

The Career Journey of an AUC Alumnus

Interview Transcript

Interviewer: Amira Tawfik

interviewee: Dina Aboul Fetouh

Date: 21/02/2012

Place: Interviewee's home in Shoubra, Cairo

Prof.: Kim Fox

Amira: This is Amira Tawfik interviewing Dina an AUC alumnus. Hi Dina.

Dina: Hi Amira.

Amira: Could you please introduce yourself.

Dina: Umm.. I'm Dina Aboul Fetouh. I'm an AUC alumnus. I graduated from philosophy major and I am 24 years old.. Umm, now I live in Cairo but I grew up in Hurghada. My family is originally from Upper Egypt, from a place called Qena, but they moved to Hurghada before I was born. So I was born in Hurghada raised up until I was 18 then I came to Cairo by myself to stay here, and, umm.. Now I work for The Assosiation for Freedom of Thoughts and Expression, it is an NGO, umm, as the name stands, it works for freedom of expression. Umm. That's it.

Amira: Would you give me a brief background about yourself, your study, and why you are working with this organization specifically.

Dina: Umm, ok, I, umm.. First of all, I got accepted at AUC as part of a scholarship called LEAD program, which basically gets to students from each governorate in Egypt. Umm, mainly it is a scholarship for activities so they picked the most active students in all the governorates, and, umm, they paid for my education at AUC and I lived at the AUC dormitory in Zamalek, and, umm, at first I was thinking of majoring in engineering, I took some classes in engineering but then I switched my mind. At this period of time, I had attended some activities, first at AUC, umm, some models and conferences and stuff like that, and then I attended some trainings in some other human rights organizations outside AUC. So that got me to learn some new stuff and I decided to change my major. First, I decided to change to political science, and I had a semester in political science. At that time I took a course of philosophy of, umm, political philosophy; that was my first philosophy class, and then, somehow, I just decided that philosophy is my field

more than political science. I was interested more in discussing ideas and reaching to the roots of principles and concepts and stuff like that, so I decided to major in philosophy. Umm, I stayed in AUC for six years for switching all these majors, and then I graduated in spring 2010.

Amira: So was that the first job you got after you've graduated or you've changed it?

Dina: No, I've changed from some other jobs, umm, my first job I got was a translator at the Sri lankan embassy in Cairo (cough) Actually it was more of, umm, I didn't like the job, it was basically like the first job, I needed money, so I decided to take it, bu

I hate translation, I'm really bad at it. (laugh) So, I worked there for like almost three months, until I got an offer from, umm, a man who is doing his masters in social science in AUC and he was looking for a research assistant. I worked for him for like five months, I think. I was doing some of the field work at AUC about his thesis and his masters' study, and, umm, then the project ended and I joined an NGO called Karama which is a feminist NGO. It is related to the V-Day international organization, and it is the Egyptian branch here in Cairo. Umm, I was interested in that work but my position was an admin assistant, so it wasn't really involved in the projects and everything, it was more of admin procedures that I was following, so I didn't really find it interesting for me. So I kept searching again for another job, and then I got to be working as a part-time in the NGO I am working in now, and as a part-time also in the same time at the Danish Egyptian Dialogue Institute. Umm, that remained for a while, working as a part-time in two institutes and then, lately actually this month, I just decided that it is too much to work in two jobs. You just can't put your mind in two things and I can't follow up, and a lot of things a like just fall off. So starting from next month I will be full time in AFTE [Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression] and I will leave the other office.

Amira: Does this job meet your expectations or does it meet your interest in work and life?

Dina: Uhhh, I never thought that I'd be working as a human rights activist or advocate, and, umm, until lately actually, even after the revolution, until lately, like last month or something; I always thought that it is a temporary job and what I always think about is just like teaching philosophy or, umm, I don't know, maybe something more related to philosophy that will make me keep reading and writing and discussing and stuff, but, umm, at this association, it is just I felt that it really meets my expectations and everything, it is very fulfilling, I feel like it really stands for my principles and everything I want to do, and, because I work as a researcher it is also has this side of reading and discussing ideas and digging deep in principles and what we stand for and stuff like that. So, lately I found it to be fulfilling. I decided to stay for a while, I am still planning to apply for my masters' degree, but I decided to postpone this until I get this experience for working for something I really want to do and see if, maybe, I'd be convinced that it is even better than pursuing another degree. So, I am trying to decide between this and this now.

Amira: Alright, do you find it relevant to the other jobs you had before, or did you, do you have any accumulative knowledge about, after you are working in this job, or it is a different experience?

Dina: Actually, it is quite different, but somehow everything always adds to each other. Like, umm, (cough) working in a feminist organization for example, it really gave me the experience of getting to know most of the NGOs working in Egypt on this field. I am not working on that now, but sometimes we need to know the perspective of the feminist on the same subject we are talking about, so you can, like, every time I have an overview of what element, a feminist

element that I can add to the project or something like that. Umm, so it really adds an experience, umm, also even working in the embassy or the research I did in AUC, it gives you just the experience of how to use the tools that you have, how to run an interview, how to (cough) make a network or reach for someone you want to work with, or it all, all these tools of how to use it and it gets you to, umm, to create actually a network in the civil society in Egypt another to know other people interested in other research field. Umm, so it all adds up to each, not exactly in the field of freedom of expression but more of like the experience of how to work and how to use these things and how to connect, to spread your ideas and stuff like that.

Amira: Alright, so do you think if you found your dream job in teaching philosophy or studying more philosophy; do you think you would be back to the human rights work, or you will just drop it and start focusing on philosophy?

Dina: Umm, for me, I think (short laugh) if I did like a masters or got a job in teaching philosophy, probably that as I view it from here, would be the dream job and I will drop everything else, and this would be it, but sometimes I feel like every time I think about something thing way, and then when I reach it, I just discover something that I've never thought off, and a lot of my friends who started teaching lately, were doing their PhD and stuff like that, they keep telling me about like, how teaching is, it is very fulfilling but it is not for everyone, and then a lot of people just can't continue, and it umm, and most of them keep doing other things beside teaching. So, for sure I don't know, it is an experience I have to take it, to decide, but as I see it from here, it feels like this would be the thing that if I start doing I would not be doing anything else, but I don't know. (laugh)

Amira: So Dina, would you like to add anything?

Dina: Umm, I don't know, it is just, umm, through my experience, I think what I have to add is, umm, of how I've passed through a lot of stages in my life. (Cough) and one important thing as I mentioned in the beginning but I didn't stress it, it was, umm, moving to the city and being, umm, kina independent and living by myself. That was a huge element in giving me a lot of experience, umm, of course growing up in Hurghada which is a small city by the Red Sea, and very touristic city, very calm, and then moving to Cairo, umm, it is an experience itself, you meet a lot of people, you just discover that there is a lot of fields that you have never even heard off, and you meet people working in something that you never thought that it exist. So, it really widens your perspective and your mind and you start thinking about a lot of things. Also, as a girl living alone in Cairo, in Egypt, I think it is a hard experience. You really suffer from a lot of things and how the people see you and the perception of your neighbors about you living alone and stuff like that, it really, it is hard, but in the same time, it umm, it also give a lot of experience of other things, even in work and stuff, I learn, I use some things that I learn from my daily life, and professionally and other things, of how to be umm, how to be clear and how to, umm, stand for what you want, and how to express it, but not being, not in an offending way, but also in a calm and nice way, but stand for what you believe in and how to express it and how to deal with people and how to explain to them, even if you are different from them, how to deal and explain with them that you are different. So, umm, it all adds up to each other and adds to where I am now and my job in this association.

Amira: Well, thank you very much Dina.

Dina: You are welcome.