

Interview 47

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: 21

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

A. Here: New York.

Q. And where did you grow up?

A. New York.

Q. Okay. And where were your parents born?

A. India and Pakistan. My Dad was in India and my Mom was in Pakistan.

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

A. Pakistani.

Q. What is your religious affiliation?

A. I'm a Muslim.

Q. Okay and that was enthusiastic. How old are you now?

A. Twenty-one.

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

A. I was born here. I'm a natural U.S. citizen.

Q. And what is your highest level of education?

A. I'm in college right now.

Q. And you're doing?

A. Bachelor's.

Q. What are you studying?

A. Psychology.

Q. Would you mind telling us where you're obtaining your education?

A. Baruch College. See, I wasn't enthusiastic about that.

Q. Are you working, aside from being a student? Okay. You're studying. And what is your marital status?

A. Single.

Q. Do you have any children?

A. No.

Q. Okay. Now I'll ask you a few questions about how you experienced September 11th. Where were you on that day around 9 a.m.?

A. I was in Baruch College.

Q. How did you hear of the attacks?

A. Okay. This is a fun story.

Q. Go ahead.

A. I was in Baruch College and people were standing at the window. You know? It was amazing. You could see the whole skyscraper and everything. So I was, like: Okay. You know? So ... And then I was, like... 'cause I'm going to go to class? And they were like, oh, the Twin Towers, like, they didn't say anything. They're like, oh, class is canceled. So I leave. And ... and I'm looking and I'm like ... everyone's not near the windows and I'm, like: Look how pretty it looks. The whole sky's blue and there's one puff of cloud at the corner of the sky. Right? And my friend comes down, she says: Did you hear what happened? I'm, like, what happened? I say, don't you see the Twin Towers are not there no more? So I'm like ... and she said ... I'm like: But isn't that ... isn't that a cloud? No.

That's smoke. And I was ... I was like, Oh! And then we just started saying stuff like ... like: Oh. they're going to blame the Muslims, and this and that.

Q. Yeah? So you thought that?

A. Yeah, of course.

Q. So what was your first reaction when you found out that this was a terrorist attack or, that the Twin Towers had been bombed?

A. I was like, Oh no. Not again.

Q. Not again?

A. Yeah.

Q. What made you think that?

A. 'Cause everywhere you go it's like, I don't know, like, oh, the Muslim people did it and this is who did it, so it's like, oh no! Not again. Blaming us again. Then I was ... I was sad for a long time.

Q. So you thought that if these were terrorist attacks, it must be done by Muslims?

A. No. I didn't think it was done by Muslims. I was like, they're blaming the Muslims.

Q. Oh. Okay.

A. I didn't think it was done by Muslims. I think the CIA did it, just for the record.

Q. What do you believe is your most vivid memory of September 11th, something you think will always stand out in your head and you will not forget.

A. The news.

Q. What on the news?

A. The crashing and the people falling. You know? That was just ...I don't know, I just couldn't bear to see that. That's what I hate ...I think I mentioned this; on the news they kept showing it over

and over and over again. It was, like, you're thinking about it and they show you again and you think about it more, and you think about it more. I was just... it was not good.

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

A. I felt sad, depressed, especially on the young people, like, people. Like, before it was knocked down people were, like, oh, maybe like six thousand, seven thousand people died. Maybe the day care center will ... people didn't get the day care people out, like, the kids out, so I was, like, oh my God! That about the kids, and then my uncle, my Mom ... My Dad's friend, he works there and his whole family works there, so I was concerned about that, 'cause we'll have to go down there.

Q. Did you feel any guilt? I mean, after they started saying on the news that Osama Bin Ladden did it, you being a Muslim, did you feel any guilt?

A. I thought the media was trying to make us feel guilty. I didn't feel guilty 'cause I don't think they did it.

Q. Have your feelings changed since the events?

A. I don't think they ever will.

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

A. Like, I was Pakistani.

Q. And then immediately afterwards?

A. Pakistani. I never changed a thing. But then, I mention it now. I'm ... I was born here. I'm on your side.

Q. Oh, okay.

A. I had to mention it sometimes 'cause people would harass me. I'm, like: You know, I'm just as ... just as hurt by this as you are. Yeah. I'm just ... I'm an American too, and this and that.

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

A. Yes. Yes.

Q. How so?

A. Okay. I like America. I like the people. Like, I ... I don't hate Americans. I like Americans. But I hate Bush. Not hate him, I just dislike him. I feel bad that I voted for him. And then I don't like ... I like the government, like, freedom, the Constitution. I like all that, but I don't like them. I don't like how they use the Constitution and I don't like that, for their own security or whatever, how they're breaking it. And I don't like that they're what you may call it? See, I lost my train of thought.

Q. You were talking about how your feelings have changed toward the United States.

A. Yeah. And I don't like their foreign policy ... 'cause it's, like, they're attacking only the Muslim countries. I mean, there are ... It's just like, you know, it's like ... like, when the Twin Towers fell the first thing that was said, okay, I'm attacking Iraq. Why ... why did he assume... they didn't know Osama Bin Ladden had done it. They didn't know anything. Why did he say that at that moment: I'm going to attack Iraq? Why ... it's, like, it's the plan then. Okay. You know? I mean ...

Q. Has your level of political awareness increased since 9/11?

A. Increased.

Q. Are you more concerned with domestic or foreign policies?

A. Foreign.

Q. Okay. Do you feel a sense of belonging to the United States after September 11th?

A. Not any more. Not any more, 'cause I'm being outcast right now 'cause they're, like ... first is, right now, the immigration thing. It's like, okay, it's only been people that are illegal. But then it's going to be people that ... that are Green Card holders. Then it's people who are citizens. You know? And soon they are going to declare the bank account. They're going to be looking at ... at taxes, or whatever, you know? Like little things or what ... what crimes have been ... have you stolen something? Do you have ... do you have a criminal record, this and that? And I don't like that. I mean, like, and especially ... and they're older people and they're doing it only to those from Muslim countries so it's like, why are you selling us out? You know? It's like, the thing that happened with the ... the Japanese-Americans? It's the same thing happening now except we're not in concentration camps, but we're being entrapped in our own homes.

Q. How did you feel before September 11th?

A. I like it. I was proud. I went to...I usually say, oh, it's July 4th, let me take out my flag. I had red, white and blue nail polish on...

Q. Oh yeah?

A. Yeah, and I was all, you know, all happy and everything else, like, singing the anthem and you know, I was like: Oh, today's my day. But now I'm afraid to go there 'cause everyone's just like ... like, you know? Now you're blaming all the Pakistanis for doing it and blaming so many people that they don't like America no more. The only Americans... 'cause a lot of people think that they like Americans. They don't ... we like Americans. We don't like the government, what their policies are.

Q. Do you think that there has been a change in the way people from the Middle East and South Asians are treated after 9/11?

A. Yeah.

Q. How so?

A. More suspiciously. They're looked at us, like: Oh, there must be something wrong with them. Before, 'cause I wear a scarf, they used to be, like in school they'd think: Oh she must be a good girl. But now: Oh my God! She must be a bad girl. Right? She must be doing something wrong. If she's religious she must be an extremist or something like that. So ...

Q. Have you personally experienced any backlash, discrimination or racial profiling?

A. Yeah.

Q. Would you like to say?

A. Yeah. People'll be, like ... they'd ... they'd stare, like, horribly and then ... or they'd be like, push and they'd: Are you happy now? Are you glad that happened? You know? Like in a mean way. Or they'd like ...

Q. Where does this mostly happen?

A. In Manhatt-- in Manhattan. I only go to Manhattan and Queens mostly. It happened a couple of times in Manhattan.

Q. In public areas?

A. Public areas.

Q. At school?

A. Public areas. People will be, like: Oh, we know you did it? Go back to your country! We know you did it and stuff like that.

Q. So was this immediately after September 11th?

A. Immediately. Immediately.

Q. How about now? How is it now?

A. Not ... not as bad now. The stares, but nobody has the guts to say anything anymore.

Q. I see. Have you experienced anything at school? [Interruption]

A. Not in school.

Q. Nothing in school? How do they look at you at school?

A. No, they're fine. They're pretty good in school. Yeah.

Q. Okay, because they're educated people.

A. Yeah, educated. It's only in the non-educated areas.

Q. Right. Right.

A. Like, where the factories and you know, like stores and stuff are. But if you go, like, where colleges are and everything like that it doesn't ... it doesn't bother me that much. They don't say anything.

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

A. Yeah, my Dad. In my dad's store people come in and, like: Oh, we'll burn your store down. And they'll put candy on the floor. They'll throw all the merchandise on the floor and they're, like, okay ... You know? They had to call the police a couple of times and it'd be like: Oh, you know and people standing outside giving an evil look and the customers won't come in no more. Like: Oh, he's a Muslim. Let's not buy from him, like that.

Q. Oh. What is your father's appearance like?

A. He has a beard. Yeah. He has a beard and he wears that hat so they're, like, he's a Muslim.

Q. What kind of a store does your father have?

A. It's like a convenience store.

Q. Do you think that Middle Eastern and South Asian organizations have been effective in handling this backlash after September 11th?

A. Not that much 'cause I was... It was after the President came with one of the CAIR people on TV that they listened to him, but it was just like that. People, like, talked back. They were, like, No. You're wrong to those people and they won't listen, so they won't get any media coverage or ... and stuff like that. But that's it's not really ... I don't think it's their fault. There are things that ... They don't get a lot of media coverage. People choose not to... Oh, okay. Let's not put them on. I think the media's really focused on, like, making them look bad.

Q. Do you think that these organizations have been effective in mobilizing the community?

A. I think so, 'cause they ... they had, like, seminars and stuff like that on how to handle this stuff. And they had, like, police people come and be, like, teach them, like, okay, this is... and this is this and ... And so we got fliers for that. So that's pretty good.

Q. Have you joined any religious or ethnic organization?

A. No. No.

Q. What do you think is the nature of the relationship amongst your ethnic and religious group and others here in the United States at the moment, such as amongst Muslims and Jews, Muslims and Hindus? Do you think they are more harmonious towards each other or more strained?

A. I think they're more ... more strained. They are, 'cause it's like ... 'cause the whole Israel and Palestine thing... blaming the government of the ...you know? It's a political thing, they regard it as a religion thing. Right. 'Cause it's not. It's all about politics. People aren't killing ... bombing themselves because they want to ... it's for Islam. They're doing it for ... so they could get their own land. It's not ... nothing to do with Islam. So then they ... But the people are saying Islam thinks so. There's, like, a lot of things that are wrong... 'cause a lot of people are ignorant about each others' religions. They don't really know. I think that's ...

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

A. Give seminars, I guess. I don't ... I don't know. What can ... what can you do, change ignorance I guess. Teach them about all the things... Like, in my ... Baruch College now for the first time in, like, I think five or six years, I don't know; for a while now it's been, they're giving a ... a class on Islam.

Q. Oh yeah?

A. Yeah. So I guess ... I think they did it so people would be more ... they would become less ignorant about the religion.

Q. Right.

A. So that, like ... like that's a good thing.

Q. What do you think the Middle Eastern and South Asian organizations can do to ...?

A. The same thing. I think they can organize more seminars or they can do more protests and things like that.

Q. Given your understanding of the status of the Middle Easterners and the South Asians here now would you still encourage these people to emigrate to the United States?

A. No.

Q. Why?

A. My ... like, my Aunt wanted to come, but we're like told her to stay there. They even ... they were moving ... they ... they were moving legally. It's really hard to get visas now. And to come to this country where they're going to get discriminated against, where ... especially if they're not Green Card holders or citizens, I don't think they should. I don't think anybody should. Yeah. I wouldn't go back 'cause I was born here and lived here. I don't think I could live in Pakistan.

Q. Right. That's true. We've spoken about the negative consequences of September 11th. Do you believe there were any positive consequences that stemmed from it?

A. Yeah, a lot of people now know about Islam 'cause they wanted to learn about it and now they're more understanding. So like, in the beginning there was, like, all backlash. But now it's starting to, like. ... People are nicer. But, like: "Oh yeah. We understand ... we understand that's not your religion. We understand that ... that it's ... we don't blame you," and this and that. So that's pretty good. I think that was a positive.

Q. Why do you think the attacks on the World Trade Center took place? Do you think Middle Easterners or Arabs hate America?

A. No. Okay. The Arabs and the Middle Easterners, they don't hate America. They can ... Americans could be and their ... their way. You know how they say they hate the American way? Americans can be running around naked and they wouldn't give a damn. It's that the foreign policies are affecting them, affecting their children, affec-- are killing them and putting restraint on them. And that's why they're attack-- it's not because... 'cause they think that all Americans are infidels, and this and that. It's not like that. And I don't think the Americans ... they did it. I think the CIA ... again the CIA did it, so ... so I don't think that. So they had to have ... I don't think they had anything to do with it.

Q. What do you think the United States can do to resolve this issue of terrorism, which is directed against it?

A. I think ... I think they can just mind their own business. I think they can get out of everyone's country. Get ... get out of Saudi-Arabia, get out of, like, all Kuwait and Iraq and all those countries. Just get out of those countries and stay with themselves. You know? Like, mind their own business. People don't want democracy they don't have to have it. How do you know democracy's right? You

know? Maybe ... Okay. I don't like Saddam Hussein but ... No. That's a bad example. Like, other countries, the people they're not... I mean, they go... They look at the bad parts. How about the good parts? Oh, women are not educated? I've seen women ... I went to Afghanistan. There are women doctors there. There are women doctors there. You know? I saw, like, you know, professionals there. There were women teachers there. Women go to school. And I don't know what the hell they're talking about. I don't think it's ...

Q. I see. Have you traveled after September 11th?

A. Yeah.

Q. By plane?

A. Yeah.

Q. Have you experienced anything?

A. Yeah. But I liked that part where they check your shoes. Officer, I have my shoes off before, and I was like: "Check my shoes! Check my shoes! All right?" And they were, like: "No, no. We don't check ..." I was just: Check my shoes, will you? Otherwise ... I was really excited. You know? But they didn't. They didn't set aside ... they were nicer to us, like, to my Dad. They checked my Dad and they were looking at his skin. Like, they were doing ... They were checking, like, if they had, like ... You know? They have implants in your palms or in your ... In your heels, but they were more towards Americans. Like, they were checking white people, Asian ... like, Chinese people and Korean people. They were che-- checking them more than ... than us. I don't know why. And I was just ... we were just like: "Oh yes, boss." And the guy that was checking was so nice and they were so understanding 'cause my Mom ... my Mom wears a burqa and she was like ... and they were, like: "Oh, it's okay. You don't have to take it off" 'cause she was ...

Q. A burqa is that long ...?

A. The whole covering.

Q. The whole covering?

A. Yeah. So she was wearing that and they were ... it was pretty cool. I was like. .. But they weren't checking ... Like, they didn't ask me to take off my shoes and they were checking ... the girl next ... behind me, she was a white girl and she was, like: You have to take off your shoes. You have to take off your jacket, and this and that. And they were like, Okay. Go away. Go! Go! Go!

Q. Didn't you have to take off your scarf?

A. No. They were really good about that. If there was a pin in my scarf they were, like, just show us the pin.

Q. Oh, okay.

A. So that was the ... the sound that the alarm was making and that's about it. I was glad to take my shoes ... that was fun.

Q. Oh yeah?

A. Yeah.

Q. Okay. Is there anything else you experienced on the plane? What airline did you fly over?

A. Oh. I went by ATA.

Q. Okay.

A. Right and ... and there was this one guy ... We had about ... We had, like, a can ... Like, in Chicago there's this new brand of soda that we don't get here in New York so we were bringing that and it was in a ... in a plastic bag. So this guy ... and it was on the floor. It was far away from this guy who was staring at the bag and staring at us, eyes looking to bag to us, bag to us, and he ... he probably thought it was a bomb or something. And it was so funny. And he was just staring and then he was ... It was so funny. So, he pushed the bag away further.

Q. Oh, okay.

A. To get him more riled up we pushed the bag farther and the guy stood up...

Q. Yeah?

A. ...and he got really nervous. And then I was, like: "What are you doing, Dad? Right? You're getting him mad." So I took the bag and I held it and it was pretty cool. That was fun. It's fun to bother people.

Q. Are there any other points you'd like to mention, something we haven't covered in this survey?

A. That's it.

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

A. Yeah.

Q. How so?

A. 'Cause he knew about it.

Q. He who?

A. If Bush pretty ... he sounded like he knew about it, he could have done something about it. I doubt he knew anything about it. I bet he knew about it 'cause he, you know, who did it, but ... but, like, he could have stopped it. He could have stopped it. And let's say the Muslims did do it and he knew about it, he could have done any ... He could have put, like, a twenty-four watch on those buildings. He could have had ... There should have been Air Force people on ... on the ... on this guy before...beforehand. They should be roaming the sky. They should have been there with bombs and guns, or whatever they have, all the machinery or whatever, intact so this wouldn't have ... this wouldn't have happened.

Q. Do you feel more secure now with the security measures or do you believe that the security measures need to be extended further?

A. I think they're fine because honestly, it's won ... there is more security then you know it's not going to happen. And it's not because they're more secure. It's because the people that are doing it are not idiots. They're not going to ... Okay. The security ... let me just go now. Let me just do it now. Right? But, if they ever do something, like, in the Middle East, expecting that there's security all around, they're ... they're expected every second, then that's better because they'll be, like, okay, people don't want to go on doing that.

Q. Thank you very much for your time.

A. You're welcome.