

Interview 21

This interview was conducted by the Middle East and Middle Eastern American Center (MEMEAC) of The Graduate Center, City University of New York (June 2002 – June 2003).

Gender of respondent: Male

Age: 32

{missing last question}

Q. This project is called the 9/11 Digital Archive. I'm going to be asking you some questions about yourself and about how you experienced September 11th. There's no right or wrong answers but I just ask that you be honest as possible. And if you don't want to answer anything at any time you just let me know. Okay?

A. All right. I'll do that.

Q. So where were you born?

A. Kuwait.

Q. And where did you grow up?

A. The first ... I would say the first ten years of my life in Palestine and the second ten years of my life ... or the second ten years of my life in France.

Q. And when did you come to live in the United States?

A. '88.

Q. And where was your father born?

A. In Palestine.

Q. And your Mom?

A. France.

Q. Okay. So what is your ethnic background?

A. Palestinian, I guess.

Q. And what's your religious affiliation?

A. Muslim.

Q. And how old are you?

A. Thirty-two.

Q. What's your highest level of education?

A. I have a B.A. in ... History.

Q. From where?

A. Brooklyn College. Brooklyn College.

Q. Okay. What year?

A. '94.

Q. What's your main occupation?

A. Pharmaceutical rep.

Q. What exactly do you do?

A. I promote [name removed] for mental illness and [name removed] for depression.

Q. So what's your marital status?

A. Single.

Q. Do you have any kids?

A. No.

Q. Okay. Now I'm going to ask you some questions about how you experienced September around nine a.m. and how did you hear about the attacks.

A. I was in a meeting.

Q. Where was the meeting?

A. In a restaurant with my partners.

Q. And now did you hear about the attacks?

A. On TV, actually. We were, like, watching TV and we saw it live on TV.

Q. So what was your first reaction?

A. My first reaction? I was shocked. I was shocked ... shocked.

Q. Did you consider the possibility that there were Muslims behind the attacks?

A. Yes.

Q. Why?

A. Why? Because ... actually, it's just like ... it's just like. It was a gut reaction, I think, I guess because of what was going on in the world and figured that it was probably the Muslim extremists.

Q. Do you have any memories from September 11th that you'll never forget?

A. Not really.

Q. Okay. When Americans asked you about your ethnic background before September 11th what would you tell them?

A. Palestinian.

Q. And what about immediately after?

A. Palestinian.

Q. And now?

A. Palestinian.

Q. Okay. Have your feelings toward the United States government changed since September 11th?

A. No.

Q. No? Are you more aware of political events around the world?

A. Sure.

Q. How so?

A. Well, it figures when you come from ... from Palestine... from Palestine ... from Europe you ... you know what's going on in the world, especially when you're under occupation.

Q. How do you feel about the foreign policy?

A. U.S. foreign policy?

Q. Yeah, toward the Middle East?

A. Very unfair.

Q. In what ways?

A. In what ways? In a few ways. In a lot of ways, actually. It's just their ... their continuous support of Israel.

Q. How else do you feel that they're unfair?

A. The way they ... they. You see houses are going ... especially in Palestine. You know? I don't know about the other part of the Arab world but I care about Palestine for now, and I see a lot of unfairness.

Q. Do you feel a sense of belonging in the United States?

A. Excuse me?

Q. Do you feel like you're at home in the United States?

A. Sure. I'm a U.S. citizen.

Q. Have you always felt that you were accepted?

A. Sure.

Q. Do you think that there's been a change in the way Middle Easterners are treated here?

A. I mean, this is what I see on TV but personally I have no problems at all.

Q. What do you see being done on television? What kind of changes have you seen?

A. I mean, hear of reports about some of the people that look [of] Middle Eastern descent in some states being attacked or ... or ... or being harassed by ... by certain groups. But I personally didn't have no negative experience at all.

Q. Have any members of your family or any of your friends experienced anything, any discrimination?

A. No, none at all.

Q. Do you think that Middle Eastern organizations here are doing enough to promote harmony and promote understanding of religion?

A. No.

Q. Why not?

A. Because they don't have, I guess, enough following or ... or money to promote that because the media is so pro-Israel or pro- ... we maybe don't have any chance.

Q. So what do you think the Arab community can do to ... to gain a spot in the media?

A. Unfortunately, the ... the ... thinking unselfishly and try to foster opinions, get into the elections and, like, start ... money for ... for all the politicians and ... and just be more ... more vocal and more active--proactive. Unfortunately, there are ... there are a lot of rich Arabs and Palestinians, as a matter of fact, with their own ... their own worry and their own goal which is to make money and just make more money and make more money.

And unfortunately they seem to forget what's going on in ... in their homeland. You know? So they have to be a little bit more vocal and more educated on the ... and just proactive to promote and ... and let the others know about what's going on in.

Q. Do you feel that Arabs here are more united or less united after September 11th?

A. No change. They've never been united and they will never be united, I guess.

Q. Why do you think that?

A. That is their nationality. So.

Q. What do you think it would take to make them united? What kind of event?

A. It's tough to answer. What will make them united? I don't ... I don't think ... I don't know. May be in ... maybe in a hundred more years, I guess.

Q. Have you joined any religious or ethnic groups after September 11th?

A. No.

Q. No? Do you in any way contribute to any Arab causes?

A. Not really.

Q. Not really?

A. No.

Q. How do you see the relationship between Middle Eastern organizations and the United States government?

A. It all depends ... it depends on what ... what kind of organization. I mean, there are ... there are Muslim organizations I guess ... I guess ... I don't see any, like, positive relationship. They closed a few ... they closed a few organizations that ... that get money to ... to send to the West Bank and unfortunately they ... they closed them, for whatever

reasons they had. But some of the organizations, I guess if they are not religious they have ... they have some decent relationship with the U.S. government.

Q. Given your understanding of the way some Arabs are being treated here, would you encourage people from the Middle East to emigrate here now?

A. Sure. It's a great country.

Q. Well, what reasons would you tell them to emigrate?

A. Well, democracy, freedom, jobs, money, but mostly democracy and freedom.

Q. So do you think that there's anything positive coming out of September 11th?

A. No,

Q. No?

A. Not for the Palestinians.

Q. Do you see anything positive coming out for anybody?

A. Not really, no.

Q. Do you find that there's an increased understanding of Islam or no?

A. Not really, actually, no. I mean, at one ... at one point, yeah. They ... they ... they spoke a lot about Islam and ... and that what it stands for. But unfortunately the ... public's brainwashed and they just have this idea that if you're a Muslim, you're a terrorist. If you're a Muslim you're a...

Q. What's the source of the brainwashing?

A. The media.

Q. The media. Well, okay. Has anyone ever asked you about Islam and your culture?

A. Yeah.

Q. What kind of questions did they ask you and how did you feel about them asking you that?

A. Honestly I'm not ... I'm not very knowledgeable about Islam myself. I'm embarrassed to say that. But I know enough about Islam to know that it doesn't promote ... it doesn't promote violence. I know that for a fact. But the questions I get ... the questions, I guess, I get are like: What do they stand for? What's ... what's illegal? What's not? Are you allowed to marry a non-Muslim?--or stuff like that, very simple questions.

Q. Well, how do you feel when people ask you that?

A. I don't know. It's ... it's not really offending because it's just curious. And I myself am curious about other religions or other ethnic backgrounds. I mean, that's part of being American. There's so many ethnic backgrounds, it's good to know a little about everybody else's beliefs.

Q. Right. Why do you think that the attacks on the World Trade Center happened?

A. Aha. Honestly?

Q. Yeah.

A. I think it's all about money.

Q. You think it's about...

A. Money.

Q. Money?

A. Yeah.

Q. What do you mean by that?

A. I don't know if you heard that a few months or a year before this attack they discovered oil in the Caspian Sea and in order to ... to put the pipes to pump the oil from

the Caspian Sea to the Indian Ocean there's only three countries that you could, like, possibly go through. And these countries are Uzbekistan, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The first two countries are ... have no problem with America. And a few months or even a year before the attack on September 11th there were reports that, written in the ... the papers--you know--European news and European magazines, about negotiations between the Taliban, Bin Laddin and the CIA and FBI, a few times actually, in April before the attack, July before the attack. And the top CIA directors did not, I guess, agree with the Taliban to ... on the ... on the conditions to put the pipes through Afghanistan. And three months or a few months later this attack happened on ... on the Twin Towers. There are a lot of speculations about these attacks and why they happened but ... and now what's going on is Mr. Cheney's Halliburton company is now in charge of all the oil in the Caspian Sea. So he's the one...

Q. So you believe there's a link?

A. So ... so he's the one who is in charge of all the contracts and all the ... of all the contracts for ... for ... for the machines and pumping oil from the Caspian Sea. He's the one in charge. He's the one that took all the contracts. So there's a lot of connections there. So I personally think that's it's just about money--money and oil. Yeah.

Q. Do you think it has anything ... Do you think it has anything to do with the Israeli/Palestinian conflict? No.

A. Unfortunately, everybody in the world [is] trying to get the Palestinians involved just for ... for ... just for to get support of the Palestinians. And unfortunately, the Palestinians fall for that trap. It's not. It has nothing to do with the Palestinians or Islam or ... or any

religious issues. It's strictly oil. This attack was preplanned, I guess. They knew about it. They did not expect it to be so ... so powerful and so ... so.

Q. Who didn't they expect it to be so powerful?

A. I would say ... I would say all the people who caused it and ... and ... and the organizations. And whoever planned it, they knew about it. You know?

Q. Right.

A. And unfortunately, they did not expect it to be so powerful; that the whole thing is going to blow up or the whole thing's going to collapse, unfortunately, and all these thousands of people dying. They needed a reason. The U.S. needed a reason to go to Afghanistan, put it this way.

Q. So you think that if the ... if it had worked the way they had wanted it to, the towers didn't totally collapse and maybe only the people on the planes died or maybe only--you know--

A. One or two floors was...

Q. Right.

A. Yeah.

Q. Do you think they still would have invaded...

A. Sure. Of course. Self defense. They have the right. Of course. If something like that hits your country that's ... that's the first thing you have to do is protect yourself. And they ... they ... they ... that's why they ... they ... they ... they just wanted a reason and without nobody in the world to object. So, I mean, you can't just go into a country and attack it for no reason. You've got to have a reason. So the proof was ... was Bin Laddin.

Don't tell me that they can find him. Come on. If they want him bad, they ... they would be able to catch him.

Q. Do you ... how do Muslims view America ... Americans and American policy?

A. Honestly I don't know. I mean, I don't ... I don't have too many Muslim friends. A lot of Muslims, actually, they ... they ... the reason they don't like America or the American policy is because of its unfairness towards the Middle Eastern world ... world. You have to understand that Israel is the only ally to America. They're using their power to protect Israel.

Q. Do you ... would you say that they hate Americans?

A. Certain groups, yes.

Q What kind of ... what kind of groups?

A. Maybe the ... the Muslim extremists hate America, unfortunately.

Q. So what do you think the United States can do to stop terrorism against it?

A. Just be fair.

Q. Be fair in what ways?

A. In the Middle East.

Q. I mean, like, such as ... can you give me examples?

A. I think you just look at Palestine and what's going on in Palestine. I mean, they have to be fair. They have to stop the occupation. The occupation has to stop. And unfortunately, innocent people are dying from both sides, from the ... from the Israeli and from the Palestinians, young kids, women ... for no reason. You know? So if the U.S. steps up and push Israeli to ... to withdraw and stop the occupation, the violence will stop. I mean, the last attack that Israel had when they used the F-16 airplanes to ... to blow up the ... the

building and the house where one of the Hamas leaders was living, Israel used F-16 airplanes, U.S.-made airplanes. And one of the American in the ... in the ... in the Constitution says it's against U.S. laws to use U.S. made weapons against civilians. You can only use U.S. weapons for self-defense. And honestly, this attack was nowhere near self defense. So.