Video interview in Boston Massachusetts
By Alice Rothchild

Diana Buttu transcript

AR: So why don’t you tell me your name and when you were born and the year you were born.

DB: My name is Diana Buttu, I was born in Toronto Canada in 1970.

AR: And where is your family from?

DB: My family is from Palestine. My father’s family is from a town that no longer exists. It’s now called Migdal HaEmek. It was called Al-Mujaydil and my mother’s family is from Nazareth.

AR: And what was life like for them before 1948?

DB: Well my father was born in 1939 so he remembers Palestine before Israel. And my mother was born in ’47 so obviously she doesn’t remember it. But for my father, growing up, he talked a lot about what it was like growing up under military rule. They lived under military rule from 1948 until 1966 and what that effectively meant, similar to what we see today in Palestine where there are checkpoints, you need permits, etc. My father was living from permit to permit and basically unable to travel throughout his own country. And when he immigrated to Canada in 1967 and went back for a visit to Nazareth in 1970, it was the first time, as Canadian citizen, that he was able to see his country.

AR: So in ‘48, what happened?

DB: In ‘48... To my father’s family, what happened? They were living in the town of al-Mujaydil and the Israeli forces come into the town and the town...everybody in the town decides to flee. They fled to the neighboring city which was Nazareth, it’s not even two miles away, and they stayed there for weeks and weeks and weeks. I think it was about six weeks, and at one point they went back to their town, only to discover that it was now a closed military zone and they were no longer allowed to go back to their home. And so they stayed in Nazareth for a period of time, but then the Israelis also started to encroach on Nazareth and it lead to another flight for them.

AR: Where did they flee?

DB: It’s not entirely clear. I know that they fled to the north. You know it was all sort of one territory, so they fled to the north. They stayed in towns of... I’m trying to remember the names... I know they stayed in Sakhnin for a period of time and to some other towns along the north, eventually going to Safed, which is close to the Lebanese border, from Safed into, it’s not clear if they went into Lebanon or not into Lebanon. Eventually they came back to Nazareth and also eventually. they ended up realizing that they would never be able to go back to their town.

AR: And when you say fled, you mean they walked?

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DB: They walked. My grandmother had, I think it was maybe about eight children at the time. My father wasn't the youngest, he was nine years old at the time, and they walked. And they very distinctly remember walking and what the walk was like.

AR: And what happened to your mother's family?

DB: My mother's family stayed in their home. They stayed in their home. They didn't flee. They remained in Nazareth the entire time. Some of the people in Nazareth who fled... there ended up being, we find out later, there was a class difference between the people who fled and those who didn't. Those who were quite poor, like my mother's family, decided to stay. And many didn't.

AR: And are their family stories of fighting or dangerous experiences the family had?

DB: My mother doesn't really recall because she was only a year old at the time. And I didn't get an opportunity to ask my grandmother at the time. She has passed away since. But my father's family... my father very distinctly remembers the Zionists coming into Nazareth and shooting in an area, and seeing the bullets bounce through his feet at the age of nine.

AR: And did any of the family members get shot or injured?

DB: No.

AR: So once '48 happened, your parents are now citizens of Israel. So do you want to explain what that status was for them?

DB: So post '48, from '48 until '66, Israel granted citizenship to the Palestinians that remained, which were probably about 150,000 Palestinians. But they weren't granted full citizenship. So they lived under military rule. They were granted full citizenship in that they could vote but they still lived under military rule which meant they needed permits to go from one area to the next. It meant that they were ruled under military law rather than under civilian law. It meant that for any blanket security reason they could be denied permits. They could be denied a whole host of rights. And that was the system that my parents very distinctly recall living under. And it was enough to drive them crazy, which is why they moved.

AR: They were "internally displaced?"

DB: They were "internally displaced." So under Israeli law, very quickly after Israel declared itself a state, the Israelis passed a piece of legislation effectively barring Palestinians from returning to their homeland. So whether you were a refugee in a neighboring country or outside, whether you happened not to be there during '47-49 for some reason or another, fearing war, etc., you were barred from both returning and acquiring your property. But they didn't stop there. They also enacted legislation, in large part to be able to take the resources of the Palestinians who remained, they enacted legislation that said that even if you fled for a day, for a short period of time, from that parcel of land that you owned and you went to a neighboring area, and it doesn't matter if it was a neighboring country or a neighboring area such as Nazareth, you were considered a present, meaning that you are physically present, but you were considered absent. So my father's family fell into this ambit of being "present absentees." They were

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present in the country but they were absent from their parcel of land. And since 1948, they have been considered present absentees, unable to get their land back. The state has denied all forms of compensation and in addition they've used this land to either house immigrants or to create factories or to create national parks, etc. So the people who are actual citizens, like my parents are actual citizens, are unable to get any remedy or redress for land that was taken by the Israelis from them.

AR: Is that also internally displaced?

DB: Yes, so the internally displaced are the present absentees, the people who are from certain cities, towns villages, who fled to another city, town, or village and are unable to go back. So they have been displaced from their homes, but they are internal to the country.

AR: So then they are living in Nazareth, so what happened in 1965?

DB: 1965. It's Purim, 1965, and my father has a young, little brother, and at the time my father, as I was saying they needed permits to be able to travel to different places to be able to work in different parts of the country, and my father was working outside of Nazareth. He's never told me where exactly, I think it's too painful. And his brother was walking to school one day and was hit by a drunk driver and killed. He died. And my father became irate that he had been killed.

AR: And this is a Jewish driver and it's related to Purim?

DB: It's related to Purim because it's a Jewish holiday, the driver is Jewish, and he was celebrating Purim. He had been drinking a lot. I don't really know Purim but that is my understanding of Purim. So he was driving and I guess didn't see the 14 year old boy who was walking along the side of the road and hit him and killed him. The driver was never prosecuted, he was never charged, not even with a minor traffic offense. Never charged, never tried. And it sent my father into a tailspin because he realized that he was never going to be an equal in his homeland and very quickly decided two things: One, he wasn't going to have children in the country, which is why I was born in Canada and my older sister was born in Canada, and my younger sister as well. Secondly, that he didn't want to live there anymore.

AR: And why was he never tried?

DB: The drunk driver? He was never tried because that's just the way the system was. You know, Alice, it's no different today. We might think that it's a little bit different today, but it's not. It might be different for Palestinians who are citizens of Israel but when you think to Israeli settlers and their behavior towards Palestinians in the West Bank, there are many, many, many crimes that go untried. There have been recently, just in 2012, a number of children who were run over by Israeli settlers and they don't get so much as a traffic violation.

AR: You had mentioned he was told it was a "victimless crime?"

DB: He was. He was told that it was a victimless crime. That my father should just accept that it was Purim, the man didn't do anything wrong and there really were no victims in this.

AR: And so he decided to move?

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DB: He decided to move, yes.

AR: And he chose…

DB: He decided to move in part because he couldn't get permits any longer. And that was because he complained, he kept complaining about his brother. So he was no longer on the clean list. So getting a permit was a bit of a problem, which meant that working was a problem, obviously. And he decided that he didn't want to live in Israel any longer. He didn't want to be a second class citizen. So he decided to apply to leave. He applied to Canada and to the US. I think he was admitted to both, but I'm not sure. He was definitely accepted into Canada.

AR: Why Canada?

DB: He wanted a country that had a system. And didn't really like…My father, when I think back on him, he was young and I put myself in his shoes and wonder, what must it have been like to be deciding that you have to flee your homeland and where do you go? So I think he chose Canada because he spoke a little bit of English, he wasn't particularly fond of the United States, and I don't think he was duped into the "land of opportunity" idea, but Canada seemed safe, I think and that was why he applied.

AR: And was he married to your mother at the time?

DB: He was. He was married to my mother. They were married in 1964.

AR: And did she have an opinion about this?

DB: She was, gosh, my mom at the time would've been 19 years old and I know she didn't want to leave. My mother had never really left Nazareth. She needed permits to leave Nazareth. So when you think of a 19 year old who doesn't speak anything other than Arabic and what that must have been like for her. She knew where Canada was but she wasn't so thrilled with the idea. And initially my father said, it was just going to be for a period of two years and then he'd come back, so she wasn't going to go with him but then I think her mother convinced her that this would be a good thing.

AR: And was this an arranged marriage?

DB: No, no, no, no not at all. They fell in love.

AR: So your uncle is killed and they moved to Canada, and what happened when they got to Canada, what was their welcome like?

DB: Oh, you know my parents, their experience is obviously what they saw the Israelis do for new immigrants.

AR: Which was what?

DB: Well the Israelis, they had the equivalent of a welcome wagon. So they would provide housing to new immigrants. They provided the bed sheets, the towels, pots and pans, and a stipend. You name it. Language lessons, etc. So my mother was expecting this welcome wagon

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when she arrived in Canada. She arrived off of this boat in Canada and instead she quickly realized, they arrived in March, the end of March in 1967, she realized that there was no welcome wagon. Which meant she had to get her own bed sheets and buy her own towels and there were no pots and none of these things. Nobody told her that the way that you immigrate to another country and you're left with nothing.

AR: So did they find work?

DB: They found work within 24 hours. My mother worked in a factory, in a pillow making factory. My father worked as a welder. And my mother left that job; I think probably within a month, became a seamstress, working in a factory that made men's pants. She stayed in that job for 23 years, until it closed down.

AR: And your father?

DB: My father kept working as a welder until he had an accident and was no longer able to work as a welder. Lost his hearing and then started to work for the train company.

AR: They decide to have children once they get there?

DB: Yes

AR: How long did that take?

DB: A year later my older sister was born, two and half years later I was born, and five years later my younger sister was born.

AR: So what are you memories of growing up in this immigrated family in Toronto?

DB: Good question, Alice. I have lots of memories, very warm memories. Where do I begin? My parents, I knew that we were Arab. I didn't know that we were Palestinian

AR: Why not?

DB: They took a decision that they really didn't want to burden us with this very heavy word: Palestinian, and all that that meant. We were Arabs and we were from Nazareth, but that's where it stopped. Arabic was not spoken at home in large part, not because my parents were ashamed, but back then the schoolteachers told parents stick to one language, English, and the children thrive. Which, of course, now we know is otherwise. And so they stuck to English. And that's why my sisters only speak English. My older sister speaks a bit of Arabic but we didn't grow up speaking Arabic. We knew we were Arabs and we knew the family was from Nazareth on some level but that was it.

AR: Did you eat Arabic food?

DB: All the time. All the time. So the food was really our connection. But I remember, Alice, I think it was the third grade or the fourth grade. It was a grade where I was aware enough to be able to read and understand and I remember reading about Arabs and in the book that was written about Arabs, Arabs didn't have houses. Arabs were nomadic people. Arabs lived in

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tents. And I remember feeling very ashamed to be Arab and I just didn't want to have anything to do with it. So we ate Arabic food at home but that was it.

AR: Did the kids tease you about the food?

DB: Oh yes. Back then the bread the kids my age ate was Wonderbread, that spongy, I'm not even sure if it's really bread. And my parents didn't have Wonderbread in the house. We had Arabic bread in the house and my mother quite often would make us a sandwich that consisted of Arabic bread with some olive oil and some za'tar on it. And my classmates would point at this and say, "She's eating a dirt sandwich!" So of course that was no longer lunch. That became something that we ate at home.

AR: And was there an Arabic community they were a part of?

DB: No. They had some friends but the kids were much younger than we were or they didn't have children. So we lived in a suburban area in Toronto, in a place called Mississauga. My closest friend was, was Lebanese, she still is Lebanese, so we were friends together, but we were friends who very quickly learned how not to be Arab.

AR: What did that mean?

DB: It meant that we had hair styles that were kind of hoping that our hair would flip a certain way. Big hair was in back then. Flip a certain way, or you would put on make-up, as I got older, that made your skin look a little bit lighter. We spoke English in the same way that everybody spoke English. So it was our secret. We definitely didn't tell people that we were Arab.

AR: And you could pass?

DB: I'm not sure we did. But I actually, you know it's interesting, Alice, I was thinking about this the other day. I remember classmates thinking that I was Pakistani. And it was an accusation. I remember that. I remember students coming and saying, "You're from Pakistan," and feeling that no, I have to tell them that I'm not from Pakistan. This is the racism that kids grow up in.

AR: So did they take you back to Nazareth?

DB: They did. We went back to Nazareth a number of times when I was a child in the early '70's in the late '70's and the very early '80's. It was the time of the very early '80's that I began to remember the country.

AR: And what do you remember?

DB: I remember a lot of rocks. A lot of rocks. A lot of family. A lot of love and feeling a little bit deprived because I didn't have an extended family in Canada. The only family I had was my uncle and his wife and two cousins, but the two cousins were born…I'm fourteen years older than the youngest one and I think ten years older than the oldest. So there just wasn't that measure of family in Canada and I remember feeling deprived.

AR: And what did you notice about Nazareth coming in from the outside?

DB: Nazareth was... So the first thing I remember noticing was that people lived in houses, because it goes back to the shame I felt that people don't live in houses. So I remember that people lived in houses, but I remember that there was a lot of chaos in the houses. People lived on top of each other. The stairs, I don't know why this bothered so much, but the stairs were on the outside of the house rather than on the inside of the house. Which meant that there were two floors and each family was living on a different floor, but I don't know why that didn't register with me.

AR: Why did families live on top of each other?

DB: I didn't know it at the time, but they couldn't buy land outside of Nazareth. Of course I discover this when I'm much older, the Israelis had turned the land that is around Nazareth into state land. This meant that Palestinians couldn't buy there, they couldn't build there; they couldn't do anything there. And they couldn't afford land within the city of Nazareth, so people live on top of one another.

That's why I was very bothered by the stairs being on the outside, but I didn't realize that it was different houses that were on top of one another. I thought it was one house and that was silly. Why would they put stairs on the outside of the house? But that was the reason. They were forced to live on top of one another. And I remember thinking when I was young that it would probably be really fun, you know, to have your cousins live above you. But the older I got, the more I started to visit there as a teenager, I realized there were a lot of problems and that's obviously what we see in Nazareth today, a lot of social problems.

AR: Like what?

DB: The inability of young people to buy a house. So they are forced to live on top of each other. That leads to a lot of problems in the family structure, where although kids get to have the love of aunts and uncles and grandparents, it means that too many people are living per square foot area. And problems happen. People begin to fight over limited resources. They begin to argue over things like water distribution and electricity. For people who are old or disabled, walking up flights of stairs is practically impossible. For people who want a measure of independence, they don't get to have that and so it goes, on and on and on. And today in Nazareth, although it's a lovely city and people are quite wonderful etc, they have a lot of problems now. In large part because people can't afford to live anywhere.

So you've got more people cramming in with one another. Now you have drug problems in Nazareth, which didn't exist 20 years ago. There are problems with weapons and possession of weapons and firing of weapons and drive by shootings and things you just don't hear about in the mainstream Israeli press. And it's become a forgotten city, even though it is one of the largest cities in the country. It's a forgotten city. The infrastructure is dilapidated. The schools are stretched to the limit. The number of students who can graduate from the high schools and become successful in the universities within the country is quite limited. When you look at 20 percent of the population that end up making up less than 3% of the university graduates, you see that there's a problem, there's a real disconnect.

AR: And are there Jews in Nazareth?

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DB: There are Jews in Upper Nazareth.

AR: And do you want to describe upper Nazareth?

DB: Yes, so Nazareth after 1948, the Israelis imposed the boundaries of Nazareth and declared areas around the main cities of Nazareth as state land. If you think about more than, we're heading into 65 years this year, that the amount of land that has been allocated to Nazareth has not expanded all this time. And yet the population obviously has. You can just see that it's becoming more overburdened. But with the state land that they declared on the outskirts of Nazareth, Nazareth is in a valley, kind of on a hill, but there's also a valley to it, in that state land, the Israelis decide to build a town called Upper Nazareth, which is not exclusively Jewish but using state funds. It was a building project, a construction project that again was designed to house Jewish immigrants. And if you look at the footprint over there and the footprint in Nazareth you see two very divergent places. Upper Nazareth has a lot of empty space, it has a lot of green space. There's a whole forest up there. They've got schools, they've got municipal services. They've got government services up there, not just municipal services but government services, like the national health insurance agencies, the other major government ministries; you can find an office in upper Nazareth. The roads are paved very nicely. They don't have problems with sewage. They don't have a problem with the electricity. Most of the houses have gardens. They don't have high rise buildings on top of one another. They don't have a problem with parking. The difference is that one is allocated to Jewish Israelis, immigrants for the most part, and the other is indigenous inhabitants for the most part.

AR: So are they funded differently by the authorities?

DB: They were. They were and are funded differently by the Israelis. They were funded differently in that the upper Nazareth was a state construction project and housing was allocated there, which meant that for the most part it was less expensive to live up there because the state was covering most of the costs. It's planned differently, which means that they've got a little bit more land, etc. And also more funds are allocated per person to Upper Nazareth than to lower Nazareth, Arab Nazareth. So it means that roads are better. They've got, not that I want a shopping mall, but they've got some shopping malls over there. And all of these are projects that are either funded by the state or encouraged by the state, one of the two. In Arab Nazareth, none of that exists. The roads are in part funded by the Israeli Ministry of Transportation, but for a large part, not. They are done by the municipality. They have problems with water and water allocation, etc. and so more money, per person, gets pumped into Upper Nazareth than it does into Arab Nazareth.

AR: So then I understand you went to visit in 1987, do you want to talk about that?

DB: I did. So 1987 it was the start of the First Palestinian Intifada, first Palestinian uprising, and I was young, I was very young at the time and the Intifada was just starting at the time. As I mentioned I didn't really have this identity of being Palestinian and so coming to Nazareth for the first time at an age where I could understand was really shocking to me because I began to see all of the problem I've just described to you and much of it just didn't make sense to me. Why would anybody voluntarily choose to live in a situation where they're living on top of one another rather than in neighboring Upper Nazareth where they had a garden? And I began to see distinctly that there was this pattern in place to isolate Nazareth, giving them as little space and

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isolating them, and then these vast areas neighboring Nazareth such as Upper Nazareth and or my father's town, Migdal HaEmek and the land that was allocated to them. And it really hit me hard. And that was then I began to realize that there was a problem, there was a real problem.

AR: And did you learn from cousins, your grandmother?

DB: I didn't speak Arabic and I learned from a number of people, cousins, friends etc. but it was, you know Alice, it was mostly some friends of my father who opened my eyes. But also just, you know Alice, when you see, you just can't un-see and the impressions that were left, they just seared in my brain. So even if I wasn't able to understand the language, which I wasn't, there was enough that just didn't make sense to me. Why is it that some people had beautiful green lawns and Nazareth's roads were just so tiny that you had to honk and wait for a person to go by? It just didn't make sense unless you realized that there was a problem.

AR: And did you go into the West Bank?

DB: I didn't, no. That entire trip I didn't go into the West Bank.

AR: Did you know of the West Bank?

DB: I didn't. The word in Arabic is Diffa, which means West Bank, and my parents kept saying, my father kept saying, make sure not to take the two of us, my older sister and I, to the West Bank. It didn't make sense. But what did make sense were the images I saw. And again those images also, I couldn't understand why young children were standing up to an army, other than either they were incredibly brave or there was a problem And it ends up being a combination of the two.

AR: So how did that affect your Palestinian consciousness or your Arab consciousness?

DB: It created the Arab, the Palestinian consciousness.

AR: Can you speak to that?

DB: Well when the Intifada erupted and I saw these images, you know back then there wasn't satellite television, there were only a limited number of Israeli channels and of course I didn't speak the language, either of the languages, so I didn't understand what was happening. But the images really did affect me. And my grandmother was then the person who started telling me all the things I told you. She told me that we had been internally displaced, I had no idea. She told me that the house that she lived in that was built in the fifties was not her home, even though she built it with her own hands. She had a home just a few kilometers, just a few miles away. Or that they lived under military rule. And these were all the stories that my father and my mother didn't tell me.

AR: The uncle story?

DB: The uncle. We knew about the uncle but we didn't really know about the uncle. You know, Alice, it was like a dirty secret. And yet there was nothing to be ashamed of. But that's what it was. It was this secret that we didn't talk about. And I returned from this trip both angry with my parents for not telling me but also very moved by this experience, without going into the

West Bank, without going into the Gaza Strip, but very, very, very, very moved. I did go to East Jerusalem, so I guess I was in the West Bank and I remember seeing a lot soldiers. But I was very moved by this experience.

AR: And you had described how your cousins had said something about if someone takes your house and kicks you out and puts you in a tent…

DB: Yes that was my father.

AR: You want to describe that?

DB: Yes. When I returned to Canada my father started to describe what happened. Because again, I didn't really understand, I was young. He said, "Just imagine somebody takes you out of your house and throws you into a tent," and of course this goes back to my shame of not having a house, "and then you're living in this tent and they take away the tent." And he said "This is the story of the Palestinians."

AR: So you come back to Canada and you're an older teenager and you have this new Palestinian identity, so how did that affect your life?

DB: It completely changed my life. It completely changed my life. I originally wanted to be a physician. I decided that I didn't want to be a physician any longer. I wanted to be a lawyer, which I am. And I really felt that something could be done for Palestinians.

AR: Why law?

DB: I think growing up in Canada you feel there is a system, again I was a teenager. I wasn't that bright, but you feel like watching all of these Perry Mason shows, all of the other law shows, that justice always prevails and I felt that justice will prevail for Palestinians. I didn't realize that it was more to do with power etc.

AR: So you actually thought you would fix it?

DB: I thought I would fix it. Yes, absolutely. I thought, this doesn't work so I'm gonna fix it.

AR: So when did you start learning Arabic?

DB: I started learning Arabic that fall. So the fall of 1988 in university.

AR: And then you go to law school?

DB: So I become quite active at university.

AR: Which university?

DB: University of Toronto. In trying to educate Canadians about Palestine and about Palestinian rights. And back then, Alice, you couldn't say the word Palestinian.

AR: Why not?

DB: It was really odd. Palestinians were Jordanians, Palestinians were West Bankers, Palestinians were anything but Palestinians. The PLO was a terrorist organization. Yassir Arafat was a terrorist. Yassir Arafat at the time of the eighties was probably just a little bit shy of what Osama Bin Laden is to Americans today, really not much different. So it was difficult. It was really difficult to say that you were Palestinian. I actually recall that there was so much push back within the university, any of the activities we did, because of this use of the term Palestinian. We were allowed to be Arab, we were allowed to be Jordanians, which I'm not Jordanian, but we weren't allowed to be Palestinians.

AR: And then you go to law school?

DB: Yes. And so then I go to law school. And I'm in law school for a year before Oslo was signed. And Oslo is signed in 1993. And I sort of think, I don't have to worry about this any longer.

AR: So what did you feel about Oslo?

DB: So Oslo it was... Watching the signing of this agreement on the Whitehouse lawn with a very popular US president, President Clinton was very popular at that time, and with Yassir Arafat, who was really quite a moving figure and an important person in Palestinian lives. And then Yitzhak Rabin who had been the very person who ordered the breaking of bones during the First Intifada. It at least seemed to me that Rabin had probably had a shift in his thought. There was a seismic change in the way that he was thinking of things. So I thought that, I found that whole experience very moving, that the very person who ordered the breaking of bones of Palestinians, and I remember seeing those videos, there was a very moving video in I think '89 of a Palestinian whose arm is getting broken. So seeing those two characters, those two individuals together was very powerful for me. Because it to me signified that there was going to be reconciliation, not just the signing of a signature but reconciliation, people coming together, having a common vision for a country, a common vision for rights. And it was very powerful for me. With a very popular, of course, US president.

And so I didn't, I think I... I became immersed in law school, which is very easy to do, but I also began to kind of check out and thought that this was just going to be a very quick process. He had a sea change, he had a moment, the light bulb went on and it was just a matter of time before Palestinians were free. So I really just thought that was going to be what would happen. I remember in 1994, I think it was October of 1994, November of 1994, Edward Said shows up to the university I was at, the law school I was at, to give a lecture in comparative literature. And a group of us had lunch with him just before his lecture and he said this is the worst thing to ever happen to the Palestinians. And I thought this guy is so grumpy, he has no idea what he was talking about. He's just in a different world. He doesn't see what we see, kind of naïve optimist with a little bit of arrogance mixed in, and I was rather dismissive and I kept pressing him and asking him why is it so bad? Why is it so bad? And of course this is before the 1995 Interim Agreement is signed. It's just at the time that the Gaza-Jericho Agreement was signed several months after, but before the Interim Agreement was signed, and he said at the time: "Just look at what's happening, they're already dividing the territory and separating the people from the land. And this is what's going to happen for the time to come."

And I remember thinking: You don't get it. You know the people in Gaza are so happy, the people in Jericho are so happy because now Palestinians are ruling over them. And he kept saying, he kept pushing this point over and over and over again, "Yes but they're subservient to someone else. They're not going to represent their own interests. And pretty soon you're going to see that it's Palestinians killing other Palestinians," and so on. And he was right. He was really right. So I lived in this kind of fantasy land for a couple of years, went back to Palestine in 1996, which was the first time I actually spent a significant period of time in the West Bank. I worked for a human rights organization called Al-Haq and that was when I started to question my own optimism regarding Oslo. I started to see more and more checkpoints go up as my time got extended there.

AR: Do you want to describe a checkpoint?

DB: Yeah, but before I do that I want to say that I didn't really have anything to compare to because I hadn't gone to the West Bank in my travels in the eighties. So in the nineties when I first spend time in Ramallah, all I have to compare to is that short period of time that I spent in Ramallah. And that's when I began to realize that more checkpoints were going up, more settlements were going up.

So you asked what a checkpoint is like. The checkpoints at the time, there were two types of checkpoints. There was a more fixed checkpoint and then there were plenty of flying checkpoints. So the fixed checkpoints required you to show your passport or your ID card to be able to cross. I didn't realize at the time that the only people who could cross from these fixed checkpoints were Israeli citizens or foreigners or people with an East Jerusalem ID. But Palestinians with a West Bank ID or Gazans with a Gaza ID didn't even bother to get anywhere near the checkpoints because they knew that they wouldn't be able to cross because they needed permission. So these checkpoints weren't the enormous checkpoints that you see in the West Bank or in Gaza. But they were significant in that there were always soldiers there who routinely turned people back.

And I remember seeing a number of people fighting with the soldiers, actually not even fighting, pleading with the soldiers more times than not, to be able to cross for some reason or another and the Israelis just saying no. So that was the first style of checkpoint. What I ended up seeing throughout that summer was that more flying checkpoints were coming into being. And flying checkpoints were checkpoints that were within the West Bank, from one West Bank town to another West Bank town, where Palestinians are theoretically allowed to be. So, for example, the main one I would see was between the city of Ramallah and the city of Nablus. Nablus was about an hour away. And it was just, it's like when in Boston where the police will routinely stop a car for what you think is perhaps testing for alcohol. Of course that wasn't what it was about, but it was the first thing I thought, "Oh they're just testing for alcohol." But that obviously wasn't what it was about. They could tell from the license plate, because there were different license plates for Palestinians and Israelis, they pull over the cars that were Palestinian cars and allow the Israeli cars to go pass and routinely search the IDs of people who possessed a Palestinian ID. And I remember being held at the side of a road for long periods of time, I think one time it was over two hours, as they unloaded everything from these cars and searched the IDs of all these various people who just wanted to go home. They were on their way home on a Thursday evening. And so this started to happen more and more and more. And the other thing

I noticed that summer was that the settlements were becoming... they were blooming all over the place.

AR: So these are Jewish settlements in the West Bank, can you describe what you saw?

DB: What I saw was…I think you have to contrast it with what I saw earlier when I was younger. You know when I was younger, I'm certain we went to the West Bank. I know we went to the West Bank; there were no checkpoints. So at the time, I remember seeing these red roof tiled houses on the top of hills. And there would be a dirt path that would take you up to these red roof tiled houses and my father would always say, "We're not going there." But this time around it began to be quite the opposite, where the Palestinian towns were the towns that had the dirt roads to them and the Israeli settlements which are Israeli-only housing, Jewish-only for most of them, some of them are not but most of them are, where they had, always on top of a hill for the most part, I shouldn't say always, on top of a hill, gated communities, nicely paved roads leading up to them. Looked to be largely empty, to be quite honest, but with a lot of military around them.

And more of these started to spring up during the period I spent there in 1996 and then again in 1997, and again in 1998 and again in 1999 and again in 2000. So with each passing month, there was either a new road that we Palestinians had to take to go from, I was living in Ramallah at the time and I was going up to Nazareth to visit my family, there was always a new road we had to take depending on the presence of a checkpoint or depending on what construction was taking place there. And this went on for years, for years and years and years. And at first I thought this was housing that was going to be for Palestinians but then, of course, I began to realize that why would there be Israeli army in front of a Palestinian house?

AR: So you began to understand?

DB: I began to understand, yeah. And of course the other things started to cement in, by this point I could speak Arabic, I could read Arabic, and all of the signs were written in Hebrew. The Palestinian cities and towns didn't exist but the Israeli settlements, no matter how small, definitely existed.

AR: So you're saying the signage didn't ever acknowledge Palestinian towns?

DB: It was very rare that you would see a sign leading into a Palestinian town.

AR: And do you want to describe the bypass roads that also started coming up?

DB: Yeah, so at that same time, the Israelis started to build roads that would quite literally bypass Palestinian towns and connect these various Jewish-only settlements to one another and connect the settlements into Israel. So, as a Palestinian and also as a Canadian, I started to see these, but as a Canadian I was eligible to be on these roads, whereas Palestinians were not allowed to be on these roads, so these started to flourish during the years I was there. And at first they were sold as: well, there need to be separate roads so that the Israelis could go around to their various settlements and not be at risk of going through a Palestinian city. But of course the obvious question is: why are they there in the first place? Why do we have to accommodate these settlements in the first place? But of course that wasn't the way. We were supposed to be

optimistic and so on. And so it was. And so these bypass roads started to really expand throughout this period.

AR: And what impact did these have on the Palestinians living there?

DB: Ah, very good. The impact that the bypass roads had on the Palestinians was that the Palestinian towns and cities were now isolated, so they became these little pods in the center of the West Bank, with roads going around them. And it was very difficult to connect one little pod to another pod without either going through an Israeli permanent checkpoint or a flying checkpoint or through some terrible road. Whereas for the settlers, it just became very easy for them to move. So the opposite was happening, rather than the Israelis being on the dirt roads, it was now Palestinians who were on the dirt roads. And the Palestinians were the ones who were isolated and the Israelis were the ones who were predominant and present and coupled with the road signs that make their presence known and seen versus the Palestinians who were just these unknown unseen people who are on dirt roads.

AR: And what about the system of closure in Areas A, B, and C. You want to talk about that?

DB: So the Interim Agreement of 1995 is what created the different areas within the West Bank: Area A being the smallest area, 17.2 percent of the West Bank, Area B being medium sized, 22.8 percent of the West Bank, and then Area C being the largest and that was 60 percent of the West Bank. But all of these areas corresponded to the number of Palestinians living there. So Area A is where the majority of Palestinians live, Area B is where fewer Palestinians live, and Area C is where even fewer Palestinians live. And so exactly as Edward Said mentioned, they were able to get rid of as many Palestinians as possible on as tiny a parcel of the land as possible. It's exactly what happened. So Area A were these little pods, these little islands throughout the West Bank, that together had the vast majority of Palestinians living.

AR: So these were the cities?

DB: These were the cities and the towns and then add to it Area B and you've got about 98% of the Palestinian population controlled under less than 40% of the land. And Area A is the area where it was exclusively Palestinian security control and civilian control meaning hospitals, schools, and the presence of the Palestinian Authority, and Area B is Palestinian schools, no hospitals, but Palestinian security, Israeli security, and Area C is exclusively Israeli security and Israeli schools, Israeli everything. So you can see that it became this convenient system for the Israelis really to get rid of the Palestinians. They didn't have to think about their education, their health, the road system, now that's all dumped on to the Palestinian Authority, but on a very tiny parcel of land. So in that larger area, the 60 percent, Area C, is where the Israeli settlements continued to build and expand, build and expand to the point where we see them today where they really only take up about 2 percent of the West Bank but they control 60 percent of the West Bank and life has become impossible to do basic things like go from Jenin in the north and Hebron in the south, and it's not a far distance. But it feels like it's a lifetime away.

AR: So you were able to be in the West Bank and Gaza?

DB: Yes I went to Gaza as well.

AR: And how did you did you relate to your cousins who were not able to travel?

DB: Well my cousins were able to travel. My cousins were citizens of Israel so they were able to travel in the same way that I was able to travel, but they didn't. And the reason that they didn't was with the signing of Oslo, a barrier was now created. We weren't all Palestinians. We are still all Palestinians, but in the mindset of many people there was division that was created. So today as a Palestinian living in the West Bank, just as an example, I'm not treated as an equal in the West Bank. For example, I, because I hold Israeli citizenship, I am not allowed to vote in Palestinian elections even though I am Palestinian. I as an Israeli citizen, I am technically not allowed to live in Ramallah. I as an Israeli citizen, also Palestinian, I am not allowed to buy a parcel of land in the West Bank because I am deemed to be Israeli even though I am actually Palestinian. So I am neither accepted by the Israeli community which just wants to get rid of the Palestinians, nor am I accepted by the Palestinian community because I fall into this gap of a loyalty that has to be questioned all the time.

AR: And how did you get Israeli citizenship?

DB: Through my parents. Citizenship extends one generation.

AR: So you have dual citizenship?

DB: Yes, Canadian and Israeli. So for my cousins, once this division becomes created, they begin to see themselves as separate and apart from the rest of Palestinian society. The Israelis spent a lot of time and energy and money in the fifties all the way through the nineties and to the current day, teaching Palestinian citizens of Israel that although they're not really full class citizens, equal citizens, that they are much better off than West Bank and Gaza and East Jerusalemite counterparts. And they used to do this through a number of different studies. They would measure the number of refrigerators that existed in the West Bank, or the number of cars that people had, etc. and they would use these statistics to tell Palestinian citizens of Israel: "Don't complain because your brethren in the West Bank, in East Jerusalem, and in the Gaza Strip have it much, much, much worse."

So in the nineties with this new policy of separation, Area A, Area B, Area C, and with the incoming of the Palestinian Authority that only governs A, for the most part, Palestinian citizens of Israel for the most part, or at least my cousins, began to view themselves as different. So they began to say things to me like, "Oh we're very different from the Palestinians in Gaza." Or, "We're just not like the Palestinians in the West Bank." You know the interesting thing, Alice, is that the distance between Nazareth and Jenin, which is a fairly large city, is about a half hour drive. To get to Tel Aviv, it's an hour and a half drive, and yet there is this idea that somehow, they're very different from us. And these are people who come from the same family. I have family members in Jenin. And it was viewed as, no they're completely separate people.

And that was what Oslo did. It really cemented the idea in the minds of many Palestinian citizens of Israel that Jenin was the place where you bought cheap goods and cheap groceries but they weren't really connected to you. They weren't really connected to your struggle. So the Israelis were dividing up the struggle. So now it was a struggle for Palestinians in the West Bank to have a state. Whereas for Palestinian citizens of Israel, their struggle was a very different

struggle. So it wasn't a struggle against Zionism. It was now a struggle that took on multiple dimensions.

AR: But you're the foreigner who can go to these places and see what's going on. I mean, you went to Gaza, what was Gaza like?

DB: Gaza was fascinating. It was a real eye-opener and tragic at the same time. It was an eye-opener because most people had an image of Gaza, I should say my family, not most people, most of my family had an image of Gaza that it was this terrible, horrible place, just miserable. But it was actually quite the opposite. People were funny. They had great lives. They had really great senses of humor. They lived lives to the fullest. They were poor. They were dispossessed. They were living in cramped quarters, not unlike Nazareth. They were deprived of a lot of things. But there was definitely not... miserable was not the word I would use to describe Gazans or Gaza.

AR: And you had witnessed the day laborers?

DB: Yes the day laborers. That, Alice, was one of the memories that will forever remain with me. It was one of those things, like I said, once you see, you can't un-see. In the nineties and later again when I lived in Gaza, the Israelis imposed closure after Oslo. So before Olso, people from Gaza could travel into Tel Aviv. They would work in Tel Aviv, they would live in Nazareth. They would live all throughout the country and work there. After Oslo, you needed a series of permits, whether it was a work permit, later it became a magnetic card that held all of your biometric ID on it, etc. And alongside the permit regime came a very severe closure regime and checkpoint regime.

And these checkpoints were not like the checkpoints in the West Bank. The checkpoints in the West Bank at the time, they're different now, but at the time, they were primarily just a few soldiers who would stop cars and stop pedestrians and look at their ID cards. These were very different. These checkpoints, no cars were allowed, so everybody was on foot. People had to go through metal detectors, much like the metal detectors that they used to have at Logan Airport where you stand, put your arms up and the machine goes zapping around you a few times. And because the system was so slow, day laborers, and they weren't allowed to stay in Israel overnight, day laborers would queue at about two or three o'clock in the morning, sleeping on cardboard, lighting fires with whatever wood they could find, and the checkpoint opened up at six. And it would take between three to six hours to process all the thousands of Palestinian men who had queued up at such an early hour. And then the process would be repeated. So then they would finish work at around four or five, come back in, go through another security search coming in, and for many men, it just became easier just to live at the checkpoint. So they did. And it was one of those things that really will remain in my mind forever, just seeing men queuing up from two o'clock in the morning until six o'clock in the morning. Sleeping on cardboard, making some basic meal, just to be able to work inside Israel and come back.

AR: So what kind of work were they doing?

DB: They were day laborers. Most of the people were day laborers who were working in construction. And it was bad enough that they had to queue at such an early hour and then come back and do the same thing over and over and over again everyday of the week, but many times,

they didn't get their pay. If there was closure, then they weren't picked up for the next day, which meant they didn't get paid. It was just this constant stream of people. So while Israel prides itself on these fantastic labor laws that it's got, these labor laws weren't applied to any of these Palestinians.

AR: So they didn't have like a job in a factory, they went out every day to be picked up?

DB: Yep, they would be day laborers. Some did, some had jobs but for the most part they did not. They were day laborers. They were working in construction, or they were working in moving, or they were working in, you know, whatever. And in the morning, after they were processed for their various permits, after they exited the checkpoint, there were trucks of Israelis looking and sizing up these men to see who looked strong enough, who had skills enough. They would ask them questions like, "Do you know how to lay tiles? Do you know how to work with cement?" etc. And so it was a whole system of exploitation.

AR: And how did that affect you as a lawyer, as one who had a mother that worked in a factory?

DB: It's one of the things that, it's.. I don't even know how to say this. I was obviously affected by my mother's work conditions. I also worked in the same factory with her. I spent my summers as a teenager working in that factory and so obviously I understood work standards and health and safety standards etc., what exploitation was etc., but this was just a gross form of it. It was so blatant. It was just so in your face. You know when you see all of this happening Alice, you see men sleeping on cardboard, lighting a fire and then having to do this because they have to go through a security search and then once they do this security search, they are sized up to see whether they are fit enough. It's exploitation. It really is exploitation. And it bothered me because of my parents being blue collar workers themselves so I could obviously connect to them and I kept thinking about their kids and how little these men, because they were predominantly, in fact they were only men, how they missed out on their children's lives all because they were trying to make money to be able to feed their children.

AR: And could they use any Israeli law to help themselves?

DB: No.

AR: Who was the Israeli law for?

DB: Israeli law was for Israelis. So the Palestinians, they weren't…it was still going through the court system at the time, but the Israelis turned a blind eye to everything that happened to them. So whether it was that they had to pay insurance, they had to pay dues into the Israeli system and yet didn't get benefit from them, or that they were day laborers and didn't get paid at the end of the day, they were paid at the end of the project. Or if there was a closure, they had to go to extreme measures to try to get their salary. If they were denied a permit, it was the same thing. In each of these cases, this was the nineties, it's changed since then, but in each of these cases, the burden was always on the Palestinian to prove that he didn't do anything wrong, or that there was a problem that was external to him etc. And when you have this disparity of power, there are very few Palestinians who could go to an Israeli court to try to seek redress. And when they did, they didn't always get their rights enforced.

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AR: And when you went to the refugee camps, what did you see?

DB: The refugee camps were more than disturbing. There's one refugee camp that's called Beach Camp and they call it Beach Camp because it's on the beach. So the irony of when you hear that the Arabs want to throw the Jews into the sea and then you see that it's actually the Palestinians who are meters away from being thrown into the sea, it's horrifying. The camps in the nineties in Khan Younis, for example, they had open sewage. There was a little bit of a fence that went around it but it was an open sewage pit. And similarly in certain areas in the north, still is, open sewage. So that was something that I just never, I couldn't understand. I still don't. How is it that any person can allow somebody to live next to open sewage? The houses were tiny, not just tiny but they were like, they were meant to be temporary and temporary turns into permanent and you could see how people cope with temporary turning into permanent. One generation feeding after another after another. So all of these problems that I was describing in Nazareth existed in Gaza.

AR: So then comes 1999, so what happens in 1999?

DB: So in 2000, it was 2000 actually,

AR: I have in my notes 1999 you were offered…

DB: Oh yes, so in 1999 the first position was offered in 1999. So 1999, by this point I was now a lawyer and I had spent three summers in the West Bank and I had received a phone call saying, "We'd like you to join the legal advisory team to the negotiations," to the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, working on the Palestinian side obviously. And I declined in 1999 in large part because I started to realize that Edward Said was right and that there was a problem and none of this was going to be undone through negotiations. But less than a year later in the summer of 2000, this is during the period of Camp David, I started to witness what was happening at Camp David and I was very bothered by Camp David and I was particularly bothered by the way that Bill Clinton had taken the Israeli side in saying that Ehud Barak had been very generous, he was very forthcoming and it was the Palestinians who had been obstinate. And I remember thinking; this isn't Ehud Barak's to be generous with. Why is it that he gets to be labeled generous or forthcoming? It's not his territory, it's not his land. And so again I went to the West Bank and this time met up with a few people who were my mentors who encouraged me to reconsider. And I decided to reconsider.

AR: So what was that like?

DB: So I thought to myself, well this will be a year. I'll go to Palestine for a year, and it will be a year and the worst case I can say it was an interesting experience, and best case all of this will be over. And it wasn't a light decision by the way. It wasn't a decision that was easy for me to make because by this point I was reading a lot of Edward Said, I myself had become critical, saw what was happening with the settlements, realized that things were going backwards rather than forwards. Life for Palestinians was becoming worse. The summer before in 1999 was when it finally hit me how few Palestinians could go into Jerusalem. And I remember friends saying to me, "Please just bring me back a stone from Jerusalem," and realizing that these were people who hadn't seen Jerusalem in years and years and years and what that meant.

So after I made the decision, again not a light one for me to take, I moved to Palestine, I arrived the first day of the Second Intifada. I was coming from California so actually I didn't know that an intifada was breaking out and I remember going into the West Bank and Ramallah looking like a ghost town. Because the checkpoint was practically empty, I landed in the evening and people were at home. And I thought; this doesn't look like the Ramallah that I know. Turns out they were on strike, but none of that really made any sense to me. I didn't know that, it's not that it didn't make sense, I just didn't know at the time that I got there. And then the next few days, it went from bad to worse. I think it was 50 Palestinians killed in the course of three days. I was still staying in a hotel, and I went up Nazareth that weekend and that night there was some Palestinians killed in Nazareth that night, Palestinian citizens of Israel who were killed in Nazareth that night.

AR: So it's the Second Intifada, you've arrived, you're on the negotiating team, tell me more about it.

DB: The negotiations grind to a halt immediately. And I'm still staying in a hotel and I was confronted with, I had to make a decision, did I want to stay or leave. It was clear that there weren't going to be any negotiations and it was clear that this intifada was going to last for a period of time, as I mentioned it was 50 Palestinians killed in the first few days. But I decided to stay. I thought, why not?

AR: Why?

DB: You know, it's a good question. I think it was that it took me such a long time to make that decision, I made a commitment and I didn't want to go back on that commitment. And although I can't say that it was a smart decision, particularly in light of the fact that it was so volatile. The Israelis were bombing places just behind the hotel I was staying at, but there was something that just compelled me to stay.

AR: So you saw the flying checkpoints, you also saw home demolitions at that point?

DB: Yes, the more that the intifada continued to go on, the more that the Israelis would use very oppressive mechanisms against Palestinians. And they were using home demolitions for other purposes as well, for what they call, "administrative purposes," meaning that the person hadn't gotten a permit to build, but now they were using these home demolitions as punishment for activity in the intifada.

AR: So can you describe home demolitions?

DB: Home demolitions were if, for example, the family of a suicide bomber, if the person carried out the suicide bombing, of even if they didn't, an order was made on the home to demolish the home and within very short order, within 24 hours, shorter even in some cases, bulldozers would show up and demolish houses.

AR: People in them?

DB: People in them. The possessions in them. And I remember seeing families just going through the rubble of their demolished homes. Just trying to pick out whatever scraps they could find, whether it was scraps to try and rebuild or whether it was their own possessions. I

remember seeing kids, especially in Jenin, kids looking for dolls, looking for their little cars, and then I contrast it with my own upbringing where it was just something I would never have to worry about, never factored in, never thought that anybody's house would be demolished.

AR: And who pays for the demolition?

DB: Depends but in most cases if it was the Israelis who were demolishing, they would impose a fine on the Palestinian family.

AR: And you mentioned also that sometimes Palestinians self demolished…

DB: Yes. For some of the administrative demolitions, meaning the person who built without a permit, a demolition order is issued and because Palestinians were both afraid of this fine, it's a huge fine for demolition, as well as they knew if they demolished it themselves, they could salvage some of the building materials, there are many cases of Palestinians tearing apart their own houses with their own hands, the very house they built.

AR: And why didn't they get a permit?

DB: The Israelis don't give out permits. These are areas particularly in Jerusalem and Area C, that 60 percent area that I was talking about. In both of those areas, less than one percent of applications are actually granted a building permit. So these are not people who are squatters on somebody else's land, they're on their own land, but they either want to build an addition, or build another floor on to the house because they can't purchase another plot of land, it's either prohibitive, or even if they purchase it, they still need a building permit, etc. And the Israelis routinely deny these permits so when you're looking at a success rate of one percent of permits that are actually granted, you've got a 99 percent of people who need building permits not being granted that building permit. And where are they going to go with their family? They have got to do something, so they build. They build without a permit and then the cycle begins. And I sort of liken it, the way that lawyers have to deal with this situation; it's sort of like a cancer patient being told they can treat their cancer through some aspirin. The whole system is designed for Palestinians never to get justice or redress. So it's like the cancer patient who treats cancer with aspirin.

AR: And if a Jewish family needed a permit?

DB: Well they wouldn't need to get a permit. So there's a difference. In the West Bank, the settlements are constructed with Israeli government issued tenders. So there's a contracting company that does that. When they decide to expand that settlement, it's also done through an Israeli tender. If an individual decides that they want to build an addition on to their house, they go to an Israeli municipal authority. And you know the municipal authority decides to grant or not grant the permit. Even in the cases where they build without a permit, the house is never demolished. The house is never demolished. Even in the cases where an entire settlement is built without permits, what they call outposts, without the government process, not all of them get demolished. But the difference is that the Israelis are not on their land, they are on somebody else's land. Palestinians are on their own land and they get demolished.

AR: So you're doing negotiations, tell me what's going on with those?

DB: The negotiations resume at the tail end of the December of 2000 with the Clinton parameters being announced. And the Clinton parameters were, it was the first time that the Americans put forward some kind of framework for negotiations. Now I have to be clear about what had been discussed before and what hadn't. One of the main problems with the negotiations was that the Israelis didn't and still don't, we're now in the year 2013 and they still don't, they don't recognize any basis for the negotiations. So it's not as though they accept that the Occupied Territory, territory occupied in 1967 and therefore we are discussing territory that was occupied in 1967. No. in their minds, it is you, Palestinians, have recognized Israel and therefore we put that portion into our pockets and because there are more settlements that have been constructed since 1967 until the current date, the negotiations are not over the entirety of the land that was occupied in 1967 but the land that was occupied in 1967 minus the presence of all of those settlements. So what it does is it breeds a mindset inside Israel which has been proven, that the more you build, the more you get rewarded. The more you build settlements, the more you get rewarded at the negotiations table.

And so that was the fundamental problem, one of the problems at the negotiations table. By the end of 2000, the Americans finally come up with what they call a framework agreement, what they call the Clinton parameters. And at these negotiations, President Clinton sets out what he thinks are going to be the contours of the deal. But again he falls into that same trap where there's no definition of the territory he's talking about, he puts out a figure, but we don't know what he's talking about. He rejects the right of return of Palestinian refugees to their homes, even though it is enshrined in international law. He doesn't deal with major issues like allocation of resources including water. And Jerusalem also fits into this model of rewarding Israeli illegality. So under the Clinton parameters, he says in Jerusalem what is Arab shall be Palestine, what is Jewish shall be Israel. Well the more powerful party, it encourages the Jewish part to expand, the Arabs can't do it, obviously because they don't have the building permits, they don't have the guns. And so the negotiations resume in January 2001, President Clinton is out of office now, President Bush has now taken over, and they resume, last for about a week, and then Sharon gets elected into office and that's the end of it.

AR: Talk about Sharon

DB: So Ariel Sharon, many call him the grandfather of settlements, which sounds like a very endearing term. He's a war criminal who had ordered massacres in Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in the eighties. And so a war criminal gets elected prime minister, not the first time, and he decides that he is going to use an iron fist with Palestinians. The intifada is still going on and he is going to use an iron fist against the Palestinians and at the same time he is going to accelerate the expansion of settlements. This is the same individual over whom the Second Intifada begins.

AR: Can you just describe that beginning?

DB: Yeah. Ariel Sharon, as I mentioned is a war criminal, who had gone onto the Harim al-Sharif, very holy site for Muslims, with 1,000 soldiers and in this very bold, I don't even know the term, and he incites anger. He knew it was going to set off anger and he deliberately did this. And he did this because in part he wanted to challenge Ehud Barak and say to Ehud Barak who had just come out of negotiations, Jerusalem will never be divided and this parcel of land, this holy site for Muslims, is forever going to remain under Israeli control. So this very individual

gets elected as prime minister and the situation just keeps getting worse and with it he takes a number of decisions. The iron fist is one of them. The expansion of settlements is another. At the end of September, he virtually imprisons Arafat in his compound, not letting him leave. In March of 2002, he unleashes the Israeli army into major towns and cities in the West Bank including Ramallah. The army goes into the president's office and starts, with bulldozers, tearing apart the president's office. We were terrified that they were going to kill him, and they probably did kill him in the end.

AR: So you had described being on the negotiating team and having hope and then losing hope…

DB: Yeah I had hope at the beginning because my friends had told me that things were close at Camp David. And that was really one of the reasons I thought to come, but then once I was in the negotiations and I realized just how arrogant the Israelis were and that this was a question of power. This wasn't something a lawyer could just magically undo, that this was really an issue of power. That's when I realized that this whole process was useless. As long as the Israelis could hold a gun to the heads of the Palestinians, which they did and continue to do, as long as this occupation continued, as long as they had the power, negotiations were futile.

AR: And you had mentioned that the Israelis wanted a surrender agreement, can you speak to that concept?

DB: That's right. It's interesting, even today when you hear Israelis talk about how they want peace, they want a peace agreement, when you take away some of the layers and start asking them questions, what is it that they really want, you realize that they want a surrender agreement. Not a peace agreement. In other words, they want Palestinian land without the Palestinians. They don't want to go back to 1967 borders. They don't want to grant equality to Palestinian citizens of Israel, they don't want to grant equality to Palestinians in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza strip whether that's in the form of equal citizenship or equal statehood. They want a Palestinian state that can't defend itself, no military, no army. Which is great but Israel has a nuclear weapon. They want the Palestinians to completely give up on the right of return, in other words, just accept that they were ethnically cleansed from their homes. And then they want Palestinians to recognize Israel, not just recognize Israel, but Israel as a Jewish state. They want Palestinians to accept all of the colonization that they are doing. They want Palestinians to accept Palestinians living under some form or another of military rule. That's what they want. That's their version of a peace agreement. Now you might hear different shades of it, but that's the essence of it, whether it's the so called left wing in Israel or the right wing in Israel. It's the same contours, the same contours, it's always the same. It's never anything different. And even when they get a Palestinian leader who is willing to forgo a lot, as I think Mahmoud Abbas is, unrightfully so, that's still never enough. It's still never enough for them. And they want to go even further and keep pushing even further and further.

AR: And often times the argument is that it's about security?

DB: It's never about security. If it were about security, why would they have a settlement in the middle of Palestinian cities such as Hebron? If I was so terrified of someone I wouldn't be living in the middle of a place that's surrounded, it just logically doesn't make sense. And it's interesting because when you talk to settlers and you meet with settlers, they'll tell you it's not

about security. They'll tell you about the idea that this land belongs to Israel, it belongs to the Jewish people. Now they use the guise of security, in order to build and expand the settlements, but the settlers are very clear in terms of why they are there. They are not there to make Israel safe and secure. They're there just to hold on to the land.

AR: You do this for a couple of years and then what happens?

DB: I do this for five years. And then I have a crisis of faith. I realized that the negotiations are going nowhere, the Palestinian leadership doesn't have a strategy, we're in a bit of a tailspin, not a bit, we're in a tailspin. The Palestinian leadership is not capitalizing on the vast resources of its people, the resilience of its people. And so I had a complete crisis of faith and I leave.

AR: So then what did you do?

DB: I pretty much just leave. I still lived in Palestine. I still do live in Palestine. I spent a few years away from Palestine in Boston and I now just work as a lawyer over there. And I'm happy about it. I'm happy.

AR: Can you talk about the development of the BDS movement?

DB: Yeah. So the boycott movement, I think a lot of people believe it began in 2005 but it didn't. The boycott movement began in the '80s with Palestinians urging, first, other Palestinians to boycott Israeli goods and to boycott the Israeli infrastructure and then encourage others to do the same. And actually if you think about it, it even began well before that, with the start of the occupation. In the sixties, Palestinian lawyers were completely boycotting the Israeli court system. Palestinian prisoners were also boycotting the Israeli military court system. They would show up because they had to but they were not willing to engage. They wouldn't plea bargain, they wouldn't do anything. And of course it builds and develops in the eighties with the First Intifada where Palestinians start to find alternatives to both Israeli goods and Israeli services. They stop paying their municipal taxes to the Israeli government and the Israeli government cracks down very hard on them.

AR: Is that in Israel?

DB: In Beit Sahour, in the West Bank.

AR: So in the West Bank, people paid municipal taxes to the Israelis?

DB: Yes, up until the Palestinian Authority came, up until the nineties. And that money wasn't put back to help Palestinians, it was being used to develop settlements. There's been a long history of boycotts and it wasn't until 2005, I worked on the court decision for the wall in 2004…

AR: Speak to that.

DB: So in 2004 there was a decision taken by the Palestinian leadership that they were going to challenge Israel's wall.

AR: Can you describe the wall?

DB: The wall, right, is over 700 kilometers in length. At some points it's about eight meters high, other places it's not eight meters high, concrete, other places its barbed wire fence, trenches, access road for the Israeli army, more trenches, more barbed wire. And anything that has come in the way or will come in the way of this vast expanse of a structure has been demolished or will be demolished under the guise of security. So the Palestinians, we felt very helpless in the face of this wall.

AR: And the location of the wall?

DB: The location of the wall, over ninety percent of it is inside of Palestinian territory. In some parts, it's very deep into Palestinian territory, and takes up a lot of Palestinian land, it just eats it up. Very little of it is actually on the 1967 boundary line. So it wasn't the idea that, "We are building this wall for security reasons." Because if it was for security reasons, you would figure they would put it on the border, but they didn't. It was a means of taking more Palestinian land and encaging as many Palestinians as possible and they've done a similar thing in Gaza in the nineties where they built a wall around the Gaza Strip. So this was just a continuation of that. But we felt very helpless in the face of this and we didn't know how to challenge it and decided that the best way to challenge it was to go to the International Court of Justice.

We took all the steps necessary to do that and ended up winning a resounding victory at the International Court of Justice in July of 2004. A year later the decision still hadn't been implemented. And the decision isn't just against the Israeli government. The decision also implores, and demands actually, not just implores, it demands from third party countries that they're not supposed to do anything that is associated with the regime of settlements and the wall. And of course the international community ignores this, and continues to ignore it. So that's when the formalized Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement begins with a group of, with a committee that calls for boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israel. And so that's been since July of 2005 and it's going to be in its eighth year soon and it's picking up. It's gaining a lot of steam. Now there was a lot of ground work that was done in the years prior, but its picking up steam.

AR: Can you define it?

DB: The boycott, divestment, sanctions movement itself is going through a bit of definition but at its core, it urges people and institutions to boycott any companies, whether American companies or foreign companies, whatever companies that are doing business with the Israeli occupation or with Israeli institutions or with individuals who are affiliated with those institutions or the government. And of course there are different versions of it, some say until freedom is granted to the Palestinians. Others say until the right of return is implemented and equality is achieved. But at its core it's basically trying to hold people to account for their relationship with Israel.

AR: And divestments and sanctions?

DB: The divestment movement is very much the same. It's asking individuals, corporations to divest from those individuals, corporations that are also doing business with Israel and Israeli institutions etc. So for example, if your pension fund is invested in Israeli corporations that do business in the Occupied Territories, if your pension fund is invested in Israeli bonds for

example, that's part of the divestment movement. Sanctions is an attempt to try and isolate Israel for its ongoing human rights violations against Palestinians. The sanctions part is the area where there's been the least movement in large part because I think it requires more governmental involvement and the Palestinian government has just been unwilling to go down that path.

AR: And can you discuss what's going on with Palestinian industry and what are the implications for people living there in their industrial development.

DB: Well you know one of the problems with the checkpoint system is that it favors Israeli industry over Palestinian industry. So if you look at the budget of the Palestinian Authority, vast majority of the money that the Palestinian Authority receives is not from its own industry or taxation but from the international donor community. So then you have to ask the question, well why is that? And the answer is just that the Palestinian industry just can't develop or thrive, there's so much uncertainty there that the business community is unwilling to invest. But even when they are there, the checkpoint system favors Israeli goods, so Israeli goods don't have to go through the Israeli checkpoint system. Palestinian goods do. Palestinian goods have to go, even within the West Bank, have to go through a series of checkpoints in which their goods are unloaded from one truck and reloaded on to another truck and so that obviously adds cost to both the production and distribution of goods. Israeli agriculture gets huge subsidies; so much of the produce that Palestinians consume is produced by Israelis, most of it in the settlements as well. So the whole system is designed to favor Israeli goods and not Palestinian goods, which is why you have this lopsided economy.

AR: And you said that the BDS movement is picking up and having successes, can you give some examples of that?

DB: It is. It is picking up steam. More and more international artists are unwilling to perform in Israel. More academics are refusing to come to Israel and do a term or go on sabbatical there. There have been boycotts of goods. There have been corporations around the world that have been targeted, including security corporations that have been targeted, that are now mandated to not do business with the Israeli occupation. For such a young boycott movement, there have been a number of key successes that people are beginning to think twice about doing business with Israel. And that's a good thing.

AR: And how has that affected Israeli policy, the Israeli government?

DB: The boycott to me is one of the number one issues that the Israelis are irate about because it goes to the very heart of Israel. Israel has always wanted to be accepted, recognized and accepted despite all of the human rights abuses it commits. So despite this, it wants to have that recognition. So the boycott movement takes that away. And that is why there has been so much energy against the boycott movement, whether it's in the form of pinkwashing. Whether it's in the form of greenwashing, trying to make Israel seem more environmentally friendly.

AR: Explain pinkwashing

DB: Pinkwashing is a way of demonstrating that Israel is a gay friendly society, which it's not, and therefore it's a country that people should be supporting. Greenwashing is a way of demonstrating that Israel is environmentally friendly, which it's not, and therefore a country that

should be supported. The latest is filmwashing, trying to demonstrate that Israelis are actually very introspective and through their films, there is a lot of criticism, it's very minor and so they're trying to do that. There's a number of different mechanism that they've used, so there are three. But they've also done other things. They've tried to hold large scale concerts inside Israel, which just a few weeks ago flopped.

AR: Flopped because?

DB: Because they couldn't get the artists that they wanted. They couldn't get artists to come to Israel. They invest a lot of effort in the form of books, in the form of different organizations in the United States to promote Israel and all of the great things…

AR: Brand Israel?

DB: Yes, but not just Brand Israel, but show just how cutting edge Israel is. All to say: "You can ignore the human rights abuses, Israel's pretty cutting edge." And so that is a lot of effort on the one side. But then on the other side there's also been a lot of effort on the part of Israel to prosecute anybody who calls for a boycott against Israel. So currently there's a piece of legislation that's making its way through the court system that is essentially trying to criminalize actions of Palestinians or Israelis who are calling for boycotts against Israel.

AR: And we haven't talked about the water issue

DB: Yeah water, I'm not so familiar with, I know a little bit about. It's again another attempt at greenwashing, this idea that Israel has done such great things with water. But when you scratch the surface a bit, you realize that Israelis consume practically nine times more than Palestinians do because they are allocated more. Israelis have swimming pools, Palestinians don't. Israelis don't have water shortages, Palestinians do.

AR: Why is that?

DB: Because the water is allocated to Israel and Israeli settlements and Israeli agriculture and Palestinians have to just make do. So for example in the Gaza Strip, where there isn't a water shortage but there is a water quality shortage, a shortage of quality water, the areas around the Gaza strip don't have a problem. But Palestinians inside Gaza, I think it's only five to ten percent of it is actually fit for human consumption. So you can just imagine what the rest of it was like. When I lived there I remember the smell of the water and the water smelled like salt water all the time. My hair would fall out when I took a shower. And then in the West Bank, because Israel controls the distribution, there're some places just this past summer, where in one of the refugee camps in the West Bank, they went more than 70 days without getting water. So you can just imagine what life is like for people who don't have water for 70 days.

AR: And then the Palestinians are drinking bottled water that is made by Israeli companies?

DB: That's right, using their own wells. So because of such water shortages, Palestinians spend huge amounts of money to buy water that the Israelis bottle out of their springs.

AR: So what would you advise people in the United States to be doing about this issue?

DB: Oh, where do I begin? First, by pushing for boycotts of Israel, whether that's at your university, whether it's you yourself and your neighbors, whether it's your municipality, your city to be boycotting Israeli, not just Israeli goods, but those companies that do business with Israel, such as Caterpillar. I'm not sure why Caterpillar snow removal equipment is allowed.

AR: So what do the Israelis do with Caterpillar bulldozers?

DB: They use bulldozer to bulldoze Palestinian houses and an American was a victim of a Caterpillar bulldozer. So I would encourage people to really push the boycott. Again, whether it is in their own city, their town, their university, boycotting Israeli goods, boycotting those companies that do business with Israel. I would be pushing for pensions to divest from Israel. I would push for the United States not to give so much money to Israel, or any money for that matter. When you look at the per capita income of Israelis and compare it to some states in the United States and you realize that some states in the United States are poorer and yet so much money, three billion dollars every year, is going to Israel. You're left wondering, why couldn't that money be put to use at home?

And I would be encouraging Americans to push for the end of US taxpayer money to go to Israel. They don't need it. They're using it to destroy Palestinian homes, to commit human rights abuses against Palestine and against Palestinians and you'd be hard pressed to find a Palestinian who doesn't see the link between what Israel is doing and the United States' facilitation of it. I would be pushing for Israel's isolation on a much more international stage. I'd be pushing for isolation at universities, so that there aren't these cross university programs such as the one taking place between Cornell and the Israeli university, Technion. And the reason is that each of the Israeli universities has some tie to the Israeli army. All of the scientific information that they use in terms of the military intelligence is developed in Israel and used against Palestinians in the West Bank. So I mean these are just some of the things. And of course there are other things: it's still not clear to me why Americans don't protest en masse when they come to visit the country and they are treated like garbage when they are in the airport. These are just things that don't make sense to me.

AR: What do you mean treated like garbage?

DB: Well you know, if you come in to Israel, to get into Palestine you have to go through an Israeli border crossing whether it's via Jordan, Egypt or into the Israeli airport, and on the way out I've heard story after story after story of Americans being treated terribly, being strip searched with their possessions taken away, etc. all because they dissent. And it's not clear to me why the US government doesn't do anything about it. Or in the case of Palestinian Americans who are denied entry. It's not clear to me why the US government isn't doing anything. Actually it is clear to me, it's because there is such a power relationship between the two and nobody is really trying to challenge that relationship.

AR: So when did you first learn about the Holocaust and how did that information affect your life?

DB: I think I was in the sixth or seventh grade when I first learned about the holocaust in Canada. And it didn't really affect my life in the sense that it was at that point such a long time

ago. And it was described to us, it was taught to us via film and books and obviously you pick up the tragedy of it and you learn the lesson, that we should be learning lessons.

AR: And as you got older did you process it differently?

DB: As I got older, I processed it differently only because I started to meet people whose grandparents were survivors of the Holocaust and I began to recognize that it wasn't just the people who were affected, but there were generations who were affected.

AR: And did it alter your understanding of how this whole conflict emerged?

DB: It altered it only in the sense that it made me realize that there was a lot of trauma that's involved and when you go through a traumatic experience, you end up, or at least what I saw, is that the Israelis ended up justifying a lot of what they did because of this trauma and not learning the lesson from it. So in other words, it was, nothing can compare to the Holocaust because the Holocaust was such a horrific experience, and it was, but then the lessons weren't really taken from that. In other words, as awful and horrific an experience it was, rather than learning from that experience and saying we're not going to commit human rights abuses against people, we're not going to dispossess people, it ended up being, not the opposite but because all of this happened, therefore we are justified in doing what we have done. And it wasn't just for the generation for the people who survived the Holocaust, but this has gone on now for generations to the point where I see today many of the apologists for Israel and Israel's activities point to the Holocaust as being a reason why they are entitled to do what they are doing rather than a reason not to do what they are doing.

AR: So you talked about having optimism, can you talk about your optimism?

DB: I'm definitely optimistic, and I don't know if it's naïve optimism but I'm definitely optimistic and the reason is I feel like that this can't go on for much longer. Peoples' eyes are beginning to open to what Israel is doing and I don't think you can really justify any longer the continued denial of freedom or lack of equality. And I see it on US campuses. I see it when I read the pages of the newspaper, where you're now beginning to read critical voices, even something as basic as Chuck Hagel's appointment. And I mean Chuck Hagel is no friend of the Palestinians, but the fact that he voiced a little bit of criticism against Israel and it's now being blown out of proportion to the point where I hear so many Americans saying, "Why does the secretary of defense have to pledge allegiance to a foreign entity?" That just doesn't make any sense to me. So I'm optimistic, I really am. I don't think that it's going to unravel overnight. I'm not so naïve to believe that this relationship between the United States government and Israel is going to change anytime soon, but I do think that the Americans are changing. And not just Americans, I think people around the world are changing. The boycott movement is picking up. People around the world are beginning to realize that this is wrong. And Israel's lies can only go so far.

AR: So you talked about overplaying their hand?

DB: They really have, they've overplayed their hand, especially in their actions in Gaza. It doesn't make sense for me or for anybody else, how Israel can justify dropping bombs on

refugee camps. That just doesn't make sense, to a defenseless civilian population. Doesn't make sense.

AR: So you think things are going to change?

DB: They are changing. They are changing. Snail's pace but their changing.

AR: And where do you call home?

DB: Palestine. Palestine is my home.

AR: Talk more about that.

DB: I made a decision in 2000 to live there and I could've backed out within months of my arrival. I didn't. Something kept me there. 2001, after my one year commitment was up, I could've left, I didn't. So I stay for a reason. I'm not sure what the reason is, I have to be honest, but it is a place I call home.

AR: Any particular part of it or the whole thing?

DB: No the whole place.

AR: I'm just addressing it because last time you didn't know.

DB: Yeah, I didn't know at the time because I've been traveling a lot. I've spent the last three years traveling back and forth. But no, that place is my home. I've come to realize that I definitely have a strong home connection to Canada and that's where I was born, that's where I was raised, that's where my parents are from, it's the country that took in my parents. You know, there's a lot of attachment there. And so definitely, Canada's home. But where my current home, is Palestine. And whether I'm living in Canada, or whether I'm living in Palestine, or whether I'm living in Boston, I have this real sense that my home is Palestine. I could be in Canada at that same point in time.

AR: And have your mother and father been able to reconnect?

DB: They have. They have reconnected a great deal. They've reconnected in two ways. In part, they are tourists who come to visit. They visit me, they visit the country they were born in and raised in, and, but they visit it like tourists, because they didn't really see it when they were kids. So they come as tourists but then they also come as people who are from that place. And so it's hard for me to describe, but you just have to take a look at the way they operate. For example, my father, while he is in Canada, first thing he does in the morning, turns on the computer and he listens to the radio from Nazareth. He knows what's going on in Nazareth, everyday. And so while he is in Canada, his home is in Palestine. And so they relate to it as Palestinians, as citizens, as this is their homeland, but while they're there, they are tourists. And I think it's in large part because they left when they were so young

AR: And how do they feel having a daughter who has gone back and retraced their steps in some way?

DB: Mixed. At the beginning they weren't happy about it. I think they are happier now. And I think that they have come to a place where they are feeling at ease and peace with it, with themselves and with me.

AR: And anything else you want to say?

DB: No I think that's it.

AR: About being Palestinian and having Israeli citizenship, the Israeli army..

DB: Oh yeah, I'm not eligible. Palestinians do not serve in the Israeli army unless they volunteer to.

AR: Or they are a Bedouin or Druze,

DB: Druze, yeah.