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Interviewer: Gill Maxwell

Interviewee: Amy Elftathi

GILL: Let's hope this is recording. It's 19th June 2014. I'm Gill Maxwell interviewing Amy Elftathi on the Stepping Into Diversity research project. Amy, could we start by your giving us your full name with its spelling, please, and telling us when and where you were born.

AMY: OK, it's Amy Elftathi and it's spelled E-L-F-T-A-T-H-I. I was born in Glasgow in 1990.

GILL: Thank you. Can you tell us, please, about the place your parents were born.

AMY: Yes. My mum was also born in Glasgow. She was born and raised. My dad was born in Tangier in Morocco, Northern Morocco.

GILL: OK. And do you have any connections currently with the place your father was born?

AMY: I don't have major connections but I did just visit. My dad's from Tangier, which is north of Morocco, but Marrakesh is further south, and I did visit Marrakesh earlier on this year, and that was the first time I was in Morocco as well, and that's the main connection I really have with it, but I think it'll be a yearly thing for us now. We're going back next year as well. I would like to go to Tangier at some point, but Marrakesh was just a nice breakthrough, because Tangier isn't as touristy as Marrakesh.

GILL: How did you feel about going to the country where your father was born?

AMY: Oh, I was really excited. I'd always wanted to go when I was a younger age, but because I think my parents divorced when I was seven, so it's always been a bit of a difficult one. I used to want to go when I was young but my mum was never so sure about it just because of the strong religion – Islam. My mum was naturally quite worried about me going over with just my dad and not her and all those sort of things. So I've always wanted to go, and since I've turned 21 we've been talking about it – I'm now 24 – we've been talking about it quite a lot, that we wanted to go. It's always been on my mind that I've wanted to. So I was really excited to see it. It was nice to see.

GILL: And what do you feel you got out of the visit?

AMY: A lot. Although it is quite near – it's only three hours on a flight – it's pretty much going to Spain, but the culture is completely different. It is like going halfway across the world. It's really nice to see somewhere so near but feel like you're in such a different



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place. I learned about a completely different culture. I really got from it how important it is to know another language or just slightly be able to have a conversation in another language. My dad can speak five but he never really taught me any of them. So I've come away wanting to learn French and Arabic, as a lot of people in Marrakesh, their language is French, but they mix it. I can hear it when my dad's speaking Arabic, you can hear some French through it.

GILL: Do you feel it's an important part of your heritage to share in something knowing those two languages?

AMY: Yeah. I do wish my dad did teach me when I was younger. My mum said she tried to get him to teach me and he was like, "She doesn't need to know, she doesn't need to know. She's in the UK. She just needs to know her English." I'll definitely push him if I have... if he has grandchildren to teach them. They'll definitely learn. I did a bit of French in school so it should be quite easy to get the hang of, I think.

GILL: OK. Good. Can you describe how you see yourself now in terms of nationality, then, having visited the country of your father's birth?

AMY: It's quite interesting, actually, because when I'm in... I still see myself as British, or Scottish, but when I'm in Morocco, I'm the Scottish girl, because I do have foreign features but my eyes are blue so I think they could see through that. I thought I might get people knowing that I had Moroccan in me but they didn't. So I was Scottish, I was British, I was from England in Morocco. But here, everybody always asks me. So it's quite difficult, actually. I don't really know. I was always just British but it's funny... I don't know, it's quite mixed. I'm definitely British because I've been born and raised here and it's all I know. Well, all I knew until this year, should I say, before I visited. I'd probably say I think I'm still British but I know there's a wee bit in me of something else.

GILL: Can you share with us what you know about your father coming to Scotland, to Glasgow originally?

AMY: He moved to... He came when he was 17 with his grandmother, 16 or 17, so he was quite young when he came. I think, I'm not sure, he didn't come straight to Glasgow. I know he was in Stirling for a few years. Actually, my dad has a daughter from his first wife. I've not met her but I do have contact with her if I want to. They live in Stirling so I think he stayed in Stirling for a while. Then he worked in Gleneagles for about five years and he became head waiter in Gleneagles. I think that's when he made the move to Glasgow. So he didn't actually start off in Glasgow. He just moved to Scotland at first. I think he was supposed to go to England but they ended up in Scotland. I know his best friend is Italian, his best friend in Glasgow. I know he lived in Italy for about a year and that's how he knows Italian, and then he came back. Then he's been permanently in Glasgow. That's the base... I don't know a huge amount.

GILL: From what you said, he came with his grandmother.

AMY: Yes.

AMY: Do you know why? Was it just the two of them?

AMY: My dad's mum died just after my dad was born. My gran died just after I was born. He didn't really get along with his father very well. I think his grandmother brought



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him up, and I think it might have been her decision. But I'm maybe assuming that just a better life for him. My dad didn't go to school. My dad ran about the streets with no shoes in Morocco. My dad had a very basic basic lifestyle. He actually shared a story with me and my boyfriend a couple of weeks ago when we went out for dinner that he finds the... because it's just automatic for our society to just give gifts on... Well, Father's Day was just on Sunday so I gave him a gift, but he doesn't understand. He knows it's a lovely thing and he appreciates it but he doesn't feel the need to get gifts. When I always ask him what he wants, he's always like, "I don't need anything." So it ends up always being socks or something basic. What was I saying about that before? I think basically his lifestyle when he was younger wasn't that great. I think that's why... I'm assuming that's why she came over.

GILL: Does he share much of his memories of his upbringing in Morocco with you?

AMY: Not really. I don't actually know why. I don't know if it's because I've maybe not asked him enough or if he's just not... I just know that... This was another reason why I'd never been to Morocco until this year. His family that are still in Morocco are just quite strange, and he's never really got along with them. We've got... I've got about eight cousins from the same mother and father in Belgium, in Antwerp. There's a lot of Moroccans that live in Antwerp and in Brussels. We get along with them and we speak to them regularly and I went to Belgium. Before I went to Morocco I went to Belgium to visit them when I was 13. So he's not... Maybe it's just something he doesn't really like talking about. It doesn't seem like it was that great a time for him, I don't think.

GILL: Does he share with you any of the culture of Morocco? Like the cuisine, for example?

AMY: Yeah, I've always loved couscous, but not like the couscous that you get in the supermarkets here - the real couscous. And a big big big pot with chicken or lamb or big bits of veg, and tagines. I suppose the cuisine is quite basic. It is just tagine - couscous, meat, aubergines. There you go, that's it. But, yeah, it was quite... That was mainly it. Not much else.

GILL: OK, that's great. You said that your parents divorced when you were seven. Do you have any memories from when you were seven or younger of aspects in the household that might have been Moroccan, as opposed to Scottish? The styling of the house, maybe, or music?

AMY: No. Actually, not at all. None at all. My mum's quite [pauses] a hard lady. She was very particular and I should have... Because my father is Muslim, my mum should have converted to Islam and I should have been... When I was born, I should have been basically brought up as a Muslim. But my mum was very strong in her opinions and her views. She's got very strong opinions, very strong views, and she didn't want that. End of. No matter what her husband was saying. She's still her own person. My mum's quite like that. So, I was brought up Catholic and my dad went along with that and went to my Communion and things like this. So, no, there wasn't very much at all. We were just quite a normal, Scottish family, I think.

GILL: Do you know if your mother ever visited Morocco?

AMY: [pauses] I don't actually think she has, no. No, I don't think she has. I know my



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dad did go back and forward... She has talked about how he's gone back and forward when they were together, and if she has it's maybe only been once. But I don't think she has. She would have spoken to me about it before I left. I think that's why she was apprehensive about me going when I was younger as well because she didn't know what it was like.

GILL: So, from what you've said, it sounds like your current insights into Moroccan culture and ways of life will have been gleaned more from your visit rather than passed down, as it were, and from growing up.

AMY: Yeah.

GILL: From that, are you aware of particular cultural similarities or differences?

AMY: Definitely differences. Just the religious aspect, obviously. But Marrakesh, because it's such a big city is quite Westernised. You'll see a lot of the religion and you'll hear the call of prayer and things like that, but you'll still see Moroccan girls walking about in little shorts and vest tops and that. I was a bit worried about going over as I'd been reading reviews online about women that got abuse from walking through the main souks in maybe summery dresses and things like that, because obviously it's hot all the time. But it's not like that at all. Obviously there are the differences that you do see, but then, at the same time, Glasgow is so diverse that you still do see a lot of Muslims walking about. So actually, no, not majorly. I think if I went to Tangier I'd definitely... Actually, I went to about a three-hour drive away, the waterfalls of d'ouzoud. It was in a small small town and I saw a major difference there. All the men were wearing the long... they're almost like cloaks and they've got hoods and it was like 30 degrees and they were sitting in the sun with these thick thick thick cloaks on. I was like, "How do you do it?" And I was wearing leggings and a vest top. This day we climbed up and down stairs to see this waterfall and I was getting a lot of glares and a lot of looks by some of the families but that was because that was a small town. But Marrakesh isn't as bad.

GILL: Have either of your parents ever made any references that you recall about cultural differences between Scotland and Morocco?

AMY: [pauses] Obviously the present-giving thing that I was just talking about with my dad. Small things like that. And the fact that I had a private education whereas my father didn't even go to school. And my school was fees. My mum and dad paid fees the whole way through, so those sort of things that I'm aware of. I'm very aware that I'm very very lucky [pauses] compared to my dad, just with his whole family life and how he grew up and where he grew up and things like that.

GILL: Does he ever share with you any of his experiences of adapting to coming to Scotland?

AMY: He never has shared them but he does say things that are still quite funny. That he's still not... that he'll never get used to probably. Not in a bad way. Things that he finds pretty hilarious. He hates sitting in the sun. He doesn't feel the need to sit in the sun. Last night we went out for dinner and we sat outside because it was so nice, and he was just finding it hilarious. There was these guys walked past us with their tops off and things like that, and those things he doesn't quite understand. But not anything in... Just things I pick up from his reactions, not anything he's actually told me.



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GILL: Now, he speaks five languages. You've mentioned French, Arabic, Italian, I'm assuming English...

AMY: English and Spanish.

GILL: And Spanish. Wow. When he left Morocco he'll have had French and Arabic, and learned Italian. Did he learn English while here?

AMY: I think he learned English here, yeah. He must have had... He must have had some sort of basis because he went straight into work as soon as he got here. So he must have had some sort of basic English, and then it's just gotten better. I think he knows Spanish from being in Morocco as well because they're so near it and he's the north of Morocco, so it's like a 45-minute ferry to Spain. They get a lot of... they used to get a lot of Moroccans going to Spain to get work and now they're actually finding... This is my dad's friend who still lives in Marrakesh, they're finding a lot of Spanish going to Morocco to work because of their financial crisis that they're in right now, so I think my dad's picked Spanish up as well. I don't think he's as fluent in Spanish but he can have a conversation.

GILL: Is he fluent in English?

AMY: Yes, completely.

GILL: And does he have a Glaswegian accent?

AMY: No, he doesn't. He doesn't. He's still got his accent, but he says "aye" and he'll use Glaswegian words, and Scottish words, but just in his normal... He doesn't even think about it. Other people find him quite hard to understand sometimes, but I think that's just due to him mumbling. I don't think it's actually due to his accent. But, yeah, no, he's still got an accent.

GILL: Now, he's lived here a long time now. Do you have any sense of how he sees his own nationality?

AMY: He sees himself as British. I had this conversation with him when we went to Morocco. We were actually talking about me getting dual nationality but I don't when we'll be doing that. He took his identity card. It wasn't actually a passport; it was just a laminated identity card. He took that with him. It's actually out of date. He needs to go and get it redone but they did still ask to see it when they were going through, because they saw his date of birth and his British passport, Tangier, but he does just class himself as British, a British citizen.

GILL: OK. And does he ever share with you his views coming as a teenager to Scotland, whether he had any expectations of what it might be like?

AMY: No, actually he's not. I think he will... I know that he'll just have come here knowing that he'll have had a better life, and I think that was... that was really...

GILL: And the weather might be different.

AMY: And the weather might be different, yeah. He doesn't need to sit in the scorching



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sun any more.

GILL: You've mentioned that he started work quite quickly, once he arrived here. Can you tell us about his experience of getting work? Do you know anything about that?

AMY: I don't, no. I know he did just start at the bottom, washing dishes, and built himself up to waiter and then head waiter, but I don't know how he went about it.

GILL: And this was in Gleneagles resort?

AMY: Yes, yes.

GILL: Prestigious resort. So he worked in the hospitality industry?

AMY: Yes. He's always worked in...

GILL: And if he was customer-facing, the language... to be multi-lingual would be a big asset I would think.

AMY: He's just a very friendly person as well. He's always smiling.

GILL: OK. Can we turn lastly to the place of worship in your current life, if at all. You've mentioned before a bit about your faith. Can you expand on that?

AMY: I don't practise but I am a Catholic. I do say I am still a Catholic. I don't practise it, but I still have beliefs. My dad is Muslim, as I said before as well. I went to Catholic school as well, so I was in church, but it's really since I've left school that I've just taken my own paths and it's not really for me. But my dad... When my dad divorced my mum he went through a bit of a tough time and he really really turned to Islam, but he found himself getting sucked in by it, and it made him... He just says it made him a little bit crazy. It just wasn't good, so his friend helped him out and now he doesn't even class himself as a Muslim. He's an atheist, he's not religious at all. But he was always brought up that way.

GILL: Thank you. So we've covered a number of aspects about your heritage, diversity. Just to wrap up, I wonder if you've any comments on any aspect at all that strikes you about diversity in Glasgow in the future.

AMY: [pauses] I feel like there's still a bit of a wall up with different cultures living in Glasgow. I didn't notice this before, but I lived in New York City for seven months and you walk past all different cultures and diversities and types of people every day, and it's completely normal and everyone's very accepting of each other. But I feel that you're getting that in Glasgow now and I think it's an amazing thing. I feel like in the future people need to let it go a little bit more. I think we'll have the hopes of... just being OK and being diverse. I think Glasgow should be a diverse place, and will be a diverse place, but I feel like there are some walls that need to come down just in society, and some people that need to let it go.

GILL: And how do you personally feel, I wonder, then, about being part of the very rich diversity that there is in Glasgow now?



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AMY: I do really like it because I don't think about... People always find it really interesting and they always find my last name very interesting, because my last name is very rare. But I don't look at it that way, but when someone does say, "Oh, wow, that is an interesting thing," and my friend was saying to me last week, "It is actually really interesting that you've got a parent from Glasgow and you've got a parent from another country." So, I do, I like it and I enjoy it.

GILL: Amy, thank you very much indeed.

AMY: Thank you.

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