

Video interview at Ann Arbor, Michigan  
By Alice Rothchild

Terry Ahwal transcript

AR: Tell me your story.

TA: My family's ancestry in Palestine goes to the 1500s. We are from Ramallah and we could trace really our grandfathers with their names to the 1500s. My mom lived in Jaffa and she will tell you her story and my dad lived in Ramallah.

The story of the Nakba was a story for my sisters and I until 1967. It was my grandfather's story; it was my mother's story. It was a trauma but you know when you're a child you don't understand it.

AR: What year were you born?

TA: I was born in 1956, the end of it. I was born in Ramallah and grew up in Ramallah until age 15. Until '67 my life was uneventful. I went to Catholic school. Our life basically was surrounded by a Christian neighborhood.

AR: How many kids in the family?

TA: There were seven girls, one boy. The last of my siblings was born in 1969. Basically our life was around Catholic school. You know you go to church, you go to school, you learn three languages.

AR: Which three did you learn?

TA: Arab, English and French. You hear your parents' story.

AR: So what stories did they tell you?

TA: The stories of the missing uncle. You know my grandfather's twin brother was in Jaffa and stayed in Jaffa. And you hear about him and how wonderful he was how great he is.

AR: And he just disappeared when?

TA: We never met him, never seen him. But we know he's my grandpa's brother, great guy. Memories are wonderful. Story of Jaffa, how wonderful Jaffa is. You know it's paradise. Ramallah is nothing. Oh, the good old days. No matter what you do, the good old days of Jaffa. That's what you heard. You heard about the family structure always being together. And then you hear about when they have to flee.

AR: What did you hear about that?

TA: How they left the food at the table. How they were told they have only two hours to leave. How they left thinking they'll come back. But keep in mind, I did not pay attention to that. You know I was...

AR: How did they leave?

TA: According to my mom and again she will tell you more details. Her father came in and says we've got to leave, leave everything, leave the food. Don't take anything with you. We're going to come back. They're going to kill us. They're going to shoot us. Let's go to safety. My grandmother's mom lived in Jifna which is I think about 40 miles, 50 miles away from Jaffa. Going north... I don't know my geography, going towards Lebanon. And so my...they took everything. There was seven kids with the family, with the neighbors, and they all gathered. They start walking and they walked, and after they walked they found a donkey or they found a jackass that would pull the young kids. And so there is the stories and I don't know much of that story but what I know is they got to Ramallah, and once they got to Ramallah there was nothing.

AR: Where were they going?

TA: Jifna and Ramallah.

AR: So the family split?

TA: No, just to Jifna, but they started Ramallah. That's what they were thinking. And again I'm sketchy with this. My mom would know more than I do. What I know about this is they lived once they were in Ramallah and there was no hope of going back, they lived there for six month in one room with a donkey. And they ate lentil. Till today lentil in my family is forbidden. We don't eat lentil because that's all they ate.

The Catholic church helped them, because they were Christian. But what always struck me as odd is my family were viewed as a refugee. And even the Palestinian viewed them as a refugee. So there was not only that they lost their home, they came to Ramallah and they became a refugee within the society, they came from Ramallah. After six month my grandfather had not found a job. What he was is a fisherman. Ramallah and Jifna, there is no sea. This is it. So he lost his livelihood. And he could not find a job. And so my grandmother went to work at the Catholic school. And my mother was forced to stop going to school and she start working.

AR: What did this do to your father?

TA: My father was not from Jifna. This is my mom's story. My dad is from Ramallah and my dad was not as affected as my mom's family is. This is my mom's family's story. My dad is from Ramallah. Until '67 there was no effect per se. He just seen an influx of people coming to Ramallah and living in Ramallah.

AR: Do you have a sense of why your mother never really told you the details of the story?

TA: She did probably. I didn't listen. I was a tomboy. I was too busy... And that's where my life, to me, it was a story, till '67 it became a reality and I seen the horror. So in 1967 it stopped being a story.

AR: So let's place you. '67 you're in Ramallah ... You're how old?

TA: Ten years old. Catholic school. Life is wonderful. There is nothing wrong. And all of a sudden I would call it a transformation from childhood to hell. That's how it was. In May you start hearing the stories of there is going to be war. The programs on the radio that you used to listen to now are becoming all political. Everybody's basically hunkering for war. You know that there is a threat coming in.

AR: What's your father doing for work at this point?

TA: My dad was a carpenter and in fact he had a contract with the United Nation to do finishing carpentry and he was in Jerusalem. In June, I think June 1<sup>st</sup>, we know the threat is real and then there was the bombing that you start hearing.

AR: What was that like?

TA: It was horrible. You can't describe, as a child you cannot comprehend what is going on. But what you see is the fear. We were told by everybody that we need to go to shelters. Our house became a shelter because we had, not an underground, we had kind of a basement. So we have thirty neighbors that are sitting in a small place, listening to a small transistor radio. No electricity whatsoever. There was fear, there was intense listening to radio, and you're listening to both the Voice of America and then you're listening to Arab radio. Arab radio was all propaganda.

AR: What does it say?

TA: We're going to war. It was Gamal Abdel Nasser who was basically standing there and saying, "We will not just sit idle. We will go out there and crush 'em." You know the usual rhetoric. You know Arabic rhetoric is flowery and all that stuff. And so you're listening to that...

AR: What was the Voice of America saying?

TA: The Voice of America were just saying that there is a Middle East crisis. Things are not looking good. There is going to be an eventful war. And all of a sudden, Israel struck Egypt and it was war. For us, probably I was the only person, myself and another child, are the only one that did not suffer a fever that day. They were all, you know, there was a lot of crying. There was a lot of fever. There was, the adult were just absolutely in panic. And what made my family more panic is my father was not in. He was in Jerusalem. My grandfather, who basically was a refugee from Jaffa, came into the US. My grandmother and my aunt were two blocks away in St. Joseph, they're in their shelter. So

nobody knows where the family is. There is no communication. You're listening to the radio. You're listening to bombs being you know bombarded. But you're listening to the Arab world cheering you up saying that we are crushing the enemy and we are doing this to the enemy and we are. And so the sixth day was pure hell.

AR: What did you eat?

TA: Everybody gathered their food. We brought all kinds of canned food and all that stuff. But the grown-up basically knew that we need to ration. So there was some bread, there was no meat, there was vegetables. You know you limit the amount of food. They did bring some chocolate. You know there was some candies but that wasn't much of that. So there was rations of food. And after three or four days the ration became less and less.

AR: Did you have water?

TA: We had water but we did not have running water. So there was water, you go to the bathroom. You don't go up there, so there was some, there was a bucket where you go to the bathroom, and you could imagine 30 people, OK. But I'm ten years old. Nothing bothered me in here except you're sitting there and you look at the fear and then your dad is not there. And that's where the horror is really. So when my dad came in...

AR: How did he get there?

TA: He came in two days later. He was able to basically walk. It's not that far. Jerusalem to Ramallah is not that far. He came in and he start reporting what he had seen. He seen that soldiers were defecting, Jordanian soldiers were defecting. And then he reported that he seen some dead bodies. And you know, so he reported on that. Again from my perspective, there was no comprehension that was there. My dad is home. That was the most important thing. Everything else was not important.

When it really hit how bad it is, is after the sixth day. As you know, this war went six days. You hear soldiers in Arabic, beautiful Arabic, saying that the war is over. You can come out and you could have a white flag. We all went, and since they were speaking in Arabic, the adult were in jubilation. OK the Arab army really beat the Israelis. And the reason they said that is because you're listening to the Arab radios saying that we are the victors, the propaganda. You go out there and it was Israeli armies and soldiers who are Israelis that spoke Arabic fluently came out.

AR: Where were the Israelis from?

TA: Different countries, but they spoke fluent Arabic and immediately the panic, you could see the panic on...

AR: So I'm trying to picture this. You're all in this basement, thirty families...

TA: Yeah thirty families and we're moving down, out with the white flag, thinking everything is fine.

AR: And you come out and there's tanks or there's...

TA: Tanks, in your neighborhood. You know, driving by. And you know, you see the panic on the family and you know it was not an Arab army. First couple of days I had to tell you it wasn't bad. It was just like, oh OK, this is not bad. These are not bad soldiers. These are like us. You know from a child point of view, and even, it doesn't look bad. You know, it looks like everybody else look. Not bad. Soldiers gave you candy. You know, here and there they were great, but only for two days. Then hell became. That's what I would call the introduction to hell. Your life became pure hell.

I learned brutality like I have never in my life would figure out; why would people be so inhuman to each other? They start gathering the men. They start bringing the men and putting them, you know lining them up, and having them stand in line in the streets. Then they start coming from home to home, house to house. And basically doing whatever, you know your house is not your own any more.

AR: They came to your house? Tell me the story.

TA: I'll tell you two stories actually. A, the soldiers came in and they said they want to do, you know everybody have to come in and they have to be at the house at a certain time and they're going to take census. They took the census and if you are not at home, then you would not be considered a member of that household if you are not at that house at that moment.

AR: So that's how you got your papers?

TA: That's how my parents got their papers. Because you are underage you don't get a paper, if you are underage. And if your, if my father stayed in Jerusalem, he would have lost his citizenship or membership at that household because Israelis had decided this is not your house any more because you weren't there. About ten days after the craziness took place, conversion of every single, I don't know thousands of thousands of thousands of Israeli that came in, to Ramallah, from our neighborhood. They would come in, and they were just like tourists. They would come into your house.

AR: Did they knock or break down the door or...

TA: No, they just walk in. Check it out, look at it, as if you don't exist. The invisibility of the Palestinian people. It's just kind of like, we became invisible. We became a nobody. Intruder would come in, they walk in, some were very nice, some were horrible. Some were... But the fact is they would come to your house and not think of you as a human being. It's kind of like, wait a second, this is not your house, you know. Some of my grandmother's neighbors from Jaffa were some of the people that came into Ramallah, and my grandmother recognized them and they were nice to her back and forth. So it is kind of like established, OK these are people, it's not as bad. It's not as bad. And then it

became horrible. You would see people being arrested. You could see your neighbors being dragged on the street. The divide and conquer policy put in place.

AR: What was that?

TA: Christian versus Muslim. I was walking with one of my classmate who went to Catholic school who happened to be a Muslim. Her name was Jirmana. And we're walking down the street and a soldier stopped us and what he said to us, "Are you like this? [gesture of cross] Or are you like this [a different gesture like a veil]." Well I said, "I'm like this [cross]," and she said she's like this [veil]. We didn't know the meaning of this. Jirmana was detained for a couple of hours. I was like, oh. Well you're a child. You say OK, they're not bad to me. You know, but Jirmana's thinking, "Oh wait a second. You know, they're all in conspiracy together."

And small subtle things that start taking place, then the brutality, then the meanness. My cousin, two of my cousins, Khalil and Abraham used to be fourteen years old and it was in the summer. Their dad is a painter and their dad basically in the summer would take them to work with him. One time at four o'clock in the morning soldiers came in and basically took the two boys, age fourteen and thirteen, and the boys were so sleepy, at four o'clock in the morning, they were sleeping, and you know. So they are six o'clock already, let us sleep, and they were dragged out of their house and for three days they were never seen. Just they took them. You don't know what happened. The family was looking around. What it was, Israel was putting what they call *lessons* in the neighborhood. They would take the kids, and they would put the fear, they would detain them for three days, no charges whatsoever, and then come back.

AR: Do you know what happened to them?

TA: Basically they said they were beaten. They were harassed. They were asked the same question over and over and over again and you would see this, again and again and again. And there is curfews.

AR: Describe curfews.

TA: The curfew is, your house is totally sealed. You put blankets, dark blankets if you want to put the lights inside your house. You can't go in, you can't go out. You are literally a prisoner in your own home. And that's when my dad, in 1969, that's when they during a curfew, that's when they came in and broke into our house and beat my dad up in front of us. We were sitting and...

AR: Describe this.

TA: What they do they have the curfew, no lights, you can't go in, you can't go out. You know you're sitting in your home, and one day we were sitting...

AR: And how do you know it's curfew?

TA: Oh they announce it. You have five minutes, they have a loudspeaker, you have five minutes, wherever you go, you know you have to come back. You know, you either go to your house or you'll be shot, basically. That's what they would tell you. You know, they'll announce it. So you would run as fast as possible.

Before I tell you about my dad's story, let me tell you a story of the divide and conquer between Catholic schools and public schools and what they did with the public school kids. There was an announcement of a curfew in Ramulah. So the teachers will you know have to let you go home because, they're disrupting your schooling. So we're walking, and public school uniform is different than a Catholic school uniform. They have stripe green and white and we have blue uniform and all of a sudden you see soldiers and their tanks and their trucks and they're spraying the kids in public school with colored water and then there's soldiers that are going after the children who were running and have water on them and taking them and basically putting them in tanks or buses or whatever vehicles that they have. So people were just in a panic, running around, trying to hide, finding doors, going to places for safety. So... excuse me... I didn't know it was going to be emotional [tearful]... So we're walking and two soldiers came to us and said, "Oh you're OK. You're in Catholic school, you just go home." So we went home, okay, it wasn't bad. I have to stop. I can't believe this. I can't believe it. [tears]

AR: It's very painful stuff.

TA: I didn't think so.

AR: I'm about to burst into tears... Take your time.

TA: So anyway... Kids my age, I mean, ten years old, eleven years old, twelve years old. So two soldiers told us, "Oh you're Catholic, you'll be OK. You'll be fine." So, the Christian community at the beginning thought, OK, they're OK, life is okay for now. And the funny part is the Muslim neighbors, or the people in the Muslim community, they saw this divide and conquer. And most people are not involved in war. They don't care who rules. They don't care, you know... What they want to do is have a living, live life. We have a dime and nickel store called Abu Habib, and he starts selling these small crucifix, you know for a dime or something. So people in the Muslim community start putting the crucifix because they thought this is safer. Well, what we did not know, that was just a ploy, because there was no distinction. No Christian, no Muslim. Nobody was spared.

In 1969, in my family, two things happened. My cousin M-, he's a fourth cousin, but he's from the same clan. M- went to work with his colleague, again a painter. I mean we come from a family, now we are professional, but before we are just middle class, made enough money to eat, enough money to live, and be OK in our community, send our kids to school. So he went to work, had two kids, and M- never came back. And when you don't come back, there is a panic. You know, its occupation, you know, you're in jail. That's what we always think. But M-'s fate was worse than that. M- was burned to death by soldiers. And the only reason we knew that soldiers killed him was a peasant, on his way to the village, he was stopped, he and his colleagues, were stopped by soldiers. They began to harass them. They began to basically, you know, hitting them, and all of a

sudden they doused them with gas and burned them. The peasant watched in horror but in fear of her life was not able to do anything. She sat there and watched. After three days, you know, we went to the authorities because there is an established Israeli authority, [U-?] and there is nothing. We didn't hear anything. She came forward. We found their bodies and they were dead. Until today I do not go to funerals, because of his funeral. It was horrible. I just I cannot describe it.

AR: You were talking about how they beat your father, what that was like.

TA: My father when he died, on his grave... I am not an emotional person. If you go to my father's grave, it says, simple and caring. That's the words on his grave. Israel did not see that humanity of this guy. He was a carpenter. Never, no one in my family, have ever, ever touched a gun. There were no soldiers in my family. There was no resistance. Yet, they came and we were sitting in our house eating breakfast. If you go to the house, it's still there now, it's a carpentry place now. We were sitting, there is one room, then there is a second, and we were eating in the third room, in a, in a, you know, eating breakfast, and all of a sudden we heard commotion, great commotion, screaming. They opened our door and soldiers came in and they were demanding why our door is open. My dad just got up from the table to go check what's going to happen and all of a sudden they start beating him.

And we're all, we're all sitting there. And we're screaming, and my mom's saying, "Leave him be!" My dad's sight was not the best of sight. And she said, "Please, he's a blind man, don't do this to him." And they started beating him with the butt of their guns and dragging him out. As they were dragging him out, we lived across from a convent, a Catholic convent. Sister Pierre looked out of the window and checked and she said, "Why are you doing this to him? What harm did he do to you?" And they shot at her. And so she moved away, and they kept beating him up until the sergeant came in, from where and to today we say, "Bless that guy." And he told them to stop. My dad was not injured as much as everyone and my neighbors. What they were doing that day, they went from one house to another, and every male in that neighborhood, including somebody who was mentally ill, they beat that day. My dad was the least injured.

AR: So what were his injuries?

TA: He had bruises everywhere. His kidney was bruised. His ribs were bruised. His hands were bruised. And everything that you know, and the terror beside that. But again, he did not go to the hospital. Everybody else did. But there was, you know, people with you know... So it was a sad scene, what was, what was the lesson of that day is how my dad and mom dealt with this issue. And till today, if I have to say there is a transformation in me and in my family is what my dad and mom did. After everybody and we found out everything is OK and everything is fine, my mom and dad asked that we pray for these soldiers. They said, "These are young kids, they don't know what they're doing, they are afraid. So why don't you pray for them." And that to me is something that, you know, when they say the Palestinian are terrorist, you know you would think of, this is what the terrorists do.



AR: What was the impact on children in the family?

TA: With me, it gave me, and I tell the story all the time, I wished that day I had a camera to show the people. And it gave me a voice, this beating. It gave me a voice to say, no it would not happen in silence. And the rest of my sisters, they are so fearful, they don't do anything. In fact, no one in my family, they think I'm nuts. Up till today, they don't go back. They don't, to them its just kind of like, OK, that's part of our life, this is part of our trauma, I do not want to live through trauma, I don't care about that trauma. I don't want to deal with that. They are always afraid of what's going to happen to me. You know, "Oh you're going to get killed one day." You know I say, "Well if I get killed just telling the truth I don't care."

AR: Did you have nightmares?

TA: Nightmares, you don't have time to have nightmares, because the nightmare continues. You know there are so many, this is only two stories. You know one day I was, my mom wanted to go and see my grandmother. It was during a curfew. And again I was a tomboy and I never adhered to any rules in life. If they need to be broken I was going to break 'em. And I decided in the midst of the curfew I am going to go look for my mother. And as I was on my way...

AR: Describe...

TA: I am leaving my house running and there is no one. And between me and my mother there was a bus and all of a sudden, there was a truck actually, and then all of a sudden I hear soldiers. I got under that bus and I just kind of like, it was 20 minute of hell. They decided this is the place where they're going to rest. So the soldiers are there, I'm underneath, and again the lessons of you know, pray, don't be fearful. The Palestinian people learn that we need to be defiant and we need not to fear and one of the things that they always tell you, well they're with their guns and they're fearing us. And we say, you don't fear 'em. So I decided, OK, I'm not going to fear these guys. I sat down and I really prayed, I was sitting there and I was kind of like calling, "Please God make them go away." And I was thinking of these soldiers more than anything. I said, you know, they sound like my neighbors. They don't sound like bad people. You know when you're a child, thinking enemy, thinking of a monster, and these are not looking like monsters, but you know they could kill you at any moment.

AR: Could you see their boots?

TA: You see the boots, you see the guns. You see anything and you are just sitting there and I tell you, I think I would have won an Olympic after they left. I ran so fast to my mother. So now I got in trouble because...

AR: What did your mother say to you?

TA: I don't recall. I used to get in so much trouble. I don't recall what she said to me, but again this is trouble. Another time is I, another troublesome time in my life is, there was, I had a fever and the fever resulted because I was attacked with a lot of bees, bees that I disturbed, needless to say. And the fever was so high that my nose was bleeding and bleeding very bad. My parents, and it was during a curfew. I needed to go to a clinic.

AR: How old were you?

TA: Oldest between ten to twelve years old I would say, the age. I don't recall exactly but I just kind of like... And my mom and dad, not only do they have to deal with a sick child, they have to deal with the soldiers. And just my mom, since you know, it's in danger, you don't send the male out to do the bidding. You send the female out to do the bidding. You would think they have more mercy. So you know my mom and then my dad you hear 'em begging. Here your nose is bleeding a lot, you have a fever, all your brothers and sisters are watching the whole thing, and you know it's not you that is needing attention now, it's the soldiers who you beg. So after 15 minutes, you know they took the soldiers, the soldiers took us in their jeep to the clinic. And again, you hear my parents saying, "God bless you," you know showering 'em with all the accolade, please. They were given half an hour, then... You know, you have to go deal with her, you know. So they took us to the clinic which is not, there was no doctor. There were nuns who basically try and they stop the bleeding. It was not medically sound. But they were, you know, they were first aid people. The bleeding stops.

Then the other thing you start seeing is, that become common in your life, that people, you know unless they experience it, you would say, this is nuts, this is crazy. You would see men kneeling for hours, one hour, two hour, three hours. Whether it's sunny, or it's cold, or whatever, with their head to the wall, their hands behind their back, and they're there. And then soldiers will be walking. Some of them will be basically eating seeds, some of them will be talking. But the men will be just there. Once in a while you hear the brave women who will say, "You are mean. You are... you know, why don't you let these guys go? Why don't you just, you know, what did they do to you?" And you'll hear shouting; you'll hear language that is horrible. And that became normal. So between curfew, between men, between the beating, and you say, "Oh my God, what is happening in our life?" And you would think, no it can't be that bad. It can't, you know, it's not that bad. Other people gets it worse. And then you'll start getting up at 4 o'clock in the morning with flashlights in your face. At first it will be once a month, and it became once a week. Your parents are standing on one side because they wake them up first. And then you and your siblings...

AR: You're all sleeping in one room?

TA: Yeah, you know we don't have a big house. You know, we have three bedrooms, you know. So your parents are standing there helpless. They can't save you. You're sitting there, and the children are just kind of like... you know when you wake up from a sleep, you're kind of like, disoriented, and it's kind of like, you're disoriented, and you can't cry. You cannot cry because you're kind of like, there's soldiers there. And it goes on

sometimes once a night, sometimes twice a night. Sometimes they don't come in at all. So your sleep is disrupted.

The other things that become normal or that...

AR: What happens when you know that your father couldn't protect you?

TA: Nothing. You just, you don't rely on your father. You don't rely on your mother. You know it's not you. It's not in your hand. It's not your life. Somebody else rules you. Somebody else tells you what to do. Your parents cannot give you, no you cannot do that, anymore. Because you know they're there. They have no authority. They're sitting there. You know, it's not that they want to. You know you see the fear, you see the fear in their face but you just don't do anything, you just kind of like you know, you're just, it just, it becomes normal. That's the saddest part of the whole thing. It becomes normal. You expect when you go some place that you're going to be stopped. You expect to be harassed. You expect all that stuff to happen to you.

One of the escape that used to happen, you know, our school did that...

AR: So you're going to school during all of this?

TA: We did. The school was never, was disrupted, you know, and actually it started only a month later, the school. But it was not disrupted at all. But new rules start coming to the school. The nuns will give you the rules at the beginning of school. This is what we expect from you. Pre-that, it was you know, "We want you to excel at school. You have to pass all your grades, French, English, Arabic, Drama, Sports." The new rule is: absolutely no politics. Absolutely no, no, you know. It becomes no, no, no, no. Nobody could pick you up. Your parents will pick you up when they could pick you up. Upon a curfew, you have to find the nearest house so find a way for a nearest house to be near, just in case your house is far away. You will be expelled if you say anything Palestinian. What they wanted from you is they want normalcy. What they wanted for you is to come and learn. But even that was not working. Your teacher will not be coming to school today because her brother was detained, or she herself is detained.

AR: Were your teachers Palestinian?

TA: They're all Palestinian, Lebanese and Irish, and French, because it's nuns. But we have local teacher who are not nuns. The other things that you know they tried to do that is normal for us, they take you to field trips. They take you to Jerusalem. And that was normal. Which is you know, Ramallah to Jerusalem is seven minutes, or whatever. It's not that far, seven miles. You will have to have a permission from your parents, which is, that's normal. But the permission has a little more now, you know. Just in case your kids will be detained, who should we call.

And I witnessed as I grew a little older, now I'm thirteen years old. We're going to Jerusalem on Good Friday with the priests and the nuns. And there is boys who are now fifteen, and they look taller. In the middle between Ramallah and Jerusalem there was no checkpoints like there is today, but there were soldiers that could stop you any time. And they stopped us. In a bus, you know. And then they start taking the boys out

and you have to have a paper. Well if you're under fifteen, you don't have a paper. You don't have the identification card. But that's not, you know, if the soldier wanted to prove to that, you know, that this kid who is fifteen have to prove that he has a paper but he doesn't have a paper. So now they're detaining these kids. And so you start looking at the nuns and the priest who basically start to negotiate with the soldiers back and forth. So your trip, the field trip that you're going some place to be normal, has been disrupted again. And once in a while they used to take these kids. And so the priest and the nuns were doing their best to try to be with their kids, and now the priests are being harassed, and the nuns are. So there was no line of respect anywhere. You are a nobody. "I am an eighteen year old soldier and I'm going to rule you." And that's what happened in there. I was most likely, I came into this country because I was most likely to go to jail. Because...

AR: Is this relevant...the family that came from Jaffa, did they end up in a refugee camp?

TA: No, no Christian family did.

TA: I could talk about that in general...

AR: We'll get back to that. So we were talking about was when you left and why you left.

TA: I was most likely to go to jail because I became aware of what is happening and I was not, again, as I said before, I wanted these people dead. If there is a rule that I don't like, I question it. And I began to question. I began to question, what is happening? I began to feel nationalistic about it.

AR: What age is this?

TA: Fifteen. Fourteen, fifteen. I stopped becoming the tomboy, I want to have fun, living. I start thinking there is something wrong with what's happening. And my mom and dad lived through, she was a refugee. They lived through wars before. They know how deadly it is. My uncles live in this county because they did not want to stay there and go through this. And so was my grandfather. So my mom shipped me and my older sister when I was fifteen to this country.

AR: And why were you about to go to jail?

TA: Because I was beginning. I wanted to get involved.

AR: Were you throwing rocks? Were you...

TA: No. We never have no violence, no violence have entered my mind. But I thought, and not necessarily, see everybody thinks that the Israeli went after you because you threw a rock or you resisted. That's not the case. Israeli went after you for collective punishment and collective punishment only.

AR: So if Israelis went after you for collective punishment, why were you particularly going to go to jail?

TA: Because some of the literature was banned. Some of the readings was banned?

AR: Whose literature? Whose readings?

TA: Any. Palestinian. Any leaflet. What used to happen is they would come in and could be underground, I don't know who they were. But people will come in and will put leaflets in your windows, in your house, in your neighborhood. You know, put them around, spread them around, calling for resistance. Soldiers will come immediately after these guys and start collecting and if they have you, if they catch you holding that piece of literature, you are going to be hauled to jail. Well I was going to read these literature.

AR: So you didn't know what political party they came from?

TA: No, oh no. And it was just there was no political. Till today I have no allegiance and no alliance with any political party.

AR: But back then you didn't know who was distributing it.

TA: No, no. but it's just kind of like people will just get up, don't take it. This is not human. You need to resist. You need to stand up for your rights. You need to organize. And I wanted to do that. I wanted to say, okay that is something that is interesting to me. And if my parents caught me few times, with that piece of literature, with that leaflet, and they were not happy with that. And so my mom, whose brothers are here, decided I want to send you, and so she and my dad made the arbitrary decision and they sent us here.

AR: How did you feel about that?

TA: Oh, I hated them. I hated everything. I came in, I think I was pouting for a year in here.

AR: When they told you, you had to go to America did you argue?

TA: Yes. I did not, I was not happy. I mean you're taking away my life. To me it was still as bad as it is, it's my life, my friends, my neighbors. You know I'm 14 years old, 15. I'm very popular in school. Life is, I was considered quote unquote a leader, because I had a lot of friends. And now I was told I need to leave.

AR: You had a Jordanian passport?

TA: No Jordanian. Actually until I had my American passport, the only piece of paper that I had that allowed me to leave the US, it says *laissez passez*. I had my birth certificate but I didn't have any citizenship.

AR: Can you explain *laissez passez*?

TA: *Laissez passez* is a right of passage from one country to another that Israel used to issue. If the American government gives you a visa, if you don't have a passport, which my mom did not have...

AR: Why didn't you have a Jordanian passport?

TA: I was under 15.

AR: So you had to be a certain age to get a passport?

TA: Yep. So I have no passport whatsoever. Nothing, except a piece of paper. I became a citizen of a country when I came to this country. I don't know what the rules was in Jordan for people to get their citizenship. I know they used to grant them... but I know we did not have one.

AR: So your parents tell you, you have to go. And you're mad.

TA: Ugh! Understatement.

AR: Describe the scene.

TA: Well we came here you know, I came in December. My mom did not want to enroll us in school because it will be only four months.

AR: You came in with your mom?

TA: I came in with her and my older sister. She shipped us here and then she left after. She stayed here for 40 days, because the rest of the family is back in Ramallah. And we came in and lived with my Uncle Joel.

AR: In what town?

TA: Levonia. We came in Levonia. Lost, I knew my uncle but I didn't know him well. I mean, he came in here when he was younger. I knew my grandmother, did not know her well. She was away. When she left, I was I think twelve. I did not know the rest of my family.

AR: Did you speak English?

TA: Uh yeah. I spoke English. Well you know, I took English, Arabic and French. So I understood English. They spoke Arabic but still, you know, you're not with your parents. And then we were here for two years before my parents came, came back here. I dropped out of school. I was out of school for three years.

AR: You didn't finish high school?

TA: Oh yeah, I finished high school and then I went to college. But I just dropped out for three years, helped the family with money, working as a dishwasher. I was a dishwasher, then a cook and a waitress. And then in '74 my parents came in.

AR: Why did they come?

TA: Because life was becoming unbearable. Life was getting worse and worse. As occupation continues, the occupation became worse. The horror stories that the family had was intensifying. It was no jobs. My dad was not finding enough jobs in there. Closure, detentions, curfews, you don't know at any given time when you're going to go to jail.

AR: Did any of your siblings go to jail?

TA: No, I was the most likely to go to jail. One of my cousins went to jail. He went and became a dentist, came back. As soon as he came back he went to jail for eight months.

AR: Picked up for?

TA: Nothing. Absolutely. He was never charged with a crime. Eight years, he spent eight months, spent a lot of money for good lawyers, Israeli lawyers. And then there was no charge. They put him back. And I suspect Israel was doing lessons. We want to give these people lessons. This is so if they are going to be involved, we want to show them what would happen.

Let me go back to a story that I didn't tell you about my neighborhood when I was under the occupation. And again that's from between the age of ten to age 15. Aside from beating my dad, killing my cousin, the curfews and all that stuff. Our next door neighbor, his name's Tony Milani. Tony's father was Italian and his mother was Palestinian, and they met because his father was going to be a priest and his mother was going to be a nun and they fell in love and they ended up with four boys. Aah, life.

Tony was ten years old during the curfew. Just before a curfew he went to get some bread. And the bakery was not far, it's less than a block away from us. And on his way to the bakery, Tony dropped a small key, and he was looking for the key, and soldiers came his way. Tony ended up with a crushed skull, broken arm, and I don't know what other injuries that he had. And oh, his teeth, all his teeth, his front teeth were knocked out. He lived. He survived, and he's still alive 'til today. But Tony in the neighborhood was the artistic one. Their dad owned a small candy store. When his brothers and I used to go out there and play, Tony was always in the store taking care of the store. Again they wanted to know why Tony was on the street, out on the street, and what was he doing in there.

That was another... Again this is my story only. And I tell people the story I tell is because we were the lucky Palestinians.

AR: Why do you say that?

TA: Because for every beating that we have, our Muslim Palestinians got ten beatings. For every house invasion we have, our Muslim Palestinian got ten invasion. People in the refugee camps were treated... OK, rats would have been treated better than they were. You were in Jabalaya Camp and you see how small these homes are? Their life literally was hell on earth. I mean our life; there was some aspect of escape in our life. They didn't have an aspect of escape. Everybody in their family somehow whether it's women or men, somebody was touched. Ours, you know, not everyone was touched. My dad was beaten, we weren't. That's why I always say we were the lucky one. I mean we did not get as much brutality as they did.

AR: You had mentioned your grandmother was from Jaffa. Explain to me why she didn't end up in a refugee camp.

TA: I suspect when the Christian population left, became a refugee, the churches were the recipient of all these refugees. They came in and they found them places, or family members of somebody. So there were aids from the churches. There were five kind of refugee I think from the Palestinian Diaspora. One is the people like my parents, who basically had some kind of family or the church that took care of them. But again they lived, they moved from paradise according to them, and it could be small room or small house, but to them it was paradise, to a place that was not their own. Then the other one was, I would say the professional-educated. They became refugee because they lost their homes forever, but they went to the Arab countries, or the US, and went to school, and became educated and lived a good life, but still a refugee. There were the refugees that were in the Palestinian proper and that is in a refugee camp like Gaza and in Palestine, the Deheisha Camp. And that is, they build a community within a community and that was surrounded of blight, a ghetto basically what it was. And these are the people that have it really bad. And under the occupation that life became unbearable, there were the refugees in the Arab order, and that was basically mistreated Palestinians who were ostracized from the rest of the society. And so there was several elements. My family became the refugee that were taken care of by churches and family but nevertheless have never left it home and the community.

You, if my mother, if you interview her, she will tell you even the Palestinians say, well whenever there's a problem, they would say, "Oh you guys, the refugee created that problem. Go back to your home," they would tell them. "We have nothing; life was good 'till you came along." So there was no welcome mat, for any Palestinians. You are not wanted. And you know how it feels that you are not wanted all the time? You are suspect. And try that in a refugee camp. You know we are a class society and a refugee camp is known as the untouchable, per se. We call them *fellaheen*, *fellah* we call them. *fellah* is an untouchable. These are the peasant. These are the people that would do the manual work for you. And going from there...

You still see these refugee camp kids, still today. I go back and forth. I have established a program through the Ramallah Federation called Project Hope, where I take young kids age 17 to 25 and do volunteer work.



AR: US?

TA: US, yeah. And we go to Palestine and we do clean-up, fix-up, paint-up and all that stuff. And one of the things that I do is take them to a refugee camp. So they would know the difference between what their family is and what a refugee camp is. And what really strikes me as the most obnoxious and most horrible and most painful of the whole thing is the young kids that sell gum. You know, if you are there. To the Palestinians, they're annoyance. And at first, yeah you would think of 'em that way, but if you really think, these are seven year old, eight years old, and nine years old and ten years old, are selling, trying to live. And yet they are viewed as a nuisance. That is painful. That is horrible. Could that happen if Palestinians did not go through the Nakba, did not go through...? I don't know. I don't know.

What pained me is they're faceless. Nobody sees 'em. If they see them, they see them as nuisance. That is bothersome to me. That's the fate of the Palestinians. But even here, even if you're telling me, are the Palestinian's, you know, they live beyond the tragedy? Did they escape the tragedy? No.

A story, and my husband was witness that, I write in the paper about what's going on, and I never, I would never espouse violence. And if the Palestinian would ever think that violence is the only way to go, I will abandon any Palestinian that would think that way. I worked in politics for a long time and the guy that I worked with I adore. Great guy. Great humanitarian. One point I wrote about the situation in there, another influential person from the Jewish community, came to him and asked that he should fire me. And it just happened that my husband knows the guy.

AR: When did this happen?

TA: Ten years ago. I heard about the story. One of my colleague told me about this, so I went to my boss and said, "You know I understand that you are getting grief." And he said, "Who told you?" And I said, "Well they told me." I said, "I just want you to know that this is a very important issue to me, and if you have to fire me, you have to fire me, I will always write." And he looked at me and he said, "Did you write it on company time?" I said, "No." He said, "You don't have to worry about that." I said, "So what did you tell them?" He said, "I told them that as long as she doesn't write it on company time, she is free to write about whatever she want to, and she is free to express anything she want to."

Well a couple of months later my husband and I encountered that individual in a political setting and my husband went to him and he said, "You know," I would not mention his name. He said, "Hello. I want to introduce you to my wife, but you know my wife anyway. You tried to fire her."

A: What did he say?

TA: [asks her husband, laughing]

Terry's husband: He turned around and got out of there as fast as he could.

AR: He wouldn't face you?

TA: Yeah. But you're always careful. You always have to defend who you are. You always have to stand up and say, "No that's not the reality." It's a continuous struggle. I don't have it as a chip on my shoulder, but I'm not Terry. I'm Terry the Palestinian. Wow. Why? [looks perplexed] You know I don't go around, I'm Terry the American. You know, there has to be a corrective history, but with that corrective history there is hostility that comes with that. So when I write...

So you always have the obligation, the corrective history, and you're always careful, well if I want to have a career in politics, whatever I say will come and haunt me. And even though what I say is not negative, but I am going to be critical of Israel's action. I will always be because their action is wrong. I would be critical of the Palestinians' action if the Palestinians are the one who's doing the killing. And I always, always, condemn Palestinian violence. Nobody talks about, you know they think it's okay to condemn Palestinians but you can't condemn Israeli violence and as a result, there is consequences to that. So it's never going away. And I always say I am willing to even you know, compromises, Israel, Palestine, everything I'm willing to go with whatever compromise, as long as they stop the killing now. Forgiveness I have forgiven what happened to my family.

AR: How did you do that?

TA: For my piece of mind, you see hate does not affect your enemy. Hate affects you. And I'm not willing to give anyone my soul. No one is going to get that. And as a result you have to come with a term of yes, you will forgive. Yes you don't understand the brutality, but don't let that brutality be your judge.

I came to a conclusion in my life, I would say twelve years ago or 15 years go. Israel is here and is existing and will continue to be. Do I want what happened to my family and to my mom and to me to happen to an Israeli child who was born in Israel through no fault of their own? Just accidental life birth. Their family, whatever their reason is, they came in and you know. Do I want the same fate for them? No. I would not want. I could not live with that fate. There is no way I could live with that. What I want is exactly the same thing for the Palestinian child.

AR: And did you have children?

TA: I don't have children. I have nieces and nephews. And what I want for my nieces and nephew is what I want for the Israel child as well. So my forgiveness comes in not because I am pure. My forgiveness is for my sake. Israeli soldier is just like the American soldier who is occupying Iraq, is like he didn't do it because he's a mean and inhumane individual. He was brought up into that patriotism. You're doing it for your country. You're doing it for this, you know, you're doing it because, to survive. And this is how I could justify these people are not evil. I don't believe human beings are evil. I believe actions are evil.

AR: At this point in your life where would you call home?

TA: Here. But, I always want the opportunity to go back. I do not want to be treated as a second class citizen anywhere in the world. And when I travel now, it takes me eight hours to go to Ramallah. Not to Jaffa, not to Israel. To go to Ramallah. In fact when I took the people at Project Hope it took us eight hours.

AR: You mean at the checkpoint?

TA: Not at the checkpoint, coming to from Jordan, it took us eight hours. We knew it.

AR: And so what happened?

TA: Just they come in, they know you're Palestinian. They take your passport. They just let you sit and what I do with the kids now that I learn how to do, because again if you use anger, they beat you. If you use humility, they get ashamed. And so what I tell the kids that I take with me in counsel and I say this is how we would do it. We are going to be stopped. We are going to be there for eight hours. Use the time constructively. If you see people who speak your language, tell them just as a matter of fact, the reason we're sitting here is because we're Palestinian background, and Israel discriminates. Tell them that this is our story. Our citizenship doesn't mean anything.

In the meantime, play games, listen to your music, have conversation, don't waste your time. Waste their time. And when the soldiers come in and the people, the border patrol or whoever, they come in and they apologize, they would tell you, say, "Oh I apologize but we had to do this." Just tell them, look at them in the eyes, and say to them "No, you are doing this because this is a systematic discrimination." And I do tell them, I say, "But I understand, you're doing your job. You're taught to do your job. But don't lie to me. I'm not going to buy your lies." And they're OK with that. So don't be hostile, and believe it or not, they are very nice to you when you tell them. Don't call them names, tell them, "I understand, you're doing your job." And go with that.

The other things I do, I challenge. When I went at the checkpoints...

AR: This is through the Allenby Bridge?

TA: That's after the Allenby. You know we take people because we... I take the kids through the checkpoints and I take them without the checkpoints. It depends what we want to do that day. If we want to accomplish a goal, we'll go the regular apartheid road, but if we want them to learn we take them to the checkpoint. And we were going on a trip and we took a Palestinian boy with us who have all his proper paper, everything. He had the permits, he had everything, and he is 18 years old. And he said, "Please can I come in." And this is his first permit in a long, long time. I think that he said that will be his first time going to Jericho, through the permit you know. We got there to Aram and the soldiers came in and they must have looked at the kid, you know the fear in his face. And they basically pointed him out. They took his papers. They got him down and they were going to return the kid. I don't know, I mean he's in the middle of nowhere, in Aram, between you know, in the middle of nowhere, no taxi, no nothing. So I asked the soldier, I said, "Tell me why." And he said, "Well he is not supposed to come from

this checkpoint.” I said, “What’s the difference?”

And so after 20 minutes, I basically went back and forth and said, “No, he’s not leaving. He have all the proper paper with him. If he’s leaving, we’re all leaving.” And he was about to say, and I then said, “No we’re not leaving either. Both of us are not leaving.” And he said, “Well this is not my rule.” And I said, “Well go tell me who gives the rule.” And he got another person and that other person says, “Well no, that he has to come down.” I said, “No.” And the fear in this kid’s face gave me determination that says, I don’t care if I’m going to jail that day. And I knew I’m not endangering anybody. I knew I was not endangering anybody. But I could not believe what they were doing with this kid. So I decided no, the guy says, “No,” he said, “It’s not me, I don’t make the rule.” The second person, I said, “Well I need to talk to the person who makes the rule.”

So they call the captain and we went back and forth, respectfully. You know I was not shouting. Respectfully I was talking to him. I said, “You tell me why this child, we have all this paper here, cannot go with us. Tell me why is...” you know. He said, “I don’t know but this is the rule.” I said, “Well no, somebody put that rule and I want you to know either you explain the whole rule for me, or I’m not going to just sit down. I’m not going to take no for an answer.”

After 20 minutes I talked him into it so they let the child with us. I shook his hand and I shook his hand on purpose even though everyone was kind of like, they wondered what am I going to do, curse him and all that stuff? I wanted the soldier to know that I do appreciate his predicament, even though his predicament is one that he put himself into. You cannot go to the level of the occupier. You have to show that you are better than the occupier. Otherwise this tragedy will become a hundred percent worse than it is now. And I’m not the only one who does that. A lot of the Palestinians have come to that conclusion. We need to deal with these people, we need to work with them. However we would not stand for what their occupation stands for. But it’s a horrible life. And it’s not something that you create. It’s something that comes with your birth.

AR: Thank you.

Maurice Jacobsen (camera man): For the American public, who is not tuned into this issue, from your perspective what is the most important thing we should know?

TA: It’s not what they should know, it’s where they should go. It’s because the Palestinians is equated with Osama Bin Laden today so there is nothing you could tell ‘em that could change their mind. Unless you know a Palestinian, you’re going to have this stigma. But what I tell people, don’t take my word for it. Do not ever take my word for it. Don’t take the Israeli’s word for it. Go to Palestine and see. And if you don’t change your mind of what you see, then there is nothing I could do. What need to happen, since not everybody is going to go to Palestine and see, I tell people really, we need to examine our whole philosophy of the West versus the East. And only when we examine that philosophy and start viewing that East in a different point of view, we will never understand the Middle East.

MJ: What do you think the role of the media in America is?

AR: Says a member of the media

TA: Unlike a lot of my Palestinian friends, I don't think there is conspiracy in the media. But I think there is laziness in the media. And there is, beside laziness in the media, there is a lack of understanding of the media. The media is, they think they are informed, but they're not. And even those who go to Palestine, I mean look at the example of Gaza, how they covered Gaza, the media. They covered from the Israeli territory. They cover it from an Israeli military point of view. Is that a coverage of something? You don't cover. You are getting a point of view from one group of people. The media is so afraid of being labeled anti-Semite that they are not having the courage to stand up and look for what the truth is. Israeli media is more critical of what Israel does than we in the media in here. And the other thing that is in the media in here is we are becoming the stenographer of our policy. If our policy dictates, I don't want to use a Palestinian/Israeli now, let's talk about Pakistan. If our policy said this is what we're going to do in Pakistan, in Afghanistan, all of a sudden the media is taking that line of what our policy is, and not examining it, just reporting from one side of that story, so to me we have a very, very well, uninformed media and as a result, we have uninformed population.

MJ: If you were writing an analysis for a mainstream media now, about the situation in Gaza, what would your lead be? What's the premise?

TA: I would say you failed.

MJ: Who's you?

TA: The media. We failed and we created chaos. You are responsible for some of the tragedy. That's what I would say. That's an analysis. From a journalistic point of view, whenever I got to the media and talk with them, they say, "Well we have to be fair and balance." Then my question is, if fair and balance, if you're covering South Africa, the past South Africa, do you quote the DeClerk every time you quoted the resistance, the apartheid, the people who were opposing apartheid? You don't, because these are the one who are inflicting the pain on the black community in South Africa.

The media in here, when it comes to Palestine, I cannot tell my story and say my story is, I've been beaten by, let's say my cousin has been put in jail in Israel. If I say that, the member of the media will say, "Well I'm going to quote somebody from the Jewish community about that story." And where they go, not to every single Jewish person, you know there's people in the Jewish community, they may have a different point of view, but they would go from the Jewish community that had a specific point of view that's going to oppose my point of view. I'm just reporting that my cousin was in jail. I'm not saying that Israel's policy this and this. Just, my cousin was in jail. And they want to have somebody from the Jewish community to discredit the reporting of my cousin is in jail. That in itself doesn't make sense. So how would I analyze the media? Beside it fails? It's contributing to the destabilization of that area.

MJ: Last hard, broad question, are you positive/optimistic at all about a resolution to the conflict?

TA: Definitely. I'm always. There is human being. Every conflict in the world, regardless, every conflict in the world at the end of the day, it ends. There is a lot of killing in between. But at the end of the day it ends. Let's look at our, in here, between us and Japan, we're allies. Germany and the US and the British, they're allies. Israel and Germany are allies. You know, you go back to the Roman time, were allies. So conflicts will end. It's how soon would it end? I don't know.

As how should it, if you're asking the question, how it should be resolved, I'm conflicted at this moment. At one point I say two state resolution. I will always say two state resolution, side by side. But I am at this moment thinking why not one vote, one person, and two vote, two people, live in the same place? If we're creating democracy, why not democracy? You don't expel anybody. You address all the issues. You need to address the refugee problem. You cannot continue to have these refugees in refugee camps and regardless of who you blame why they're in the refugee camps. You cannot have the slave and slave owners live in peace. You have to have an equal level for everyone. And that's when there will be peace. But it has to be today.

I been talking to George Mitchell. We have a conference with George Mitchell...

MJ: What was that conference about?

TA: Well I called regarding Gaza, to Senator Levin, and he said, "Could we set a meeting with the state department?" I said, "I would love to do that." And it was going to be a meeting but they said why not have a conference call with George Mitchell. And George wanted to know our opinion, what is our concern, what do we need to do. The one thing that was optimistic about this, he said he's not interested in a process any more. He's interested in accomplishing a goal, and doing it fast. That to me is something that is good. But in the meantime you hear the Obama people, and you hear Hilary. That fear is still there. If you don't support Israel 150% you are going to err on the side of destruction. And that is just a ploy.

MJ: For what?

TA: A ploy just to continue as is. You see the Palestinian people, in the scheme of things, the suffering is not that big. In the scheme of the world, the globalization. You know what's the killing of a few hundred Palestinians? I mean if you look in the newspapers today, there is nothing about Gaza. There is nothing about the destruction. There is nothing about the soldiers who use phosphorous bombs. There is nothing in there. It's just a story for a couple of weeks. Israeli economy is prospering, so there is no reason for Israel. If they're not, beside they are losing their soul, there is no reason for them to run and help. And the Arab word, if you want to use the Arab word, is [Arabic word]. Their life is not disrupted. So a few hundred Palestinians, it's just like a few hundred Jewish in Germany was not a big deal. A few million was not a big deal in Germany. You know, people did not act until six million and eleven million people died. Then they started acting.

Woman in background: And also' til France and Britain were threatened.

TA: That's exactly. That's exactly. So it's kind of like, unfortunately, in the scheme of things, the Palestinian story is not big; the resistance of the Palestinian is not much. So why rush?

MJ: Do you feel that in the East/West conflict, that essentially Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the core of that?

TA: Oh yeah. Yeah. The Arab ruler used the conflict for their own power. Israeli use it to get so much money. You put peace today, the Jewish community who is very philanthropic, very, very philanthropic, they are not going to spend their money here, in Israel. They are going to spend it someplace else. The money is not going to be as much. American money is going to be less. So it's in Israel's best interest to continue to say, "We are threatened." In the leaders of the Arab world's best interest, the conflict is still going on. In the West, again they don't see it as a big threat to them, even though we talk about Osama Bin Laden, all that stuff. It's not, you know, I don't think that's a biggie. Pakistan and Afghanistan is going to be the biggie because that's really when the rubber hit the road, because that's really when the East threatened the West and because at this moment we are not succumbing. Saudi Arabia is threatened.