

## **Interview 9**

**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:** 32

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

A. I was born in Haiti.

**Q. Where did you grow up?**

A. I grew up ... My family came from Bethlehem and I was actually born in Haiti accidentally because my family went to ... They left Bethlehem in the early twentieth century and they went to France. They, you know, they left the port in Jaffa and they ... they arrived in Marseilles. And so they ... they were in France and then they kept going. They kept saying, Ah, America, America. It's going to get better so they traveled. And they landed in America and then they landed in Latin America in the Caribbean. So that's my grandfather. Because the situations at the time in the Caribbean wasn't always the best my parents pretty much grew up with a European education. It was an Arab and European education, a very Bethlehem-like education, and a French education. So I myself, when I was born ... My parents were married in their '20s. They were in Europe. They were in Switzerland, in Lausanne. And when my mother was about to give birth because she was twenty and, she ... she traveled because my grandfather who was in Haiti absolutely wanted to see his first son's child and he didn't want to go to Switzerland, so that's how I got born there and then we left and went back to Europe. And then my parents then tried to go to Boston, Massachusetts because my father was an economist and he wanted to get his doctorate degree in economy. So he went to Boston and I stayed in Boston till I was about seven years old. And then my father started going ... he went to

Latin America, he went to Miami and from Miami he started working with Latin America. We were sent, me and my siblings ... Well, me and my sister really we were then sent to boarding school back in Europe and then we also spent some years in the Caribbean. So I kind of had, you know, a very multiple, like, American, Latin American and European and Arab.

**Q. So you grew up all over the place?**

A. Because we always ... Yeah, I did. And we also ... I mean, we have to say that are Bethlehemite. And I only realized that ... the in, and the influence of Bethlehem is ... I only realized how Bethlehemite it was when I got older and when I went to the Middle East and also just understanding better about the region, I realized how Bethlehemite they were, and how much they had kept that.

**Q. Your parents?**

A. My ... Yeah, my family really. And so I grew up all over and we went to ... I went to school ... After I left boarding school and I left the Caribbean. Of course, by then they had left ... They went to ... where did they go? I'm sorry. I lost track. Yeah, they started working with Latin America. And then my father discovered the Dominican Republic, which he absolutely fell in love with and he moved there. And my brother ... that's why my brother who's the youngest in my family, pretty much has sort of like an American and also Latin American because he ... more than me and my sister although we too, we kept going there. So it's, like, a bit confusing because it's not so I spent ten years here and ten years there. They kept ... kept going back and forth. So I did go back to college in Boston. And then I went back to Paris and then I went to England, and then I came to New York. (chuckles) So that's sort of been my life. But while I was in Europe the advantage I had was that I became extremely close to the Middle East. I would go there all the time and, discover very much the whole region really ... and so ... That was a long ... where I grew up.

**Q. International. So you came to live in the United States for a while?**

A. Well, I was ... I ... I was in the United States from the time I was little till the ... till I was seven or eight years old, I think. And then I returned to America when I was sixteen or seventeen until I was in, like, about twenty-three or twenty-four and then I went and then I left. And then I came back here about two years ago.

**Q. So both your parents were born in Bethlehem?**

A. My parents were from Bethlehem, yeah.

**Q. And what is your religious affiliation?**

A. I'm Christian.

**Q. How old are you?**

A. I'm thirty-two at this point. Yeah.

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

A. Yeah. I'm a ... I'm getting citizenship, like, any day now so I guess...

**Q. Permanent resident.**

A. Yeah.

**Q. And what is your highest level of education?**

A. Post-graduate. I'm finishing my doctorate degree.

**Q. From?**

A. From the [name of university].

**Q. And in what?**

A. English and Drama Department. And my thesis was on [title removed].

**Q. Wow! And so where did you obtain your education between?**

A. I got ... Well, I got my BA in International Relations at [name of college], and then I got my MA in English at [name of college]. And then I got my MFA, Masters Of Fine Arts, in creative writing in [name of college]. And then I got my MPhil at the [name of university] and then my post-graduate. Now I'm writing my thesis. I'm no longer ... You know, I'm just finishing my thesis.

**Q. You're finishing up.**

A. Yeah.

**Q. What is your main occupation?**

A. Writer.

**Q. And what is your marital status?**

A. Do I have to say that?

**Q. No. Now I'd like to ask you a few questions on how you experienced 9/11. Where were you on that date around 9 a.m.?**

A. Okay. Actually I was in the Dominican Republic for my cousin, the one that was marrying the Palestinian. And my brother actually worked for Merrill-Lynch in the World Trade Center. And I'll never forget, I was going to the airport in the Dominican Republic to go pick up some relatives coming in and I got a call and told me the World Trade Center blew up. And I said, "What are you talking about?" Like, I was like: what are you saying? And meanwhile my mother and my sister were ... which, by the way, live ... My brother and my sister and I live in New York, were, like, can you imagine? I mean, we don't know where my brother was. And, I mean, really it was a paralysis. I think the ... I think the only word to describe this is unbelievable and then Oh my God, who did this! And then thinking, Oh my god, like, they're going to really get to us they are. That was, like, my thought, like, Oh my God, like...

**Q. Is that what you thought initially, that the attacks could have been Middle Eastern?**

A. I thought they're going to blame it on Muslims or ... It's going to be something like that and it's going to be ... it's ... like, really, it's going ... its bad news. You know? That ... that was ... we were just ... I mean, we were just devastated. And of course, by ... by the time we found out ... My brother was in the subway.

**Q. Okay. Good.**

A. And then when he got out of Cortland, they couldn't stop at one station. I think he stopped at Cortland, I don't remember any ... I mean, he just started running. He ran from

downtown to mid-town to meet my cousin because he called her and he ... He was alone 'cause my sister and I had gone to the wedding. So ... so I mean, really, there was ... I can only say, like, it was ... there was really no words 'cause we were just so, so unbelievable. We just ... I remember. I mean, it was the week before the wedding. All my cousins had, the ones who had made it, we sat in front of the television ... we had no words. We just kept looking and looking. Like, that was the first initial [reaction]. And then everything else came afterwards, which was Oh my God, what's going to happen now? Who ... You know, the ... the conflict, thinking of the Muslims and another conflict with the Muslims and discrimination and ... and so forth. And that's what happened. I mean, there was a lot of discrimination in very, very subtle ways. I think the community ... I do think there was, like, a sort of evolutionary stand because if we remember well during the Gulf War ... I mean, I remember being in college and I ... it was terrible. You know? There was absolutely no real ... I felt no understanding, no knowledge whatsoever ... and now I think that there was more consciousness. And I also ... because the Muslims ... as delegates, it wasn't only, like Arabs, had it been only Arabs. Because, like, who are Muslims? I mean, you know, we're talking ... You're talking African-Americans. You're talking Pakistani. It's big. You know? It's not so limited to Arabs only so it's a very delicate issue. I think ... I don't know if you remember what Mohammed Ali said. I mean, they ... they ... I think they interviewed him and they asked him...

**Q. After 9-11?**

A. Yeah. They interviewed him and they told him ... I think they told him: so how do you feel when someone like you that's a Muslim like yourself, did this? And I think he responded: "Well, how do you feel that Hitler was a Christian?" And he ... You know? It's harsh but, I mean, it says it all. And I think mainly what I've experienced as myself as a writer and a lecturer, 'cause I write and lecture a lot and I did a lot of things about September 11th, I think people forget in America ... we're so spoiled in this country. I think if every single American went to a developing country their views would have been

different. And I think mainly ... they also don't realize that in some countries that some peoples' lives ... they die knowing September 11th ... every day of their lives was like a September 11th. And this by no means justifies...

**Q. Of course. Yes.**

A. But it's just a question of awareness and knowledge of the realities of other people and how American foreign policies affects these peoples' lives.

**Q. How did you feel right after the attacks? I mean, you mentioned before the complete paralysis. So did you feel a lot of guilt as an Arab-American or anger, or pain?**

A. I felt ... Guilt, no, absolutely not. That's the last thing. I mean, why would I feel ... No. Besides paralysis I would say I felt ... I think I felt sadness. I ... I think that's what I felt 'cause I felt like, oh man. There's going to be more misunderstanding. And I felt, they could say, you know ... It's hard to explain desperateness to someone. And it's not, again, justifiable. It's ... it's like saying when a husband beats a wife all the time and she kills him and you say okay, is it justified? Sure. I mean, it's not the point. But it's really important to understand I think, because until we go to the root of the notion ... It's, like, when we compare the Arab-Israeli conflict. In one case, give me land and I'll give you peace. The other one says give me peace and then I'll give you land. The point is it's just ... it's... You know? Finally there is a simple solution. You know what I mean? We all as human beings ... I mean, this country which is based on the democracy. And based on freedom: that every single individual has the right to live in peace and in freedom should understand more than anyone in the world the fundamental human rights of ... of ... of others and what they fight for. I mean, I don't even know why the question ... I mean, we ... this is what we as Americans idea-- ... I mean, this is our ideology. So how ... how can we even question when someone wants to fight for those rights. You know? So I would say sadness and understanding that there's so much misunderstanding and how to ... and also thinking of the ways in which to break that. Because as myself, having studied a lot,

the process of immigration and transformation ... I mean, when you look at, you know, the history of all immigrants to the United States from the time of the Greeks and the Italians, how they were discriminated and stuff, every immigrant that came ... I mean, there's always that initial ... Just think of the Japanese.

**Q. Have those feelings changed since then?**

A. No, they haven't. I think ... I think I still feel, like, bad that ... that we've come to that point that we have to act in ... in these ways. I think ... I still think there's a huge misunderstanding of the American government and the American ... It's not only about the ... It is not....

**Q. Isn't it understanding by our community towards the American government or international...**

A. No. I think the Americans towards Arabs.

**Q. Okay, the U.S.**

A. I think there's an incredible misunderstanding today. And also the point is that, I mean, why on earth ... These people ... Arab-Americans are Americans. I mean, all of these other Americans, Anglo-Saxons, they have other origins. These are American citizens born, raised, or however their lives happened. This is their country. They're not going to go anywhere. They're not foreigners and they shouldn't be treated as foreigners. You know? So I think that's a very important thing to ... to remind ... Like, why is ... why is it in times of crisis that people of ethnic origins in this case Arabs or Muslims, why is there identity ... why is their American ... American identity questioned. Why?

**Q. Yeah. I understand.**

A. Why? Is ... When we have ... when we have problems with other countries do we question Anglos' identity. Do we question all these others? No. It shouldn't be.

**Q. It shouldn't be like that. What would you say your most vivid memory of September 11th is? Is there something that stands in your memory even today?**

A. I ... I mean I guess the image ... the image of the World Trade Center blowing up.

**Q. On TV?**

A. Yeah. I mean, they kept passing those images, which was also very devastating. I think it was ... It seems that ... I think it just ... it just felt like it was this ... this crash inside of you as well. It was so depressing.

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

A. Oh, that I'm Arab-Amer-- ... I always say Palestinian, actually.

**Q. And what immediately after 9-11?**

A. The same.

**Q. And what do you say now?**

A. The same.

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

A. No.

**Q. What about your level of political awareness?**

A. Has it heightened?

**Q. Has it heightened or changed or...**

A. Not really. I mean, I always as someone of a, you know, ethnic origin I think you're even more aware of what's happening all the time. So not really. I mean, I ... I knew these things before. So...

**Q. Do you feel a sense of belonging in the United States? Do you feel you're part of the larger fabric of society?**

A. Yes, I do because ... because I think when I am in an environment that's not Arab-American, there's multiple ... this multiplicity that consists of America. I'm like everybody else. You know? I've had ... I've had my own reality but this is still part of me. I'm still ... I write for America. I ... I'm very much a part of America and I contribute, because Arab-Americans are part of the American experience. And I continuously, as a writer, as an activist, as a ... a scholar, instructor, whatever, I contribute to ... to American

culture. So ... so, yes, I feel...

**Q. Do you think there's a change in the way people from the Middle East have been treated since 9-11?**

A. Yeah. There has been ... I think it's ... it's been a mixture and it depends on which circle you're in. I think if you go to the mid-west, for example, sure. I think in commun-- ... I think in places in the United States where there was a Muslim population or Arab-American population of course, there's more awareness of who that ... those people are. I think in places where they don't have that connection they don't ... they've never met an Arab-American or ... or Muslim ... although amazingly enough, there are so many mosques in, believe it or not, Des Moines, Iowa for example or Kansas. I have friends that are in, like let's say Kansas, Arkansas who once upon a time the Muslims were completely segregated. After years, they got used to knowing about who the Muslims were. So I think it's all a question, again, awareness and knowledge. And I think our system, the American educational system, is very ... lacks a lot in teaching of students.

**Q. Teaching the students...**

A. Teaching their students about, you know, this diversity and about the world and geography, and unders--and knowledge of that. 'Cause I think we tend to be, Americans tend to be ... We're so self-centered in many ways. And so ... so to answer your question, I think yes and no. I think the attitude is suspicion and there's subtle discrimination on one end. And then there's other people who ... who are actually trying to know more.

**Q. To learn more?**

A. To learn more, to really ... I feel ... I mean, compared to the Gulf War it's ... it's ... the difference is extremely bigger. And also because, like I said, there are different ... It's not only Arabs or Muslims. This also has helped in bringing broader understanding.

**Q. Have you personally experienced any backlash since 9-11 in terms of discrimination or harassment or...**

A. Not directly. But, of course my family ... part of ... Not directly. I mean, there's two

types. Sometimes physically, when you look one way, you're treated ... you could be treated in a discriminatory way. And then knowing you are one way, knowing who you are you can be also treated ... so there's, like, those types of discrimination. And so I think ... I think, yeah, I've seen it, I mean, all the time going through immigration, asking ... for me sometimes it's my name. They don't ... [name]. I mean, people can't really know. Like, I have a cousin who has, like Muhmud for sure they'll stop them. You know? And so directly, no. But indirectly, like with other family members, yes.

**Q. So other family members have experienced backlash?**

A. Absolutely.

**Q. In what sense?**

A. I think being questioned at work, like, suspicion, you know? Especially men. And I think the suspicion, I mean, it's insulting.

**Q. The suspicion is?**

A. It's insulting, I think. You've known someone for twenty years who's worked with you, for example...

**Q. So the experience is mostly work?**

A. At work, yeah, and also through immigration, of course, going ... going out and into the country with your paper, I mean, with a passport, absolutely.

**Q. And they're American citizens?**

A. They're all American. Everybody's American and...

**Q. And they're still suspected?**

A. And they're still suspected, absolutely. You know? I think sometimes also because New York had been the target, getting through immigration here, sometimes the immigration people they were almost nice to us. Like, if you went to ... Oh, I went to Seattle to ... with some Arabs and that was, like, they were so touched.

**Q. Really?**

A. Yeah. So I think some States are more ... are more ... I mean, you know, not really. I

mean, I've heard all sorts of stories as well, like, random place where they were kept aside but I have people coming ... I have also, like, Arabs who came from England who are British who came to America and because they saw visas of other Arab countries they were treated really questioned, kept and questioned again continuously questioned. So...

**Q. Do you think Middle Eastern or Arab organizations have been effective in handling the backlash against these groups since 9-11?**

A. I think ... Of course, there's always space and room for more and I think they should continue to do more, and we have to be even more active. I think, of course, there's been a huge thing within the Arab-American Lobby and all the associations because, of course, the new generation, we have another notion of things. I mean, we're American. We're secure in our feeling as opposed to, for example, I mean, the grandparents or the parents. I mean, you hear the older folks ... all the time I hear my older aunt say, like, don't talk ... don't talk ... they're going ... You know? They'll ... they feel like they're going to always be kicked out. Whereas the new generation ... you're Americans. Like, who are you? Where are you going to kick me out to? You know? Of course, they've lobbied more. And when there is a discriminatory statement or whatever, they fight against it. They respond. They're doing ... But we still need ... there's so much work needs to be done still.

**Q. Yeah. What do you think they can do more?**

A. I think, for one thing I think building awareness in the educational system. I think that's very important. Because when you grow up and in school you have knowledge of the other, you're not as afraid of the other. When you don't have knowledge of the other, of course it's intimidating. I think it's a very important thing to look into. Of course, I think we ... we should lobby all the time, as we do. I think there have to be people in all different sectors. That continue to speak out whether it's in politics, in the educational sector, artists, every which way, and not to ... not have the attitude, Oh, what can I do? Everybody can do something. I mean, you speak to a person in a cafe and you tell them about, you know, they'll have another notion. Oh, I met this person. Like, I've met

someone ... Like, I've met people who've said, Oh, I've never met someone from that part of the world. Or ... so I think that's important. I mean, it's sort of like ... when you go to Europe people have greater knowledge of the Arab world and of who Arab people are so that's why there's a deeper understanding. And that's why right now there's all this debate because of the stand the European nations have taken, as opposed to the stand the Americans ... Well, I mean, or that Europeans are anti-semitic. First of all, that word bothers me anyways because we're ... people ... it's sort of a monopolized word and ... but it's just ... it's just that in Europe there's more knowledge. I can't even emphasize that ... that more that awareness.

**Q. Have you joined any group since September 11th?**

A. You mean Arab ... Arab organizations? You know, I've ... I was part of them already, like most of them, like ADC and Mi--

**Q. In what capacity?**

A. Different roles in ... Well, just some as members that I always participated in, like let's say there's a campaign sometimes I participate. Or I'm very involved in Arab-American arts, promotion of literature. I interview a lot of Arab-Americans. And I also ... I try to educate people. I wrote a book on the poetry of Arab women, which is an anthology. Actually, I gave [a lecture] at CUNY, I think I told you, at City University. And I think you talk and you lecture and you try to reach as many people as you want, as you can. I'm sorry. So at a very, I mean, when I'm most involved is at an educational and at an artistic level. But of course, with campaigns and anything that's going on I tend to be involved.

**Q. In your opinion, what do you think the nature of the relationship is between Arab-Americans and other groups in the United States?**

A. What other...

**Q. Whether it be other Americans or Latinos or African- Americans?**

A. What are our parallels and differences?

**Q. Is it more strained do you think or is it more harmonious, more tolerant?**

A. I think on this question it's very interesting because in my observation of things, according to which State you're in. It's interesting to look at the relationship. Like in New York Arab-American community I think we're really close to, like, African-Americans, for example. The girls ... I look at the girls that they're so influenced by the hip hop artists and so forth. I think it's...

**Q. The Arab girls?**

A. Yeah, the Arab girls. I think there's a big connection with that and I understand. I remember when my sister and my cousin went to school in Connecticut at Miss Porter's, and when they were there it was mainly Anglos. There wasn't really ... there wasn't really many ethnic people except for some Jewish girls. And there was, like, a few African-Americans. And that was where they found their, like, pals. Like, that's what they related to that. You know what I mean? So I think there's that connection, definitely, with ... with the African-American community. I think also the African-American community in different states is different too, so there ... there are varying of ... I think the Hispanic community ... I mean, I don't ... I don't ... It is unbelievable how many Latinos, Hispanic-Americans, Latinos, whatever you want to call them, are originally Arabs. But the difference is that Latinos, I hope you're going to hear me because ... the difference is that Latinos integrated very well in Latin America so they ... they really ... I mean, they would speak ... Oh, my father has an Arab name, or they ... still, they're quite integrated, and they consider themselves rather, like Dominican, Chilean, whatever it is. But ... so I think Arabs ... For example, the Arabs in Florida they're very ... particularly very connected to the Latinos. There's a very big understanding between them. And, yeah, I think there's ... I think we ... I think communities that are ... that ... knew ... that had parallels, for instance, like Asian-American communities and African, I think there is that ... they understand the community better and there's that ... and of course, we don't want to erase any difference between the communities, but do have parallels. Yeah.

**Q. What do you think that we as individuals can do to either build better**

**relationships or continue to have good relationships with other Americans on an individual level? I know we talked about organizational level at one point.**

A. I mean, just merely in getting to know each other. Because I don't think we are from that generation anymore where once upon a time our grandparents only hung around each other. It's like, if you think back to the Italian-Americans, they all were living in Little Italy and they all hung out with each other. Now there's one road that's Italian-American. All the Italian-Americans have really dissipated and married [someone] else, and so forth. And in our community I think ... Yeah. We have friends ... you have friends from all over. I have friends. Just knowing each other, being friends, open ... inviting them over ... I don't think it's ... it's ... well, I think more people are ... know Middle Eastern food, Middle Eastern ... I think people are much more aware. Even if you go right to Atlantic Avenue and you look at the Arab restaurants you'll have people know more. And I'm not only talking ... but in New York sometimes Middle Eastern food, what's known of it, is sometimes more like ... they think of it as Israeli. Like, most they call, the Israelis, cuscus, for example so ... but still, I think there's ... there's ... there's an understanding. And I think. I think one ... one aspect that's changed a lot is artists, musical artists. I think that's ... that's had a big impact on the world and ... and knowing ... I mean, that Shakira comes out and dances, but that even, you know ... And the incredible influence of North African artists in, like, Europe and in France and in ... of course, now more in the ... the States. I mean, the influence is far more over there than it is here. But still, I think these artists ... I think it's a really important role, 'cause everybody listens to music. You know what I mean? It's non-discriminatory.

**Q. Universal.**

A. Yeah. It's really universal. So I think that's great. I mean, even, okay, as writers, too, but although writing can always be ... people can always say, oh, this poet has, or this writer has a biased view of things.

**Q. Given your understanding of the status of the Arab immigrant groups in the**

**United States would you still encourage people from the Middle East to emigrate here?**

A. Uh, God. Yeah, because ... Yeah! I mean...

**Q. Why?**

A. You know, for me to ... to say no would mean for me to have no absolute no belief in this system and I think I do. And I think the lack of knowledge and understanding is also what sets us aside. I don't know what the world ... I mean, the world is taking a turn that's so incredibly different than what we ... what I would have imagined. You know? What's going to happen tomorrow? Are we going to go back in war with Iraq? I don't know. What's going to happen is so difficult for me to ... it's difficult. Actually, I have a question. I'm still in ... in limbo as to how it ... Because if we do go to war, for example, would the ... difference is that, though, I think the majority of the American people do not want war so I think that really makes a dif-- ... even when they were in Afghanistan, I mean, the ... I think the average American didn't even realize how much damage there are, just like Iraq and so forth. But people didn't ... a lot of people didn't want the war. Of course, the initial reaction after September was go kill these people, whatever. But I think ... I think as a general rule there is that level of consciousness in this society, in America. I think that, even if many Arabs, many people are very skeptical and they're, like, Oh no, you know? There isn't. I myself see it. I feel it. I don't know how you feel, but I feel there has been. So ... I mean, tomorrow we go to war and there's a big ... I don't know. But I ... I would like to believe that, you know, the system...

**Q. Works.**

A. Works. Yeah.

**Q. We've talked about some negative consequences of 9-11. Do you think there are any positive consequences?**

A. I think the positive consequence would be that this would force people to know about who Muslims and Arab-Americans and Middle Eastern people are and the differences

between them. I think once upon a time we used to say all Latinos were alike until Latinos really pressed and said: Listen! I'm Puerto Rican, I'm Dominican, I'm Nicaraguan, I'm Ecuadorian, and so forth. Europeans are all Europeans but they say, I'm Greek, I'm French, I'm, whatever, Scandinavian, Swedish. And Arabs, they should know the difference, even if we have a common language and we have parallels, but they should know the history of Algeria, of Palestine, of Egypt, of the Levant--the Gulf, North Africa, Yemen, Libya. I mean, they should know these varieties. And within these groups there is a cultural ... their own cultural distinction within the country and within all the villages there's ... So there is a parallel. I mean, it's like saying Australia, the United States and the U.K. is this ... all the English ... No. You have to ... you have to know they're different. You have to know the history of the countries. You know? And ... and I think also understanding ... Like when we look at TV and we think ... we hear mutilation and Islamic this ... I think they have to understand that fundamental Islam's in the politics. They have to understand that. It's not like Islam, the religion. They have to understand and have the knowledge of ... It's like we don't ... all Americans don't agree with all that American ... U.S. politics. So does that mean that all Americans ... No! So exactly with the ... that should apply exactly with the Islamic countries. It's not all the Islamic people, Muslims that are ... so I think the positive thing would be awareness and knowledge and trying to under--...

**Q. Do you think there's more awareness?**

A. I do. I really do. I feel that. I feel that.

**Q. Why do you think what's going on...**

A. No. The only thing I would have to say, though, is that of course the ... the issue of Palestine and Israel has been the only thing because even ... there are more knowledge but because it's such a delicate subject because of the Jewish-American lobby and the power of this community. I've heard Americans say: Oh, those poor little Afghanistan children, I want ... and never, ever, ever heard anybody humanize a Palestinian child.

**Q. Whether in the media or...**

A. I mean, and the thing is, when they've started to ... Okay? CNN was ... they had backlashes. Even what's his name? No. Oh, he was married to Jane Fonda. He has...

**Q. Ted Turner.**

A. Ted Turner. Even when he made that comment ... remember? He made a comment the other day about, like, I don't remember what he said exactly, Palestinians spi--or something like that, like ... or he said something and then Israel decided, okay, we're going to, like...

**Q. In terms ... I think he was saying something in terms of, it's both their faults or something, in terms...**

A. There's as much terrorists, I think, in one two ... It was something ... anyways, you can't say anything or that they'll boycott you. And the problem ... what happens is that when you have so much power then, well, you're stuck 'cause even if you would want to speak, you can't. I mean, everybody, from Hilary Clinton ... everybody. After they've said one thing they've had to, like, really work hard to reprimand it. So that's been, like ... So I can't say it's like, the Americans. Like, I think it's the power ... the dynamic and the power dynamic that enables them. And it's really unfortunate.

**Q. Why do you think the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon happened?**

A. Oh. Well, I mean, I think they needed to be heard...

**Q. Who's they?**

A. Well, okay, Al-Qaeda or Bin Laddin. It ... I mean, for me I'm very skeptical about what happened at the World Trade Center. Maybe it's them but it's not them alone. I mean, there's always a bigger conspiracy. I really be-- ... Things don't happen ... I mean, you can't have ... Israel is always looking out for these people. The United States, we had ... we ... one year before they were in Jordan and the King of Jordan was, like, ... I mean, even all the evidence we've had and we've heard, they've come and they've gone and

they've been, like, on the surface. But everything indicates that there was a knowledge, when, how ... Maybe they didn't know exactly. I don't know. And we'll never know, just like we don't know so many things. This is how I feel, that we don't know so many things. What would have been ... Like, people will tell me: Oh yeah? But what would have been the reason for them to lose so much money. This is the heard of the cri-- ... Yeah. I don't know. I have no clue. All I know is that it's always a bigger ... it's always something bigger ... there's always some other reason that we as the general public ... we look at history and we ... years later and we see what really went on, I mean, most likely not knowing everything. But we look and then we're saying, oh my God! You know? This is a more com--complex ... and I think this is much more complex than how we just see it, like Al-Qaeda and Bin Laddin and this ... Oh, it's just ... it's just not ... It's just not that simple. It's not. And so any attack or any kind of ... any kind of anger or ... against Americans and American politi-- ... and that's another thing. I mean, yes, it's true that the government is America ... okay ... in a way. We elect them, we support them, and so forth. But I think people who live every day in Israel, it's like if you're desperate and you're out somewhere, you'll ... you'll eat ... Sometimes people have eaten human flesh and other things that you don't think you could ever do in your whole life. You know? Desperateness is a state that's very indescribable that neither you or I can really know.

**Q. Right, yeah, your reaction.**

A. And psycholo-- ... we could say everything. We can say that they can't justify it. We could say this; we could say that, all of the above. But the point being that it is a psychological state. We can today sit there and say, Oh, divorced parents and this child is traumatized for this. That doesn't mean that and the child grows up and is this way or that way and we say ... we can't ... as an adult you can say ... you can't blame the child for acting that way. But everything is an aspect of who you have become and who you are. We are a combination of our experiences and of our ... our realities, our wounds and our pains and our happiness. So you can't expect someone whose whole entire life has been

in prison and in jail, whose been giving no fundamental rights for anything, cannot be ... I mean, what is that person supposed to lose. Again, it doesn't ... It's sad that we here in America, we're spoiled. We eat like there's no tomorrow. We throw things away. We're given more food ... I mean, one appetite that is bigger than for three people and then, you know, there's other people are starving in the rest of the world. You can't ... How can you stand that! You have to try to understand it. But even ... and Americans have never, ever seen a developing country or a Third World country or a poor country. I mean, I have a cousin who grew up in Atlanta, Georgia. They're, like, really southern. The first time they came to visit the Dominican Republic his mouth was ... the whole time he was, like, he was so shocked. He had never seen an ounce of poverty in his life.

**Q. Would you say that...**

A. Injustice is what caused, I think, a lot of...

**Q. Really?**

A. Injustice! Injustice! Profound injustice. And of course, in the nature of all things, power dynamics. Yeah. There's no justice. Okay. But that's why there's always revolutions and ... and uprisings and wars because oppressed ... I mean, they're oppressed. They don't want to be oppressed. Nobody ... I mean, nobody should be oppressed.

**Q. Do you think Arabs or Muslims in the Middle East hate America?**

A. Well, hate is a word ... I don't like this word. I mean, it's not hate. You don't like ... If right now the Americans made peace and gave the Arabs a chance, the Arabs would open their arms. But you can't sit there and be treated so badly and want and expect to be ... I mean, what do you expect from them? You know what I mean? They don't hate them, no, but just ... they're not treated fairly.

**Q. It's the injustice you were talking about.**

A. It's the injustice that ... that ... Of course you react to it, sure. And you might say things like that. It's not hate. This is not ... you dislike ... the ... the policies. You dislike the fact that they're ... they're unjust and not treating them fairly but, no, hate is not ... Because

I'm sure, like I said, tomorrow if they were fair and then they opened their arms, the Arabs would be more than ... they wouldn't ... Yeah. And a culture that's so generous and open. But you will react to what's coming before you. It's a normal human reaction.

**Q. What do you think the United States can do to resolve the problem of terrorism directed against it?**

A. Do to not have terrorist attacks towards the ... Oh. well, the opposite of being unjust ... fair policies.

**Q. Can you talk a little about this injustice that...**

A. Yeah. I mean, we go into ... we go into the ... we go ... I mean, it's very long and interesting. I don't know if I can get into, like, every single thing. But, I mean,

**Q. Well, look at Arabs.**

A. Yeah. We look at our ... Yeah. But I mean, we look at our inter-- ... we in America, we look at our interests in the Middle East and in ... and we don't take into consideration the implications of how it will hurt them. And the policies are not fair, the policies in ... in the Middle East, for example, in Palestine/Israel. I mean, what kind of policy is that? You know? They ... Everything they tell the Palestinians, like, if the Palestinians don't respond to it they feel that they don't want peace or they ... Basically what I mean, whether we're talking about Palestine or whether we're talking about Iran or any Middle Eastern country, the policy is always one sided ... interest is in there. There's nothing there for the people. Look at Iraq. Look at the amount of people that have died and suffered from, you know ... Does the average American people realize that there's ... even there's still some bombing over there right now in Afghanistan. Do we know all these things? We don't. And what happens? They come and bomb on our soil September 11th and look at how the people are. And that's what I don't understand? After you've experienced this bombing on your territory and it's been devastating for you, how can you not understand those people over there who have the bombing when you've just experienced it. How can you not understand the bombing over there and sympathize with

it? Why don't they have that reaction? So I think the government's policy has to be one where ... First of all, the government has to become more aware of how things are over there and how it works. Second of all, we can't be so imperialistic as to imposing our ways on them 'cause they have their own cultures. And also, whatever policies it is that whether it's in Iraq hasn't ... whichever, because there's different policies in all these, you know, a more just and calculated policy for them and so, I mean, just briefly that's how I would say. I could go on and on and on.

**Q. Popular justice, basically. Well, are there any other issues or points that you'd like to comment on that we haven't talked about in this interview?**

A. I don't think so except that I think that it's about time the Americans really put their feet down and do something to solve the Palestinian issue. And when I say that I say a fair one, not just, you know, tell them...

**Q. Well, as we say, under the Crescent.**

A. Yeah! Not just tell them, Oh, we've given them a land but what's in the ... in their back yard? You cannot ... you can't give someone a house and live in their living room. You know what I mean? You ... you can't do that. So it has to be fair. You can't al-- ... You have to educate in the news that it's not the Palestinians saying no. You have to show the people what they're giving them. Okay? There has to be a firm stop of settlement and a ... You bother someone. You keep bringing. You keep building. You bother them. And then the person reacts and then you say, they're violent and they're barbaric people. What do you mean? So I think there has ... they have to ... they have to solve this problem. And they have to send aid back to Iraq. And, I mean, it's just not ... we're not talking ... not only Iraq but all the other neighboring, like, even what's happening in ... It's not only, like I'm saying, Oh, I'm sending some help, no! But I mean, really fundamentally. And also, not have the mentality of wanting to wage another war. Like, there's been so much talk on trying to get Saddam. When is this going to finish? When are we ... I mean, when is the region ... also, I mean, dynamics are always very ...

something you want, you wanted this equilibrium in regions. And it's to the advantage of colonizing countries or First World countries. I mean, the Balkans. Look what happened in the Balkans, the break up of Yugoslavia and all that same with the Middle East. There's always, like, this ... you don't wasn't that region to gather its strength. But so I would ... I've spoken about the Palestine issue. I think it's a very important issue. And ... and I'm not saying that the Palestinians are perfect people. They'll make mistakes. But just like, I was listening to the Charlie Rose ... some scholar speaking and they were saying, all nations make mistakes, like, Israel mad it's mistakes. And that's fine. I'm not one of those people that subscribe to, oh, I'm anti-Israeli, anti Jew. I'm not going to speak to them until there's war ... I don't believe ... I fundamentally believe in dialogue. We are all human beings and we should dialogue. But I'm also incredibly against this, I mean, profound injustice. I cannot ... it just amazes me how ... how we are as human ... And one other thing, finally, to end is that I don't like to speak about the other, like, oh, this one's American and this one's Arab, and this ... this ... the bottom line is we're all human beings. And when we're stripped of all those other things it's just that person and the other. And there's no reason why they can't communicate and talk. It's a little optimistic. You know

**Q. It's an optimistic way to end the interview. It's been really great.**

A. It's a little idealistic and some people might say naive, but...

**Q. But you mentioned before education and awareness and it's from ... that people will open their eyes; people will begin to understand...**

A. I mean, you look at all these third world, developing countries. I think of a country like Haiti. If the population had been given ... what should they do for these people? Educate them. You know what I mean? Because when you educate then there's not some leader that comes along ... they say I'm going to promise you this, and you're going to believe in everything they say. So education is such a key thing. I mean, what if all oppressed people ... Look at the Palestinians? It's such an imperative thing to educate,

even when they weren't allowed to, like, the Israelis went in, and so forth, they found ways, like, to go to schools and so forth because ... and that's what the Jews, for example, the Jews have done. You know? They were denied the ... and they educated themselves. That happens. You empower yourself like that through education. And it's ... it's an important factor. So education, knowledge and awareness of ... of your people, your country, and everyone around you. So I would have to say this is biggest weakness of this American system ... I mean, Americans, the average American doesn't even know ... Sometimes they don't even know, like, who the senator in Pennsylvania is. They don't even know what the capital is of another state in the United States. We have a huge problem of education, I mean, like that. I think of, like, European children, what they get in terms of their education, the knowledge they have of all the world. But then again, we probably under-- ... Like, when you're in Europe you have, like, all these other nations around you ... these countries around you. When you're in America, like, we're so self-centered. Everything is American, like, our music. It's, like, we are so everywhere. You drive through a little remote village in Egypt, or a little remote village anywhere, and you'll hear, like, an American Madonna or someone, Michael Jackson

**Q. And it shocks you just to hear it.**

A. It's just ... You know? And people should stop asking ... Like, I heard a lot of people asking after September ... Why us? Why us? We do so good in the world. Why us? You have to...

**Q. Take responsibility?**

A. Yeah! I mean, you have to start knowing things. And also one thing that really bothers me is that continuous parallel of September 11th and the Americans trying to get rid of terrorist attacks and doing whatever they want, quote, unquote, that some Jewish-American scholars have expressed, or politicians, as opposed to, you know, Sharon doing whatever. It's not the same thing.

**Q. Yes.**

A. New York was not colonized. New York is not under occupation so I refuse this ... this parallel of ... It's ... So you could look at it the other way around, too. You could look at it, the ... Why is it that the Gulf War the Americans went in to "liberate," right? So, okay, why don't they liberate Palestinians then? Why don't you see it that way? I don't know. And again, I have no anti-Israeli prejudice and I do not ... I'm not one of those people. But I have to say one thing. My entire life I had never felt so, I mean, amazed by when I went to the ... we went to a peace ... we had a peaceful demonstration at the Israeli march

**Q. In New York?**

A. In New York. I was ... I think, yeah, it was ... when was it? It was May, June?

**Q. Sometime in April, I believe.**

A. Well, I remember the aggression, the ... the foul language

**Q. From?**

A. From the ... from the Jews in the ... in the ... was for me the first time I'd ever experienced that type of anger against our people. Who are they? They don't exist? And, like, Oh, I forget the name of that Pal--that Jew who has said that Palestinians came from dogs. And they had panels saying we agree with him. I forget his name now. And I myself, I never rally, even going to Palestine/Israel all the time ... and sure there are ... there are soldiers humiliating, and so forth. But that type of closed mindedness that...

**Q. From a fellow American...**

A. From a fellow American, yeah, was unreal to me, unreal. And I'm not saying that all Jewish ... I work with so many Jewish-Americans who are not like that. And of course, we always have to remember that it's a ... it's a human instinct that if you are being criticized ... It's like, if ... if I know you did something wrong, I might still ... personally I might say you did it wrong. But then to another I might be ... Look! Stop bothering her. That's just a reaction that you have. That doesn't mean you agree but ... so I can understand that. And there's another problem with the Jewish ... Like, anything you say that means you're anti-Semitic ... But no! So when we criticize bush or when we criticize

any other person does that mean we're anti-American? No! We just criticize them. This is democracy.

**Q. That's the beautiful thing about the United States.**

A. But why is that if we don't agree with you that means we're anti-Jewish. We're not ... of course we're not. Of course we're not! We're not!

**Q. They do the same things to Jewish people who speak out against Israel.**

A. Exactly! Exactly. Aren't you ashamed? You're a traitor, they're told again. No! Why? So what happened? Why ... why ... It's worse than ... worse than anything I've ... Oh It's amazing! So, I think, also coming to know ... I ... I notice, I mean, like the Jews sometimes have the fundamental ... I mean, I've spoken to many Jews who have the fundamental belief that the world wants them to disappear. And then they're protecting themselves.

**Q. Annihilation. Right?**

A. It's ... and they believe it really. I mean, before I used to think, no, they can't believe that. But a lot of them really believe that. It was interesting to me that Charlie Rose thing ... there was four scholars, one a Jewish-American, one ... she was from Ms. Magazine. She's ... and there was a Jewish from Romania and there was another man, a European scholar, I think. It was interesting, the different perspectives that they had. And also the Euro--the Romanian was saying, about the Holocaust, he was like, it's a boring subject now. And so I think we should always remember and learn from the past. The problem is we don't. You know?

**Q. Thank you very much for your cooperation.**

A. Thank you.