind of weird." Like, "Why are you talking like this?"

But I think it's also a way of... when you're in an environment that people are just laughing about it and it's normal just to laugh about it because there's not a lot of dark people. So I think that was a certain way of yeah, not feeling like... not feeling seen, I think. Because if you can talk and the students can talk like that and nobody says anything, then I just feel like it was a normal thing just to joke off other ethnicities. So it was kind of interesting. But I think there's also like, you just get used to it somehow, and I just think it was a little normalized. So I just think when the environment is like that, then you also just adjust to that environment because you don't know any different. And it was not a time where Facebook and Instagram was huge. So there wasn't like any other opinions. So I just think that it was very normalized...

I just remembered, actually another one [memory]. And this one hurt me. It was... I remember when I wanted to move to Copenhagen, there was one of my friends who bought a sofa and her dad wanted to come and get it. And I remember this girl, she was always saying like, "Oh, because of *them*..." Like, there was always some comments [driven by racism coming out of her mouth]. And then her dad, when she said goodbye, he said, "Oh, where are you moving? Why are you selling?" And I said, "Because I'm moving to Copenhagen." And then he said, "Yeah, I think your kind of people also fit better over there."

That really stuck with me. I think I was 18. And it was very like, "Woah, you're my friend's dad, and you're like an adult, and..." It was a very like, "Okay, yeah, interesting. I'm glad I'm leaving Aalborg." So it was another example of just feeling different or just like getting something [aimed at me], but I didn't think of that. I wasn't very conscious at that time [about racism]. So I remember that actually hurt me.

¹ She is referring to someone who is "from" Denmark.

F:

For a while, Amalie says she couldn't fully make sense of her experiences. But, two different events in her life would change the way she viewed the world and ultimately, how she would engage with the world. The first is a video her mother shared with her during her teenage years.

A:

I got a video from my mother. It was about the law of attraction with Rhonda Byrne. And it was about how everything you think becomes the way that you feel, becomes the way that you act. So if I'm feeling very anxious, insecure, and negative, that I was at that time, I will create environments and people around me who have the same. But if I'm very positive and happy and joyful, I will also attract these people.

So I remember I saw a 20-minute video. And I had a tear in my eye. And I was like, "Whoa. It's *me* that's the problem. I'm not the victim of the world. I created this [my reality]." And I remember when I saw this 20-minute video, I had a tear in my eye, I just felt like anything is possible. Like, I am just gonna be... I'm just gonna create something so big when I get older, and I'm just gonna be in totally a creation phase.

So I think that video changed me and I started to research on every author in that video, about mindset, what do successful people think, what do they do, and I just saw that it was very similar. Everybody used this. And at that time, it was not noticed at all to know about energies, the law of attraction, what you think you feel you create, manifestations... So I remember when I talked with people about this, they would look at me like, "You're fucking weird." And my family was also like, not my mom, but the rest of them were like, "You're so weird. You're just a hippie."

F:

The second experience was her move to Copenhagen and everything that followed.

A:

When I was in Aalborg, I always knew that, "Okay, I'm gonna move to Copenhagen someday because there's more opportunities, there's more like different kinds of people." I remember the first time I was there, I just fell in love that it was... there was room for everybody. You don't have to be in a certain way. So I remember when I finished high school, I had to wait like a week, then I told myself like, "Okay, I'm gonna move." But when I had like, the last day [of school], I was like, "Why do I have to wait?" So two days after, I just packed my stuff and went to Copenhagen. And this is where I studied marketing economy.

And after that, I went into an incubator with my clothing company. And I think that I always like, chased success. I always chased this idea of society saying, "Oh, you're happy when you're this entrepreneur," or, "You have this amount of money," and stuff like that. So I just bought into that belief system and was like, "Okay, and I think that's the normal thing to do. So I'm just gonna start my own company." And yeah, I did that. And I think I reached my goals financially. But I remember I felt so empty. And I was like, "No, there's something missing. That's not it. Why do I feel this empty inside?" And I played the game of society. I succeeded in the game of society. But I didn't... there was still something missing.

And then I had an awakening where I pretty much experienced, just like my consciousness, totally expand. And from one day to another, I could really feel other people's energy, I could feel this illusion of this society. And I was like, "This is crazy." And it was so overwhelming that I pretty much stayed in my home for a month because it was too much for me. Like, I just went to a supermarket, I would get overwhelmed because I could just feel and see all kinds of things that maybe other people couldn't see and feel. And then I got an opportunity to go to Costa Rica to help other people on the streets, and

that was also an out-of-the-blue experience, where I said, "Yes, and then I went there for eight months," came back and started my own coaching company...

So I think it's a journey of self-acceptance and going from a place of being very rushy and having this belief system about what society says is true, living truth, and then finding my own truth, and standing by that and creating that. So I think it's been like a crazy journey the last five, six years. And I think this is also the journey of Copenhagen that helped me with, rediscover that, "Okay, you can be spiritual and you can act like you don't fit in anywhere." And there was a lot of people feeling the same way [in Copenhagen].

F:

Since finding her true self, Amalie says she is confident in her different identities.

A:

For me, I just say that I'm Danish, I'm spiritual, but also on a bigger level connection, I always say that, you know, "I'm a soul and a body and I'm having this experience." So it's not only about my physical appearance, but it's more like levels of seeing other people, that you can see them from their colors, their titles, their clothes, but also seeing them like, "Oh, there's something deeper and we actually are the same. We come from the same thing." So I think for now, I just say, "I'm Danish, I'm spiritual." Sometimes I don't say I'm spiritual, I just say that, you know, I'm "all religion" because I studied a lot about different religions and I find similarities in all of them. So I think there's also the red thread that I discovered because I don't think that I could put myself in a box of, "I am this," but, "I am everything."

F:

Amalie shares an encounter she had in Copenhagen, and how, with the new perspective of her life and the world she lives in, dealt with it.

A:

I remember one specific... it was actually not that long ago. I was on the bus and then I had a pizza. And I was on the way home. And there was just like a Brøndby football game. And it's very known for Brøndby to be the shouting people who are very aggressive. And the bus was filled with the people who just came from the football game. And I remember I had chili or something on my pizza. And you can smell it. And then there was a guy who was like, "Oh, you smell like chili," and then, you know, people started laughing. And I was just like [in my head thinking], "Alright, that's a very low conscious level of, you know, saying things and thinking." So I think it was humoristic, like, wow, okay. I just think, like, people are different, and if you have a need to get approval from other people by saying that because you maybe have low confidence, you know, that's what I see. I was like, "Okay".

But I remember he looked at me, like *directly* looked at me. And I know that when other people, it doesn't matter if they bully you or whatever is the situation, if they look at you, they want a response. That's the game, you know, the dopamine, like, "Fuck, I just got you. I stepped on you." And I just remember that when he said that, I was looking at the window, but I didn't turn around because I didn't want to approve his comments because I don't want him to gain my energy, gain my, "Ooooh that was..." [and tell him something]. I just had a moment where I wanted to say something sarcastic, but I was like [to myself], "No, no, no." Because I don't want to go into this energy battle of, "I want to give something back to you that is sarcastic." It's different from situation to situation, but it was just like, it was kind of a racist moment. And I was like, "Okay, interesting. Doesn't bother me, but I see it."

F:

Amalie reflects upon what racism is to her.

A:

I think racism for me is having a story, a perspective, out of the physical looks of another being out of color, out of eye shape or hair shape, whatever it is. So it's about the story that is created through our programming of our subconscious mind that this society, movies, has made us believe that in every movie, it's like, the poor people are the Black people and the rich people are the, you know, it's always the same story, and the Arab people are the terrorists or whatever it is. So it's pretty much a program that... it is important to take a step back and just like, wake up, and see the reality through your own eyes, own perspectives.

Because I think if you believe in that, you will look at that with those eyes. So every time you see an Asian, Arab, whatever it is, that's the eyes you're looking at. And then you have some limit in beliefs about, "Oh, I don't want to ask about this," or, "I don't approach them because of that, because of the story..." So I think racism is changing those lenses and the stories that you program with, because it is hate, it is discrimination, but people are each other's mirror, and if there's something that you feel you get triggered by other people, you can look back at yourself and be like, "What is it about this person that I can't handle?" Because I can handle a part of myself.

F:

Amalie also highlights the importance of acknowledging and accepting oneself and others when engaging with issues related to racism.

A :

The more I can just self-accept who I am, that's also like... it [racism] doesn't affect me that much. But it [racism] does exist. And I think it's also understanding the behavior of other people, like why other people hate or make other people different. And it is in our nature, like if something is different, you know, we see it in children's eyes, if somebody has glasses or not, has the same weight or anything or the [skin] color is different, then there's something in just the human nature of making other people want to feel bad so they can feel good about themselves. But I think, yeah, I think for me, it was just like, in the beginning, "I'm not good enough. I'm different because of my skin color and the way people are in the surroundings around me." But then I just was like, "Okay, a way to free yourself is also the understanding of hates and behavior and culture so it doesn't become personal." Because the more we can have this awareness about the things that are going on, the more we can just be observers and not take it in.

I think there's a discovery of consciousness and there's a discovery that we are physical beings, that everything is just this reality. And I think it's also about being curious about energy, like, at the end of the day, if we look at quantum physics, a proton and neutron is going around energy. And everything is made of this. Like H₂O, our bodies, the water. And it's also rediscovering the reality that we're in and questioning how powerful our minds are, that we can change our reality to our minds. And yeah, being open-minded, I think. And this can also be hard because it can switch the reality of, "Whoa, there is more?" And it can be very painful because it destroys the illusion of our current reality. But also just to... yeah, be curious about others and the world. And I think that makes us more human because we expand our points of view and the more we can expand our point of view, the more we also can accept what is.

F:

Against the background of her experiences, Amalie has the following to say on what she thinks it takes to be antiracist.

A:

I think that [being antiracist means] going back to the self, just like asking questions. Again, "Why? What is the problem about this person?" So I think to become anti-racist, you just pretty much have

to rediscover yourself because, you know, we're projecting stuff. If I have hate for other people or races, it's because I have something in myself that I hate or can't handle, as I mentioned. So I think it's about awareness as we do now with, you know, Black Lives Matters and Pride, that... accepting each other. And I think that we live in an amazing, amazing time period, because we all are very like... accepting of people being different, men having makeup on, and... just seeing that is cool. So I think that we're starting to mix up with... yeah, it's okay to be different. It's okay to look different and feel different, and some people are like, "I don't have any gender," and that's also cool. So yeah, I think we are at the right time, and social media has definitely helped with that, where we can all have a voice.

.....

F:

You can find more information about race-related issues in Denmark, as well as other articles, books and videos Amalie recommends people to take a look at on racism, on our website, www.ourcontexts.org.

You can also find the transcript of this episode on our website in English, French, German and Italian.

If you have a personal story to share, reach out to us on our website, Instagram or Twitter – you can find us by typing in #our_racism.

This is Fumi and #OUR_racism. See you next month, on April 3!

.....

This episode was produced and edited by me, Fumi.

Music by Pete Morse, Crescent Music and Fugu Vibes. This podcast is powered by the Competence Centre for Diversity and Inclusion at the University of St. Gallen.

A big thank you to Amalie for her invaluable time and energy in going down memory lane for us and sharing with us her stories and insightful reflections on this issue.