

Interview 38

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: 23

Q. I'll start by asking you a few questions about yourself. Where were you born?

A. Kabul, Afghanistan.

Q. Where did you grow up?

A. It was in Afghanistan, Kabul, until I was seventeen and moved to England for three years. And it's two years I'm living in the United States.

Q. How old were you when you came to live in the United States?

A. I was twenty-one.

Q. Where were your parents born?

A. In Afghanistan, Herat.

Q. Then, you would be foreign-born, first generation. So what do you consider your ethnic background to be?

A. Afghan.

Q. What is your religious affiliation?

A. Muslim.

Q. How old are you now, if you don't mind?

A. Twenty-three.

Q. Are you a U.S. citizen or a Green Card holder?

A. A Green Card holder.

Q. What is your highest level of education?

A. Graduated from college. Went to college in England ... in science.

Q. So you have your bachelor's degree?

A. Yes.

Q. What is your main occupation, your job title and if you can briefly explain what it is that you do?

A. It's about physics, always experiments about physics there. So...

Q. Your job title? What do you do?

A. Oh!

Q. What did you think I was asking you?

A. Oh. You asked me about my ... my education.

Q. No, no, your job title. What is it that you do exactly?

A. Just become a professor and just teach physics. That's all.

Q. Oh. That's what you want to do eventually?

A. Yeah. Yeah.

Q. What do you do right now?

A. Oh, right now I'm working in different ... I'm not working in my career. It's ... I'm just doing different jobs.

Q. For whom are you working right now?

A. I'm self-employed.

Q. Okay. Can you just briefly explain what you do? Would you mind?

A. I own a textile company, fabric, and I'm just selling fabric.

Q. So you eventually want to move on to be a professor?

A. Oh yeah. Hopefully.

Q. Hopefully. What is your marital status?

A. I'm married.

Q. Do you have any children?

A. No, not yet.

Q. Now I'll go ahead and ask you a few questions about how you experienced September 11th.

A. Sure.

Q. Where were you on that day around 9am and how did you hear of the attacks?

A. I ... I was on the train going to Manhattan and I found out ... my brother called me from England and he told me that something happened to New York City and I didn't know that.

Q. He was in England and you were in New York and you didn't know?

A. Yeah. He find out. I didn't know. I was ... I'm a couple of blocks from, I was a couple of blocks away from World Trade Center but I didn't know. I knew it was a lot of police cars around, ambulances, but I didn't know, so he told me that it happened ... this happened in ... at the World Trade Center, South and North Tower, and that's how I find out.

Q. What was your first reaction when your brother called you and told you that this is what happened?

A. I was a little shocked and I knew it was ... it was going to happen one day 'cause, yeah, it was going to ... 'cause all these ... America always do all these tortures in Muslim peoples something's going ... one day they're going to respond. So that's what I was thinking, and I still am thinking the same thing, I think.

Q. Did you think in your head that the terrorists might be Muslims?

A. Not the terrorists, but I knew it was Muslims that are being tortured ... by U.S. I knew it was Muslims.

Q. What do you think is your most vivid memory of September 11th that you think you can never forget, which will always stand out in your mind?

A. Not much, just something simple for me.

Q. Something simple for you?

A. Yeah.

Q. And what were your feelings about what happened immediately afterwards? Did you feel sadness, grief, pain, anger?

A. I was shocked a little bit and 'cause all of these innocent people died. You know? And that's all.

Q. Did you feel any type of guilt being a Muslim since the Muslims were behind these attacks?

A. No, not at all. I was more proud. Yeah, 'cause all these things going on in the Middle East that's all U.S. used in war in the Middle East killing Palestinians, all these Muslims. So ... this ... there was nothing, something surprise for me.

Q. Have your feelings ever since September 11th changed towards the United States?

A. No. No. It's the same thing used to be.

Q. How do you feel towards the United States?

A. Good. It's ... it's like my second home. I'm living here. But no, it's pretty much the same thing before September 11th, same thing.

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

A. I used to tell them I'm from Afghanistan.

Q. And how about immediately afterwards?

A. I was more proud ... I was even describing more I'm from Afghanistan, a Muslim. I was so proud.

Q. You mentioned that your feelings haven't changed toward the United States since 9-11. Has your level of political awareness increased or decreased in any way?

A. Not really 'cause I ... I don't have an interest in politics so I don't ... I don't listen a lot to politics. I don't ... I think it's pretty much the same 'cause nothing changed.

Q. But since you mentioned that the U.S. is involved in a lot of what's going on in the Middle East...

A. Yeah?

Q. How are you aware of that?

A. Well, everybody knows that. Everybody knows that. The thing is U.S. is a superpower. Nobody can do nothing. You know? That's why.

Q. Do you feel a sense of belonging or do you feel at home here in the United States?

A. A little bit. If I find a way to go back to Afghanistan I don't want to stay here. That's my real home, Afghanistan.

Q. So you really don't feel at home here right now?

A. No, not at all.

Q. I see. Do you think that there has been a change in the way the Middle Eastern and the South Asian people are treated here in the U.S. after 9-11?

A. Yeah.

Q. In what ways.

A. Yeah, a lot. Well, I heard, but nothing happened to myself and my ... my family and I heard some people are just ... just--you know--because of being a Muslim ... Muslim people got beat up and disrespect, people disrespect them. But that's only thing I heard. But I haven't seen nothing. You know, like eye ... eye witnessed nothing.

Q. Oh, okay. All right. Have you personally experienced any backlash?

A. No

Q. Since 9-11?

A. Not at all.

Q. At your work place or in public?

A. No. People was even ... even my ... my friends and my customers used to come more often and ask me are you okay? How are you doing? Everything all right?

Q. So people were more generous to you?

A. Yeah, a lot ... a lot more.

Q. Has any family member of yours or anyone you know experienced any such discrimination or harassment?

A. No, not at all.

Q. After September 11th you've heard that, in Texas the mosques got fired at or just recently, like, three Muslims--medical students-- they got arrested, racial profiling was taking place. Do you think that Middle Eastern and South Asian organizations have been effective in handling this backlash of September 11th towards their community?

A. To be honest, I have no idea. I don't know.

Q. Okay. Have you joined any ethnic or religious organization ever since then?

A. No. No, and I don't want to do it.

Q. You don't want to do it?

A. No.

Q. In your opinion, what do you think the nature of the relationship between your ethnic and religious group is amongst others in the U.S. right now? Do you think that the Afghan or the Muslim community is more harmonious and tolerant towards, like, the Jews and the Hindus or do you think that they're more strained and oppositional towards each other?

A. I think they're more strained, that is what I feel.

Q. In what sense do you feel that?

A. I don't have a lot of information but I'm just feeling a strange this society. That's all.

Q. What do you think that members of your community can do to improve relations amongst these other groups? Like, you said that they're more strained. In order to take away this strenuousness what do you feel that your community, or people from your community, can do to make it more harmonious?

A. They should get together and try to explain a lot to try to explain to the people, their religion, their culture; that they are not terrorists. You know? There's some people like al-Qaeda, in Afghanistan ... I mean, they just get to Afghanistan and they used Afghanistan the wrong way. So they should explain to the people there weren't no Afghans involved in this attack. If you say Taliban, they're not from Afghanistan. They're from Saudi Arabia, from wherever. You know? 'Cause Afghan people are being treated

so badly for the past 23 years. So ... those people are starving. They have no food to eat. They have nothing, no houses to live. So they should explain more to those people that Afghan people were not involved in these attacks and that's all.

Q. Given your understanding of the status of the Middle Eastern and the South Asian people over here and of what's happened after 9-11, would you still encourage these groups to emigrate to the United States now?

A. Well, yeah, of course, 'cause they're all not terrorists. You know? There are only, like, like, a few people in Saudi Arabia and they were terrorists, whatever. But most of them are, you know, [are] good people. They come here to study, to live, to work. And unfortunately, people of the United States are ... all these people thinks that anybody comes from Afghanistan or Middle East or Arab communities they are terrorists and that's wrong. And, no, they should come. They should come here.

Q. But just like you mentioned that they have ... they look at Middle Easterners differently.

A. Yeah.

Q. But would you still encourage, like, people from Afghanistan, Pakistan or people from other Middle Eastern countries, to come to America.

A. Yeah. The only reason I wanted to come here to explain more about their country, their religion and their culture and explain to these people that they weren't involved in these attacks and these terrorist activities.

Q. So far we've spoken about, the negative consequences of September 11th. Do you think that there was anything positive that stemmed from 9-11?

A. Well, one thing positive probably, people think it's funny--I'm happy my country got free. You know, 'cause it was impossible. It was something ... we weren't ... 'cause I was ... till '98 I was in Afghanistan, Kabul. I met Bin Laddin myself. I met all of his top members of Al ... I mean, Taliban. I didn't know Al-Qaeda at that time. I met ...

Q. You met Bin Laddin?

A. Yeah. I met like face to face. I met Mullah Omar. I met all ... I ... I didn't know these people, but ... 'cause I was too young, like 16 years old or 17. So there was something ... they were okay but when we were there, we were seeing people, they were okay. But after these things happened, after we got out of Afghanistan and then I found out that it's impossible to live in Afghanistan again and then going back there. ... And basically I was unhappy 'cause all innocent people died here. In ... and in another way I was happy 'cause Afghanistan got it's freedom after like 23 years. And ...

Q. Would you mind sharing a little bit experience ... I mean, people would love to hear this, like, what your experience was when you saw Bin Laddin?

A. Well, when I saw him he ... he's a nice guy. He looks nice. He's like calm. He speaks very slowly.

Q. How did you encounter him? How was it? I mean, he was just walking across the street or...

A. Yeah. ... Our house was in ... in fourth floor. And then they were just crossing in front of our block so we all, me and my friends, went down to see the Taliban moving into Kabul after, like, two years they were in Afghanistan. So we were so excited to see them. And after we came down and we saw Bin Laddin. We didn't know Bin Laddin at that time, and then after a while you find out that Bin Laddin is from Saudi Arabia. And then

he went to a mosque and we went to, like, Friday prayer and he had a speech, you know in Arabic. Well, we didn't know he was Arabic 'cause we thought he's just talk Arabic because of prayer or something. And after a while you find out he's from Saudi Arabia. And we thought he's a good man and I still ... I think ... I don't know he's a good or a bad ... good man or he's a terrorist. I don't believe he's a terrorist 'cause they have no proof against Bin Laddin did this. You know? Each time they find a tape--a videotape, Bin Laddin doesn't say that I was in a war with these terrorist attacks. And Afghanistan, well, was ... it was ... it was a really bad situation 'cause I was grow up in war. I was born in war, grow up in war. I see a lot of dead bodies, killing people, a lot of ... I had a lot of a lot of bad experiences in Afghanistan. But still, I want to go back to Afghanistan. And that's all.

Q. Okay. Why do you think that the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon took place? Do you think it's because the Muslims hate America?

A. 'Cause they had to respond.

Q. Respond to what?

A. To America's action 'cause America, in Middle ... like in Palestine all these Jewish people being supported by the U.S. Everybody knows it, all the world, that there's no power to stand against America. And then so everybody knew that one day the Muslims going to turn back and just do something to U.S. But the things they did it wasn't fair because they just take the life of innocent people. They should do something about the military or different way. But since they were ... they weren't that strong to do that, so they just, they just did it simple way that they ... they could ... to attack ... hijack a plane and just hit the Pentagon or World Trade Center. And I knew ... everybody knew that it's

going to happen one day. Still ... U.S. should stop supporting these Jewish people against Palestine if it wants to be safe. 'Cause everybody asks, it was on TV that people asked why everybody hates America. Nobody hates America. America has to stop whatever it is doing right now 'cause we do know. We're not outside the politics. We just see everything from our side ... side involved, they should stop whatever they're doing right now so people should not attack them again. 'Cause everyday people are they panic if they're scared going to work. Okay? Are we going to be attacked right now? Somebody's going to do this, that, with a bomb or hijack another plane. So if America want[s] to be safe, stop supporting the Jewish people or ... enough torture the Muslims. And then that's the only ... otherwise, America cannot protect all the borders. You have the border with Mexico, like, miles ... thousands [of] miles, and the same in ... in Canada so it cannot stop all the people coming into the United States. And the only way, it should ... it should just think again and stop whatever it is doing right now so that people can stay away from America, not to attack America again. If you continue doing these things that it's doing right now it might get ... somebody, the Muslims will ... might attack them again.

Q. So apart from what you're saying, in order for America to get safe they should stop supporting the Jews. Apart from doing that, what else do you think that the United States can do in order to resolve this problem of terrorism which is directed against it?

A. Well, that's pretty much I know. But they should stop whatever they're doing right now. Whatever they're doing is wrong.

Q. Do you think that these attacks could have been prevented?

A. Yeah. 'Cause all this U.S. intelligence ... this ... come from a law from God. You know? People say, Oh, why did this happen? Why we couldn't do nothing? 'Cause the U.S. has a lot of intelligence, like FBI, CIA. They're all over. They're getting paid, like, years for doing nothing. They should have find out this before. But if you think, this is something from God, you cannot stop the attack the World Trade Center it wasn't something that somebody can imagine, hijack a plane and hit the World Trade Center and the two buildings, like, which is like the tallest building in the world, they come down in a matter of seconds. It's something from God. Nobody could stop it. Even if they knew it they couldn't stop it because some things comes from God ... but that's what I believe. And all the people, the Muslim people, believe that.

Q. After September 11th have you traveled by air?

A. Yeah. I traveled to Pakistan. I mean I went to Afghanistan though.

Q. How secure do you feel now? I mean, you've traveled before September 11th also.

A. Yes.

Q. Did you feel any difference? Did you feel more secure after September 11th traveling by plane?

A. Well, it's pretty much the same 'cause the airline I was traveling with, it was an Islamic country so I knew they're not going to hijack that 'cause they knew they were Muslims. They're not going to kill the Muslims so I was safe. But I'm still scared if I travel by American airline or any European or U.S. airways.

Q. How do you feel about the security issue now? Do you feel that this security that they have now could have been provided before September 11th?

A. Well, the security that they have right now is, like, useless. You know? Anybody can do anything that they want. You know? They ... they shouldn't keep it that they have security. They check everything, 'cause I went through all the security. They didn't check my bag. They didn't ... they didn't do nothing. They just, the same thing as before. But it was the same thing. I probably was problems the airline I was traveling with, I don't know about that, but it was the same thing as ... Before September 11th and after there was the same security.

Q. Okay. Are there any other issues or points that you would like to comment on which you feel we didn't mention in this survey?

A. No. That was ... that was good. Everything was complete.

Q. Well, thank you so much for your time and cooperation.

A. No problem.

Q. This was a great interview, especially your Bin Laddin experience.

A. Oh yeah.