

Interview 31

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: Female

Age: 47

Q. Okay. I'd like to start by asking you a few questions about yourself first.

A. Sure.

Q. Where were you born?

A. I was born in Nablus, Palestine.

Q. And where did you grow up?

A. In Nablus.

Q. How old were you when you came to live in the U.S.?

A. Oh God let me calculate that: 1955, 1978, three, five... twenty-six.

Q. Okay. And where were your parents born?

A. In Palestine.

Q. So you consider your ethnic background to be...?

A. Palestinian.

Q. Palestinian?

A. Yeah.

Q. Okay. And what is your religious affiliation?

A. I don't have any. I mean, I was born a Muslim but... .

Q. Okay. And how old are you now?

A. I'm forty-seven.

Q. Are you a U.S. citizen or?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay. And what is your highest level of education?

Q. [Removed].

Q. In what?

A. [Removed].

Q. And what--what year was your degree awarded?

A. [Removed].

Q. And in what country did you obtain your education?

A. Here. You mean [removed]?

Q. Yeah.

A. Here? [Removed].

Q. Okay. At NYU?

A. No, [removed].

Q. What is your main occupation?

A. I'm a professor.

Q. What is your marital status?

A. I'm married.

Q. Do you have any children?

A. No.

Q. Now I'd like to ask you a few questions about how you experienced September

11th. Where were you on that day around 9am?

A. I have to give you my... my piece. I was actually on the train coming here to teach my first lecture, [name removed].

Q. And how did you hear of the attacks?

A. I was... I was on the train and I heard some people on the train, like, saying there is a terrorist bombing-- you know -- and so on and I thought they were exaggerating. I'm thinking: These Americans, they're always exaggerating. Nothing is going on. And then all of a sudden they announced on the train that the train is going to only go -- it's the commuter train, Metro North -- was only going to go to Grand Central to take only official personnel, Police Department and Fire Department. Everybody else will be let off at 125th Street. So then I realized something was going on but I was still thinking this was just like Oklahoma. They're going to... You know? They're going to accuse Arabs or Muslims or Middle Easterners, but nobody has anything to do with it. So I was just -- you know -- I was just trying to kind of like lay low and not to get into trouble or anything like that.

Q. Wow! What was your first reaction? You mentioned Oklahoma.

A. Well, yeah. I mean, yeah. I just thought that... the thing is that I had just come from Egypt. I had just come like a couple of weeks earlier, relocated to the U.S. from Egypt. And... and I was... I wanted to come because New York is, like, really rich in culture and vibrant and all of this stuff. So I was just really looking forward and I was looking forward to kind of like a calmer life 'cause Egypt everything's crazy and it's kind of like relax and write and research and--you know-- do the things that I've wanted to do. And now that I've graduated and I'm done and I have a job... and so it was... it was like, really ... it was really weird. It was... I just thought that immediately there will be accusations of

Arabs and Muslims and Arabs, and so on, exactly like Oklahoma because that was the first time... the first impulse -- okay?--since already Islam and Arabs and we are the evil of today. Before it used to be the, "the red scare," and now we are. And my second impulse is to actually think about making sure that I'm passing, I'm passing for something that I am not in order for me to be able to be safe. So I... I had this pendant that says, "Salaam." Just like the one you're wearing from Egypt, but two of my students gave it to me on my birthday before I left Cairo and I usually wear it. That day I forgot. 'Cause I was rushing out of the house I forgot to wear it. So I just... I go like this to kind of see if it's there and it's not there. So I was relieved that it's not there. But then I started thinking am I betraying who I am? Shouldn't I... shouldn't I have it on? And so -- you know -- I went through a whole lot of things. I'll give you the piece I wrote because it actually talks about all of this stuff.

Q. Okay. Was this before you found out that it could be Middle Eastern or...

A. Yeah. It was before and continued after. I mean, the question of safety and security gets exa--exacerbated after -- you know -- there were suspicions that... I mean, we still... . Nobody had no... no -- you know -- guilty... innocent until proven guilty, so nobody has actually been convicted of actually carrying out these attacks so... But we know that the suspicion and the eye... and that the eyes are pointed towards Middle Eastern Arabs or Muslims -- you know -- and so on. At least we know that this is what U.S. seems to either be convinced of or acting based on that conviction at least. So, yeah. I mean, for me the question of security and safety continues until today. It hasn't gone away -- you know? -- especially because the suspicions are that it is Middle Easterners. You know? So before 9-11 we were sort of invisible as Arabs and Middle Easterners or Muslims and we... I

think a lot of us wanted more visibility. We wanted to have some... some... to carve more space in the public sphere, to know of, like be acknowledged for who we are, 'cause reading the paper they're always talking about all sort of ethnicities except us. We don't count. We never count. We never get counted in. But after 9-11 we got too much of visibility which wasn't the kind of visibility that we were...[seeking]. It was... even though there were articles and coverage talking about all sort of things and trying to be kind of like more “objective,” in... in approaching Arabs and Muslims and Middle Easterners I don't thi--I think that [was] overall negative. My construction of the image has... has always superseded that. And as... and it's not only in terms of like, “terrorism,” but also in terms of, like, women's behavior, who we are, what we do, what our role is in society, what's our status, all sorts of things that [are] very, very reductive; flattens-you know -- our experiences.

Q. When people asked you about your ethnic background or origin before September 11th what would you tell them?

A. I always said -- you know -- I'm... if people said where... where are you from, I 'd say I'm from Palestine, or sometimes I'd say I'm from New York, 'cause I am from New York. I've lived in New York since the end of 1983 so I've been here for a very long time.

Q. Okay.

A. But at the same time, I say I'm Palestinian-American. I'm Arab-American. Like when I went to identify myself on the things that they gave you.

Q. Yeah?

A. The forms, they say, other, and I say Arab-American/Palestinian. This is the way I... I identify myself and I continued to identify myself afterwards. But afterwards became more cautious. I mean... .

Q. Immediately after?

A. Well, on... on the way coming back home after I got stuck -- and I'm not going to bore you with all the details; I'll give you the... the piece I wrote because it... it details all of that. But while I... while I was coming home, I actually tried not to talk a lot because I don't want people to recognize my accent, to ask me where I'm from 'cause I was really afraid. And now in certain... in certain places, I don't want to. I'm always worried that if somebody looks at my ID, -- I mean, they look at me and I pass for what you may call -- you know -- like dominant... the image of... of the U.S. woman. Right? Okay. I'm not veiled. I have short hair. You know? I look like practically any white person, -eh? -- So I could pass and be safe. At the same time, like any time somebody looks at my name and it's [Arab name], all of a sudden you know that there is going to be all sorts of things. So I'm always hoping that nobody will ask for my ID or... you know? And... and many times you see the smile fade way, I mean, and you know where it's coming from. And sometimes you may... you may suspect that it's fading and you, we don't know, but the way we've been constructed leads us to think that this is how -- you know -- how we are perceived now with suspicion not... we are an other, but we are not a good other. We're a bad other. We are an alien other. We're a foreigner. We're something that ... that provokes feelings of suspicion, of distrust, of hatred, of being demeaned.

Q. What would you say now if somebody asked you about your ethnic background?

A. I would still say... I would still say I'm from Palestine. Yeah. I say I'm from Palestine. I say I'm Arab-American, but I'm... I am less likely to seek situations in... in general.

Q. Okay.

A. I mean, on the... on campus and activist circles it's not a problem but in intellectual circles it's not a problem. I don't have a problem with it. But there is always something lurking in the back of my mind about the question of safety and security 'cause it's a very serious issue.

Q. Yes.

A. Because we know people were attacked and it's not something that's in the figment of our imagination, of course. So I do say that but I'm... I'm... I look around. I don't say it just... it doesn't come out intuitively. I come out, but I'm very conscious of that I am actually making a decision to have a political act by saying who I am.

Q. Okay.

A. It's not... it's not unconscious. It's not just... you know? I mean, before, of course, if you said Palestinian, it always provokes all sorts of feelings in the U.S. -- right? -- but it was... . I would seek a pretense to actually say it because I want to explain to people, 'cause I want them to say "where is that?" so then I start explaining what it means, like. Right?

Q. Exactly. Okay.

A. Now, I... I'm very conscious of them, of the various negative possibilities that exist around it, not that before it was... there was necessarily hospitality towards Palestinians, not necessarily, but there was less hostility and less risk in life -- in personhood -- than it is now.

Q. Okay.

A. Not... people... people were attacked before--Palestinians were attacked before-- it's not the first time, but it's much more now. And... and the problem with now is that it's much more accepted by... by dominant... by the dominant sort--by the main culture. It's much more accepted that if somebody gets attacked most people are willing to jump to make... to make a justification why that happens. Before people would say: No. Nobody should be attacked on the basis of their ethnicity or race or... . Today people will jump to explain why that's okay.

Q. Okay

A. So you're actually... so people have sort of like a license to attack persons of Arab, Muslim, Middle Eastern descent than before. Before there wasn't a license. Today there is a license because of this kind of, like, hostility in the public sphere.

Q. Okay. So do you think that there's been a change in the way people from the Middle East have been treated since 9-11?

A. Yeah. I definitely think... I think it's much more scary and I think it's much more... it's much more negative. And I think, I mean, I was talking about the visibility, and I think we're much more visible but in... in... it is compounded, sort of like doubled or more, actually, magnified that the extent to which we are constructed as enemies -- as public enemies. I mean, people before may want to sample Middle Eastern food and they would say they'd like to do something exotic. So Orientalism is always there. Okay. But today it's sort of maybe sampling in a way to appropriate Middle Eastern culture. I'm not talking about... I'm talking about the dominant culture. I'm not talking about everybody. Obviously, a lot of people subvert that and resist. But I'm talking about the dominant

culture, and this is the dominant environment, is that people will think, oh yeah, we... we can take it, sort of like we can seize it. Ha? Or we won't do it. We don't want to patronize it. We're going to boycott it. So there is this kind of -- you know -- kind of like ... there is much more at stake in engaging with things Middle Eastern, Arab, Muslim today. Yes, definitely. I think definitely they have changed after 9-11, yes. I think we can talk about before and after, yes.

Q. Have you personally experienced any backlash after 9-11?

A. No, personally I haven't actually. Oh yeah, yeah, I mean, yeah, yeah. No, no.

Q. Okay.

A. Well, until recently I haven't. But in July I went... I flew overseas and I was actually profiled at the airport.

Q. Really?

A. Yes. And it was very interesting because the questions I was asked reminded me... they were so reminiscent of the questions we get asked in Tel Aviv airport, exactly the same: What's the purpose of your trip? Why are you going? Come in! So, yes. So, I mean, I was asked... I was flying from New York to London and I was going to meet my parents -- my elderly parents. My father is sick--to take them to Jordan -- accompany them to Jordan -- and then cross the bridge to Palestine -- you know--in ambulances and everything 'cause he's very ill. But I... at... at the airport -- and I was flying Virgin-Atlantic Airways...

Q. In New York?

A. In New York -- in JFK -- and I was stopped immediately as you go in, which is... which is... which I've never experienced before in the U.S. This is exactly what Israel

does. You go to the counter, they send you back to security. And you go there and you stand in line and they ask you. And he said: What's the purpose of your trip, etc. And then he... he puts a sticker on my passport which has S on it -- a yellow sticker -- which I'm standing in line and I noticed that this doesn't look like the rest of the passengers. It's a different sticker. So I realized I was profiled. I get to the... to the counter and... and I asked them if I could ship my... my stuff directly to Amman and the guy said, "No, we cannot because you ...you .. we are not in the system to Amman. We'll take you to London." I said, "Okay." So then he said to me, "Do you have another passport." and I said, "No I don't. But I'm just curious. Why are you asking me about another passport?" He said, "Oh, because we will be responsible for you if you go to Amman." I said, "But you just told me that I'm not supposed ... that you wouldn't ship my luggage to Amman. So as far as you're concerned I'm only ending up in London. You... you wouldn't even ship my luggage. So you're not responsible for me. Besides I'm a U.S. citizen." "Oh no, no," so he comes up with all sorts of ques--which is also exactly the same as... as Israel. We get to the line to go to the gate and there was behind me an elderly lady with... her hand ... hand was bandaged in a cast. So I said to her, "Please go ahead," 'cause she needed more help. So she comes on and she has an Israeli passport. She was right before me. The woman said to her, "Oh hi, hi! Welcome aboard." You know? Go, "and she goes. She looks at me and she says, "Go to this line." All of a sudden I noticed that there is a line, I'm in it. There is a family, Indian or Bengali, with a man, woman and three children. There is, like people... everybody who has the same complexion as me -- looks like me -- not necessarily veiled or anything but... and we were all standing in one line and they are... and everybody else is getting on the plane. But everybody else is looking

at us because we are the villains now. We are the ones who are going to threaten the security of the flight. And then they... they... they search our luggage exactly like Israel does, they pat us. You know? And then I go to go on the plane and the guy says to me, "Have you been searched?" I said, "Why don't you... why don't you have some kind of a system to figure out who has been searched and who hasn't been searched?" And then he tries to kind of like move the passport like this at me, and I said... I said, "Don't play games. Give me my passport." You know? And I, like I said, "You know? You know, it's really... it's really sad that I have to say that I'm a human being just like you." But it felt really, really humiliating and I couldn't up the ante because I was afraid that they will prevent me from getting on the plane. And I had to go because my parent needed me. So it was... I mean, it was just in the U.S. I... I... I always get these experiences in Israel. I always get these. But this is in the U.S. This was -- you know?--there was always the potential but I've never actually experienced it. This was the first time that... yeah. And oh yeah. In February actually, my husband's father died and we took his remains back to Puerto Rico. And at the airport, to fly to San Juan, they made me take off my shoes and...

Q. Oh really?

A. Yeah, just me. Everybody else got on the plane fine. They made me take off my shoes and searched me. YEAH. So, yeah. So it's been... it's been different. It's been much different. I mean, it always happens in... in Israel -- always -- but this is, like, in the U.S., very new to me.

Q. Has any member of your family experienced backlash?

A. I don't have any members here except for my husband. All my family is back home or... .

Q. Do you think Middle Eastern or Arab-American organizations have been effective in handling the backlash against Arabs since 9-11?

A. I think... I... I wouldn't call it effective. I wouldn't cla--classify it as effective because the... the backlash is very strong.

Q. Okay.

A. But I think they've done a very good job.

Q. Okay.

A. I think to say effective means that we have actually been able to wipe away the backlash. And I don't think that anybody can do that because it's coming from the government. I mean, it is... it is instigated by government actions so it is not just something that is an aberration or... or isolated incidents here and there. When it's coming from the government -- when you have the whole system against you -- it's very hard for organizations to kind of like... . Given... when you take that in... into consideration along with Orientalism, along with racism against Arab-Americans, against Palestinians, against Muslims, against Middle Easterners, from before 9-11, then why we're constructed as the other... we're not part of the Judeo-Christian tradition. We're not. Okay. We're outside of it. And we are not completely ne--neglected like other cultures, but there is a stake because of Israel's relationship with the United States. There is that already there. But then you... 9-11 comes and we are... we become defined as public enemy number one. Then it becomes... the attack is so strong that it cannot be undone

only by the efforts of some organizations that represent an ethnic community. It really requires a bigger movement than that. It requires a movement on behalf of civil liberties, on behalf of people who are fighting for peace and justice, for all sorts of people. It cannot be done just by Arab-Americans because when... when the civil rights movement arose in the... in the '50s and the '60s to... to... to eradicate a lot of... of the remnants of slavery -- the Jim Crow laws in the south at least in the United States, and so on -- it wasn't just blacks who were... who were fighting. It could not be. You could not win if you're just fighting alone. It doesn't work, especially in a... in a country that is multicultural as this one. Even though it refuses to see itself [as] multicultural.

Q. Do you think they've managed to maybe organize or mobilize the Arab-American community politically?

A. I think they've been able to mobilize some. And I think there have been many incidents before. Like I know in 1986 there was a big attack against Arab-Americans. If you... I don't know if you know of the Los Angeles Eight Case in Los Angeles. Eight Palestinians were...seven Palestinians and a Kenyan wife of one of them was arrested in a pre-dawn raid with the INS, Secret Service, FBI, and so on, in 1986. And actually the headlines were: WAR ON TERRORISM HITS L.A.! And the only... .

Q. What year was this?

A. 1986. And the only crime they had were that they were distributing Palestinian magazines from the PLO organizations and engaging in dancing and--you know--things like... from within the Palestinian cause. And so it was... it was a very, very big issue and it was part of Reagan's policy at the time. And Bush was his Vice-President, Bush Senior, and he had developed something called the Vice-President's... the Vice-President's plan.

Task Force on Terrorism... on Terror... on... on Alien Sub -- terrorists and Undesirables. And they wanted to build, like, camps, like, the internment camps for the Japanese in Oakdale, Louisiana, to put in it citizens of Arab countries and Iran. And it was at the time when... when Reagan was trying to actually suppress all sorts of dissent around his foreign policy. You know?

Q. Okay.

A. This was the Iran Contra Affair time and they didn't want... . Also, they were attacking the people of El Salvador and all sorts of people. And they thought the Palestinians were the weakest link so they... they attacked. It didn't work. But people mobilized: civil libertarians -- you know -- ACLU with [name removed], the biggest civil libertarian lawyer -- you know? He was defending Puerto Ricans in Hartford and he... and the Puerto Ricans told him: Leave! Go! Defend the Palestinians, and he went and he did. And ... and... and it became a very big case and people got mobilized. And actually, the Palestinian community at the time, instead of becoming fear... fearful, they actually got on buses and went and gave support to the people who were arrested, and so on. But still... but even that, and today, and people are resisting. I mean, people are not taking this lying down. Muslims, Middle Easterners, Arabs, are not taking this down. They're resisting. The... the problem is... is that there is also... there is a different... there is a multitude of issues. One of them is that many of us come from very repressive backgrounds. You know? I mean, I... I come from life under occupation. That's my... this is my growing up, my... my -- you know -- my formative years, so we are always hesitant to speak up our mind or to... to... . We... we have a very hard time believing into this freedom of speech business.

Q. Yeah.

A. And at some point people used to think that we may be too paranoid, but it's really clear now that we're not really too paranoid: freedom of speech for some, not for everybody. You have freedom of speech to a certain extent as long as you go with the status quo. If you go a little bit against it, it's okay. But if you go a lot against it, there isn't such... such... it's a facade, really. So people are really always afraid. They're afraid to speak up their mind; afraid to express their ideas. They're always thinking that somebody's going to kick them out. And because any time you have any... and I remember we used to have demonstrations at the Israeli Embassy here with a police permit and all and people will come spit on us or say foreigners go home. Yeah. I was... I was spat on, clearly. And there was a cop over there and I kept on... told him: Hey! Look at this. And he said, "What am I supposed to do?" and pretended he didn't see it. And they will come and say, Go home! Go home! If you don't like this country, Go home! You always... you always... even if you... there is... even if somebody's trying to convince you that you belong, there is this grain against... trying to expel you and telling... telling you, you don't belong. So now this is much more compounded. So even, I mean, the organizations -- Arab-American organizations -- are active. They're not... they're not, not doing work. They are doing work. It's just not enough. It's not enough to have a movement to change the policy of the... the policeman of the world, the United States government. I mean, look! The whole world is against what they want to do in Iraq and they're still going on with it. So you can't just like, a few organizations stop them. We don't have the resources. We don't have the... the... the bodies. We don't... it's not... it's not enough. You can't organize only around the Arabs and actually do something. The

only thing that got organized around ethnicity was--if it happened; if it gets proven -- is the World Trade Center. And it proved its ineffectiveness. It was... it was wrong and it should have never happened.

Q. Have you joined any ethnic or religious organizations since 9-11?

A. I've always been part of organizations -- you know -- that I haven't... You know? It didn't make something different for me. You know? I'm part of the American Arab Antidiscrimination Committee and I'm part of Arab Women's Solidarity Association. I'm on the listserv of Al-Awda group. I... You know? I haven't... I haven't done anything different than I've... I've done before.

Q. What is your most vivid memory of September 11th? Is there anything that stands out in your mind that you'll never forget?

A. Getting stuck on 96th Street and seeing this Muslim woman in... in hijab. She was pushing a baby in a cart. And I saw her 'cause I was getting... I was stuck there. I was trying to come to work. And I saw then the smoke. Okay? And by then I believed that something has happened. And then I went to her and I whispered... I was trying to see if I should say something, should I not say something? I didn't... you know? I was hesitating because I was afraid that she would take offense. Then I said, I'm going to say it. It's okay. I'll take the risk and I went and whispered in her ear, I said, "go home." And she looks at me and she's thinking that maybe -- you know -- why am I being hostile. And I said, "Look. I'm a Muslim like you," and I told you I don't identify as a Muslim. I said, "I'm a Muslim like you. Go home. Pretty soon some people are going to... to be aware and you will be attacked. And you have a child. You can't even... go home." And she did. She turned her cart--the stroller around and she went. She went home. And I hope she's

safe. You know? But that was, like, one of the... because I have never thought... I've... I've always been a secular person. This is... this is who I am. I'm not saying it's better or worse or... it's who I am. But I have never ever thought that I would actually... I would identify as a Muslim and I did at that time. And it was necessary for me to identify as a Muslim to convince this woman to -- because I was -- to go home because she could have been attacked. Who knows what would have happened? I mean, we know what happened in other places.

Q. What were your feelings about what happened immediately afterwards?

A. Well, first, I was really hoping it couldn't... it's not Arabs 'cause I really... I was really hoping... I was just, like, praying: Please let it not be Arabs. Okay? And then when... when it happened and people started saying that -- you know -- Arabs couldn't have done it. They couldn't be so sophisticated. They couldn't be so smart. Then I started to think I really hope it's Arabs so people would be convinced that Arabs could be that smart and that sophisticated. You know? So there is... at the same time, I mean, I .. I... I really have... have problems with this approach. I mean, I... I... I do agree that there are a lot of people... a lot of people around the world have grievances against the United States government and the United States government has been criminal in its treatment of its people and people around the world. I don't have any hesitation in saying that. At the same time, I don't think the people who were working in the World Trade Center... I understand why it was chosen as a symbol of economic value and in New York City, but at the same time I think it was a very, very, very, very big, big, big, big mistake. It's... It's wrong to lump the U.S. people and government at the same time. Yes, granted a lot of the U.S. people have shown very chauvinistic and xenophobic attitudes. I... . Granted. I

agree. And I think yeah, this is very, very... not nationalistic. I wouldn't even call it nationalistic or patriotic. I would call it a xenophobic and racist sentiment. However, I still think there are a lot of people... I mean, the immigrants who were working in the World Trade Center... and we... and we don't know how many people got killed because there are a lot of people who are not even going to go claim because they cannot 'cause they were living here illegally, 'cause they will be arrested and they will be thrown in jail. The reversal of ... of the fight for people who fight for their self determination; the legitimacy of self defense; the... the way Islam can be seen, Arabs and so on. I...I think people really... the people who did this really miscalculated. And really the only thing that I could think of that's similar is what... when... when Iraq occupied Kuwait. It was a very big miscalculation. It was wrong. Yes, there was a corrupt regime in Kuwait, but it doesn't justify... I... I think it was wrong. I don't think it should have happened.

Q. Did you... Did you feel anger or pain?

A. I felt... I felt really sad for the people who were dying. I felt sad for the relatives. I... . For a few hours I couldn't look at my husband.

Q. Why?

A. And I kept thinking... because he drives a train and sometimes under the World Trade Center. And I thought... I... I didn't know what I would think if something happened to him.

Q. Was guilt involved because Arabs or Muslims were involved in the attack?

A. No, because I'm not responsible. Why? I don't... I refuse to accept responsibility for the actions of [others]. I mean, I think people themselves assume responsibility. I mean, people do this all the time. I mean, Timothy McVeigh said that he did what he did

because he was acting on behalf of white Christians -- you know? -- sort of like white man's backlash. Right? Well, nobody's profiling all white men around the world. And white men and white people are not... are not taking responsibility for it. Why should we? I don't see... I don't see why. No. I don't... I'm not responsible for this, no.

Q. Have your feelings changed since the events?

A. Towards...

Q. The feeling of sadness you were talking about or the anger, pain, of 9-11?

A. I'm just ... I'm just really alienated. I'm very, very much alienated from the general U.S. environment. I don't feel that I could... I really don't feel that I belong. I mean, one of the things I wanted to do after 9-11 is go to donate blood 'cause I have 0 negative. I have a very rare ... -- you know -- so that's really a very good blood. And then I thought if I go to donate blood, people are going to question my motives. I mean -- you know -- the Israeli President went and donated blood and Arafat went and donated blood. And everybody said, Oh, the Israeli President is expressing solidarity with the Americans. But Yassir Arafat is a crook. He's a crook but he... he went to donate blood. Why is his motives questioned while the Israeli motives are not questioned, when the Israelis are going to... the most from this, you know? So I... I just feel very alienated. I feel very, very detached from this whole thing. I don't feel that I belong. You know/ I... I feel... I still feel sad whenever I see people grieving, yes. But I keep thinking why don't they grieve for everybody else around the world. Why they never grieve for anyone? People around the world have always had these horrible things happening to them. And it's only because it happens in the U.S., all of a sudden the whole world has to grieve. You know?

Disasters are always going on. And I don't think people -- Americans have a franchise on pain. You know?

Q. Have your feelings towards the United States changed since 9-11?

A. They? I have more of a problem with its policies. I...

Q. In terms of what?

A. Its policies. Its bullying. It's... this policeman business. Is going and destroying Afghanistan and--you know--wiping out a whole people under the guise of... of saving them and muscling everyone around. The... the policies... the laws they're passing on the domestic front which are really scary and fascistic, basically. I'm... I'm... it's really scary. It's very, very scary. Yeah. And it's... I mean, I always thought I wouldn't like. I've never approved of the U.S. policies. I've always had problems with the U.S. domestic and foreign policy, the government. Okay? I've always had problems with it. I never thought it could get this bad -- never. And it's basically, like just a cowboy who gets injured so he goes around and shoots everything in sight instead of just maybe stumbling on the little ant or the little mosquito that bit him. And that's what... because they can.

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

A. No.

Q. Have you always felt like this?

A. I've... I've felt alienated on many levels, but in... in many ways I felt like I belonged.

Q. In general or...

A. As an academic -- you know? -- as a middle class person, somebody educa--...

Q. Before September 11th?

A. Yeah.

Q. Okay.

A. I mean, there's certain ways in which I belonged and certain ways I did not. I never completely felt that I belonged. I've always... I never had illusion that -- you know -- I'm ... I'm assimilated. Okay? But after 9-11 I... I just have no doubt that we don't belong. We just don't. Yeah.

Q. In your opinion, what is the nature of the relationship between Arab-Americans and other Americans are in the United States at this time?

A. Well, theoretically we all should be the same.

Q. Okay.

A. Practically there is no such thing. There is no such thing as being equal because equality is very much structured and shaped by the locations from which we all originate. so -- you know -- under U.S. law men and women are supposed to be equal but we know they're not. Some women actually have better status than some men. And black and white are not supposed to be equal but we know if you're a middle class black in a middle class neighborhood you probably have much better chances of living than white homeless person who was a Vietnam veteran living in a park. Okay? So it's... even though, in general, all these macro big processes do... do show this kind of, like, differentiation and systems of... of differentiation and hierarchy, when it comes to actual practice you have to look at the social location. So for us, we're supposed to -- as Arab-American we're supposed to be equal. On the books we're supposed to. There is laws against hate crimes and hate speech and against discrimination and so on, but in practice there's not. We don't get access to the same amount of jobs. We don't get access to the same ... We don't get the same protection under the law. Actually, there was even... even the... the question of

illegal aliens where you're talking about... . No. Actually, il—"illegal aliens" who come from different places, who are now actually protected if their bosses cheat them out of wages. Well, there was an Egyptian taxi driver actually, who is a U.S. citizen who... nobody protected him and he was picked up by the police and put in jail because somebody said he looked funny. What does that mean? So there... there should... there should be some... people should be equal. People should have integration not based on their ethnicity nor -- based on all sorts of human issues. But this is unfortunately not the case.

Q. Would you say relations are more tolerant than 9-11... than before 9-11 or would you say they're more strained or oppositional?

A. No, more strained.

Q. What... what do you think Arab-Americans...

A. Why?

Q. Why?

A. I think it's because a lot of -- unfortunately, a lot of other Americans have actually bought into the xenophobia and... and participate in it. And so when you do that and when you actually exclude a whole people. It's one thing when just one branch of a whole government does it, but it's another when the whole society actually participates in it and promotes it. And especially when the intellectuals and the scholars that... are actually participating in something like this it... it makes it very, very hard to have tolerant and amicable relations.

Q. What do you think members of the Arab-American community can do to improve relations?

A. I don't think we can do anything except disappear 'cause I don't think the onus is on us. I think it's just the same way as when you discuss racism. Is it up to black people to actually -- you know -- do things to get rid of racism or should actually eliminate it from the dominant culture, from the...? It's a... it's a system. It's a systemic thing. So we're not... we're not the ones who brought this about. What can we do? Just get out of our skins and become something else.

Q. Do you think that Middle Eastern or Arab organizations can do anything?

A. Well, I mean, they're doing everything they can do. I think they're bending over backwards. Sometimes it's too much, actually. But... but no. I... I really... I really don't think. I think the burden... the burden of tolerance is... has to be with the dominant group, not with the dominated. When you're dominated you really don't have much power at your disposal to do things. You know? Individually we can talk to people and we can show that we're nice people, and so on. It's not about attitudes. It's not about individual... this is systemic thing that has to be changed from the top.

Q. Given your understanding of the status of Arab immigrant groups in the United States after 9-11, would you encourage people from the Middle East to emigrate to the U.S.?

A. No. Definitely not.

Q. Why not?

A. And if I had to do it again I would never do it.

Q. Why?

A. It's a very hostile environment. I mean, it is very tough on us as adults. Imagine if people emigrate with families with children. Imagine children having to be confronted,

day in and day out, with hatred with... with classmates and families and neighborhoods telling them that they are less than human beings and they deserve less, and so on. I don't know if you... You probably are familiar with the argument that eliminated the... the school segregation in the south in gold versus... Brown versus the Board of Ed. And when they... when they brought the dolls and showed them to the little black girls and black girls chose, every single instance, they chose the white doll as the beautiful one and they said the black doll is the ugly one because they've internalized this racism. They've internalized inferiority. And it is back home, yes, there is poverty. There aren't as many resources as there are in the United States because this is a very rich country. Of course, not everybody in the U.S. is rich. This is a rich country, has a lot of resources. So if you're middle class there and you can middle class here you have a better life here -- quality of life that you have over there. However, I don't think it's really worth the loss of dignity and humanity. And... and that's what happens. That's what happens when little children go and every single day... I mean, we grown ups have to actually protect ourselves. Imagine when they are, like, little vulnerable children. You know? What kind of human beings are they going to grow up to be? At least maybe back there they'll be... they'll have dignity. They'll... they'll... they'll be proud of who they are. Here they will either be -- you know -- afraid, meek or bullied. What do we need this for? I wouldn't, no. I don't think it's a good thing.

Q. We've talked about negative consequences. Were there any positive consequences of 9-11?

A. No.

Q. Why do you think the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon happened?

A. I think because of, as I said before, there are grievances that groups felt that they have against the U.S.A. Of course, we're still under the assumption that it may have been the work of Middle Eastern Muslims and Arabs and I want to see proof. Okay? I still would like to see proof. But at least, according to the indications, there is the suggestion --strong suggestion -- that it has been the world of Middle Easterners, Arabs and Muslims. But it could have been the work of any international group because the U.S. has wrecked havoc all over the world. I mean, this is a very extreme way of... of... of showing your displeasure but the U.S. had wrecked havoc and continues to do so. It hasn't learned. It hasn't learned its lessons. I mean, they just... Wasn't it in July they bombed a wedding party in Afghanistan and then they turned around and said sorry? There are always going to be civilian casualties. So... you know... .

Q. Do you think that Arabs or Muslims in the Middle East hate America?

A. Yeah.

Q. Why?

A. I think they hate the idea of what America represents because America -- and this is like, even... even to call the United States America, which is not even America. It's the United States of America. There is Canada. There is the America, North and South America. But they even appropriate that -- defines itself as the best: for instance, as the one who knows the best for everybody; defines itself as the... the one that has the right to intervene anywhere in the world and shape anybody's life and tell people what to do or else they will... they will hit them a button over their head. People don't like that. People

don't like bullies. They don't like bullies. They don't like people who suck the blood out of them. Nobody likes that. And the U.S. not only does that but it does it with such a rude and nasty manner. It's an empire. And of course... yeah. I... I think people are justified. I think the problem is that when people mix up America-- the U.S.... the idea with everybody in it.

Q. Okay.

A. But... because that's not... because we are in it too. So we're not part of that, so and I think there needs to be kind of like a more nuanced analysis to kind of separate, - distinguish- I mean, this idea of America, the bully, the mighty, the nasty, the ugly, and a lot of people in this country who are not like that.

Q. What do you think the United States can do to resolve the problem of terrorism directed against it?

A. Stop intervening in other peoples' affairs and exploiting their resources.

Q. Are there any other issues or points you'd like to comment on that we haven't mentioned in this interview?

A. The one -- ... the only thing I think is just one really important thing is the way that women have been deployed as the hapless victims.

Q. In the United States you really are.

A. By the U.S. media, by the U.S. dominant culture that needs to be saved. So the... .

Q. In the Middle East. Yeah.

A. Yeah, so the Bush administration actually claimed that it is the biggest champion of women's rights. And we know that's not true. Right? And then... and... but the problem is that...also is that major feminist organizations in the U.S. actually go and cheer Laura

Bush and George W. as the champions of women's right which is very problematic. And I think this is another incident of cultural impudence, if you will. Words.

Q. Okay. Well, thank you very much for your cooperation.

A. Are you going to transcribe that?