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Persons present: Dina Khalil - I
Mohamed Elmasry – S

Khalil: First I would like to thank you for taking sometime to take this interview with me. Can you tell me your name?

Elmasry: My name is Mohamed Elmasry

Khalil: Your title?

Elmasry: I'm an assistant professor in Mass Communications and also the graduate director in the department of Mass Communication at The American University in Cairo.

Khalil: Area of residency?

Elmasry: Heliopolis

Khalil: your age?

Elmasry: 36 years old

Khalil: Where were you during the 9/11 attack?

Elmasry: I was actually in Egypt. I arrived in Egypt on the morning of September 4th 2001 and I was scheduled to stay in Egypt for several months.

Khalil: How did you find out about the news?

Elmasry: Actually what happened was, I came home to my Aunt's house where that's where I was staying and everyone was kind of gathered around the TV and saying that you know airplanes had struck the twin towers. And it was obviously a very big story and I stayed and watched the

news with them for 10 minutes or so. But my Arabic at that time was not so great so it was frustrating for me because I did not understand a lot of what was being said. And So I ran to an Internet cafe and hopped on the Internet and just started watching or following the coverage and the reports on CNN and Al-Jazirah and other news outlets.

Khalil: And how did you react when you saw that?

Elmasry: I was just shocked and and sad and and the images, and of course at that time we didn't exactly how many people were gonna die, but we knew it was clear that there were a lot of people who died. And It was very frustrating also as a Muslim American that you know it appeared clearly from the beginnings; it appeared that it was some kind of a Muslim perpetrated attack, which you know was doubled the double the frustration, frustrated because you know innocent people are dying and then also because somebody who considers them selves to be a member of your faith group is committing these crimes in the name of your faith. One of the things I did on that day also on 9/11, I looked up to make sure that all of the Muslim organizations acted appropriately. I I logged onto the websites for "The Islamic society of North America", "The Muslim American Society", I logged on to the web sites of various other organizations in States and abroad, and I was there as a person who is interested in Media and Public relations I was u know and also in humanitarian work, I was very keen to observe what their reactions were going to be, I wanted to see that they were going to be proactive and I was actually very pleasantly, I went going to say surprised I think I sort of expected it, but I maybe was surprised

by the intensity of their communications. They all denounced the attacks as mass murder. They called on Muslims in the area to go and help and and donate blood and help in what ever way they could. And so I was actually pleased with the way that those groups reacted and reacted quickly on the same day in most cases they care, did a press conference on that day and they were sending out releases to the media and things like that. I think that was really really important, you know to to demonstrate our complete you know innocence of these acts. These were acts that were committed by a group of crazy minded extremists that have really nothing to do with any kind of mainstream or academic Islamic thought. But I think what everyone was just following was just that the humanitarian crisis. I mean we saw images of people, I mean am sure you remember the images of people high up in the buildings waving things trying to get help and...

Khalil: ya

Elmasry: People falling out of the building. I mean it was just really to see I mean there is destruction and killing everyday. I mean Everyday we've been in constant war for the last 10 years. But rarely do we see get to see it that up close in personal or its being televised live and so it was really kind of emotional and it's difficult day for everybody, difficult period for everybody.

Khalil: When did you fly back to the States?

Elmasry: I flew back in December of 2001, ya...

Khalil: So it was after a while!

Elmasry: Ya, it was a few months after the... the attacks.

Khalil: And did you experience anything when you came back from the American community? The way they were treating you or treating the Arab Muslims in America.

Elmasry: Well I'll say this, the overwhelming majority of the people that I met and came in contact with and worked with were extremely supportive and understanding. And they knew that what took place on September 11th had nothing to do with Islam but rather it had to do with an extremist political ideology. And so my experience was overwhelmingly positive with the average American citizens. I did notice though of course the increased security efforts and a lot of the religious profiling that was going on in the after math of September 11th. And around 2005 I started to be, I mean this is quite a while obviously after September 11th, but I started to get harassed by some of the American intelligence community, the FBI also the TSA and other security agencies, who were I think just suspicious of anyone who was a Muslim particularly anyone who was Arab and young.

Khalil: And so of course you heard about a lot of different various conspiracies, about what happened, which one surprised you the most?

Elmasry: Which conspiracy theory surprised me the most?

Khalil: Ya, the American community they talked a lot, the government talked a lot, they accused different people... what did you think about that?

Elmasry: I mean I'm only aware of one conspiracy theory. That there are people who claim that it was an inside job and that the American government was behind the attack, is that that ...

Khalil: Ya that's one of them but for example the American government they accused Osama bin Laden of him attacking, that this whole thing was planned by him. And others said that it was Israel, and some other people said no it's ya maybe the Al Qaeda. Ya... so a lot of people were talking...

Elmasry: Ya I mean I guess I group the the Al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, Islamist extremist elements, I group that all to one category. And then the inside job is another category. And I've heard a lot of those arguments and read some of them. There is the well-known movement now the I think it's called 9/11 truth movement. Which is organized actually by academics... ya I haven't I haven't been very convinced by some of their arguments. I'm not an engineer so I really can't comment or have an opinion on the engineering aspects of buildings collapsing and how they collapsed. And whether it was possible or not with a, you know planes hitting their towers. But I just know that logically it would be extremely extremely difficult to arrange that kind of a conspiracy. You would have had to have had literally thousands of people inside the American government at the highest levels at the American government, planning and organizing and orchestrating that attack and none of them would have been able to speak out. If just one person came forward and said what was happening or what was going on that would destroy the... you know the plan. And to date nobody has come forward from the inside circle. I don't say it's impossible I mean I'm not you know... God knows best what happened exactly. But I'm very doubtful of that inside job theory. I think the most likely

scenario is that there were a extreme... a group of extremist who carried the attack out, whether you know Bin Laden was directly behind organizing it or not I don't know. But I think it was it's pretty clear from a lot of the evidence that's come forward there were a group of a you know Muslim extremist who organized the the attack.

Khalil: and You said that you were being harassed, what did this also happen before 9/11 or it started after 9/11?

Elmasry: No, I was I started to get harassed after 9/11. And actually well after... I mean... look right after 9/11, whenever I would travel or what ever you know there is just a very minor ok searching and you know...

Khalil: procedures

Elmasry: Searching procedures, you know you get randomly selected or whatever. They call it random selection obviously it's not. But that was all very minor but in 2005 I started to get more severely harassed. I was visited by the FBI, I was questioned by them. When ever I would travel I was you very you know seriously harassed I would get taken aside, taken down to special rooms and and and investigated and all my things were... all of my belongings and my person were were investigated. They would take my laptop computer and search through my files and and copy my files and these types of things, so it was very invasive...

Khalil: Did the give you a reason why there were doing that?

Elmasry: They sometimes didn't wanna... some of the officers, I mean I got stopped many many times because I was traveling a lot during that time of my life and... some of the officers would not give a reason,

some would use excuses like we are checking for child pornography. Others though were more honest with me, they said look your name is one a a... your name is on the list you know what ever list, so for security, so that why we have to do this with you. They they harassed me pretty good at the airports, wherever I went, whether it was Europe or in the Middle East, in you know Egypt or in the United States, I was harassed pretty good. And I also was flagged in the in the US government system, anytime I had to do anything official, so for instance when I applied for my daughters birth certificate, she's an American citizen, and when she was born in 2009 I applied to get her birth certificate and her passport but it got flagged for security reasons... and they had to we had to do this whole rigmarole and it got delayed and ultimately she got it but you know it was just that security issue. And then when I applied to bring my wife to the United States, my wife is Egyptian and I'm an American citizen. When I applied to get her to the United States they they also you know gave us a really really hard time, at one point they issued us a a notification of intent to deny my wife's application. So they they basically were telling us in the letter that for security reasons we can not allow your wife to come to the united states unless you can demonstrate you know one, two, three, and I don't even remember what those things were. But I had to get a lawyer and go through a whole legal process and and it ended up taking two and a half years for my wife to get her visa and it's a process that it's suppose to take between six and eight month officially.

Khalil: Ya

Elmasry: So those are just some examples, but thankfully I had a really good lawyer and she was able to work with them and submit requests multiple on multiple occasions, file paper work to try to get me removed of at least some of the lists. And apparently its working because the last you know, the last two or three times I've traveled into the United States, I have not had... have not had any problems at all. So am very thankful for that.

Khalil: Ya... Am very surprised to hear that actually... Ya they harass a lot of Muslims especially Pakistani and Afghani people. That was very interesting actually thanks a lot of your time again and ya...

Elmasry: ok no problem, thanks for making it an interesting interview; at least it wasn't something boring (laughing) it was an interesting topic it makes it easier.

Khalil: Ya, its easier for me as well (laughing). Thanks a lot.