

Interview 46

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: 20

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

A. London.

Q. Where did you grow up?

A. London.

Q. How old were you when you came to the Unites States?

A. Twenty.

Q. And where were your parents born?

A. Pakistan.

Q. Both of them?

A. Yeah, Pakistan.

Q. So you're first generation. What do you consider your ethnic background to be?

A. Muslim from Pakistan.

Q. Okay. That would be your religious affiliation.

A. All right.

Q. Do you consider yourself, British or Pakistani?

A. British.

Q. British-Pakistani.

A. Yeah, British-Pakistani.

Q. And your religious affiliation you said is Islam.

A. Yeah.

Q. And how old are you now, if you don' mind?

A. Twenty.

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

A. No.

Q. Okay.

A. I'm British.

Q. British?

A. Yeah.

Q. What is your highest level of education?

A. High school.

Q. Where did you obtain your education?

A. London.

Q. What is your main occupation?

A. Housewife.

Q. So you're working for the in-laws and your husband?

A. Uh-huh. (laughs)

Q. Do you have any children?

A. No.

Q. Now I'm going to ask you a few questions about September 11th and how you experienced it. Where were you on September 11th, at 9 a.m. American time, and how did you hear of the attacks?

A. I was in Pakistan. From the news probably.

Q. What was your first reaction?

A. Very shocked. I was crying.

Q. What about the reaction to the possibility that, you know, the terrorists are Muslims?

A. I didn't even consider it.

Q. Okay. And when you were watching the news what would you consider your most vivid memory to be, something that you think will always stand out and you will never forget about September 11th?

A. I guess when the plane actually hit the Towers.

Q. You were actually watching that?

A. Yeah.

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

A. Confused. I didn't know what to think.

Q. After you heard that the terrorists were Muslims did you feel guilt for being Muslim and for Muslims being involved?

A. I didn't actually believe it. I chose not to believe it.

Q. Okay. Have your feelings changed since then?

A. No.

Q. Have your feelings towards the United States changed in any way?

A. I think about ... about 9/11 I don't really know. But about everything that's happening now I think it's really ridiculous, about how they just started chucking Muslims out of the country even if they've been living here, like, fifty years and ... and so on. I'm not happy with that.

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

A. It's increased.

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

A. Anything going on at the moment, like the Iraq thing, everyone ... they're into that and so ...

Q. Okay. Do you feel a sense of belonging to the United States?

A. I do.

Q. Have you felt like this ever since you came here?

A. Yeah. I ... I actually ... I like America. I like the country. I just don't like the government.

Q. Do you think that there has been a change in the way people from the Middle East and South Asia have been treated since September 11th?

A. As I said before, I wasn't here before so I don't know about what's really changed.

Q. But what have you heard from the news or from other sources?

A. From what I've heard, yeah. There's been a lot of racial discriminancy. And I see people burning Sikhs thinking they were Muslim.

Q. Right. Okay. Have you personally experienced any backlash?

A. No, I haven't.

Q. When you go out do people look at you differently?

A. I don't think they do.

Q. Has any member of your family or friends been harassed?

A. Yeah. A friend was ... I think straight after it happened she was in college and she got called names and stuff because she wears a scarf on her head.

Q. Names? Can you go into detail, what was she called ?

A. Osama Bin Laddin's wife.

Q. Oh yeah? Okay. And do you think that the Middle Eastern organizations and the South Asian organizations have been effective in handling such backlash against this community?

A. I think they're trying, I mean, these groups. They're organizing and stuff. I ... I feel like they're trying their best.

Q. Have you joined any ethnic or religious organization?

A. No, I haven't.

Q. In your opinion, what do you think is the nature of the relationship between your religious and ethnic group and others in America at the moment? How do you think the relationship between the Muslims and the Jews is after September 11th, or the Muslims and the Hindus? How do you think the relationship is now?

A. I think everyone's got together and, like, targeting Muslims and Islam altogether. I think it's, like, unite with everybody else and kick us out, I think. I think that happened.

Q. Do you think the relationship has become more strained and oppositional?

A. Yeah.

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

A. I don't think there's really anything 'cause I think people have just made their mind up, I mean, 'cause of what the government is showing on the TV. Everything they're showing is just, like, lined up: those things are bad. Islam is bad. You know? Everything turns it towards that. So I ... I don't think there's anything we can personally do. I mean, I think there's debates being done and, like, stuff happening, but I don't think there's anything else that we can do.

Q. Okay. Is there anything the Middle Eastern organizations can do to help the situation?

A. I mean, I don't know if the Muslims can do anything. But, I mean, Jews and stuff, I mean, they could show more support and stuff...

Q. How so?

A. ... influence in a sense. Just, like, guys on TV, they can show more support and stuff.

Q. Okay. Given your understanding of the status of Middle Easterners and South Asians here in the United States, would you still encourage people from the Middle East and from South Asia, to emigrate to the United States after what's been happening?

A. Not any more. As security and everything's been so much tightened, the INS and stuff, I mean, they're being very selective about who they let in and stuff. Like, me being from London, I heard, like, just a few months just before the September 11th thing happened that people were getting their Green Card, like within five months. Now I've been waiting, like, nearly a year and I still haven't heard anything. So it's become much more tighter and much harder.

Q. So you wouldn't encourage people to come here?

A. No, not until things have calmed down.

Q. Do you think things will calm down?

A. I hope they will.

Q. Because this registration process all of a sudden, and the list of twenty Muslim countries, it's pretty shocking to everyone, you know?

A. Yeah. That was... there's a lot of racial discrimination happening.

Q. Right. Do you think that something positive will come out of it?

A. Well, you can just hope, I guess.

Q. Right. So far we've spoken about the negative consequences of 9/11. Do you think any positive consequences have stemmed from September 11th?

A. Positive?

Q. Like for instance more visibility of Muslims and Islam?

A. Yeah. That's true. Yeah, it's coming true. But it's coming in the wrong way, I guess. I mean, people are reading a lot about it now. They know what the religion ... religion is and they're hearing about it. I mean, I guess there's a handful of people that are actually with the Muslims. But I ... I think it's bad publicity we're getting.

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

A. I don't think it was them. I mean, there's a real controversy that it was the news. Or some people even say it could actually be America doing it themselves for whatever reasons. So I don't really think it was the Muslims.

Q. Okay. Taking into consideration what they've been showing on TV, which claims that all the hijackers were Muslim, do you think they had a good reason to do that?

A. I think America should have seen it coming.

Q. Why do you say that?

A. I mean, they've been oppressing Middle Eastern countries so much that they had it coming.

Q. Oppressing them in what ways?

A. I mean, all these sanctions and ... they're like big bullies. You know? They're just like: you can't do this; you can't do that, but we can do everything. So, I mean, what they're doing with Iraq is very good, what do you say?

Q. ... Is a very good example, you mean?

A. Yeah. Like, they've done ... they've put sanctions on her and they shouldn't. Like, all of these little kids are dying because they didn't give them any, like, medicine ... medicines like Aspirin and

stuff, like, that they need and I mean, like, stuff like that. And even now, I mean, Iraq is corresponding with them, helping them so much, you know, and they're still, like ... you hear Bush saying that, you know, we don't want no bullshit, I'm sorry...

Q. No, no. It's okay. You can say whatever.

A. ... From Iraq. I mean, you know, they're doing everything they can and still he's ...

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

A. It can stop terrorizing people itself. I feel like they're doing the very ... a lot of terrorizing themselves. And they can just butt out of other peoples' business. I mean, especially when people don't need them. You know? So that's what I think they can start off by doing.

Q. Okay. Have you traveled by plane after September 11th?

A. No, I haven't. No, I haven't.

Q. You haven't gone anywhere?

A. No.

Q. Have you gone outside of New York?

A. Yeah. I've been to ... No, I haven't. Yeah. I've been to North Carolina.

Q. Okay. So have you felt any difference between New York and North Carolina?

A. Yeah.

Q. How?

A. Oh yeah. Like, you don't see people there. But ...

Q. I mean, your relatives talking about September 11th?

A. Yeah. I mean, they talk about it. They have issues, I guess but I don't think they've had any ... a lot of discrimination.

Q. Okay.

A. So I think it's been okay everywhere else, I think.

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

A. No I think you've got everything. Yeah.

Q. Okay. Thank you for your time and cooperation.

A. Okay. Thanks.

Q. Thank you.