

Interview 59

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 – March 2003).

Gender of respondent: Female

Age: 28

Q. Okay. I'd like to start by asking you a few questions about yourself. Where were you born?

A. I was born in Peshawar, Pakistan.

Q. And where did you grow up?

A. In New York.

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

A. I was ten years old.

Q. Where were your parents born?

A. They were born in Peshawar, Pakistan, too.

Q. So you're first generation.

A. Um-hum.

Q. What do you consider to be your ethnic background?

A. Pakistani.

Q. And what is your religious affiliation?

A. I'm Muslim.

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

A. I'm twenty-eight.

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

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

Q. What is your highest level of education?

A. I got my Master's from Hunter.

Q. In what?

A. In human services.

Q. Okay, human services. And you said Hunter College?

A. Yes, Hunter college.

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

A. I work at a company as an assistant to a social worker.

Q. And is that a private company or a government...

A. It's private company. We help out--you know--a lot of people that don't have homes and Medicaid and stuff like that, and we find them and we help them with their paperwork.

Q. Oh, okay. And what is your marital status?

A. I'm married.

Q. Do you have any children?

A. Yes. I have one daughter.

Q. Okay. How old is she?

A. She's five.

Q. Now I'm going to ask you about your experience of September 11th. Could you tell me where were you on that day around 9am and how did you hear of the attacks?

A. Yes. I was attending work and I heard a lot of fire truck and police people. You know? There were cars and sirens and stuff like that. And I was thinking--you know--what happened. To me there was a lot of--you know--commotion going on in these streets. And I just started going up for work and I was just working, like, a regular day and I didn't know ... and I'm, like, what's going on and nobody knew ... nobody knew what was going on. And I was soon to find out that some ... One of my co-workers said that they ... they hit the Twin Towers, like, an airplane. I thought it was a complete accident, like a little plane probably hit the wing or something, and I was like, Oh, it's okay. Everything will be normal. We all went back to work. And after an hour later, or forty-five minutes or something like that, when I heard the second airplane hit and I was, like, Oh no! It's definitely something planned. I knew right away it was something planned 'cause how can two airplanes hit the Twin Towers within an hour--you know--a two hour differentiation in time. Yes.

Q. What was your first reaction when you heard this? Did anything in your mind tell you, okay, if this is a terrorist attack, the Muslims are involved?

A. Can you repeat that?

Q. What was your first reaction when you heard all this?

A. I was devastated because--you know--I grew up in America. And I loved the Twin Towers and I used to always go there--you know-- on my days off and watch the Twin Towers and go to Battery Park. And I had a lot of friends at BMCC, there's a college there-- so I loved the Twin Towers. I loved the shopping areas there. I was devastated. And yet it did kind of let me in on it was something with the Muslims or something, with--you know--these fanatic people that are doing all these crazy things.

Q. I see. So what is your most vivid memory of September 11th? What do you think will always stand out in your mind, which you will ever forget?

A. It was the second airplane hitting the .. the first Tower. As I watched it on the TV in my ... also, a another vivid memory I have is walking on the Bridge when all the trans--transportation got messed up ...

Q. Stuck.

A. Messed up--you know?--out of service.

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

A. Yeah. I felt a lot of sadness because I loved the Twin Towers. But at the same time I knew something big was going to happen. You know? I just knew in my heart that one day America was going to get it or something like that because they always put their nose into other peoples' businesses in these countries and stuff like that.

Q. So did you feel any guilt being a Muslim knowing that the Muslims were involved?

A. Of course not! Of course I didn't feel guilty because I didn't do it. But of course I felt pity for the people who died and ... and--you know--for the people that were there witnessing it. But no, I didn't feel no pity. Why am I going to feel pity? I didn't do anything. I wasn't involved. It was them that did it. But I did ... I did, at the same time, feel a little, like, unhappy because I was like--you know--all the Muslims just get a bad name. They just get a bad name over and over and over. If it's not the Twin Towers it's .. it's the other Twin Towers that got hit by that blind guy four years ago. It's something that hap--

Q. Right. In '93.

A. In '93, yeah. It's something that has to always do with the Muslims.

Q. Okay. Have your feelings changed since the events?

A. Repeat the question?

Q. Have your feelings changed since the events, this feeling of sadness and no guilt, no pity?

A. No, no, no! They have! I mean, what are you talking about. I do have pity. Who said I didn't have guilt. I do have that stuff, but I don't have

Q. You just ... you just mentioned that you don't feel guilty...

A. I don't ... I don't have it ... I don't have it to a point where I'm going to sit there and cry about it. Of course I feel pity and ... and ... and sad that people died over there. But, no, I don't ... I don't ... I don't feel pity that ... that Muslims specifically did it. You know?

Q. I see. So these feelings of sadness that the Twin Towers came down, have they changed since the events?

A. Maybe just a teeny little bit. But what do you mean, changed? Like, can you explain it to me a little bit more?

Q. Do you feel more sadness or less sadness? Do you feel more grief ever since the events? It's been over a year now.

A. Well, I'm very neutral.

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

A. That I was a Pakistani.

Q. And how about immediately afterwards?

A. Immediately afterwards I was a little ... I was a little scared because I was thinking--you know--they're going to hit me or attack me, or ... you know how sometimes peoples' ignorance get in the way of knowledge. You know, America just shows what's on the media, in newspapers. They don't sometimes show the truth--you know--or say the whole story. So I was a little scared so I used to tell them I'm Asian, like, Middle Eastern, Asian--you know--somewhere there. And they used to say where, I used to just ignore the question.

Q. And how about now?

A. Now ... Now it's ... things haven't changed that much, but it's better. It's much better. It's better. I'm sorry, Miss. I'm kind of nervous but...

Q. No, no. Don't worry about it.

A. I'm really happy you're doing this 'cause--you know--you see my enthusiasm.

Q. It's okay.

A. Oh, okay.

Q. But it's okay. Don't worry. It's completely confidential.

A. Okay.

Q. Alright. Going to the next question, have your feelings towards the United States changed since 9-11?

A. Like what? Like what do you mean?

Q. Like your level of political awareness, has it increased?

A. Oh yes. I've been watching TV more. I order the New York Post. They had a sale ... they had a great sale, by the way. It's one week for a dollar so ... and I couldn't miss it. Yeah.

Q. Oh, okay. Alright. And do you feel a sense of belonging to the United States? Do you feel at home here?

A. Of course I do! I grew up here. What are you talking about?

Q. Do you think that there has been a change in the way people from the middle East and South Asia have been treated ever since 9-11?

A. Of course, a total prejudice.

Q. Um-hum. How so?

A. You know, people who wear hijabs--you know--people make comments and look at them. I ... I ride the train. I'm in the public all day long. When I see people coming in the train wearing hijabs--you know, the Muslim scarf they wear?-- people look at them. People don't want to sit next to them. When I tell people I'm from Pakistan some of them ... Oh Taliban! You know?--stuff like that. So ignorance gets in the way. You know? And ... and they say stuff like: Which building are you going to bomb next? And stuff like that, so it just pisses me off a lot.

Q. Oh, okay. Have ...

A. 'Cause I'm not a Taliban.

Q. Have you personally experienced any backlash since 9-11, any discrimination or racial profiling?

A. Not really. Yeah, a few. You know, when I talk about from Pakistan they do make a little bit of comments, or sometimes they do make, like--you know--a little bit of judgment or remarks, or they ask me questions like, if .. as if I know where Osama Bin Laddin is, things that are total ignorance. But not really. I don't really take it personal.

Q. Okay. So no racial profiling or any harassment?

A. No.

Q. At the workplace or anywhere?

A. Not at the work place. Like, you mean, like, my .. my job.

Q. Yeah, at your job or...

A. The people there ... the people there treat me fine. You know? The people there treat me good. But the people that I ... that I do try to assist finding shelter, a home, some of them are Muslims. Some of them, yes. You know? They ... they tell me that-- you know-- they do ... they do see racial profiling and stuff like that.

Q. Has any member of your family experienced any backlash?

A. No. I don't have a big family. It's just me and my daughter and my husband.

Q. Okay. So has your husband experienced anything?

A. No, no, no. His ... his ... his whole family's in Peshawar and my whole family's in Peshawar, Pakistan. Him just a little--you know--the regular here and there, once in a while, a little comment or thing. But it is very upsetting still--you know--'cause it still continues after a year.

Q. Right. You mentioned that the people that you help out finding homes or shelters or people...

A. Yes.

Q. Who are in trouble, some of them are Muslims.

A. Yes.

Q. Can you share with us an experience that you've heard of?

A. It's really personal because I'm a social worker and it's a privacy code that we do not discuss what happens with ... with them. So

Q. Right. No problem. It's okay. Do you think that Middle Eastern and South Asian organizations have been effective in handling this backlash?

A. No, not at all. That's one thing I'm very angry about. None of them have done anything. I don't see any club opening. I don't see any TV programs. I don't see any special magazines coming out or little sections at least that they could add--you know--or a hotline number or a little community getting a little group together or a meeting together or a once a month thing. Nothing! Very disturbing. Especially--you know--now they're kicking out all the Pakistanis. You know? I ... I feel sorry for all the Pakistani community and stuff like that.

Q. Right. So have you joined any ethnic or political or religious organizations since 9-11?

A. No, I haven't. There isn't any for me to join that I think that's helpful for me to help the ... the people that have suffered [from the events of] September 11th. You know?

Q. So in your opinion, what do you think is the nature of the relationship between your ethnic and religious group and others in the U.S. at this time? Do you think the relationships are more harmonious and tolerant of each other or they're

A. I think ... I think it's a little bit more tedious; it's a little bit more frustrating. It's a little bit more complicated. I think it's now more harder than ever to ... to come with compromises because people now are always, like, on the defense. You know?

Q. Okay. What do you think members of your community can do to improve these relations?

A. Well, they can set up meetings. We can set up organizations. We can set up once a week meetings. We can help people who have received--you know--racial profiling, stuff like that. You know? We can help each other better. But we don't. We're lazy bums.

Q. Given your understanding of the status of the Middle Easterners and the South Asians in the United States at this time, would you still encourage these groups to emigrate to the United States?

A. If their country is completely not in peace, like Afghanistan--you know--or, like, a country like Gambia or ... or like--you know--those kind of countries, yeah. Why not? You know? It's not like America hates all Pakistanis or Afghanis or America hates Muslims. No. It's not like that. But if you have a country like ... like Jamaica or Brazil or Spain, no. Why are you going to migrate here, you know? You have your country. You have your food there, your people, your community.

Q. So basically what you're saying if you can make it in your country, just stay there. No need to come here.

A. Yeah. No, no, no. You know? America's just work, work, work.

Q. We've talked a bit about the negative consequences. Have you seen any positive consequences that have stemmed from 9-11?

A. Yes, that people are most now aware about the Muslim religion, about the *deen* [religion] we call it--you know?-- and also about Afghanistan. Because it was a country that no one knew what it was. So people are ... Now I'm happy that they're aware that--you know--Islam is this kind of ideology, is just a way of life, and this is what people believe. And they ... they recognized--you know?

Q. Okay. Why do you think that the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon took place? Do you think that the Arabs and the ...

A. I have no comment because I'm not ... I'm not part of them. But I don't think they ... I ... I have no idea what to say. I'm not them so I can't even comment.

Q. Okay. What do you think that the U.S. can do to resolve this issue of terrorism which is directed against it?

A. To resolve ... resolve this issue? It's very complicated so I don't think that I can give you an answer. This ... this takes a long time ... you know? I think they've got to go through this bonding of their relationship. But America can--you know--mind its own business when it's ... when they're not needed--you know?-- 'cause we always try to get in ... in these political issues between other countries. You know? And that's ... that's why--you know--they get like this. You know? Like, they're always supporting the Jews and helping the Jews and sending billions of dollars in [sic] the Jews. And my tax money goes to the--you know--to these people until it eventually goes there, one way or another--stuff like that.

Q. Have you traveled anywhere within the country or internationally after September 11th?

A. Oh yes, I did. Yes, I did. I went to Germany. Yeah.

Q. Oh, that's nice. So do you feel that the security measures which were put in place now, if they would have been put in place prior to the September 11th attacks that these attacks could have been prevented?

A No, 'cause when I went there it was all the same. I didn't see no difference. Yes, I saw people taking shoes off, but that was just 'cause of the shoe bomber. But no, I don't think so.

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

A. No, not any that I can think of right now. No. All the questions were fairly good.

Q. Well, thank you for your enthusiasm.

A. Oh no! You know, I love talking about this because--you know--I think our community should get together and talk about these things like this. You know? And there should be more people like you or where you work at or whatever. But I think there should be more people like you serving the community in ... in doing these things. But I think people will get nervous 'cause they're getting recorded and the signatures.

Q. I mean, but as you know, these recordings are just for ... just so we don't miss any of your responses.

A. Oh, I ... I trust you. I understand. But--you know--I'm just talking about other people. But thank you very much.

Q. And thank you for your time.

A. I hope I helped you.

Q. Yes, you did. Thank you.

A. Thank you.