

Interview 37

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: 29

Q. Where were you born?

A. I was born in Afghanistan.

Q. Where did you grow up?

A. I grew up in New York.

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

A. I was five years old.

Q. Where was your father born?

A. Father was born in Afghanistan, in Kabul.

Q. And your mother?

A. She was also born in Kabul.

Q. So you arrived in the United States before school age, you are considered second generation.

A. Yes.

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

A. ...I consider myself to be an American because I was raised here and all of my education and everything [was here]. But since I was born in Afghanistan I'm still an Afghani so ... I have a dual nationality, you can say. I mean, I still ... I have all the culture and every single thing in my way of life is, of course, Afghani. So even though I've been raised here and I'm still living here and this is

my homeland, but that's in my blood and that's something I can't change. So by birth [I'm Afghani], I think it plays a big role so ... I do feel I am Afghani but I am also an American.

Q. When people ask you your ethnic background do you tell them American or Afghani?

A. No. I tell them American-Afghani because ... I'm proud to be what I am now.

Q. And what is your religious affiliation?

A. I am a Muslim and I am a full practicing Muslim. I cover from head to toe. So this is what I was saying in my previous question; that although I was born there and I was raised here, but I fully practice my religion. I cover, I wear the *hijab*, which means to cover the head and every single thing, but my way of life ... I do everything that the Americans do. ... I love the freedom and every single thing that this country has to offer...

Q. What do you mean by you do everything that the Americans do?

A. I work. I went to school. I graduated. I'm working right now. I have American friends. I like watching TV. ... I like listening to music. I like to go to the movies. So I am not only a strict what is ... it called? I'm not only a Muslim that is, like, a totally, totally ... what is that word? ... I'm a hundred percent Muslim but I'm not so strict and so...

Q. Not too extreme?

A. I'm not an extremist. You know? So ... I practice my religion, I say my prayers, I recite the Koran and ... I follow everything that I have to. I abstain from having alcohol, from eating pork and things ... we're not supposed to do, but in the meantime, I keep my social life. I have my social life, I have my friends, I join the communities and every single thing, I'm very active, and I do everything that America has to offer.

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

A. I'm twenty-nine years old. I don't want to tell you my exact date of birth but I am twenty-nine.

Q. No. That's all right. I don't need to know that. So are you a U.S. citizen or a Green Card holder?

A. No. I'm an American citizen. I came here when I was five years old. Right now ... it's been like, twenty-four years so...

Q. What is your highest level of education?

A. I graduated from Hunter College. I have a degree in public affairs.

Q. So you have a B.Sc.?

A. Yes.

Q. What is your main occupation, your job title? Briefly can you explain what is it exactly that you do?

A. Although I have the degree, my B.Sc., I'm a people person. ... I like the office environment. I had many jobs, but finally what I settled [for] is that ... I'm an office manager. ... I work with this very prominent company. It's very well known and I am the office manager. I'm responsible for taking care of all the vendors and I'm responsible for almost everything that goes on in the office. ... I have people working under me and I manage them, and I also take care of the payroll and I coordinate ... other peoples' schedule, and I'm responsible basically answering to the bosses.

Q. Okay. Is your company a private company or it's...

A. It's a private company, yes. It's a very big private company. It also has a [various] locations in the ... world. But I don't want to mention the name.

Q. Okay. It's all right. And what is your marital status?

A. I am married and I do have children. I have four children.

Q. Four children?

A. I got married when I was very young.

Q. Okay. Now I'll go ahead and ask you a few questions about how you experienced September 11th. Where were you on that day around 9am and how did you hear of the attacks?

A. Well, around 9a.m. I was in my office ... We had just entered in the office. And from where we were, we were able to see the people, because the windows were leading outside. And again, I don't want to tell you the exact address, ... but where I was you could definitely see the commotion going on And suddenly we saw tons of people just going here and there and everybody just got so worried because we were entering inside at that time and we were, like ... what is going on. You know? Is there a bomb? ... If something is going on, what is happening? ... September 11th I vividly remember it was a Tuesday morning and we were very busy because we had a lot of things to take care of because from the day before. And we had a lot of things on our mind. And the minute we saw all the commotion going outside it just ... blinded you. And then suddenly we are hearing all the ... terrorists are here! The terrorists are here! ... We weren't sure where because since my building is also ... it's a skyscraper too, and we were, like, where? So we didn't exactly know what was going on until our doorman told us that the World Trade Center has been attacked. And we were just in shock ... so it was just like, everybody just kind of froze or something, 'cause I have six or seven other people working in the same office as me. And we were just shocked. And we do have a small TV so we turned it on so we did see what was happening. We saw ... when the first plane had hit the Tower already and we saw the flames coming out, whatever, and we saw the second one make a turn, go around and it ...the second tower. You know? We saw the whole thing. And I was really bursting with tears because all this thing was happening. ... It was heartaching, I mean. I didn't know what to do. At that time we didn't know who did it, why they did it, and why ... I don't know what to say. ... A lot of people probably didn't get to see it or maybe they didn't have

an access to the TV at that time. But we saw it. I mean, we saw every single thing. And right away when we saw what happened to the Twin Towers everybody just started to say evacuate the building! Evacuate the building! And we just started running down. Thank god ... my office was not on ... the top floors because it would be very difficult, because there's tons of people just coming out. We were on the lower floors and it was easy for us that we exited the building. When we came out, we saw the streets were full of people. People were just running. The cell phone was not working. Even my computer was frozen. It wasn't working. And it was terrible. And I covered [myself]... And then we got some news that Osama Bin Ladden had done that. People, they were just, I think, full of so much anger that everybody they saw [with] the cover [*hijab*] or something they would just give them an attitude or something. And I just saw some people just looking at me like this --you know? And I really got scared that because these people are probably thinking we are the same people, or whatever, and we are the ones who are responsible. So they started giving an attitude. And at one point, ... there was this one lady, she just brushed against me so hard and she passed by me, "Move it, man. You Muslims move it, you .. you .. you guys." And I just got really so scared because she brushed against me because everybody's trying to like, you people did this. And I got so scared that somebody's probably got so angry for all the things that are happening they're probably going to punish me or something and I had to take off my *hijab*.

Q. So you took it off that day?

A. I took it off that day. I took it off. I would not do this normally but I got so scared because the minute when they announced that Osama Bin Ladden had done this I got so scared, man. I mean it was so terrifying. But ... even until now ... when I think back at that time ... I almost thought that the people probably going to come out and kill you. And I just took it off and I put it in my bag or something. I don't know what happened.

Q. What was your first reaction, I mean ... when you heard that the Twin Towers were under attack. Did you think that the terrorists might be Middle Eastern or Arabs? Did that thought come into your head?

A. No. When ... I first found out that the Twin Towers had been attacked, we didn't ... know what [happened] until later. I just thought that maybe there was a misunderstanding or something went wrong, that the planes ... I personally thought it was an accident. I didn't think of it as being a terrorist attack and I was probably thinking ... when the first Tower, of course ... this is an accident. You know? But when the second one got hit and we found out about the Pentagon and then the Pennsylvania, Oh my God, at that time everybody say terrorists, terrorists, terrorists. And even then I didn't think that it would be Osama ... Right away, within seconds, they started saying it's the ... Muslims. It's Osama Bin Ladden. So right away we had this ... this fear because I am from Afghanistan so I have more fear than other people. You know? ... I got very much scared because Osama Bin Ladden at the time he was a refugee in Afghanistan. I was totally terrified. You have no idea. I mean, from there they had no trains. Nothing. Nothing was working. It was really, really hard, ...

Q. What is your most vivid memory of September 11th? ... I mean, anything that stands out in your mind that you think you will never forget.

A. ... Even until now, when I think back I see ... this picture just comes in my mind when the plane just came and hit the second Tower and I saw people jumping out. I saw that on TV. It just ... it makes my heart melt. I mean, I think that was so ... horrifying. I don't know how people ... I mean, you have to see that these people, ... they know they're not going to live so to prevent themselves from burning from that heat and from everything else, they were just blindly jumping off the windows, knowing that if they stayed there they're still going to die or jump down they're going to

die 'cause they're jumping from a hundred and ten stories down. So ... I have seen that exact moment when ... it happened and I just can't forget it and I just think it is heartbreaking. It's ... terrible, terrible, terrible.

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

A. I felt so much pain ...

Q. Grief, sadness...

A. Grief, everything. I felt so bad for the people that it was happening to. ... At that time I hated to be even Afghani. Because I am an Afghani I cannot eliminate that from my ... from my heart. ... I'm always, wherever I go in my life, I'm always going to be called Afghani. ... I hated that word at that moment. ... I wished that I could just rip it off and tell the people that I'm not Afghani.

Q. Did you feel any type of guilt being a Muslim?

A. Not being a Muslim, but being Afghani because all these things were being associated with Afghanistan. There's no time in my life I would feel guilty of being Muslim because being Muslim does not ... teach us to do things ... You cannot testify whatever happened on September 11th. But I felt really bad for being Afghani because all those things happened. Because of that I felt really bad because all those people ... it happened to, they were also human beings. Afghani are human beings. These people are also human beings. These people never even thought that they will never come home, parents, children. They loved their children ... These parents never came back to these children. ... I was in grief. I was in pain. I cried so much. And then for me to just take off my *hijab* is not so easy because I don't do that. I took it off ... this is how badly I felt because everybody knows Afghani ... women cover. So right away any woman they saw that was wearing a *hijab*

they're, like, Oh, Afghanistani terrorists. ... Everybody knows that even the Muslim women ... they are terrorists and they do things like that. So at that moment ... I took it off.

Q. Have your feelings changed since the events, like the guilt, this pain, grief, sadness?

A. Yeah. I guess that time is the best medicine for all the ... problems that we have. So, yeah, the feelings have changed but not in the sense that ... I think that what Osama did is justified, no. But my feelings that I used to think that maybe we are responsible, this has changed. I don't think that we are the ones who are responsible or Afghanistan is responsible for doing this because they were housing Osama Bin Ladden at the moment. So this has changed towards that. I have become much more mellow towards myself. ... I have started covering again. I had stopped for, like, two months because I was really, really very scared 'cause I live all the way in Long Island and very far down in Long Island. And the community that I live among is mostly Jewish. And ... living amongst them, I mean, it's all white people ... they would just kill you so I was very, very scared about that.

Q. How were they before September 11th when you used to...

A. Before September it was no big deal. It was really fine. There was not a big problem. ... Everybody minded their own business. But after this September 11th it was so terrifying. I was so scared even to go home because I usually drive back home. And I was really scared. I became more conscious about my children 'cause I had to be on time to pick them up from schools--whatever. I wouldn't let my children go out, thinking because everybody, they have children in the neighborhood playing they might...

Q. How many daughters do you have, by the way?

A. I have two.

Q. Do they cover as well?

A. Right now, no. They're very small right now. One is only nine months so she is not going to cover. The other one is two. They're very small. ... I started covering because I wanted to. It was not something that was forced upon me. So I'm the same way. I'm not going to tell my daughters to go ahead and start covering because I do it and you have to do it. No. I teach them. ... I prepare them. I give them the weapons and then they have to take care of themselves.

Q. Weapons?

A. Weapons, you know, whatever.

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

A. I used to tell them I'm an Afghani-American. But definitely I don't say Afghani-American anymore because ...

Q. Oh yeah?

A. Yeah. I do say American. I mostly say I'm American. But I still have a little bit of accent so people still going where were you born? Sometimes ...

Q. But you don't have an Afghani accent.

A. ... No, because it's, I don't know. It's some ...

Q. You do have a slight accent but it's not Afghani.

A. It's not an Afghani [accent] but [it's from] somewhere. But I'd rather not tell them I'm from Afghanistan. I tell them I'm from Pakistan because, you know, we ... actually, when we came here we were ... we migrated from Afghanistan on foot we came to Pakistan and from there we came to America. You know? So I .. I'm pretty much ... I don't like to tell people that I'm from Afghanistan.

Q. After September 11th?

A. Yes, after, because people are very, very scornful of what happened and people, no matter how much time it's going to take them to recover, they're still going to have that grief, that hatred in their hearts for Afghans. So I'm scared. It's not because I'm scared of my life or whatever. I'm just scared because I'm just an American like everybody else. I would go and I would die for America, if given the chance. If they want me, yes, I'm more than willing to do that. But just to be on the safe side I'd rather not say I'm from Afghanistan. I say to people I am from Pakistan.

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

A. No. My feelings have not changed towards the United States because I think that the United States it's just doing what they should have done to help themselves. They're trying to be cautious, which they should always do. I think any country would. It's not only the United States. I mean, you know, come on. If I see myself that I'm in a danger or something, of course, I'm going to do something. I'm going to move my hands and my ... my legs to try to put myself in a safe place. So it's the same thing. When it comes to a country why do we have to become, Oh no! The United States is doing ... I think the United States has the right. I mean, if they want to take any precautionary measurements, I mean, let them take it. They have to do it to defend the public. You know? Look what happened. They were so lenient on everybody else and look. These immigrants come in and they just bomb ... killing five thousand people. That's not justified.

Q. Has your level of political awareness changed?

A. Yes. Before I was not too keen ... I was not ... Okay. I would watch the news here and there and whatever catches my attention I would read about it in the paper. But now anything that, especially about the Middle East or Afghanistan or in that region, Iran, Iraq or whatever, Pakistan, India, whatever I read, I mean ... whatever catches my attention right away I jump to it. I want to know. I want to read the whole article.

Q. Are you more ...

A. More aware.

Q. Is your awareness more towards domestic policies or foreign policies?

A. I tend to be on both sides. I ... I watch what's going on in the United States. ... You know, every time I see the documentaries or whatever about 9-11. Yeah. I'm more aware of both domestic as well as international [policies]. I think that this event has not only changed my thinking. I think for many, many Americans, every ordinary American you can imagine, because before we were just very carefree. But now, I think that every person just feels that they have been touched by something and they need to do something to ... be part of it; to make other people who suffered because of that, to make them feel that ... they're not out of place and that everybody else felt by that.

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

A. I have always felt a sense of belonging here because I was only five when I came here so I don't have too much memories of back home. You know? So I never felt that I have been out of place. I have always felt that I have been welcomed here. This land gave me the great opportunity that I don't know if I would have had when I was back there so I never felt out of place.

Q. Do you think that there has been a change in the way people from the Middle East and South Asia in the United States are treated since 9-11?

A. You know, I do think that there has been a change. I mean, like I told you, on 9-11, the woman just pushed me and she brushed against me and screamed at me. So I do think that the peoples' attitude definitely has changed on, like, me. I don't know. There are probably many more people who went through and suffered so much. Probably because of that, I mean, I have heard a story about in the other ... southern States or something that they ... they beat the Muslims and they went

out ... outside of the mosque. So people have suffered. Yes, I do believe people have been hurt people, have been called names, people have been ... just a lot of stuff. It's not just doesn't been given eyes like an attitude or something like that. I remember that when I was driving two or three times I still had my *hijab*. You know? This was even after two months that I started wearing, I still had, like, you know, coming from Long Island into the city takes a long time and you do hit traffic. And then and you are in traffic other people around you could be just giving you a look and made me uncomfortable, like what the hell is this? Why are you giving me an attitude? You know? I'm just another person like you. You know? It's not a big deal. I'm an American just like you. Or maybe I'm more American than you are.

Q. You mentioned previously that you've had an experience or two after 9-11 which was of harassment or discrimination. Is there anything else that you personally experienced: any backlash, harassment, discrimination?

A. I mean, I remember in my neighborhood that my car was parked outside at night and people there ... in Long Island, it's like small towns. Everybody knows who you are. And one night we were just sitting, and this was around eight, nine o'clock, in my living room and somebody just throw, like a big rock ... I just hear like, a big crash or something and I just ... I got scared because this was still, like ... this was, like, the week after, and I really got [scared] ... I was, like, just ... what just happened? And I turned off the lights in my house, and I looked out the window. I was very scared. And I'm just, like, panicky. And thank God my husband was home at that time or else I would have totally, probably gone berserk or something. And I really got scared and I turned off the lights and I [drew] the curtains. And I [looked] through the curtain, like, very hesitantly, you know, I just, like, peeked and I saw that ... that these two white guys cursing: You Muslims, you son-of-a-bitches, you mother fuckers, get out of our country, you terrorist people, and they smashed

the ... the windshield of my car. It was ... It was really bad. You know? I mean, we don't do anything. We are just tax paying people just like them and you mother fuckers ... I mean, they were very, very rude. I mean, not that they were ... it's a big harassment. ... These people, they were, like, get out of our country! They're cursing you out like anything. And then my husband dialed 911, because we were scared that since they ... they broke the ... the glass in the car they're probably going to do some other property damage, vandalizing. You know? We really got scared. We dialed 911. And then, as soon as the police [arrived], ... they heard the sirens, they just ran away. ...

Q. So the police did arrive?

A. The police did come, but before they came the two guys were ... They had just ...

Q. Were they guys from the neighborhood?

A. You know something? I would never be able to tell 'cause it was, like, getting dark at that time, because the days were small already. It was kind of dark and there is no lights outside either. You know? It is in the street and we weren't able to see so clearly and we couldn't give them a description of how they looked. But even at that time police said, I'm sorry. What can we do? Because even police, I think, they ... 'cause I don't blame them. They ... they also lost a lot of people. I mean, I don't say that what these two guys did was justified because I think we should be given the same protection as any other citizen, but what ... police wasn't able to do anything and until now they have never found anyone. So you can just imagine that we were scared to death living in that neighborhood. I even had ideas of just leaving from there or selling the house or just going away because I couldn't bear it. I was, like, this is an all white neighborhood and I'm scared.

Q. Do you feel secure in this neighborhood now?

A. Oh, after all this time, now it's okay. You know? We'll still get some grouches here or there or whatever, but it's not what it used to be. ... I left for one month from there. I didn't stay there. I went to my cousin's house in the other part, because I was so ... I was so scared. You know? And thank God my children, they are not big, they're small, so I didn't .. I was not missing too much of their school time. You know? So that was covered for them. You know? But I was really, really very upset so I did leave for, like, four weeks. I wasn't coming back to my house because I was very, very scared from what had happened. And until now the police, they said that, you know, in that day he ... the police officer said, What do you want .. that kind of complaint do you want us to write? You don't know the people. You don't know the description. You know? Just telling us that people came in and they were vandalizing your property and they cursing you out. But other than that you don't have any[thing] .. You know? And they said that you should understand what happened. Five thousand people [were killed] ... You should understand what just happened. And we just kept quiet. I mean, where are we to go? You know? At that time I felt like this is not fair. This is totally unfair.

Q. Has any other family member of yours experienced any backlash?

A. No, not them, because I'm the only one in my family who covers. So I guess because of that ...

Q. Did you experience any harassment or discrimination at your work place?

A. Yeah. At my work place they were calling ... they started ... since I'm the manager they cannot say it, like, in my face because they know better, so they don't have the courage to come up to me and to say it to me. But I did remember hearing, like, when I was on a lunch break or someone and people didn't know they would be calling: Oh, Talibans, Talibans, they'll be calling me names, associating me with, like, oh, you know, she's from Afghanistan. Oh she's a Taliban, Taliban. You

know? I did hear things like that. ... They wouldn't come out to me and say it to me. But you can say definitely ... it is a harassment ... since I still cover at work, so they do ... You know?

Q. Do you think that the Middle Eastern and the South Asian organizations have been effective in handling this backlash against these groups? Do you think that they have managed to organize or mobilize the community politically?

A. You know, I personally think that these organizations, they should have done more--much more than that. I believe, I think they were not more effective. They didn't come out and they didn't try to persuade people. I mean, I see in so many different places all over New York that you go they have, like, small organization here, a small organization there, and each one is working individually, trying to beat the other organization, unlike Americans. They have different organizations but their one goal is to come together and work and try to get the message across, which is highly lacking in us people. So I don't think they were as effective and trying to dissuade the people from thinking the Muslims are like this. They should have come together tried to ... they should have done something to bring all the Muslims, not only from India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, the Middle East, Iran, Iraq--not working individually, but should have just come together ... You know? They should have done a rally or something trying to promote what Islam is really about. You know? Maybe they should have gone public. They should have gone New York 1 or CSB or CNN or Larry King's show or something, their spokesperson or something. But they didn't do that! Only these big officials coming--you know--politicians--whatever. But we ordinary people want to hear from ordinary people like us. It's ... I think it's much more effective. Like the children. Bring all the Muslim children together. Show their relationship with other kids. Show how American they are. Not only they're American, but we are much more American. What about the Afghani children who have given birth here; who are born here. You can not just--you know--put them on the side.

Q. This is what you think the organizations should have done?

A. Done more. Whatever they did ... I don't know because I didn't hear, like, so much about it but I think whatever they were doing or that they were trying to do, they should have done much more than that. Like, I'm saying they should have come together as one community, as a Muslim community, and tried to ... Because this was a big ... 9-11, this was a big event. It was such an excruciating experience for everyone, full of sorrow and grief and--you know--and people needed to be--you know

Q. Educated?

A. Not educated. People needed to be calmed down. They needed emotional support, and every single thing. So I think the Muslim community should have been more helpful towards them. You know? I didn't hear any Muslim ... like, organizations going down to Ground Zero and trying to offer help and such to let people, let them have their anger out, by telling them, no. It's not us. It was one person who did that and that person should not be justified under any circumstances; that that person deserved ... Osama Bin Laddin, he deserves to get caught and to be punished in whatever manner America thinks is justified. But not just all Muslims. We should educate more people, tell them this is what Islam is. Islam doesn't say go and kill five thousand people. Islam even says not to say to anyone that your religion is no good. We are not allowed to do that. ... We have to embrace all the religions, be it Jewish ... Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism or even Atheist people. We have to embrace them as they are and do not try to enforce them and tell them, oh, believe what I believe or else you ... your religion does not matter. Islam does not teach that. If you want to become a Muslim, it should be because you want to: you learned it, and that you studied it and you were totally satisfied by it ... not because, okay, my religion is the best and Christianity is not good or Judaism is not good. No. So this is what the Muslim community, Islamic

organizations in America should have done. But I think they did not cooperate for some reason, and they didn't come out.

Q. Have you joined any ethnic or religious organizations since then, since September 11th?

A. I have been actively involved even before that in some ... in two or three organizations. We do go around and try to promote people and tell people what Islam is all about. ...

Q. Did these organizations that you are involved in, did they do anything?

A. No. This is what I'm trying to say. I don't want to mention any names because it becomes particular organizations, but ... they were just doing small, small work and maybe gathering some money, like charity work on a small basis, and they were basically busy in defending themselves because they didn't want people ... I remember the mosque near my house, they shut it down. They were that scared.

Q. I see.

A. They shut it down and nobody was coming to pray there. Can you believe that? And why ... if they shut the mosque down how would this organization go here and try to defend themselves for some reason. So I believe there wasn't enough work. Ground work was not done.

Q. In your opinion, what is the nature of the relationship between your ethnic and religious group and others in the United States at this time? You mentioned that you live in a Jewish community, so what do you think the relationship between the Muslims and the Jews is right now? Do you think that after 9- 11 they're more tolerant and harmonious towards each other or they're more strained and oppositional?

A. I think Jewish and Muslim ... I mean, the issue has been coming from a very, very long time. They were not harmonious before. I have never felt this way in which I would say that they were ... they were trying to kill each other. I never had that type of an experience, although I knew that--

you know-- they don't get along. But there was never a problem as such. But I think that since the September 11th, although they ... although they don't come out and say it, but you could feel it; it's in the atmosphere, you feel this grudge. You can sense it. I mean, your sixth sense you can just feel it. I mean, this is one thing I like about the Jewish, I mean, if you're standing next to a Jewish, they're never going to curse you out. They will never say to you, Oh, you this or you that. They're just into themselves. And I don't see ... I know there is a big date for everything that is happening, but I think that after ... they're not so harmonious with one another. I don't think they get along, no. I think if given ... if given a chance they'll just go and kill one another. If there is no punishment, if there is no law or something, I think they'll just go and kill one another. But I don't think there is harmony among them because if there was, the things that are happening after 9-11, I don't think that would be happening.

Q. Apart from what you said, that the Muslim organizations should have brought the children out and should have done more or should have been more active, in being effective, do you think there is anything else that members of your community can do to improve relations between these ethnic and religious groups?

A. Yeah. I think they should form some ... some kind of organization in which they would incorporate Christians, Hindus, Jewish and Muslims and come ... bring them together and try to spread, harmony, try to make them feel that you're not ... you're not more important than I am, or my religion is not more important than you are. And they should have more seminars educating people and letting them know that this is what Islam is. This is not what it says. What happened is not what is supposed to be. That happened, and people who did that did not die in the name of Allah. It's done ... And there is no way, I think, God would accept that as being a sacrifice. It's not acceptable. ...

Q. But have you said this to your organizations that you're involved in?

A. Yes, we have said it. We have tried to do something, but our organization lacked money. They don't have the basic support. I mean, they don't have money and everything starts with money. And we don't have prominent people coming out and trying to ... Okay. Let's just come out and maybe do something, do one seminar. I'm going to give you this much, or whatever. I'm going to ... Or maybe different people come together and put money together and do whatever. They haven't done that. So as a result, if you don't have money, people ... they don't want to put money from their own self so they don't take [initiative]. ...

Q. Given your understanding of the status of the Middle Eastern and the South Asian immigrant groups in the United States after 9-11, would you still encourage people from these countries to emigrate to the United States?

A. You know, after all the things happened, I'm even scared for all the things that these people did. And most of the ... terrorists that they found out were from ... Middle Eastern [countries]. ... I don't want to say that you should stop [emigration] down here because that's not fair, because there are many, many people who need to come. There are many people who are in such need that they need to come here. But I think that the United States should become a little bit more strict. They should have stricter restrictions. Not that they should totally cut off having migration from these countries, but they should become more strict ...

Q. But if you had a chance to say to someone: Hey, come here to the United States because America's this, would you still do that now?

A. Yes. America is still a land of opportunity. Terrorists tried to destroy it, to put New Yorkers behind. So like they say, if you cannot make it in New York you can never make it in anywhere in

the world because New York is the place, you know what I mean? America, I still say it's still the land of opportunity. ...

Q. You mean to say if you can make it in New York, you can make it anywhere else?

A. Make it anywhere ... Yeah. You can make it anywhere in the world. Exactly. So I still say it is. Of course, every country ... I think every country has ups and downs and last year it was ... it was down side of America. But Americans they were brave ... and they fought it back and then [got up] back on their foot. And hopefully they're going to be back on track.

Q. Hopefully. So far we've spoken about the negative consequences of September 11th. Were there any positive consequences that you think stemmed from 9-11?

A. There's only one positive ... I mean, having lost that many people I wouldn't think that there are any positive effects of it. But the only one positive effect that I can really talk about is that people in America were not aware of what was going on in the Middle East. What was going on in other parts of the [world] ... like, Somalia, like India in Kashmir and what was going on in many other [countries]... like, in Kuwait and many other countries. So I think people became ... in Palestine, in Israel what was going on and what kind of tortures that these Muslims were going through. So I think that September 11th shed ... it glorified all the events, not only here, but all over the world and it made people think twice. A lot of people didn't know. They don't even know where Pakistan or India is until now. Now everybody knows, this is Pakistan and this is India. Now they know where, geographically, it is located 'cause people here were very illiterate. And these people ... even [from] Afghanistan, they didn't know where Afghanistan was or what country was bordering it. But now all of a sudden. ...

Q. Kabul is well known now.

A. Everybody ... even if you are a five year old, they're going to ... oh, Kabul, Osama Bin Laddin. They're going to associate all these things right away. So I think that the world of torture, terrorism, I think ... this came into a lot of perspective so, individual, normal living American is thinking about what is not only going on in America but also in the other parts of the world. Or maybe they think twice that what they're doing. Is it right or is it wrong? They'll try to differentiate between the right and the wrong.

Q. Why do you think the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon happened? Do you think that the Arabs or the Muslims in the Middle East hate America?

A. You know, to tell you the truth, I'm not even sure if Osama Bin Laddin did that. I mean, until now we have not had one single proof that linked him to the attacks. I mean, everything we hear is: okay, we found this, we found that, but where is the solid evidence? Until now I won't believe it. Okay, yes, Osama Bin Laddin he did that. Okay, fine. I believe it. He did it because the officials in the United States say they have the sufficient proof that it is linked to him. But to a 100% make me believe, I don't think he did that. I don't think ... I don't know who did it. I don't know if even American people believe that. I mean, white Americans believe that he did that. It could have been anyone. It could have been anyone in disguise to cover up what they're doing and put it on him to blame him for it. So I don't know exactly who's responsible for it. I really don't know. ... All I know is what happened should have never happened and whoever has done it ... should be caught, punished according to what he has done. If it's Osama Bin Laddin he should be caught, he should be hung, he should be ... he should pay for what he did because nobody deserved, nobody can do this to anyone else. This is ... totally, totally wrong. And if he did it, then I don't forgive him. And ... I'm not fond of him. I don't like him.

Q. What do you think that the U.S. can do to resolve the problem of terrorism which is directed against it? The World Trade Center was attacked in '93 as well. What do you think that the United States can do, what changes can it bring about to eliminate this?

A. You know, I work in a building and it's a skyscraper also, and all I know is that I think the security measures should be a little ... tightened. I think Americans, they were so carefree and they didn't have such high alert security. I mean, they should ever change foreign policies ...

Q. They should never ever change foreign policies?

A. No. I said that wrong. Yeah. I think they should try to work out something. They should try to become more mellow, more lenient toward other people. Maybe there is so much anger in other countries, in other people, that is for United States and we don't know about it. I was worried about that, I guess ... Okay. I think the United States has to rethink about its policies, especially maybe how to change its foreign policies.

Q. In what sense?

A. In what sense? I think ... if it is to say that Osama Bin Laddin is responsible for what had happened, I think maybe Osama is trying to give a message to the United states in one way or the other, probably trying to say get out of the Middle East! Don't get involved. Don't interfere with our system. Don't try to be the father or the mother of our land. So maybe this is what ... if he did it, Maybe this is what his message is. Otherwise I don't see a reason, because I think he's a billionaire himself. And ... maybe this is what his message is. And if this is what he's trying to convey, I think that America should try to rethink about those things and try to be lenient, and try to be more supportive of people who need, rather than just pushing the Jewish on the top.

Q. Do you think that these attacks could have been prevented? How do you feel towards the security system now and before?

A. I think the security system should have always been installed, even before 9-11, because I feel much more comfortable now. I mean, there are many people ... you're walking down the street, you never know who's what? I think that this should have always been there from the beginning, and I'm very happy that there is more security alert, more police and FBI and all the CIA. Everybody is on a big alert and I think they should have always been like that.

Q. Okay. Do you travel back to, Pakistan?

A. No, I have never been there. Ever since I've been here I have never gone back there.

Q. Oh, okay, because I was going to ask do you feel more secure traveling now.

A. I have traveled to other countries. Like, I have gone to Italy for a little trip, and I do travel to California, over there because my sister...

Q. So have you traveled after 9-11?

A. No. I haven't yet. No, I haven't so I cannot actually say that I'm terrified. But I am scared 'cause it's not easy. I have ... I also have been to Germany but that was before 9-11.

Q. Okay. Are there any other issues or points that you would like to comment on which we have not mentioned?

A. I just think that, before people just start to come out and blame other people for this or that, and the Muslims is bad, only that the Taliban, or see anybody in *hijab* or cover and tell them that ... or they're the ones responsible, I think they should just as--take and consume all the information, think about what's going on, not only just follow the CNN or the local channels, should also go the BBC, watch the world news, be aware of the atmosphere of the world around them and try to see try to make up their mind, not just blindly hold somebody's hand and let him, make you go on the same path. But using your own brain and try to see if the puzzle fits. You know? I think you should--you know--think that way and not just when one person says, you say, Okay, Osama did it, okay,

Osama did it. Everybody ... God has given everybody a brain so use it and try to be more harmonious. Life is short.

Q. Well, thank you very much for your time and cooperation. This was a great interview.

A. Thank you.

Q. I know you have many children for you to look after and it might have been difficult for you to take out the time.

A. My youngest sister, she's taking care of them.

Q. Right. Thank you very much for your time.

A. Thank you for coming here.

Q. No problem. Thank you.

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