

Video interview in Boston, Massachusetts
By Alice Rothchild

Yamila Hussein Shannan transcript

AR: What I would like you to do is tell me your name, the date of your birth, and where you were born.

YS: Yamila Shannan. I was born in Colombia, South America in 1968.

AR: And where is your family from?

YS: A small village called Kobar. It's near Birzeit.

AR: What were your family stories about what it was like before 1948?

YS: So, my mother remembers the... the stories that she talks about revolve mainly around the end of the Ottoman Empire and finally Palestinians having a chance to dream and imagine having their own, their own rule and her stories are very much influenced by the stories of my father who was very active against the British Mandate. He was one of the few men in his village who actually carried arms and spent most of his time in Jerusalem and Dayr Yasin. I think her stories in the village were very limited, but they come through his. So he used to go to the village and share all the stories, so most of the stories that we have come through him. And it was mostly about resistance, about the British. For him it was occupation, it was colonialism, it was.... And he fought against it. And he actually was in Dayr Yasin when the Kastel fell. He was there.

AR: Did he talk about it at all?

YS: He had injuries on his body that I remember seeing as a young girl. I don't really understand much. There was definitely stuff in his back. He fell from some place. He had an injury in his face. He was there when Faisal Hussein was killed.

AR: What year was that?

YS: That was April, 1948. And he was one of the soldiers that carried Faisal Hussein and went back to Jerusalem for the funeral, which is what contributed to the Kastel falling in the hands of the Zionist groups and eventually the massacre in Dayr Yasin.

AR: Do you want to explain who Hussein is or was?

YS: Actually, I'm saying Faisal Hussein. Faisal Hussein is his son. It's actually Abdel-Qader Al Hussein. He was the leader of the local Palestinian resistance movement. There were several attempts at the resistance movement. He led the peasants. He was a Hussein urban Jerusalemite but the way he understood and explained the Mandate and

the importance of resistance, attracted a lot of the peasantry. So it was men like my father who were fighting. And they perceived themselves and they called themselves as soldiers of the resistance. And he was killed in Kastel in April of 1948. And it was during those two days when the Palestinians are so into their own mourning and the funeral and they're in a little bit of a shock having lost their leader, that then the Zionist gangs go into Dayr Yasin and commit the massacre.

AR: So your father started as a peasant, is that right?

YS: He lives in a village. He grew up in a village and he was probably one of those peasant kids that doesn't want to be a peasant, so he kept going to Jerusalem. He spent most of his life in Jerusalem as an adult. He studies probably until 2nd or 3rd grade, he did a lot of work. So stories revolve around him working in the construction of the Qalandia Airport. Some of the stories I remember revolve around him buying a camera, wanting to have a car. He was one of those young men who wanted to explore, I think, things. And at the same time.... These are some of the stories I remember.

AR: What about your mother? What stories do you remember about her?

YS: My mother tells us a lot of stories about growing up in the village, the difficulties of being a young woman, not entirely having a voice. At the same time being a very strong woman. So a lot of her stories are about the times when she stood up for her rights. Like for example, they had to go to the wells to get water. And it was her and her younger sister. And them being tired and exhausted but still being expected to do more work and then putting their foot down and saying, "We need to rest," or, "We need this or that." She never went to school. None of her siblings did actually. There are three brothers and three sisters. At some point one of her brothers ended up in Jerusalem in some orphanage, and he was educated, he learned to read and write, and became a carpenter. And a lot of her stories in the village are around, for me at least, I grew up with the emphasis of our generation having many more opportunities than she did and encouraging us to take advantage of the opportunities, as women particularly.

AR: Can you describe the village?

YS: The village I think still looks like more or less the same. Our village is a dead end. So you don't go through our village to go anywhere else. It is surrounded by now Israeli settlements, but it's never been a route for the settlers to go through. And that has helped maintain a certain culture of the village. Of course we are convinced it's the most beautiful village in Palestine.

Our village has produced a lot of important political leaders over the years. So like currently people might have heard of M-, but historically when the Communist Party was very active in the '70s, the Israelis used to call our village Little Moscow. Now Hamas is very active in my village. In between, a lot of Fatah leaders were active. It was, I'd say like most other villages, you know, agriculture, land, olive trees, figs, a lot of peace. Everybody knows everybody, or at least did. Probably the past ten years things have changed a little bit.

AR: So what happened in '48? Were your parents married by '48?

YS: I actually don't, no, they were engaged. It's a little bit of a love story that they had. He waited for her for eight years and he kept asking for her hand. Her family was not impressed because he wasn't the hard working peasant. He was always in Jerusalem, wearing these weird clothes, you know. So he waited for eight years until they finally agreed, put these impossible conditions which he met.

AR: Like what?

YS: Like, for example, the dowry you say, they asked for way more than everybody else at that point. I don't remember the numbers but it was like something crazy, like ten times more. And he said, "OK." So then he went to Kuwait, worked for two years, came back with the money. And he sold everything he owned.

So it is a love story and I guess it gets captured with his brother telling my mom, "Of course your neck hurts because for eight years you were looking up waiting for my brother," because she's much younger, relatively shorter. So that's kind of a story about the difficulties and...again that was part of the voice where she couldn't really say yes or no. It was a little bit indirect. But luckily one of her brothers understood and supported her in the endeavor and kind of protected the space until after eight years the rest of the family members...

AR: So how old was she when she got married?

YS: Twenty-four. Really, really old for her generation. And I think that's one of the reasons why her family had to accept.

AR: So '48 comes and what happens?

YS: I think he, my father, did not know how to deal with losing the country. He was in the front lines and I think he struggled with that. So she had a brother in Brazil and they were supposed to go join him, who had left before '48. So he decided to leave. I think he couldn't live in the country having lost the majority of the land and now expected to live under Jordanian rule.

AR: Where did he get the funding for the guns and the...

YS: I always assumed that it was part of the Abdel-Qader Al Husseini resistance movement, which I don't know where that came from. But I...There are stories floating around. Other men in the village told us stories when we came back to the village, when we went to the village, about him being one of those men that would attack the British convoys and steal their guns. And part of the story is about how he was very, he had his principle, "We don't take their food, we just want their guns. These soldiers need to eat, we just want..." But I don't really know, I was too young when he died so I don't really know.

AR: So then he decides to take your mother to Brazil?

YS: That was the idea.

AR: What did the family say?

YS: Well at that point when they're married; he gets to make the decisions. So, he couldn't get a visa to Brazil. They considered him as having physical disability because he was injured from the war, and you could see it in his eye. So he just walked into the Colombian embassy. Apparently the plan was, he goes to Columbia and from there he makes his way to Brazil where her brother is, because that sort of immigration always relies on other family members. They're going to support you. And I don't know the details but he got to Columbia and after four years he sent her a ticket to join him in Colombia. And he had made apparently well, good business. He had... So she joined him there.

AR: Did they speak Spanish?

YS: They learned. There are a lot of stories about them learning Spanish. So she's there. She wants to become independent. She's always been into being independent. And she calls him, after probably two months, from the market and she wants to make sure that the red meat that she's buying is not pork. But she's never seen pork. But she doesn't recognize this red meat. So she calls him. And of course she is talking to him in Arabic and saying, "How do I know if it's pork?" Now in Arabic, pork would be feminine or masculine. So he keeps insisting and saying, "It's not pork, it can't be pork." And then he tells her it's actually a female pork. So it's that kind of joke that she says he was making fun of her because she was trying to learn Spanish applying Arabic language grammars and structures. She always talks about how she learned Spanish really fast compared to other people.

Part of it is because she took the risk. A lot of other women relied on their husbands. But she was very clear when she arrived that she wanted do that. By the time I grew up she had her own business. She worked with him in his business, but she also had her own business.

AR: So they were married in Colombia?

YS: Oh, of course they got married before they left Palestine. Yes. They would never have been allowed to leave.

AR: So he went to Colombia and then came back for her?

YS: No. They got married. He left. Then he sent her a ticket. He never went back. Then, he sent her a ticket. She talks about that flight, not knowing a single word outside of Arabic.

AR: What did she say?

YS: She talks about... By the time he left, she was pregnant with their first child. So she's traveling now with a three-year-old girl. And she tells stories about how she was doing sign language. The girl needed water. The girl needed to [signs washing hands]. At some point she arrived at a place. She had a connection in some hotel and the owner could tell that she's Arab. And he called up some other Arab that he knows. And it is all the stories about these immigrants, them connecting with each other. And that person who doesn't know her but just spoke the language, met her wherever she was and helped her out, what she needed. He did until she met my father.

AR: So was she living at home with her parents?

YS: She was actually living with his family. So they got married and they had one of those old houses where each of the brothers had one room and then they all shared a common space. And because he wasn't there, his mother lived with her in her room because she was without a husband, without a man. So she lived those few years there without him and she tells stories about a lot of people in the village saying, "Oh, he abandoned you. He's actually not coming back." She always talks about, she never lost faith. And then she joined him and they lived in Colombia for many years.

AR: Where in Colombia?

YS: They lived most of their times in Bogota, the capital. That's where all of us were born.

AR: So are there other Palestinians living in Bogota?

YS: At least Arab. Because when she talks about it, she always talks about Arabs. When I grew up, what I remember from Colombia, I couldn't tell who was Palestinian. I think they belonged to that generation that believed in the Arab nationalism, yeah, pan-Arabism. Religion was not important and those distinctions didn't matter. And then as I grew up I think I started recognizing the Lebanese from the Syrian.

AR: Everybody has a different accent.

YS: Yes, from the Palestinian. But that didn't seem to matter much. So in Colombia it was definitely, she has pictures with the Egyptian ambassador and the Syrian I-don't-know-what. I think they were together as Arabs more than anything else. And then for the last few years they moved to another part of Colombia which is what I remember, where I grew up. It's Juahila. It's close to Venezuela and there's a lot of trade happening there. They lived there maybe six or seven years.

AR: So you were born...

YS: We were all born in Bogota.

AR: You remember growing up in this other city. What do you remember?

YS: Not a city, lot of the roads were not really paved. Definitely a strong Arab community. They had their Arab club, what we started calling to, I think it was Sundays. We would go to the club to learn the language, the music, the culture, the map. They had a huge map of the Arab world. I didn't understand much, but I remember them telling us that we have piece of this land, that a part of the land was taken. And they talked about it with, I was little and I kept thinking that they lost something that they really liked. But, so that I remember, it was a very active Arab community, very secular, very culturally oriented.

AR: And your family was Muslim?

YS: Yes.

AR: Did it ever have a religious time?

YS: No, until now. Again, so that's one of the things. We didn't know that there was some Arab Christians in that community. We didn't necessarily know. Like some stories that we didn't understand and then I realize, "Oh, the guy was actually a Druze, a Lebanese Druze," and that's what was going on. Or like they even had a couple of Jewish friends and it's like, "Oh, Hasan was an Iraqi Jew." But they never talked to us about it. As far as we were concerned, this is the Arab community. Religion was very, very marginal. My mom did Ramadan. I remember that. I remember my mom not eating. He never did, but she did. But I don't think I never understood that. Some of us went to church and it was okay with them. I guess his philosophy was, you know, if we believe in something than it actually makes us, it helps us make sense of things. He wasn't... But at the same time when some of my siblings went and said, "Come talk to the school. They're forcing us to go to church," he was like, "OK". So he went and talked to the school and told them to not force them to go to church.

AR: How many siblings do you have?

YS: Ten.

AR: And what number are you?

YS: Eight.

AR: What was it like to grow up in a family that big? I know it's normal size for a Palestinian family but...

YS: For our generation. I don't know how the situation is. When I was little it wasn't fun. I had a lot of mommies and daddies. Everybody wanted to teach me, everybody wanted to show me. Everybody had a better idea of how I should do things. So that was difficult. Then I grow up and I realize what a privilege that was. They all took care of

me. I was the first one who went to college because everyone put everything they had to send me to college. And afterwards, three of my other sisters went to college. My older sisters had gotten themselves through community college. But by the time I finished high school, there was like seven people older than me that invested. And in many ways I feel that I was very protected socially in many ways, my sisters in certain ways, my brothers in other ways. And I want to say probably since high school, I always emphasize the privilege of being one of the youngest.

AR: And is your mother still alive?

YS: She is. She's 79 now.

AR: And where does she live now?

YS: In her village in Kobar.

AR: How did that happen?

YS: So that's where I feel like my mother's story becomes very powerful. She...The story is they were in Colombia temporary until things calmed down or, and I think they believed that, you know, '48 was a mistake, it was a crime against a whole nation and somebody was going to do something eventually. I think '67 for them was a big blow to that dream. They were in Colombia when it happened.

AR: Do you remember what they said or how you knew about it?

YS: My older sisters have told, I wasn't born yet, but my older sisters have talked more about... I don't know. They remember my parents glued in front of the radio and the TV. There is a story that floats around about Nasser, president of Egypt giving a speech and the Arab community in Bogota actively working to make sure that the national TV broadcast that speech. Then there was '73 and then the dream starts... In '73 was, they decided that they needed to go back home.

AR: Why?

YS: My mom said it became obvious that things were not going to get better.

AR: What kind of work was your father doing?

YS: He was a merchant. He used to sell clothes and fabric. The place where I grew up, in Bogota, I think that he had a restaurant at some point. She talks about the restaurant. I don't know when or for how long. In [?] he had a business, trading business. It was that sort of business. And then they had the little shop where they sold perfume and accessories, kind of a separate business.

AR: So in '73...

YS: They decided to go back. They started planning to go back. And then in '77 he died in Colombia.

AR: How?

YS: He was killed. So she took us. It's local politics. It's not local politics actually, not in the traditional sense. He was in Colombia with a brother of his and his brother got in trouble with mafias that would deliver goods tax free. And at some point they attacked the brother, my uncle, in his house. My father heard the first bullets and ran to protect his brother, and they killed him. So my mom took us and left immediately.

AR: Did she leave in a hurry?

YS: Yeah, within six hours.

AR: Six hours? How many, did she have all ten kids?

YS: It was traumatic. It was difficult. I didn't understand what was going on. And the hardest part for me was that we were supposed to say, at some point I remember a journalist in the house and somebody told me, "If they ask you, say that the one who died was your uncle, not your father." 'Cause, I think she knew that if they knew that they didn't kill the person they wanted to kill, they were going to come back and they could have kidnapped one of the children to force him or you know. So, I think she was thinking about that. They put us in a bus and we left to B- which is part of that same part of Colombia. We stayed in B- probably two weeks until they got passports ready. I don't know what else they needed to do. And from there we left. We separated from her in Frankfurt. She went to Jordan with his corpse because she buried him in Palestine. And we entered Palestine through the airport.

AR: Which airport?

YS: El Lod.

AR: Ben Gurion?

YS: Yes. She went through Jordan. It took a couple of weeks until she got the permit to be able to cross into Palestine with his corpse. It took a lot of political interference, both from Jordan and the Palestinian elite, some of whom had cooperative relationships with the Israeli occupation. So there was the mayor of Hebron, J-. He interfered and helped get the permit. So she did, she entered the country and she buried him in his village. In the piece of land where he always thought he was going to build a house.

AR: And so this whole bunch of children arrive...

YS: And she doesn't have money. She doesn't have a husband.

AR: Do you remember the trip from the airport to the village?

YS: She didn't want us to go to the village without her, so she sent us to a relative's house in Jericho. And when she crossed the borders from Jordan to Jericho, we all went together with her to the village, with my father's coffin. And it seemed to me like it was already a funeral. I don't know who these people were but there were a lot of people.

AR: Your memories are...

YS: My memory's really very confused. They had started sending us to the club to learn Arabic, but not all of us had the same, and in general I think our command of Arabic was still not entirely. The good part again for me, I had all these older siblings who took care of me, so there was that. It was a bit confusing. It was not clear. But then she gets to the village and eventually she has to set in and she has to figure out her relationship with his brothers. In these cases, the idea is, "These are our kids," and her response being, "Uh,uh. They're my kids." So that was her first battle. Soon...

AR: Did she move back into the house?

YS: No. She actually rented a house. My mom has always defied almost every single expectation of a woman in the village. And that was a big, a big issue that she didn't buy into the idea that these are the men of the family and she should accept their protection and their... So she just rented a house and started working in factories and whatever she could do to sustain us. But she didn't want that to happen. And her position was, I mean, growing up she always told me, "People have two parents. You lost only one. You still have the other. Nobody else has that authority over you."

AR: Was she speaking to you in Spanish or in Arabic?

YS: That's a very interesting question because in Colombia we had to speak Arabic in the house, and the little ones, I was still allowed to still use Spanish if I needed to. In Palestine she shifted it. We had to speak Spanish in the house. And that's how we still speak it after 30 years. So I remember going through a period of time, for me it was hard. I was learning Arabic, and here I'm sent to school and I'm learning English. And in my school, they're teaching German. And you know, keeping Spanish was not very meaningful. I didn't know anybody other than my family who spoke it. Her two arguments was, "You cannot claim to be Colombian if you can't speak the language. It's not OK." I don't know what language she used but it was not OK. And I guess there was, however way she framed it, my decision was like, "No, I am Colombian." Because she always told us we could be both. She never expected us to choose.

And I guess I compare with my cousins who were also in Colombia with us, and when they went to Palestine they were all somehow deciding to choose. But she never made us feel that we needed to choose. She always made us feel that that was who we were. And the other, at some other point when we were growing up, she started saying, "You know people pay tons of money to learn a language. I'm not going to let you lose

the one you have.” So inside the house we had to speak Spanish and it shifted. They did it the other way. And my sisters would sit us down, the little ones, on Sundays, and teach us Spanish. And you know, grammar, reading, writing. Then she had this whole system to encourage reading. So if you were reading your book nobody can interrupt you and ask you to do your chores, which is what I did. I’m not good with chores. Now if you’re reading Spanish actually can get some actual pocket money. If your book is in Spanish you get extra. So she was...

And that’s one of the stories. It’s like, “I never had the chance to go to school; I’m not going to let you miss out on that opportunity.” The biggest challenge she faced in the village with my uncles, but also the larger society, was the schooling of the girls. So here she comes back to her village. According to the Israeli military law, she doesn’t have the right to live there because she wasn’t there in ‘67 and she wasn’t part of the census. And here she comes back with ten kids. She can’t send us to public schools. She doesn’t have money to send us to private schools. But we’re not technically refugees so she can’t send us to UN schools. So she sent us to an orphanage in Jerusalem, the girls. And at this age I imagine how hard it is for a mother to make that decision.

AR: You’re the second person who’s had this experience that I’ve interviewed.

YS: Yes. And the boys, the boys got to spend a few more years with her in the village because there was a Catholic school in Birzeit who offered a scholarship for the boys. You know that mentality that the boys’ education is priority. They said, “We can’t take them all, we can take the boys.” And they took my youngest sister for a couple of years.

AR: So how old were you when you went to the orphanage?

YS: I was nine.

AR: What was the name of the orphanage?

YS: Dar al-Tifl al-Arabi, which for me I always feel like how the story comes together. The orphanage was established as a result of the Dayr Yasin massacre in 1948. And the woman who started it is Hind al-Hussieni. I’m not sure how she is related to Abdul Kader but I think she’s his sister. She had a teacher/mentor from Dayr Yasin, so when she heard about the massacre she went to Dayr Yasin to check out her teacher, and she came back with 32 children who had survived the massacre. And being a Hussieni, she had a place to put them. And then in her diary she talks about running around with these 32 little kids who survived the massacre because now there is the war and things are only getting worse in Jerusalem.

At some point some convent protected her with the girls, with the little children. From then on, she tells it in her biography, she started off a school and it’s called Dar al-Tifl al-Arabi, the House of the Arab Child. And it became a school for girls, from two to three months old, new born, eventually until college. I went to that college too. And there are hundreds and thousands of women for whom that was their only chance for a school education.

AR: So how often did you see your mother?

YS: The school regulations were the parents could come visit every other week. My mother was given permission to visit us every week. I think it was a way for our school to recognize the traumatic change that was involved. Eventually my brothers also went to Abu Dis, a similar orphanage for boys. So they would come visit us on Thursday and she would come visit us on Sunday. We would go home probably every two months.

AR: Do you remember any of that from home?

YS: All that I remember.

AR: Tell me a story about going home.

YS: The summer vacation was for me very interesting because all year I am dreaming of the summer vacation and then I go home to the village for the summer vacation and after six weeks I am ready to go back to the school. I miss my friends. I miss everything about it. I miss Jerusalem. I miss everything. The school, for me continues to be an incredible institution that survived against all odds. It's, they usually had financial problems. There was almost 300 of us there. They had this huge responsibility. We all have, just like any other, you know, experience, memories good and bad, some better than others. But for me, I feel like what remains with me is, I was offered a private education, because other than those 300 girls, the school was one of the strongest schools academically in Jerusalem.

We competed with the private schools where the elite attended. So what Hind al-Husseini did through this institution is offer a large number of us the same education that the daughters of the elite of Jerusalem could afford. So for me that is the ultimate form. And the other thing is she was obviously very nationally conscious. And when I tried to analyze and think, our teachers, the teachers in that the school, were not only academically the best, they were also the kind of teachers when I think about my understanding of dignity, of justice. As a young, where did I get the belief that I could do anything I want?

Well, she used to hire the teachers that were rejected by the Israeli military. And those tended to be the teachers that had a very political awareness of the role of education, and that wanted to actually create strong spirits. So at that level, our school had you know, that culture and richness. We all had a lot of facilities for sports. We played music. We were taught arts. We had a lot of opportunities. We had annual trips to Acre, Haifa, Jaffa. We had a lot. We competed, I played basketball. We competed with other schools. It was very rich. It was extremely rich, academically strong, but holistically very rich. It was... When I think about it I think, this is what for me women like Hind al-Husseini represent: the capacity to create an institution that actually goes deep into how you improve the lot of those in society, girls, probably orphans or for any other reason neglected, this is the group that she targeted.

AR: Tell me what it was like to be living in Jerusalem at that point.

YS: It was beautiful. Now I'm going to cry. It's what I know. For me Jerusalem is home. I can't go now. My friend who lives in New York who has never been in Jerusalem has the right to go live there. I lived there for 14 years. I can't enter. Sorry. I'm sorry. Can we take that out? Can we stop the camera? I'm sorry. [tearful]
I lived in Ramallah for five years. I went to the village during the vacation, but I grew up in Jerusalem. I did my school, my college. I feel I know Jerusalem, Jerusalem knows me.

AR: Because a lot of people who are going to see this don't know Jerusalem, can you tell me...something that is for you...

YS: So I guess for me, one of my earliest connections with the city is growing up in Colombia, or that part of Colombia very, very Catholic, and I was very spiritual, so I used to go to church. And I knew the story of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary. So when we first went to Palestine, that's what I was very interested in. I wanted to do that, to see that. So then I, when we first went to the orphanage, they wanted to show us one of the places where Hind al-Husseini was able to hide with the 30-some girls. So they took us to a place. And it happens to be at the intersection in the Old City with the Via Delarosa and it's hospital that was run by nuns.

So for me my early memory of Jerusalem is both. It's the Via Delarosa intersects with this other road. It's my orphanage where I am now getting the schooling that my mother thought I needed to get, and it's the Via Delarosa. So I remember I stood there and I asked my educator, we called them educators in the orphanage, I was more interested in the Via Delarosa than there. And she said, "Are you Christian?" And I said, "No, but I really want to do this." So she promised to take me on a full day at a time when it wasn't crowded.

And we did. They took us. They took us and we actually did the whole walk. We walked and we went all the way up to Mount Olives. And our school was very secular and very respectful, and they were very interested in our learning and our education, but also our educators. So for me those two converged. For me that was the beginning and then you know, it has this... For me Jerusalem has this amazing, unique for me, feature of history and present, of Jerusalem is everybody's city but it's nobody's city. I know until now, and when I'm going down and I see the old city, whether it's B-al-A-, what in English they call Damascus Gate or B-, I don't know what they call it in English, Herod's maybe. In English they have different names.

To me like looking, coming in and looking at the Old City, I feel pride. This is Jerusalem. It's simple and it's proud. The last time I went I felt, this is not my Jerusalem. What has been done to it is not organic. It's not natural. It's not normal. It's not, it's not it. The Old City continues. It still maintains a lot of its...the surrounding of it, a lot of the neighborhoods with what I suppose they call development. It's not it. Which is not to say, that you know, we want to keep the city as it was. I'm not saying, I'm not opposed, but that what is been done to the city is not organic. It doesn't grow out of it, it's something done to it. It's a...

As a little girl in Jerusalem it was very safe, in the '80s. People, it was safe. I don't know what else to say. We would go on Saturdays to the Old City. We would visit all the places. But as far as we were concerned, we just were looking for spaces to play. We wanted playgrounds and green grass and it was quiet, it was peaceful, it was safe.

Then as a teenager and you know, a young adult we would go all the way up, cross Jaffa Road which then within five steps puts you from Arab Jerusalem to another Jerusalem. We would go there, why? Because they had a mall that had things sometimes relatively cheaper than ours. And it was fun. Sometimes we used to go just to eat ice cream. And we used to fight and discuss Palestine/ Israel, tell them, "Jerusalem is mine." They would say, "No it's mine." And then, "OK, give me ice cream." We talked. I mean we fought but...

AR: When did you start developing a real sense of Palestinian consciousness, from the pan-Arab consciousness?

YS: I wouldn't be able to remember the year but whenever Camp David happened. I do remember the demonstrations. I remember being young and not understanding why everybody was so... I think the pan-Arabism lasted for Arabs in exile much longer than it was for the Palestinians who stayed in the country. 'Cause I think the minute we entered into Palestine it was no longer about pan-Arabism. It was about... We were Palestinians. And the experience makes it so. There was no need for many discussions. Our cousins went to Jordan. We stayed in Palestine. They had a totally different experience than ours. We knew.

Whichever way you want to look at it. I mean, on the one hand they had a lot of more freedom and etc. On the other hand, because of the political and national movement, we developed a sort of consciousness, and we were expected to read and educate ourselves and learn, not only about our history but how our history fits in the larger history. So I remember growing up, my cousins coming to visit and me thinking, how come they don't know. Like, our schools are controlled by the military, but we had all these other ways through which we learned and so in a way it was always there. There was nothing other than that. There was definitely larger international dimension to it, so we discussed Algeria, Vietnam, you know, other sorts of experiences of people that fought and won their liberation.

There was also a lot of emphasis on solidarity with other people that were in similar positions. But my earliest experience of a direct nationalist consciousness was Camp David when Sadat was about to come to Jerusalem. I'm mixing the years probably, there was at some point a lot of weeks where people were in the street demonstrating and a lot of people were killed. My sisters probably know which years those were. I always connect them with Camp David. And our school got very worried and they sent us home. They didn't want to be... with 300 young girls. So they figured out ways and they helped us all get home.

There were a lot of strikes but... and it's not the kind of nationalist that I see now. It was different. It was different. Ours was very educated, informed. We had to read. We had to study, we had... and probably part of it was because our schools did not teach us that. In schools we were taught about the Jordanian society and the kingdom and our history text books, so then there is the world and then there is the French revolution and there is like Europe, the Dark Ages, then Enlightenment. And as far as we're concerned, there is the ancient Arab-Islamic history and that's it. So then I remember like seventh or eighth grade, asking our teachers, "So what happened?" And our teachers saying, "I'm sorry, I can't tell you. You'll have to study it on your own."

So we did. We would then go out and look for books and study it on our own. And that, I think, added an element to it because it wasn't, it wasn't imposed on us through text books. Jerusalem, I think also for me, my memories, is tourists. It was that double feeling on the one hand being very happy that all these people want to come to my city and at the same time being, especially as I grew older, becoming aware of how little they respect me, or how little they see me. I actually don't count. In their eyes, they don't believe me, that the city is mine. Not only because I'm a girl, or because I'm little, but because of the way I experienced it in our part. And probably there is an element of tourism, of that in tourism, you know, elsewhere, but there is an element of it that's about, I think, some sort of, for example, maybe that will help. Tourists, they come and they say, "Can you tell me where I can get Bus #74?" But we don't know numbers. We know the bus that goes to Bethlehem. So then we say, "Where are you going?" because... now the tourist at that moment it doesn't occur to her that we don't know numbers, that we have another system. Her reply is something along the lines of how little we know our own city.

And I do remember thinking [shakes head] and then I grow older and I'm like, "Ohhhh, she's looking at Jerusalem through her own frame and whatever doesn't fit into her frame becomes invisible." The idea that our buses don't function by numbers or to us, you know. All she could see was a deficit. She could not see a different system, a different way of living. So tourists for me are a big part. And because I was also learning English and German, we actually were encouraged to talk to tourists, to practice our English, which I did a lot. Until I started understanding what they were selling. Because at first I had no idea. I think that these are some of the parts I remember about Jerusalem.

AR: So then you finished college in Jerusalem and then what happened?

YS: Yes. Well, when I was in college the First Intifada broke out. And 1987 the Palestinian popular uprising started, December '87. And in February '88 a military order closed all educational institutions until further notice. The closure lasted for two years for schools, four years for universities. I was in a small college in Jerusalem so ours was not closed because the Israeli military system has a special treatment for Jerusalem. It's kind of sometimes they treat, I mean to us it's obviously occupation, but there is a lot of legalistic measures to pretend that it's civilian rule. In which case our college was never ordered closed. At some point our administration decided to close down the college for awhile.

AR: Can you say something about the First Intifada and what you saw and what you experienced, were you part of it?

YS: Well, you couldn't not be part of it.

AR: How were you part of it?

YS: It was a very, I mean, regardless of why, the First Intifada took a lot of people by surprise. Probably, except the Palestinian youth. We knew it was happening. We knew it

was coming, it was a matter of time, and in 1982 right before the Israeli invasion on Lebanon, there was a little Intifada that had broke out inside the Occupied Territories. I believe the objective conditions were not there, but I think, after the PLO was forced out of Lebanon, the Palestinians under occupation, under direct occupation in '67 land realized that they had to do something.

We are on our own. We have to do it. And in 1987, December, an event, not totally unusual, of a number of Palestinian workers being killed. It was not the first time but at that point people responded in many ways in different parts of the country, in Gaza but then resonated all over the West Bank. And the Israeli military responded by killing and shooting young people randomly. Numbers of people every day. And then...

AR: So were there tanks...

YS: Curfew. I think curfew was the biggest, for me was one of the biggest visual manifestations. So you're sitting and then you hear the loudspeakers, the soldiers are in the jeeps. I keep thinking that everybody knows what curfew is, and they say, "You are all under curfew by military order. If you are found in the street we can shoot you. Go home, go home, go home." They even say it in Arabic. Somehow they memorize the word in Arabic. And then you go home and you never know how long it's going to last. Sometimes it's two days, sometimes it's seven, sometimes it's nine. In cases where the curfew lasts long, then we go for each others, we used to go for each other's help, rescue. So, they come and say, "Oh, that village has been under curfew for six days, they must be hungry, do you have any food?" So everybody brings food, we make bread. Whatever we have we can produce.

And then the young men and women take the food and try to sneak into the village to, you know, give food to people. And the checkpoint system, some of them were permanent and some of them we used to call them pilots because they used to, you never knew when they appeared and when they re-appeared and disappeared. And the checkpoints were, other than disrupting the daily life, was also another than a form of intimidation...

AR: So describe...

YS: So the checkpoints basically, huge blocks of cement that block the road and soldiers there. Sometimes, if it's a permanent checkpoint, with a tower. If not, just under like sacks of sand or something. And then every car has to stop by there and they, you roll down the windows. The options range, depends on gender and age of people in the car. Depends if it's a public taxi or a private. Depends if the plates are Jerusalem plates or not. And depends on the mood of the soldier most definitely. It simply could be, "Hey where are you going, okay, go." Or it could be, "Everybody get down, get out of the car." Some search of the car. Sit there, wait two or three hours. It could be, "You go to jail." It could be, "Why did you yell at me?" And what, so that was like the regular. Then the checkpoints became the way that they closed down areas from each other. So, and then the checkpoint is closed. That's the language we used. It's just closed. So we go and they say, "Go back. Nobody's going to go through here today." So it depends. Sometimes you go back, you leave your car then you start going through the mountains because the

soldiers don't know the mountains the way we do then. That was back in the day, you know, in the late '80s.

And if, you know, you are in ninth grade and you actually don't want to go to school, you go home and you are happy and you go back home and you say, "The soldiers didn't let me go to school." So it depends on what's going on. Then there was, of course the biggest part probably for me, one of the most important elements of the First Intifada was the closure of the schools. I became very active in what we called popular education. I was in college and what happens is the order is so vague and it's a one liner military order that says all schools in this district are closed until further notice. And I think the first weeks or so, because we were used to having the schools closed. Not all the country, not all the West Bank or Gaza, but the school, the other schools. So we didn't think it was going to go that long.

By the time we realized it, we started organizing in what we called popular education committees, so every village, every neighborhood, every young people were called on to take the initiative. In most of the places women played an important role although men were very active also in many locations. And the idea was, the priority was given to first graders and twelfth graders. Twelfth grade they have to sit for a national exam that would determine whether or not they can go to university. And we didn't want to be stuck with generations of illiterate young kids. We didn't know how long that was going to last. And then in between of course we didn't want second and third graders to forget what they have learned. You know, to maintain the habit. And then it became fun. Then we realized actually we can teach Palestinian history.

AR: So was this in people's homes?

YS: It started in people's homes until the popular committees were banned by military order and if you are a member of a popular committee you could go to jail up to ten years or pay fine or both. And if you are, you know functioning as a popular committee in a house, the house could be demolished. That's when we moved to churches and mosques. We thought they would not dare to demolish those. And that's when in the springtime we moved the teaching to the mountains under the trees. There was nothing there to demolish.

AR: So people would just leave their houses in the morning and go...

YS: Yes, the kids, it was very important to us, I'm talking about my village. It was very important for us that the kids don't get out of the habit of getting up every morning and spending a few hours learning something. So they would get up, my sister always talks about this little kid, I was sent to teach the older kids, so I didn't work with the little ones. But my sister talks about this kid, the joke in the village was that he had never taken so much care of himself. He would dress up and put his hair. He was happy going to school. The school was out there. They would go work on the land. It was very connected to their daily lives. Nobody told him to sit down and shut up. It was about talking and learning and reading poetry and singing and dancing and learning. It was that. It was math and science and everything, but it was the structure was not there, and there was a lot of it there.

AR: So you made up your own structure?

YS: Yes. Yes, and we moved as needed. And there was always, when we were teaching, again, I was teaching the twelfth graders so my job was not as much fun, but people took turns being our guard because we couldn't be caught teaching. Teaching was criminalized, that's the whole thing. That's what happened. So there was always people taking turns, watching out for in case the soldiers, because they started doing raids. They started raiding whenever they thought there was any teaching happening they would raid. And that lasted like I said, the schools, for two years.

The universities had a different challenge. In universities the closure lasted for four years. But it was part of what happened in the Intifada was actually a full, when they call it uprising in Arabic it actually makes total sense because it also implies popular. So you didn't need to be politicized, you didn't need to be a member of a political party to find something to do for your community. Everybody had something to do. You could work in economic projects. You could work in adult literacy projects. You could work in... You could work on female discussions so one of the things we would do is go hold meetings with young women, young mothers who never had the chance to explore some of these questions when they were younger. And now that they have kids and their kids are actually going to that popular school, the mothers also. So in some places were created for women to get together and talk about...

AR: What was your mother doing?

YS: My mother was one of the women that... Well, when she wasn't running from prison to prison looking for her sons and her daughter, which was her case...

AR: You?

YS: No, one of my sisters.

AR: So your mother's running around looking for her children in prison...

YS: Yes, so during the Intifada she had two of her children, well, my brothers were in and out of jail during the Intifada. At some point they were sentenced, but there was always the detention which sometimes lasted for a few days, sometimes for longer, sometimes for months.

AR: Was this, picked up randomly, throwing rocks, actively resisting....

YS: All of them, all of the above. It depends. And one of them, I mean, I don't know how things compare that when I was younger in the '70s, I don't know what that was like. But people saw the soldiers take my brother but we don't know where they took him. So then you go to the military headquarters and they say, "No he's not here." And then you say, "But everybody saw that you took him," and they say, "No, we don't have..." So there was that.

And that we find out later was used as a tactic of intimidation for the prisoner where the argument is, “Nobody knows where you are. We can kill you and by the time they find out you’re dead, you will be long gone. So we have you and you have nothing.” So somehow, these young kids trusted that their families were going to find them. And one of the tactics that a lot of the mothers did was just sit in the headquarters and said, “I’m not moving, shoot me. I don’t go. I need to know where my kid is.” Another tactic was every five minutes one of us walks in and asks for the same person. And then they say, “He’s not here,” and then we send somebody else. They say, “He’s not here,” and we send somebody else. So now they are going crazy, we are putting... So in a lot of cases she would actually have to go around because at some point somebody would say, “He actually was here for the last six days but today they took him to this other detention center.” So she would have to go there.

So she spent a lot of her time doing that. And then once she know where they are she need to find a lawyer and then follow up. So, you know, that was a big part. And then when they are sentenced, she has to coordinate with the Red Cross to go visit them. So that was like a big part of it. She was the one who asked for adult literacy programs during the Intifada. She had always wanted, she never learned to read and write. I mean, she could write her name. So that was part of her mobilizing that. And she allowed us to teach in our house which was very dangerous. It could have been demolished. But her thing was, “Ah, well, you know, just have somebody watch out.” But it was, for me the Intifada was an example of, I guess that’s what I bring my belief in life and my research and everything. People can do it. I know; I’ve seen it. The idea that we all need structure, government, you know, cooperation. No. People can do it. It’s not the same. It’s different but people know how to take care of themselves.

AR: So historically the First Intifada ends. What happens to you?

YS: To me. That’s when the big checkpoint in Jerusalem became permanent.

AR: Qalandia?

YS: Yes. And that’s when it started becoming harder and harder for me to be in Jerusalem. And then I started spending sometimes months in Jerusalem not leaving because I didn’t know, I wasn’t sure that I was going to be able to go back in and eventually...

AR: So what kind of ID did you have?

YS: The West Bank ID. So when my mother came from Colombia to Palestine, they told her that her application for residency, for family reunification was rejected. She had her mother apply for her and they rejected it. Then she had some other family member, they rejected. And then at some point they actually took her and threw her out of the country; put her in a cab and sent her to Jordan. Back then they didn’t have computers to track where we were. The date that they had in front of them showed her coming in. It didn’t show us ‘cause we came through Ben Gurion. So they took her and put her in Jordan. So she came back and hired a lawyer, an Israeli lawyer whose parents were in Germany

during the Second World War. I'm not sure who of her member survived. Felicia Langer, very active defending Palestinian civil rights.

So she took on my mother's case. And Felicia took the case to the Supreme Court and put a halt on that, on the deportation order. She took us all to court with her. I think the judges were not happy, and they asked her, "Did you need to bring?" And she said, "Well out of respect I left the two youngest outside." I think she wanted them to see what ten children means. Not a number, she wanted them to see us. So they put a hold on and they gave her a year. And during that year Felicia organized a powerful campaign both inside the country and abroad with our picture. And basically, you know, a campaign, which apparently worked.

But then it was going to take eleven years until we actually got our IDs. By the time we got our IDs, my youngest brother had already been in jail. So by the time she was done with this, she had already started this whole other phase of her life, but now her children are being actively involved in that. So for my mother, that was since she arrived to Palestine until probably the signing of Oslo. That's not true because my brothers were also put in jail after Oslo. They happen to be people, yeah. So that was a big component of her story, the eleven years. They would give her, they would renew her document for a month and then every month she would go back and renew it but then she would go back and they would say, come back tomorrow. And that would go for 15 days. And then when they would give the renewal, it would be for only another 15 days, because it's for a month. And she did that for eleven years until she actually got the residency. So it was a West Bank ID.

AR: So now Qalandia is a big checkpoint and what do you do?

YS: Now it becomes harder for people like me to be employed in Jerusalem.

AR: What were you doing in Jerusalem?

YS: When I finished college I started getting involved in, first as a volunteer and then as an employee, with organizations that were working on human rights, focusing on children's rights. Democracy. I was working a lot with kids. I was very interested in working with children. So my organization moved to get to the checkpoint. So it was technically Jerusalem, but we didn't have to deal with crossing the checkpoint. And for me that was it from 1993 until 1997. Those four years became much harder. I couldn't live in Jerusalem. I still could probably sneak in to go visit. And then in '97 I left.

AR: You left Jerusalem or the West Bank?

YS: The West Bank. I left Jerusalem technically in 1993. That's when I decided, it's not, I can't do this. It became hard. Like I said, there was the employment but there was also the difficulty of doing that. In 1997 I left on a scholarship to come for graduate school.

AR: At Harvard? Where did you get the idea to do that?

YS: My friend saw an ad in the newspaper. And he said, "Well, you're qualified. That's

you.” Like, they had all the ...what they were looking for.

AR: What were they looking for?

YS: Let me see: BA, your undergrad had to be B+ or A- I think it was, and I was definitely. TOEFL, they wanted GRE, which I didn't know what it was but I thought well, I could do that. Certain number of years of experience. Interest in studying something that was going to benefit the community. So I went through the process and I did the tests. Then when you apply for the Fulbright you don't apply for universities, you apply for the Fulbright and then they do that for you. So they got me here to Harvard.

AR: What did your mother think when you left?

YS: So my mother had two interesting reactions. On the one hand there was the, “I knew it.” She knew that I was moving in that direction. I always had, I mean, I don't think I had more passion than my sisters but I always, they paved the way for me. I didn't have to work as hard and that's an advantage, that's a privilege.

That's, you know. She... And at the same time she was afraid that I wasn't going to come back. She was a little bit worried about that. And I think it took a little bit of active work on my part to settle that fear. She had herself lived in exile so she knows how difficult it is to live in exile so she was a little bit worried about that. But like me she had never heard of Harvard. She tells people it's the Oxford of the Americans.

AR: So what was it like to arrive and living in Boston. What year was that?

YS: 1997.

AR: So what was that like?

YS: A big culture shock in almost every way possible. Luckily my English was good. I barely understood what my classmates were saying. I understand the readings. I could write, understood my professors. I was very thirsty for learning. And I was on a scholarship so I actually didn't have to work, which was, if I only knew that was going to be the only time in my life. I'm glad it was Boston. I'm glad it wasn't New York. This was a big city, but it's not New York so it was a good transition. I was very lucky, and again, it's one of those things. I immediately connected with the Arab community here, but I also connected with the South American community. And as if that was not enough, I also connected with the progressive community on campus. So I feel like I don't have memories of times when I feel like I felt alone.

I do remember going online and checking for Arab students and I found an email arab@mit and I sent an email saying, this is my name, I just came from Palestine, any Arabs out there? I'm going to be at Café Algiers on Saturday at three pm. Seventeen people showed up. Some of them I'm still good friends with them. And for me, I feel like, yes, this is what my people do. This is how we are. And then like I said, I connected with the Spanish speaking...

AR: What are you studying?

YS: I'm writing my dissertation on politics of education. I look at the politics of education. I'm particularly interested in how Palestinians have understood the purpose of education and how they linked that understanding to their national liberation movement. In other words, what was education supposed to do for their national liberation movement, given that they had no control over the education of any of their kids, whether in West Bank, Gaza, the territories of 1948, Lebanon? They had no control. They still believed in the power of education as a political project. And what we are trying to tease out is what is it exactly that they thought schooling was gonna do.

AR: And when was the first time you met a Jew who wasn't an Israeli?

YS: 1997. She's going to love this. 1997, Harvard, masters year. We're taking a course called Education for Social and Political Change. And the professor asked that we introduce ourselves. In most other courses you could go for quite a few weeks and not know each others' names. This professor thought it was important at the beginning, although she had 120 students in her class. So she had us write down our information and a few ideas about who we are on cards. She collected them, they xeroxed them, and they gave everybody a copy of all the cards. And they said, "Meet your community. You need to know who you're learning with."

So this young woman approaches me and says, "Hi, my name is Rhonda." I'm like, "Hi." And she says, "I'm Jewish." And I said, "And..." I didn't understand. So she said, "I've never met a Palestinian." And we are now very good friends. This happened twelve years ago. And that was my initial thing. She invited me for Passover. And she said, "What do you know about Passover?" And I said, "Curfew. When they have Passover, they put us under curfew. That's all I know." And to have the chance to be in a place where Passover means a beautiful thing to somebody was powerful. And I'm not religious. But it was powerful to be able to hear how she relates to it. How she experienced it. How... And that was when I told her, "I've never had the chance to actually learn about Judaism or see, you know, and their soldiers."

That's what they know and I always like telling the story of our little niece and the she comes and tells her mother, "This little boy has a gun." And the mother is probing and asking more questions. And then our niece, she was maybe three years old, says, "No, I know he has a gun because he speaks Hebrew." And that's exactly the reaction. How do you explain to a three year old that the connection they're making is not organic, it's not normal, it's not natural. How do you explain that? So for me there was that version, but as an adult. I actually didn't know. I just, I simply didn't.

AR: And when did you first learn about the Nazi Holocaust?

YS: I was probably. I was very young. My theory is, I was a very angry young woman when I started understanding the occupation, and when I started realizing all the injustices about it. And I think my sisters, my older sisters wanted me to gain perspective. So they gave me a book. I used to know the name of the author, called in Spanish, *Death Had Two Kids*. And it's written about a family who survived. It's a

young man who survives the Holocaust and now he's in Jerusalem. And the story goes back and forth between Europe and early '50s Jerusalem. They also had me read the *Diary of Anne Frank*. They had me read what they considered important pieces of work that would introduce me to it, which only made me angrier for a few years. Because I had no, I didn't have a frame to make sense of that. And all I kept throwing back at them was, "I don't understand the connection. Why do you want me to know this, I don't see. I don't understand." And I didn't. I didn't understand the connection.

Of course eventually I did, and I remember at some point one of my older sisters, it was during the First Intifada, told me, "Anger doesn't help us. You need to get over your anger. You need to transform your anger into something constructive. You can't be angry. And if you continue being angry then they won. You need to be a happy person to be able to fight for your country." And for me that was a transformative moment. And then I started realizing, "Oh they were making me read stuff. They actually, they never talked to me about it. They just gave me books to read." They wanted me to, I think to broaden my horizon and to understand beyond my direct experience.

Probably my most important other experience was when *Schindler's List* came out. I happened to be in Spain and I went to see it. I was very conscious that I'm curious to know how the public discourse tells the story. Cause I had read some reviews about it. And for me, that was the first time I said, OK, I understand something both about the Holocaust but also about how the Israeli narrative is being told to the world through that lens. With my friend with whom we have endless fights and discussions, whichever way you want to call it. Through her I've also added another dimension of learning her experience as an American Jewish woman who is not directly tied to the Holocaust but for whom this has shaped an understanding of herself, her past and her future. So for me I feel that this is a very powerful experience because for me at a younger age, me being expected to learn about the Holocaust was not helping me. It was much more helpful for me to see how it impacted this particular human being. And not in any way that would justify what then was done to me, but as a human experience. It was definitely much more powerful.

AR: And where would you consider home to be?

YS: Jerusalem. I go home. I visit my family. I don't feel I went home. When I can't go to Jerusalem, I don't feel I went home. I've lived in Boston more that I lived in Ramallah. I've lived in Boston more than I lived in the village. I've lived in Jerusalem for my important years. I went to school. Any part of the world you have evidence that you lived for 14 years, that you went to school and college in that city. It's a little bit hard for that to not count. My friend that I'm just mentioning, she just was here two days ago. She has the right to go live in my neighborhood. She doesn't think it's home. She doesn't consider it's hers. Hers is called the right of return. Mine, I don't know, it doesn't have a name, that for me is, and that's what I always tell her, for me Jerusalem is not a political question as an ideological issue. For me Jerusalem is home and nobody can convince me that being denied home is justified. Nothing can convince me with that.

AR: When was the last time you went back to the village to visit your mother?

YS: Last May.

AR: So you went through Allenby Bridge?

YS: Yes. We are not allowed to use the airport.

AR: So what was that experience like?

YS: It was... Probably it sounds a bit repetitive but it's very humiliating. Extremely humiliating. It's very. I am not convinced that all of it is about logistical bad bureaucracies, bad organization. I think a lot of it is about intimidation and humiliation.

AR: So how long did it take?

YS: We left. So I flew in and spent the night at my uncle's house.

AR: In Amman?

YS: Yes. The next morning left to the borders. Probably nine hours.

AR: And you were questioned for how many hours?

YS: I wasn't. My brother was. I met with my brother and our niece and we crossed together. I wasn't questioned this time. I used to be questioned all the time. I mean, I still am at airports.

AR: Did they do a strip search? What did they...

YS: No. In that particular trip no.

AR: They have those.

YS; Yes, oh yes it is. For me one of the ironies is being searched at the airport in Tel Aviv when we still could use it. Like searched like every single way possible. And then a young woman is walking me... well, I don't know if you know that but when you used to go through the airport they would search us and interrogate us. And most of the time they would just delay the search until the flight is about to leave, so they would take us right to the flight. But then there were times when, because I arrived five hours early, they couldn't really delay me that much. So they would let me go but then the person was with me all the time.

So as she's walking me she says, "So tell me, how is life at Harvard?" And I remember thinking, she doesn't realize what she's just done to me. She really thinks that I'm going to sit down and talk to her about Harvard. It was a very powerful moment for me thinking, and she's a very young woman, and for the first time it hit me that I don't know what they understand they're doing. I don't know what they think they're doing. I don't know what she thinks that makes her think that at this point, simply because we

stepped out of the room we can actually chat. So for me there was that. And of course as I grew older and started looking at them, they are very young people.

And I cannot help but think about the stories that we've heard about other experiences of oppression when after the oppression is ended and then the soldiers say, "I didn't know what I was doing or I thought I was doing this, or..." And I feel like, they're missing out on the opportunity to actually doing that reflection. And a majority of them are just very young people. And I can't not help look at them. I mean, now I'm double their age. I'm twice their age. I look at them and I think, well, they can't now humiliate me, they can't make me feel that. They can't intimidate me. It just doesn't work. But for them, what is that doing for their society, for their people? Dialectically speaking, crossing the, I don't know about other times of the year, but this time when I crossed it wasn't, also it wasn't crowded. We were made to wait for, but it wasn't crowded and I think that made it... But if you think about it, it just doesn't make sense the whole, all the steps that you have to do, all the... Even the idea that you can have a ban on who can use the bus and the airport and who not by their name and their nationality. Even if you have a passport that is not Palestinian but they can prove that you are Palestinian. It's weird. It has serious financial implications, it has other, but the idea that you can actually do that and get away with it and we don't call it discrimination. We have figured out other names to call it.

AR: So you have a Colombian passport and Palestinian ID?

YS: A Palestinian travel document.

AR: And a Palestinian travel document. Do you plan to go back?

YS: Yes.

AR: Where?

YS: That's a difficult... For me back is Jerusalem but I can't. So at least going back to the Ramallah area where my mother is. I'm not, maybe I won't live in the village at this point. I've never lived in the village. Maybe Ramallah.

AR: How much more time do you have.

YS: I should be done in March and I have a couple of job commitments that take me through June and then probably during the summer pack and leave.

AR: So is there anything else I should know?

YS: No.