

Interview 19

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: 49

Q. Okay. This is called the September 11th Digital Archive and I'm going to be asking you some questions about yourself, your background, and how you experienced September 11th. There is no right or wrong answers but if you don't want to answer anything you just tell me and that's fine. Okay? So first I'd like to know where you were born?

A. I was born in Yemen. Okay?

Q. And where did you grow up?

A. I grew up in Yemen.

Q. And when did you come to the United States?

A. When did I come to the United States? Come here it's 1974.

Q. Where was your father born?

A. In Yemen also.

Q. And your Mom?

A. She was born in Yemen too.

Q. Okay. What is your religious affiliation?

A. Muslim.

Q. And how old are you?

A. I'm forty-nine.

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

A. U.S. citizen.

Q. A U.S. citizen. What is your highest level of education?

A. Two years in college.

Q. In Yemen?

A. No. Here in ... in Hartford, Connecticut.

Q. Did you obtain a degree?

A. No.

Q. Okay. What is your main occupation?

A. Right now I'm an owner of a restaurant, [name removed].

Q. Okay. What is your marital status--marital status?

A. Marital status? Yes, I am married and I have two children.

Q. And how old are your children?

A. One is eleven, one is five.

Q. Okay. Now I'm going to ask you some questions about September 11th and how you experienced it. Where were you the t day around nine in the morning?

A. I was watching a movie.

Q. You were...

A. I was watching a movie home. My wife was in the supermarket and she called me and she said: there is ... a helicopter hit the World Trade Center. Why don't you change the channel from what ... the movie channel to Channel 1. I switched on the Channel 1 which is the news television--you know--the news station, I see smoke. And I say, oh, there's a helicopter. They're going to ... then ... then I kept continuous switching the remote control from the movie, 'cause I liked the movie, and I want to know what's going on there and

all of a sudden there was ... I see a plane, --you know--hitting the World Trade Center. They say the plane in Washington got hit and stuff like that, and I ... I felt ... I say this is a serious thing is happening now in New York City. I shut off the ... the movie channel and I start ... I went out and everybody's going nuts. And smoke is coming all over. Then it was a very big disaster and...

Q. Do you live in Manhattan?

A. No. I live in Brooklyn, but as ... as ... I live in [town] and there was ... the smoke. It was so close to Manhattan to where the incident happened. And it was a very big disaster and something you cannot describe how did we feel, and the fear and the...

Q. What was your first reaction to the possibility that they were Muslim terrorists?

A. Well, as always happened we ... we get used to say they are Muslim terrorists or Muslim--you know--suicide or something like that. We got used to hear that. But we was waiting for ... we was waiting for them to get the result. We thought maybe get something that happened like what happened in Oklahoma City when they say it was a Muslim then it turned to be somebody else. And I was hoping that nothing ... whatever had happened was ... happened by someone else, not a Muslim. Then when they say it was Bin Laddin, then it ... it was ... I don't know how to describe the ... the reaction I had ... so me and my family also. But it was ... to hit New York City for me is like they hit my home back home. Even ... even worse because living in New York City over twenty years I feel like this is my city.

Q. Right.

A. Like, my children were born in New York City. That's where I make a living. That's where I live. And I feel this ... is my city. This is my ... it's my home town. And I don't

care to live anywhere else but New York City. And when they hit New York City I felt that they hit my house, not just New York City.

Q. Understandable. What's your most vivid memory from that day?

A. Well, the smoke, the smoke. The smoke was coming here and the ... the ... when I opened my car I find the dust all over even though it's about three miles away from here. And the memory before the World Trade Center is ... is when. About two months before that happened I had to take one of my friends ... He came to visit me from [town] and I would try to impress ... to impress ... him, to take him to the World Trade Center and we went to eat in the Windows of the World. And he ... me and him we never stopped talking about that beautiful place and that beautiful time we had that time. And that's the biggest memory about... Not only that, but I see it every day. I don't see it no more. It's like something is missing in New York City. It's like ... you know when you have a picture in your house, then all of a sudden it disappears and every...

Q. You feel it.

A. I feel it, yeah. I see it every day from my window. I didn't see it no more. I feel like I live in Hong Kong or somewhere else. Yeah, I don't see it. That's what it is.

Q. Have your feelings changed since September 11th?

A. Yeah.

Q. How so?

A. I think it changed in so many way since the--you know--just feel like walking in the street and, for example, walking in the street and I try to not say anything, try not to do anything wrong because maybe these people think: this guy is a Muslim or Arab. He's in this country and he's saying what he's saying. And that's ... that's one of the changes. The

other change is we have over here is we have to deal with a lot of ignorance. You know? And that's one change, change in business and--you know-- daily life, try ... trying to educate my daughters not to ... to feel confidence in themselves, not to hide themselves. Like some ... some people I know they change their name because of ... Muslims. You know? One lady she called ... her daughter was named Fatima and she ... she changed her daughter's name to Claudia. And that's ... that's one of the changes people have here now.

Q. So before September 11th when people asked you your nationality what would you tell them?

A. As I always say ... I always say I'm Yemeni ... from Yemen.

Q. And you say...

A. Now or before--or then. That I can't deny.

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

A. Of course.

Q. How so, politically, domestically...

A. Everything. They say ... there's a saying when the United States sneeze, the whole world get the flu. That's what happened.

Q. I thought that was about Europe.

A. No. Now it's the United States...

Q. Okay.

A. Yes.

Q. So what do you ... Has your level of political awareness increased?

A. No.

Q. No? Okay. Do you feel a sense of belonging in the United States?

A. I'm sorry.

Q. Do you feel a sense of belonging, like you're at home here?

A. It is my home.

Q. You ... You...

A. I feel ... I feel this is my home.

Q. And that hasn't changed?

A. It hasn't changed.

Q. Okay. And do you think there's been a change in the way Middle Easterners are being treated now?

A. Yeah. Some people I know when ... some people they ... they ... is a lot of changes. Like, one family here they ... they decided to leave the United States forever because they say it's not a home town for them any more.

Q. Were they attacked?

A. No. They was criticized. You know? That's all. They just ... they just say, it's not for us any more. We've got to leave. Yeah. And that's ... since a lot of people have ... there's a lot of changes in the ... in the Muslim and Arabic community. There is arrests happening. I see it almost every week for violating the law of immigration or the e others. And there's ... there's a lot of eyes keeping on us--you know--in particular Muslims and Arabs. but for one reason I don't blame ... that's ... I don't blame them what ... what they're doing because ... they're considering the safety of their people. And with the other hand I feel is wrong because ... because sometimes they just attack an innocent person having nothing to do with anything.

Q. Right. Have you personally experienced any kind of attacks or discrimination, physical or verbal?

A. No.

Q. No. Has any member of your family or friends?

A. No.

Q. Okay. Do you think that Middle Eastern organizations are doing enough to promote harmony after September 11th?

A. No. I don't think they're doing ... they're doing any ... I don't think they do ... they do a good job.

Q. Why not?

A. Because they have to go out and express themselves to the other ... to the public, to the government and ... and say: Hey, listen. We ... we didn't do anything. We have ... We have to ... why we have to be the victim. We ... we ... they should go after for whatever who did what he did. You know? There ... there's no ... We didn't have enough media to say here ... here are. There's no way ... there's no ... they didn't go out and express themselves right. They don't...

Q. Why do you think they don't express themselves?

A. Because they have to express themselves through the media. They have to ... their letter has to get to ... to the people who...to whom it may concern. And they should, instead of just feel sorrow or some ... or feeling sorry about that, just go out and say: Listen. This is... We are Americans, we live in America and we have nothing to do with this. And that's ... that's why they. We've been attacked, we've been ... been arrested, we've been keep watching. And that's because the Islamic funda--Islamic community

we're here, they're not doing anything enough to ... to let--to whom it may concern-- know that they had nothing to do with whatever happened. You know, since September 11th up to now they haven't caught anyone who's related to any ... this incident because this is come from the outside. It's not from the people who live in America.

Q. Have you joined any ethnic or religious organizations?

A. Have I did what? I'm sorry.

Q. Have you joined any ethnic organizations or religious groups?

A. No. No.

Q. In your opinion, what do you think the nature is of the relationship of Middle Eastern organizations and the government?

A. That's ... I don't know. I don't know what they're doing there. You know? I am following one thing, try to support my family, but I don't know what's going on beyond that.

Q. Given your understanding of the way Arabs and other Middle Easterners are treated now, would you encourage people from the Middle East to emigrate here?

A. No.

Q. Why not?

A. I don't think they ... they ... Everybody want to come to the United States. I don't ... I don't need to encourage anybody to come here. They can encourage themselves. You know?

Q. But if somebody had absolutely no clue and they asked you...

A. I ... I will tell them: you're ... you're going to go and live in the best, most beautiful country in the world. But if the person is doing well in his own hometown I didn't think ... I didn't advise him to come over here.

Q. So we talked about all these negative things that name about from the e attacks.

Do you think ... do you see any good coming out of it?

A. After the attacks? So far nothing is coming good. No, nothing is good.

Q. Such as maybe a better understanding of Islam and Arab culture?

A. Well, there's ... there's nothing really ... I didn't see anything come except ... I didn't see anything coming good--you know--to the Islamic community here--nothing. I'll just be honest.

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

A. That I don't know. That's something I really don't know. That's ... that's ... there's so many things you could say where did that come from, but you ... that either way is confused.

Q. Yeah, no ... nobody knows. But...

A. Nobody knows. It's a confusing thing really.

Q. Do you...

A. The people ... the people who really follow this step by step, they know what's going on. At least, if they don't know a hundred percent ,they know something. But an ordinary person like me, I don't know. We ... we don't know. I don't know.

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

A. Well, I don't know. I haven't go there for a long time.

Q. And what about Arabs and Muslims here?

A. Well, that's ... that's also I don't ... really don't know how they feel. You know? But I don't a few ... If there is anybody who hate America it will be few. That's not ... not ... 'cause as long as you live in America and you make a living in America, you have children in America, I don't think you ... you ... you hate America. You know? You love America more. That's ... that's how I feel myself.

Q. So what do you think the e United States can do to stop terrorism against it?

A. Well, I don't ... What they do to ... they are trying to stop terrorism. Terrorism is not in one ... in one place. They're all over the e world. In order to ... it's going to take a long time to do it. And you're maybe not ... maybe not going to finished it but there's still ... there is terrorism all over the world. It's ... How the United States going to do it by themselves?

Q. So you think that...

A. So it has to be the country ... the country who have the terrorism in their own country. That's the people who are going to have to deal with it.

Q. And what do you think the United States can do to help them deal with it?

A. Just help them, technology, with weapons maybe if it is necessary, with trained people how to deal with that situation because in the third world they really don't have that knowledge to deal with such a thing like that.

Q. Right. What do you feel about United States foreign policy right now?

A. Well, United States foreign policy they always have ... the foreign policy of the United States they. They--they considering ... every President of the e United States have a different ... different policy for ... a different foreign policy. For example, when Reagan was the President he concentrated on the military. When Bill Clinton was the President

he concentrated on ... and when ... when Bush was our President he concentrated on the imperialist oil in Iraq and all that. When Bill Clinton was the President he ... he concentrate in ... home ... in--what they call that? They ... concentrate on the what medicinal is that? What is it? Clinton, he was concentrating on ... to give people med--

Q. Medicare?

A. Medicare, yeah, health insurance and Medicare. Now we have Bush here, he concentrate on fight terrorism. So every President of the United States have his own ... his own foreign policy.

Q. And how do you think he's doing so far?

A. Well, we don't know yet. Probably he just started. That's it, I guess.

Q. So is there anything that you'd like to mention, --any other additions that you'd like to...

A. No, not really.

Q. Okay. Thank you for participating.

A. You're very welcome.

Q. And giving me the answers.