

My name is Nour Ballout and I'm a Detroit based artist, curator and entrepreneur, and I want to be the adult I needed this kid. I was born in Beirut, my first memories of the world are within that setting but also at that time, Lebanon was still under occupation. So other memories were my brothers almost getting shot because a helicopter flew over our house and the bullets landed right between the three of them. Like, war was a huge part of the childhood... bombs... like, I'm still afraid of fireworks.

I moved here with my siblings to live with my father, who is married to an American woman who didn't speak Arabic and my mother stayed in Lebanon. I was in a new country where I didn't speak the language and my mother, who was the person I'm closest to wasn't there. My sense of home was destroyed and so I spend a lot of my time evaluating where and how I feel at home. Like, during that time period where I was beginning to understand myself and my sexuality, I sort of felt very alone and I thought I was the only queer Arab Muslim person in the world, because that's an abomination. How could I be queer? I met someone who was also queer and they were like, no... there's like a lot of queer Arab Muslims here and in Lebanon. Even with queer communities, there is a lot of Islamophobia around that, right. It tells you that Muslims are homophobic immediately. That's not a narrative of Arab culture, but rather a narrative of the West that perpetuates Islamophobia. And so anyways, that person taught me how to make home, like taught me how to, like, build these spaces that are become the safe space for that intersectionality, but also by going to this LGBT Muslim retreat. I realized a lot of the ways that I love and a lot of the ways that I build community is rooted in Islam and that is a huge part of my identity and if I let that go, how can I build community?

I am really invested in not feeling alone. So I create spaces where I can reimagine home with people and I can reimagine community where other people don't have to feel like

they're the only one... or even if they are, they still have a safe space to go and that they're intersectionality is beautiful and is to be celebrated and they don't have to make a choice between either identities. And I want to continue to become that, because I think there's a lot of kids out there that need that person, because I think once you create a space that is safe for marginalized communities, you create a truly safe space for everyone.