

AUC Students in the Eyes of a Professor

Interview Transcript

Interviewer: Sylvana K. ElFakahany

Interviewee: Mark R. Mikhael

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Prof.: Kim Fox

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Sylvana ElFakahany

Mark Mikhael

ElFakahany: May you introduce yourself?

Mikhael: Sure, my name is Mark Mikhael. I am a writer instructor in the department rhetorical and composition. I have in Egypt in five years teaching in the American university of Cairo (AUC). Before that...

ElFakahany: And? (Interpreting)

Mikhael: Before that I was in the United States. I taught in various universities and colleges. My most mediate teaching assignment, well, before AUC was a private university called Parley Ticket University in New Jersey.

ElFakahany: Okay, so, tell me more about your experience in Cairo.

Mikhael: My experience in Cairo, what exactly would you like to know?

ElFakahany: What do you think is the difference between here and there, the students, the lifestyle...?

Mikhael: In terms of lifestyle like the core culture maybe the American culture is very, there is a lot of diversity. But it is so different when you go from town to town there is always a Starbucks; it is always the same sort of thing. If you go from town to town in Egypt it is like you are moving into a different culture and it is so quick. So, in America it is very different from downtown and downtown has the sort of difference going to Shobra. So, there is very sort of close areas.

ElFakahany: Exactly

Mikhael: But one is more of an art scene and the other is Urban and is throwing back to the British occupation and there is that sort of French and European influences, and then you go to

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another town and everybody is eating fool and tamia (oriental Egyptian food). It is very. It takes time getting used to the sort of quick changes.

ElFakahany: Yeah, you can see that on campus!

Mikhael: As well?

ElFakahany: Yeah, don't you think?

Mikhael: To an extent I think that is true. I guess I need an example!

ElFakahany: You can see that we have different types of students. We have...

Mikhael: That is true, that is true. Very true (Interpreting).

If you take a walk through the campus and you see the little booths with the clubs and the kind of the clubs students that usually hanging out there. Then, you pass through this alley way and there is different little ankles. There is the rugby guys have taken over certain areas that there is just nobody else goes there or if you go there you have to know them.

ElFakahany: Exactly.

Mikhael: And then you walk all past that and on your right hand side there is this umbrellas and all the sort of, I don't want to say, Gucci-ish type of kids goes there. But the kids who are more into the social scene are there with their pink t-shirts and their spansks or whatever. And when you go further down, there is like the Quick and after the Quick and the Saladero, there is all the international students they are hanging out there. And even further down if you can get that further down there is the PVA kids.

ElFakahany: If you. (Laughter)

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Mikhael: (Laughter) if you can get that further down. But the PVA kids...I have sort of... I have tried to interact with each level of student. I get to understanding where they come from. I think that makes me a better teacher. The PVA kids are great, they are very art scene. They are very interesting to engage in, they are all constantly suggest songs to listen to, bands that they like and they'll suggest poets that they should read. The Gucci kids not --- and be sociable they be friendly. The rugby guys are just fun. So, every group has some positive about it.

ElFakahany: What do you think the strength of each group? Or what.

Mikhael: I think that that is a very good question. Each group has a certain strength. The rugby kids, I will talk about them for a mint, they are very self confident, self assured, and they have no problem joking around me, even making fun of me, but I accept that because that is natural to them and they are confident that way. The PVA kids, they are very art scene, and sort of sensitive and they have an understanding of that part of life and that's great. The Gucci kids know how to dress. That is very important too they are stylish and they are aware of themselves to an extent and that is a good thing. The club kids are socially active and trying to make Egypt to a better country and I think every student have that sort of sense about them that they want the best for their country think.

ElFakahany: Do you think any of these groups are missing out things in life?

Mikhael: Everybody is missing out on something, but what I think is that they AUC-ians are not seeing, and this is in particular within the recent strike, they don't really grasp that they are situated perfectly to lead the country into a prosperous future. They do not get it.

ElFakahany: They do not?

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Mikhael: I do not think they do. I think they see, I do not know. I would like to be told otherwise, but it is similar. Please do not take this out of context, this is a complement. There, they are given English language, they are given a social network, they are given an education, they are you know. They are made into a product which is you know, like in a better term a leader. You know, what is need to be seen is how far they can take it. It is sort of a counter point to other sort of vanguard movements; if you know what does that means like the people that claim to be at the forefront of any sort of ideaology or whatever. AUC provides the like, provides a group of students that are a counter point to that. We are leading this country; we can lead it to a positive direction. Of course, this is a statement which is a sort of assuming that capitalism is a positive direction and democracy is a positive direction and these are my beliefs. Yeah, capitalism and democracy are good things, because we want people to be enabled, we want them to be empowered and you cannot enable and empower people without providing them the opportunities. So, it is goes along with that kind of idea.

ElFakahany: Talking about that, don't you think the strike was like an example for them doing that?

Mikhael: I am not so sure, I think each person has-is when they are acting are not acting to be bad that's as a teacher you have, one of the first things you realize if you have any source of sense of yourself is there is mischief and disrespect, there is difference between the two you know. If somebody is joking around you, the Rugby guys jokes around me, they are just having fun. But if so you have to go to what the core is, the core person is good. Now, with the strike you know these kids obviously had grievances and they had things they wanted to say and they wanted to say them; these are good things. I think some of the things that were said were not so good, some of the demands were not logical. But the fact that they were made is a good thing.

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The fact that they, students, voiced their opinion even if their opinions needed some retooling is a good thing.

ElFakahany: What do you think about the decision they made by, like making some of their demands come true? That makes them feel more strength, it gives the more strength.

Mikhael: I think it gives them some strength, but I do not think that strength is what the need. I think they need to understand how university works and how democracy works. What it means to be a citizen of a university and how being an AUC-ian can contribute to the greater good of AUC and of the country. You know what I am saying?

ElFakahany: Yeah.

Mikhael: So, alright. You are demand is that you see... let us talk about the controversial demand, like you want to see what my evaluations are, that is great. You have the right to ask that and there are some..., not really everybody, because of course this compromises me. You know. Is this how we work in a democracy, where we, you know? This is of course democracy, when one group can sort of put the other groups at a disadvantage. Now, that is not... well, it is perfectly acceptable in term of demands. I mean there are several universities that have done that; it does not make it right. It means you sort of stepping on my toes and you want to see what I am doing. My evaluations are pretty good, but it is just. It is not. It leaves things open to misinterpretation.

ElFakahany: Do not you think transparency is a good thing?

Mikhael: It is very good, but you need to know what transparency means.

ElFakahany: Okay.

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Mikhael: And you. And this is what I am saying to engage the ideas of leadership, of community services, of all the ideas that we sort of have on the table that people do not know or do not really mean. You do not know what your rights are, and you do not know what your responsibilities are. You cannot ask for Mohamed Zook employment records because it is a private university. No private company will ever release employment records. That is not your right to ask that. You can ask for the financial statements, but you do not have to because it is all online. In fact, you want to know how much I spent, what the salaries are? You have to know, you just go online and you can get that. It is frustrating to see people not understanding the situation that they are in it.

ElFakahany: What do you think is the next step? Or what should we be doing as students and you as faculty?

Mikhael: As faculty we should be communicating. The first thing is always communication. Let us get on the same page. Let us talk about what we want and what is expected of us. I do not how many students work, but if you ever ask your boss for more money a good boss will always say sure want more money what will you give me. When my students ask me for more time, I ask them what are you going to give me for that? I want to give you that more time. You can ask for something, but please give something in return. You want workers to have rights, but how many of you guys get into the literacy program?

Okay you want the Lord to wish it, but you are sort of. I sort of walked off topic did not I.

(Laughter)

ElFakahany: No, no. it is fine and thank you for your time.