

Video interview in Boston, Massachusetts
By Alice Rothchild

Leila Farsakh transcript

AR: So can you tell me your name, date of birth, and where you were born?

LF: My name is Leila Farsakh, and I was born in Irbid. And I was born in 1967, just two months after the war. This is why I was born in Jordan, instead of being born in Birzeit where my family comes from.

AR: And can you tell me something about your family before '48, where people were living?

LF: Well my family, my father's side, they came from Ramallah, from the Birzeit region, they were born in Birzeit. But his mother was born in a town beside Nazareth which was wiped out by the Israelis in 1948. She came from Saffuriyya. So my grandmother, who I knew, that I grew up with, came from that town which in 1945 was actually as big as Nazareth, and had a big Palestinian community. My grandmother was born there. She actually went to school in Saffuriyya, in the school run by nuns. So for her generation she was quite early, she could read and write. She could read quite well the Quran because she was very pious. She could write her name. She got married when she was young, married when she was thirteen years old. I think she got married, '25, 1926, that's my suspicion, yeah, I think. And she came down from Nazareth, from Saffuriyya, which was a big town, to Birzeit, which at the time was a little village.

And what I know of '48... So my father tells me that they went once or twice to Saffuriyya to see his uncles. I've visited Saffuriyya again, which as you know was completely wiped. It was one of the villages that the Israelis destroyed in 1948. But what he tells about my grandmother is that the last time she went was maybe '45 or '44, and that after '48 she could not go. And which meant two things: she got separated from her village, from her town, but also from her family.

And she connects with them in 1967 because some of her family members became refugees in Syria and in Lebanon, and a few actually sneaked from the border in Lebanon and went back to Saffuriyya, which they found wiped out, and so they go to Nazareth. And there's actually a neighborhood in Nazareth called the neighborhood of the Saffuriyyans.

As to talking about the memory of '48 in my family, that is something that was not spoken of, which I think is typical of most traumas, people don't talk much about it. The only thing I know about it is from my grandmother, what she talked a bit about the town, a little about when she was growing up, but not much.

AR: What did she say about how she was growing up?

LF: Well, she was an orphan, which I think was hard for her. She came from a big family. Her father was a *sheikh*; he was a big notable in the area. But, I don't know how big a notable because you know how the story, when people narrate them, they become bigger than what they are. But definitely he was a respected person in his area. I mean, she used to claim that between her and the prophet there were 35 grandfathers. So she had this, so her father was a *sheikh*, he was a pious man, very respected.

And I think one of the reasons also my grandfather married her is because he was marrying into status. What would make somebody from the area around Jerusalem to go all the way to the north to marry somebody from there. So she did come from a big family, a good family, let's put it this way.

My grandmother was sad, that is how I remember her. She always felt that she was exiled you know, in the sense that, because I knew her after '67, which was now the second exile, which I am going to get into. But she did not talk about the village much. She just talked about her father, whom she loved. The one who talked a little bit more was my father when he went because he remembered his uncle on a horse. But, it's all these patchy memories. There's my aunt, who is the wife of my uncle, who is a relative of her. She did talk once and only about Saffuria, once because I asked, and I was probably seven or eight years old, "How was it?" Because she said, "Yeah, we left in '48. We left without anything." And she was probably nine. I made a calculation, I think she was nine. She did say that her mother took the only coat she had, which was not much, and they walked all the way from Nazareth, all the way to Syria. And they actually settled in the refugee camps around Damascus.

AR: Did she talk about that?

LF: She told that her mother cried, you know, and that they lost everything. I've always been meaning to go back and talk about it with her. But what I've noticed, especially although I come from a family that was very politicized, always talked about politics. I was raised very well aware of the conflict and the reality of the conflict. What struck me is talking about the Nakba and the Naksa [expulsion in 1967] was very difficult.

Now the third memory of the Nakba, comes from my father, from my father's reaction to it. I still have a vivid memory of him telling me how he felt about the Nakba, when he was 15 years old, still living in Birzeit, on the height of Ramallah

AR: What was he doing there?

LF: He was 15 years old at the time. And he tells me that when he saw the refugees coming up from Lyd, because they came to the region of Ramallah. There are three major refugee camps in the Ramallah area. There actually was a small refugee camp in Birzeit. He said, "When I saw the refugees coming up, with nothing, the shock of what has happened," and he was probably 15 years old, 14 or 15. He said to himself, "This should never happen again. It happened because our fathers were not aware enough of the Zionist danger and did not act enough to stop it. This should never happen in my generation. I will make sure that these people go back home, and we go back home."

So and I've always pictured him. I know how it is when you are 14 or 15. This is when your political consciousness really shapes up, a turning point that was for him and for his brother because both him and his brother became very politically active, which was very much the generation of the '50s in the Middle East. I mean, the whole Middle East in the '50s and '60s were everybody was politically active. There was large political freedom and various political parties. You had the Bath, the Bath party which was, you know, the major party, pan-Arabist Party... There was the Nasserite Party, supporters of Nasser in Egypt. There were the communists. My father was not with the communists, for like most of the generation, my father was more inclined towards the Baath, the pan-Arabist movement.

I heard that from him as well as from my uncle as well as from my aunts. The massive demonstrations that would happen in Damascus, in Amman, and Beirut, in support of Abdel Nasser, in support of Arab unity, the belief that Arab unity is the only way to liberate Palestine, that the Zionist entity is an imperialist entity; that the problem was not with the Jews at all. I always grew up that the problem was not with the Jews, the problem was with the Zionists.

We always lived with the Jews, we always had the Jews among us, used my grandmother to say. But actually, in my own family there is also lots of taboo that we don't talk about; what was the relationship between Jews and Arabs, or Muslims because I don't like the distinction. For me the Jew is an Arab. The distinction should be between an Israeli and an Arab, and a Jew and a Muslim. The conflict has never been a conflict about religion. The conflict has always been a conflict over land and over statehood, and who gets to share this land or not share this land.

So I was raised with all that, but for me growing up, because I'm born in '67, so I'm born after the second catastrophe for the Palestinians, and I think that was very massive for my father. But again, what I try very much today to ask what exactly happened in '67, where were you, how did you see the refugee coming out? He's been very reluctant to talk about it.

It's been much more my mother would talk the war of 1967 and its impact on the family than my father. And I think because of the heaviness of that trauma and how you as a Palestinian try to deal with that trauma. And also with this principles that I told you, when you are 15 years old, you tell yourself, "This should never happen again in my generation," and you are politically active, and you campaign for the cause, and then see another catastrophe happened again, that is too much to bear. My father was a student in Germany and they organized massive demonstrations in support of the Palestinians. You know, he was an ambassador to his country. His brother also was, you know, everybody, there was a certain freedom and hope in the Middle East that you've never captured again, you know. I've always told him, "You're lucky because somehow when you grew up there was hope around you and you felt you could do something," and he answers, he said, "Yeah, but then our dreams were so badly shattered, look where I am today after all, 60 years of struggle. We got worse than what we started off with." He did get in the end that he could go back home, but it's a very bitter, it's a very bitter reality.

AR: So going back in history, there's the grandmother in...

LF: Saffuriyya.

AR: And the grandfather in...

LF: Birzeit.

AR: And they get married and they...

LF: She had five children. My grandfather was married to two women so he had, my father had a total of eight siblings. There were nine kids. So the woman from Saffuriyya bore five kids: four boys and one girl, which gave her a lot of status as you can imagine. But she always felt, and she inculcated in her kids, the importance of education, the importance of studying. So all her kids studied, and all her kids went as far and all of them got university education.

AR: Where did that come from?

LF: The perseverance that education is the only thing that nobody can steal away from you. They can take the land, they can take the money, they can take the gold, but they cannot take your knowledge. And that's also how social mobility happens, through education. She was very proud that one of her kids was an engineer, one was a doctor, the third was an accountant. They were not just peasants working the land or taxi drivers.

AR: And her husband was a...?

LF: Her husband was a *sheikh*. My grandfather was a religious *sheikh*, you know and, as well as, he was a businessman. He had a shop in Jerusalem for a while. Then he went back to Birzeit and settled in Birzeit and traded there. For example, my father tells me that the first time he saw the sea was when he was twelve and that's because they, on top of his work, I mean, my grandfather was a *sheikh* as well as a businessman, but he also had land, and they had grapes. And they would pack the grapes in boxes and they take them down to Jaffa.

And that's the first time he saw the sea, which was for him a stunning experience. He just saw how beautiful it was, but he remained a mountain boy. He was not a sea boy. But the big shock, though, the thing that always marked me was that him, I can just picture him on that hill in Birzeit, seeing the refugees coming. And I don't know if you read the book *The Lemon Tree* when he describes the refugees coming out of Lyd going all the way to the Ramallah area with nothing. And that gave even more resonance to my father's experience, seeing these refugees coming, and asking himself, "What are you going to do about it, and why did it happen?" and how this should never happen again.

AR: So did your family have any sense that '67 was happening or about to happen?

LF: No. It hit them blindsided because also, I mean, they felt something was going to happen but everybody was taken by complete and utter surprise that Israel did a pre-emptive war in '67. I had an uncle living in Palestine at the time in Birzeit, as well as a grandmother. So they left with the war because they don't know what's going to happen. And then they all come to my father's house in Irbid, so his sisters and his cousins, and it was a very small house, they had just gotten married.

And I always tried to picture how that was, and my mother pregnant seven months with me. My mother when she talks about it she talks about it quite calmly. She is able to narrate it. Maybe because she is not Palestinian, she was a witness. She could see what was happening.

But she did say how much there was a sense of defeat, a sense of, what are we going to do next? It was a big defeat because it was a full disillusionment of Arab nationalism, a full disillusionment of Abdel Nasser, a full disillusionment of what are we going to do now. But this marked also the movement towards the PLO. Although my father, my uncles were big supporters of the Bath movement and Arab unity, they still remained adherent to that but their political activism became the PLO.

AR: How did your father and mother meet?

LF: They met when he was studying in Germany.

AR: Why Germany?

LF: Because Germans were good engineers and he wanted to be a good engineer. That was the idea. And his father used to tell him, “Look, a German manufacturing, it never breaks, it’s solid.”

AR: Did he know German when he went?

LF: No, he did not know German. He learned it from scratch. He managed to get a scholarship and he always said it was a very welcoming society. Not warm, but very right, very correct, very legal, and very supportive. He did very well in his engineering. He finished his engineering degree and was even thinking of doing his PhD, but he wanted to go home to build a country. So he met my mother and he went back in 1965.

AR: So she was Italian, so what was she doing in Germany?

LF: She went to study in Germany. They met and fell in love and...

AR: Any sense of her...

LF: She, I mean she was very interesting. My mother tells me that in 1964 when she met my father, nobody knew who are the Palestinians. They weren’t even on the map. European knew there were Arabs but they didn’t know who are the Palestinians. So she meets him, she falls in love with him, they decide to get married, and she goes with her father in 1965 to the West Bank. And actually given that we are at Boston College, it’s a very beautiful story about how my grandfather decided to do a background check, if you want, on my father, to make sure that my father was really sincere about my mother. Because my grandfather, as you can imagine, was freaked out, what on earth was she doing?

AR: She’s Catholic?

LF: She’s Catholic and he’s Muslim. So my grandfather also was agnostic. He was not religious man. He came from Trieste which is a very beautiful Italian city, quite cosmopolitan because it had always been a melting pot of various cultures, **Slovanian**, Austrian, and Italian. So, but what he did, I found always fascinating. He met my father and liked him, this is how my father and my grandfather tell the story. But my grandfather said he wanted to do a security check on him, and just to show you how the Catholic Church works very well, even in the pre-internet era. So what he did was, he was a friend who was the cardinal of Trieste, and asked him, “There’s this guy who comes from beside Jerusalem. Could you get any information about him?” So the cardinal contacts the people in Rome, the Vatican. And the Vatican contacts their office in Jerusalem. And the office in Jerusalem contacts their priests in the various dioceses, because Birzeit had a big Christian community, contacts their priest in Birzeit. And the priest in Birzeit reports back, “Of course, Hashem Farskash comes from a very good family, he’s very good. You can trust him. It’s not somebody who would just fool around.” It always struck like how in 1965 you could do that in pre-fax, maybe pre-telex, maybe telex was then. It just shows you how well the church works.

So anyway, they were in love. They got married. But my father’s dream was to go and build a country.

AR: What did his family think of him bringing this...

LF: Actually my grandmother was supportive because my grandmother was also an exiled woman. She actually befriended my mother. They were very good, supportive for one another. She saw in my mother somewhat her own story: that she left a more sophisticated place to come to a less, to an alien place that she did not know. She appreciated the love that my mother had for my father. My mother was very respectful as well. So there was an empathy, I think the empathy of the foreigners.

AR: Did your mother learn Arabic?

LF: Yes, my mother speaks very good Arabic today. She learned Arabic. My mother also always said, "I am not an exile. Your father is exiled. I am not exiled because I chose to leave. Your father did not choose to leave." And I think it is very grounding when somebody lives in the same place in the same house for 25 years. I mean, I don't know that myself. I envy her that. So that maybe gave her the strength to be able to know who she is and to be able to know, to understand who others are, to appreciate them and not to judge them, not fear them. That was her incredible, still is her incredible ability to empathize and not to judge.

AR: So it '67 she's in Jordan.

LF: She's in Jordan, both in Jordan, and my father was working on this project, again an Arab nationalist project to build a project on the Jordan River. Because I don't know if you remember or if you know, Israel was stealing water from the Jordan River. So there was a pan-Arab project to build a dam on the Jordan River, a canal that would prevent Israel from diverting the water of the Jordan river. And my father was working on this project. So it was, and then this project also stops because the war in 1967. And once the project stopped, my father moved then to Amman, to Jordan, capital.

AR: And that's when all the relatives came?

LF: No, all the relatives came to Irbid where he was working, because Irbid is a town by the Jordan River source up in the North. It's in the North.

AR: Can you describe that house?

LF: I don't know it because I left it when I was only one year old. I don't know it. I even tried to find it but I could not. But what I know is from the other relatives; some of them went back, through the Red Cross, and other ones to Kuwait, another exodus. And my father and my uncle applied for permission to go back to the West Bank. Israel refused to give it to any of the men; they only gave it to my grandmother and my aunt. It was again on humanitarian and military consideration. So that was a confirmation of the exodus of my father, could not go back, which was very hard for him. And we started our exile within the Arab world. I mean, I grew up in Jordan in two different cities, and then when we moved to Kuwait.

AR: Let's go through this one by one. So you moved to Amman when you were one. And what's your earliest memory?

LF: My earliest memory is Black September.

AR: Which is what year?

LF: 1970. So I'm three years old. And Black September was when the king turned against the Palestinians because the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization] was growing in Jordan and was challenging his own power over the country, it wasn't really challenging...It was challenging the authority of the king. It was not planning to topple the king. But it was a question, the big dilemma that the PLO and the Palestinian cause goes into, which was it needs Arab support to succeed but Arab support also wants to contain it so the PLO does not drag them into a war with Israel they did not want. The important thing is the king put his troops against the PLO. It's a conflict of ten days, ten to fifteen days. 3,000 peoples were killed in it, mostly civilians. And then the Arab League intervenes.

AR: And you remember...

LF: I remember, the only thing I remember, I remember the cannon, the sound of the cannon exploding. My first memory, if you ask what is my first memory, me with a friend of mine, probably my first friend, hiding in the car of her father. I don't know if it was our fantasy or if we really heard something. I'm hiding

in the car. And the second memory is playing with some friends out in the neighborhood and then this cannon explodes and all the kids go inside the house and I'm left out on the street wondering where my mother is.

And my mother comes and takes me. My mother is that comforting, that symbol I have that, yeah she's the one who protected me. But that's the first memory I have. And then the memory after that is moving us to Kuwait, which was 1971. So 1970, and my mother, actually I discussed with her a bit, and she revealed that my brother and I were quite anxious. I don't remember that but she did say because she had to sell the things in the house. And she said that every time somebody came to the house to buy things and take it, we would cling to her clothes which was a sign that we were scared not knowing where we were going. So, it was me and my brother then. I was three-and-a-half when we moved to Kuwait.

AR: Why Kuwait?

LF: Because there was work there. My father went and found a job, found a good job. We stayed in Kuwait two years.

AR: Memories of that?

LF: Memories of that is kindergarten, the heat of Kuwait, the birth of my sister. I remember the birth of my sister.

AR: What kind of kindergarten?

LF: The only thing I can remember in the kindergarten is I had to go to the bus to the kindergarten. I would play music.

AR: Public, Christian?

LF: That's a good question. I don't know. Also in the Middle East people, you forget, you don't ask people if they are Christians or Muslims. You're Arabs full stop. Today people make a lot of fuss about Muslims or Christians, but the way I was raised out in the 70s, you never asked, you knew somebody's religion from the feasts they celebrated, if they celebrated Eid or if they celebrated Christmas, but you didn't ask people if they go to church or if they go to the mosque. In all the schools I was in, we were always mixed Muslim and Christian, I was not in a singular Muslim. So I was raised, up until the 18, in a very secular way. We always attended religious classes in school, two or three hours a week. But the ethos was mainly secular in the sense that we don't talk about religion in class.

AR: And were you at home learning Italian or Arabic?

LF: Yes, I always spoke to my mother in Italian. My mother always spoke to me in Italian.

AR: And your father?

LF: Arabic. We always spoke Arabic. And with the kids, our siblings, we always spoke together in Arabic, which I think as a result because we were living in an Arabic society. With my mother up until today, I still speak to her in Italian, although she speaks good Arabic by now. It's the mother language. Although I always say the only language I speak without an accent is Arabic. You know, I speak a number of languages but the one I speak without an accent is Arabic, the language of my socialization, how I grew up until I was 18.

AR: Two years in Kuwait and then?

LF: Two years and then we moved to Dubai. And that's 1973 war.

AR: And why was that?

LF: Because my father found a better job in Dubai and because his brother was living in Dubai. And the idea was, given we are an exile, you might as well be together. It's good for the kids to have cousins. It's good for the brothers to be together. So we moved to Dubai in 1973, just before the October War, the Yom Kippur War. We moved in September and the war happens in October. And I remember that quite well, I'm by then 6. I remember my parents watching TV. I remember seeing on TV these planes. I remember the enthusiasm, "Oh very good."

We defeated the idea that Israel is invincible because the defeat of '67 was a very major blow on Arab psyche and Palestinian politics. And the PLO, don't forget by then has been affirming that we exist and Palestinians can take their life in their hand. And that the liberation of Palestine is going to happen through Palestinians, not by relying on Arabic armies. It needs Arab support but the one in the driving seat has to be the Palestinian, and the aim of the Palestinian was the creation of a democratic state in all of Palestine inclusive of Jews, Muslims, and Christians. And I remember those phrases growing up. I remember asking my mother because my grandmother was coming from the West Bank, so she brought with her news about the life under occupation. I hadn't yet visited Palestine. I didn't know how it looked like. And she used to tell us about how the Israelis questioned her at the checkpoints, at the borders and how much hassle they gave her. So my question was always, "How do we, can we live with these people or not?" And my grandmother used to say, our problem is not Jews, our problem is the Zionists who don't want to live with us.

Israelis don't want to live with us, but Palestine should be for all Muslims and Christians and Jews. So that's the program I was hearing and in 1973 when the war happened, I'm hearing my uncles and my father speaking and talking about it and happy that finally Arab armies prove that they could stop Israel, and Israel is not invincible; that with proper Arab co-ordination, and Palestinian fighting you can liberate Palestine, and especially also soon after you have the Arab embargo. Saudi Arabia decides to put an embargo on oil until the US forced Israel to retreat from the 1967 borders and confirm UN resolution 242. So that was a massive euphoria that you see there as Arab solidarity, we can defeat Israel.

AR: Did you see people celebrating in the streets or what was the...

LF: I didn't see people celebrating, I saw lots of people talking about it and the other talking that I heard was, "Why didn't Sadat move the troops further? Why did he stop after crossing the Suez canal? Why didn't he go further?" That was all of them, why did he stop? And then came all the questions. He's doing it for tactical reasons. He's not interested, really, in liberation. The war was a means to move the negotiations because, if you remember, the negotiations were stuck and the war was a way to reengage the Americans into forcing a peace deal in the area by forcing direct negotiation between Arab countries and Israel. But then you have Kissinger coming along and Kissinger was not for comprehensive peace. He was more for step-by-step diplomacy. So I was hearing all that. I wasn't just studying, I was hearing, I was too young, too young but I remember the Geneva conference that took place in 1974, who was going to go to it or not because the PLO was not invited. The Syrian also did not go. So, on the one hand, there was an attempt to do something about the conflict, and on the other hand, Israeli reticence and also Kissinger's playing Israel's advocate basically.

AR: Growing up, how is this affecting your sense of identity?

LF: It was not a question of what I am. I was raised to be Palestinian full stop. This was not something negotiated. I came to grips I think, with my mother's identity, I think, I was ten. I asked her, "Am I Palestinian? Am I Italian? What am I? Am I Arab?" And she said, "You're Arab. You're Palestinian. Your friends are Palestinian Arabs. You are growing up in, you are the result of the society you grow up in, not the result of just who your parents are." I think she was downplaying her role, but I was very much raised in this consciousness that we are all Palestinian. We were sometimes described as the daughter of the Italian, but that was always looked upon as a plus in the sense that you could speak another language. It wasn't taken as an identity or our Palestinian-hood was being put into question, because, it was not negotiated. We are Palestinian because the father said so, it's a very patriarchal society as well. So I grew up very much aware that I'm Palestinian.

And I grew up without defining what it means to be Palestinian. It was hard to articulate what it means to be Palestinian, where it is evident. I knew in exile it is hard. I knew I was Palestinian because everybody told me I am Palestinian. I knew I was Arab because I spoke Arabic. But of course remained

this desire to know how Palestine looks like. The way my father talked about it was a bit like a promised land. We would ask him, "Tell us how it looks like. Or when my grandmother came, we used to ask her, "How is it there, how are my aunts, how are my cousins?" We were told of the cousins and the aunts and everybody. So the major turning point for me was in 1977, because my father managed to find a way by which we could go into the West Bank because my mother got a Jordanian passport.

AR: And how did she do that?

LF: Because she was entitled as a wife of a Jordanian man, she could get a Jordanian passport. And with it she can get the kids on the Jordanian passport. But he could not because the Israelis said no. My aunt made the request to make my parents come and my father's request was rejected, my mother's was allowed. OK, because also the kids were small.

AR: Why was your father's request rejected?

LF: We don't know. I think it's a policy of not allowing men back because if men come back they will settle back. Israel's policy was to discourage return. The idea was if women go back, women are not as harmful because eventually without men they can't produce, whereas men can be militant, men can organized, it's all a policy of discouraging return. So we went in '77, I'm ten years old.

AR: Tell me about that.

LF: Oh my God. That was paradise. Literally.

AR: Being there, what happened?

LF: Getting there, that was a nightmare getting there because, so we're four kids. The oldest is ten which is me. The youngest is three. And there's my mother. We're trying to cross the border.

AR: You flew from Kuwait...

LF: We flew from Dubai to Jordan, to Amman. I had an uncle there. We had to get permission from the Jordanians to exit Jordan, to go into what was called the Zionist entity. It was not called Israel in the 1970s. It was called the Zionist entity. So we had to wait on the Jordanian border for one day until they gave us that permission, in the middle of the desert, because it's by the Dead Sea. In July, so you can imagine how hot and how much flies there were over there.

So we waited for six hours, from six in the morning until two in the afternoon, eight hours. That day our name did not come out, because your name had to come out and then you get on the bus to cross the Jordan River. It did not come up that day. It came up the second day. So we went back home, the second day we came back.

AR: Back home...

LF: To my uncle's house. Because from Amman to the bridge, what we call the Allenby Bridge, is 45 minutes. It's not very far. So the next day we get the permit and we get on these buses which I cannot describe to you how stuck, stuck with dirt they are. We're dressed light. We're dressed in our lightest possible clothes, so we'll remain fresh, we don't get too hot. And it was very rudimentary on both sides. And we finally get to the Jordan bridge, the Allenby Bridge. And I grew up with the songs about the Allenby Bridge, Farouz, which is a very famous singer, sang for Jerusalem and sang about this bridge which she called the Bridge of Return, "*Jasr al Awda*".

So I really want to see it and I really want to see this Jordan River because, also for Christmas there's a song of Farouz about Christmas and Jesus being baptized in that water. And I remember crossing that Allenby bridge and being shocked at how shallow the river was... I mean today it's like this. In '77 it was as large as this table, a little bit. It was as large as this room. I'll give it that. And then there was an Israeli soldier on the other side waiting for us, and at the time they didn't have a terminal. It was just shacks. It was just shacks in the sand. So we had to pass through the security check whereby we had to

undress, our shoes taken away.

AR: The children had to undress?

LF: Everyone had to undress. They take our shoes away and then they come back after having checked that we did not put anything in our shoes. They throw the shoes in front of you. And you know, shoes are in the Middle East, are quite not a respectful thing. You throw shoes and you go and look for your shoes among all this mess, quite humiliating...OK, I'm still a child, but still it shocked me.

But what shocked me the most is that they give you a number so that your bags have to be checked. What is in your bag, one item by item has to be checked, to make sure that you are not carrying any papers, any weapons, any whatever. And it was where you're sitting, there would be the Israeli soldier, and my mother and us, we were here sitting. And between us was a barbed wire. And the soldier had a wooden table and she took the suitcases and empties it like that, and my mother had to tell her if there's something fell down, please put it back in the bag. They also took away the food for my brother who was three years old, the milk bottle. So it was surreal, I still remember it today. We were like waiting there in the desert.

So I can tell you the metaphor of the Jews, you know wandering the desert for 40 years. I always love this metaphor. I think it's one of the most beautiful metaphors from the Jewish faith that you're lost in the desert for 40 years. It felt like, yeah, you're on a desert in the middle of nowhere. You don't know where you're going afterwards, there are people are checking you inside out. My mother who is usually used to be a very hot tempered woman, she had a certain serenity that day. I don't know why, because she knew that she cannot control situations out of her hand.

So we finished all this ordeal by 2:00 or 12:00 and then we take a taxi. And we drove to Birzeit. And it's just, I still remember it, the landscape around the Dead Sea which is so, you know how it is, it's very rough; it's very like being on the moon. And then you slowly start going up the mountain and you see more and more green. And the taxi driver tells you there's Jerusalem over there and he goes into more and more green landscape. I came from Dubai so I grew up as a child, basically my consciousness basically has been in deserts. I'm in Kuwait when I'm four years old, and in Dubai I am from the age of six until I'm 18, so it was a very arid, desert land.

Here we come to Palestine and we start from the desert, but you're going towards green, towards olive trees, towards pine trees, towards grass. It was just heavenly. And we reach Birzeit and my grandmother, very happy, my aunt, very happy. The house does not stop, people coming, greeting, because we are the kids of one of the exiled sons. The house is a very beautiful old house, the house my grandfather built in 1911. It's one room beside another room beside another room. Beautiful old stone, and a very beautiful balcony that overlooks the hills, the undulated hills. You know the terraced olive groves. And my grandmother had this wonderful big garden that had, what do you call it, a blackberry tree, mulberry tree, had fig trees, had almond trees. I mean, we were down. The idea that we could climb a tree, and we could pick fruit from the tree was just heaven.

So, actually, my mother always says that holiday she did not see her kids because we were either in my grandmother's garden, or my father would say grandfather's garden, or at my aunts' houses which also had these big gardens. They had the fields, you know we just had the fields. Like one of my uncle had the field and they had a spring just by the field. For me the idea that I could see a spring... We went down picked cucumbers from the field. I ate cucumbers that summer which came out of my ears. I went to pick almonds. Just climbing, this idea of climbing trees and walking to the hill and seeing the spring was really very, very beautiful.

And of course with that trip we went everywhere. We went to Jaffa. We went to Tel Aviv. We went to Nazareth. We saw our cousins who were from Nazareth, who were the kids of my grandmother's nephew. So you see the 1967 war reconnected the land. There I am, Nazareth is very different from Birzeit. Tel Aviv is like you're being in Europe, when you go to Tel Aviv. But we traveled around. There were no check points. We went to the sea.

AR: How did this feel to you?

LF: It felt it's all our Palestine. It felt Palestine occupied by foreigners who cannot relate to the land at all, who speak a strange language, who look like European. They didn't look Arab to me, they weren't Arab. I didn't see much of the Oriental Jews, but I mean the shock was the people were in shorts everywhere. My

mother said how badly they're dressed. She's Italian, so you know that was the important thing, how people dressed.

I remember Haifa, this beautiful garden, and people coming for weddings and you could tell who was Arab and who wasn't because if they were made up or not.

It was all the same land, also I was told it's all the same land, but yeah, inhabited by others. But of course we left and my father telling us, when you come back bring me some soil from Palestine, some earth. So it's also this, like we're going to see my father, images of his own country. And which was also our own country but how does it become your country? But that experience was important for me because I think it created my own personal bond to Palestine. Palestine became real, not just become the images of my father. And it also became my own Palestine because it was my own direct relationship to my cousins, it was my new friends, I was experiencing the land, was living in the house, it was the giggles at night.

And ever since we went every second year, which every second summer we spent it there. So it helped foster a personal bond to the place. And I also went afterwards. In 1991 I worked there for a year with the UN. In 1998 I worked for a whole year with the research institute in Ramallah. In 2008 we went for a sabbatical. So it's not just a visit that I'm going over for a holiday. It's more like, what can I do for the place? Why this place means to me? It always meant a lot to me. I often found it as my refuge. And people always wonder, how on earth can the West Bank be a refuge? But just going, walking through the olive trees, the olive orchards, these hills. They're not beautiful, they're not ugly, but there's something so resilient about them.

I think what's very beautiful about Palestine for me was always the resilience of this land; the olive tree represents this resilience. People can come and go, alien, foreigners, occupiers, original people, but these trees will remain unless somebody comes and smashes that. And that resilience, that there's something solid, something here to stay and nothing will move it, was for me something very solid and a very important thing because of my exile experience. And it always gave me strength because I knew my cousins, my aunts would never leave it.

And the question was, can I go myself and stay there and not be moved and why is that so important? I think that was so important because up until 2000, up until the latest Israeli war by building the wall, that was a turning point. But up until 2002, Palestine always revealed two things: resilience and determination, and also hope that you could do it. Because the big experience of '67 was about: we are not going to leave the land. We're not going to do the mistake that happened in 1948. We're staying here. And that also changed the situation. Because if people left we wouldn't be with the problem we have today, or that Israel has today. But this idea that you have to stay and the way you stay is what you make survive, live, persevere... You need support and the support comes from money or the role of the PLO or the role of Palestinians. Even when it seems absurd, you just keep at it. You build your institutions, you create houses, you go and study abroad but you go back to build more.

What really killed people's spine was Oslo, or rather after Oslo, and above all what Israel did with the wall and the checkpoints, because that's what killed the hope. That's what killed the fact that you can't communicate, you cannot go from [area] A to B. Also my father goes back. So my father in 1994 he goes back.

AR: So how did he get permission?

LF: Because by then it's Oslo, it's the peace process. And by then he also has an Italian passport so he enters as an Italian. And also on the Jordanian passport he could enter. In other words, it was permissible and he was by then, in '94, 60 years old. That was a big moment for him and for his siblings. And unfortunately, I was not with him and I always regret that I did not go with him when he went for the first time, because also for me, Palestine was already real. It was his dream he would go back, build his house over the piece of land where he used to play as a little boy. And indeed he went back in '94 but the Israelis would not give him a permanent permit.

So he had to go every three months, go out in Jordan, stay a bit in Amman and then go back to Palestine. He and my mother decided to definitely want to live in Palestine in 1999. This still meant to them that every three months, we are talking about people who are 65 years old, every three months go back to Jordan, stay two weeks, and then go back to Palestine in every three months. They kept doing that for eight years until Israel in 2008 forbid them and detained them for what they considered to be "illegal", they told them they could not do this three months, they should either get a permit or not. And my father had applied for the permit, and he said, "Look, I have applied for the permit, for a residence permit." You

are applying to the Israeli for a residence permit to stay in your own land because he's born in Birzeit. And they said, "Well you don't have it so you can't come in." And they deported him after detaining him in Ben Gurion Airport for 24 hours, and then put him in airplane and ship he off... Anyway, yeah, it was a very hard...

It was very painful. That nearly killed him; psychologically it was very hard on him, and also on us kids to see how broken he become, looked. The Israelis did not need to humiliate a man of 74 years old just because he wanted to go and live in his hometown... Now he has it. Now they finally gave him the permit. Now my mother doesn't have it. It's just like it's bureaucratic and humiliation. They wanted to stay and the only way you can counter that is to persevere and to say, I am still going to come and stay. And still take every time this risk that you go to the border and you don't know whether they are going to let you in. And maybe they let you in this time, and maybe they won't let you in this time. And you keep doing it. And that's what they did, they kept doing it.

AR: So when did he get permission to stay?

LF: Just six months ago.

AR: Six months ago. At what age?

LF: At 75.

AR: But your mother didn't get permission?

LF: No, she's waiting. For me now, all of this has become incredibly painful. It becomes now, my father represents what the Palestinian cause is. This is the struggle of a man who was not that political, who was not selfish. He fought for his cause in his own way. He raised his kids to be aware of it. He worked for it in all various ways. He was exiled. He came home. He built his house over this piece of land how he wanted it. And then in the end he was denied entry again. The only way to do it was to still keep at it. And now that he has the ID, the Israeli ID, which means that he cannot leave the Ramallah area. It means he cannot, he can only go to the Jordan Valley, again to the same process, go to Jordan and then come again from Jordan. He cannot go anymore to Jerusalem. He cannot go to Tel Aviv. He cannot go to Haifa. He cannot go to Nazareth. So he became imprisoned. So the only thing he got in the end was the permission to die where he wanted to die. And I think for me it was, for me and for him, it was very painful for him.

AR: Where is he now?

LF: They are living in the West Bank.

AR: And your mother has a three month visa...

LF: Yeah. So it's a very. Basically it's a summary of the story of how Israel killed that project of the Palestinian state. That was the dream of all. Everybody went back, my father went back to live in this Palestinian state. And that when you have a Palestinian state, you have some maneuver, you have some ability to build something. Until you realize that, in the end, this promise of a Palestinian state has and will not have sovereignty. The one that issues you the permit is not the Palestinian. It is the Israelis and the scope of mobility is also not determined by the Palestinian, it's determined by the Israelis. So basically what you got was permission to live in a big prison, an open air prison, but it's a prison. And that prison became internalized. My father doesn't leave the house. He doesn't want to leave the house. It became totally internalized which, is killing for me, it's a killer. And Palestine, which has always become a source of hope, a source of resilience, a refuge, has changed. Whenever I used to feel like life doesn't make sense, what the hell am I doing here, just to go to Palestine, oh it makes sense. Look at people, how they are resilient. Look at how they create meaning out of little. But not anymore... I never used to say that Palestine could limit in my horizon. I always used to say the Palestine gave me horizon. The last few times I went, I saw, as Mahmoud Darwish said, the earth encloses on us.

And OK, people don't give up, but you ask yourself, what, how to get out of this? And what is

happening is more and more people are talking about the one state idea. For example, my father is, although I don't think whether he was a supporter of the one state idea 20 years ago, now tells you that the only way for us is to live together with these people. But it's very hard because how can you live with people who humiliat you in this way? Who keep taking from your land. Who keep imprisoning you. And how do you resist, how do you resist in these circumstances? How do you resist when somebody builds a wall?

I was there when the war on Gaza happened. I was in Ramallah. People were demonstrating to Qalandia Checkpoint. The Israelis want to put another wall in front of the wall. So we're throwing stones on the wall. You understand how dehumanizing, how imprisoning, how futile... Do you think it's going to get better? I mean, I think it's pretty bad now and people lost lots of hope. I do believe something is going to happen within the next 15 years. But I also think what is very important to happen and the only thing that's going to shake it really, will need to happen on the Israeli side. Because the level of ignorance and denial that the Israelis are in, is beyond conception. I have friends, I have very good friends who is a Yememi Jew. I do not call her Israeli. She keeps saying, "Look I am an Israeli." I say, "No, you are a Yemeni Jew." Very dear friend of mine. She is married to an Ashkenazi Jew. I keep telling her, the only way forward is to live together. She understands and agrees, even is she is skeptical. Because she's lived Israeli oppression, she knows the discrimination of Israeli society; her husband is petrified of the idea of a one state, of living together. She came to visit me for example in the West Bank.

Her husband was petrified that she came to visit me. He thought the Palestinians were just people who were going to lynch Israelis. And I was shocked at this idea that he thought this about us. And he is progressive, liberal, lefty. But this, the fact that liberal people in Israel think like this is a result of Sharon's policy to both imprison the Israeli public as well as the Palestinian by convincing the Israelis that they are in a cage surrounded by terrorists who hate them and are not human. And the Palestinians to imprison and tell them that you are savages, you're not going to leave the wall, has been very devastating.

I really think the only way how to change it is for the Israeli people to come out and say, "Look we are oppressing the Palestinians. They are human like us." I think that you need to have buses for Israelis to go to the West Bank. The whole point of the checkpoints and the whole big item that no Israelis are allowed to come in has nothing to do with security. It has to do with dehumanizing the Palestinians, because if you don't see the Palestinian on a one to one, you will always fear him just as the Palestinian, if you don't see the Israelis you will always be scared of them. For me, the Israelis, up until I went to university, the Israeli was just a soldier. That's all it was. It only became a human being, I have to say many years later after I worked with this friend of mine who, you know this Israeli of Yemeni origin, whereby she wanted to connect with her Arab roots through me and I wanted to reconcile with the Israeli Jew by connecting with an Arab Jew, that really I overcame that problem. Maybe also because I did learn Hebrew when I came here to Cambridge.

AR: Let's go back. So you're in Dubai. You finish your...

LF: My baccalaureate, my A levels whatever, high school. And then I came to England to study.

AR: Why England?

LF: Because I wanted to study political science and my mother said the best politicians in the world are the British. Just see what a mess they did in Palestine. And she's right. So I went and I studied in England, maybe also because of a European tradition. I had my cousins studied in America, but maybe my mother and my father were not too impressed with America. I was brought up not in a very pro-American house as you can imagine. For good reason as you can imagine. It struck me, oh yeah, Europe made much more sense. So I went to England, and I did political science, and I loved my education there. I think it was a very good BA education. I actually say today that America is good for graduate studies. England is much better for undergraduate studies. I learned some very good skills.

AR: You studied...

LF: Political science. I was in a university which had a very good Middle East department, so that was also very gratifying. Still exiled, I felt homesick. I felt very homesick to the Middle East. I carried another exile in the UK.

AR: You went on what kind of papers?

LF: Student's visa.

AR: And your passport is?

LF: Jordanian at the time. Jordanian and an Italian. I have both passports.

AR: So then you finished.

LF: And I finished and then I went to Palestine. I wanted to work in Palestine.

AR: Where did you meet your husband?

LF: We met when I was in the university in England.

AR: Tell me when you meet your husband who is...

LF: German. Well, a longer story. We were pen friends, my husband and I. We met when we were 14 years old. So we were in the pre-internet era. I think if we were in the internet era also our story would have finished long before. But this love story through letters which were 10 pages long in which the first few years we just tried to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict, the German and the Palestinian. It was very interesting. I kept the letters. I keep saying that one day I should do something about them.

So yeah, I met my German husband and then I went to Palestine. But then we had another war in the Middle East which is Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait and American troops arriving on Saudi soil to liberate Kuwait. And I decided then to be in Israel and Palestine. I really wanted to be in the middle of the action. Maybe, because people lived war, I lived the war in a certain way but not really. So I wanted to be there and I went and I worked with the UN, UNDP, United Nation Development Program. And it was a very, very important experience for me because it allowed me as a mature person by then to have, to build a new relationship to Palestine, to work. It was my enthusiasm, I was 22 years old. I wanted to work through the UN. Through the UN you can do development projects, you can build a country. You're preparing for the state.

There was really this idea that the state is there. The Intifada was at its height. So it was a very invigorating moment; I felt I was living a historical moment and I was participating in it. I was not watching it, I was involved in it. So that was... We were building the state, the state was just about to come. But at the same time, that war, the Iraq-US war also marked the end of Arab nationalism because Arab countries split: those in support of the Americans and those not, which was a big shock.

But it was also when Saddam Hussein used to send these Patriots over Israel, where Israel distributed gas masks only for the Israelis but the Palestinians had no gas masks. But the Palestinians were not really scared of the war. The Israelis were scared of it but the Palestinians no. They used to say "Oh, there's a scud coming. Interesting." You can see the coast of Palestine/Israel from Birzeit. I can see Tel Aviv on a good day from my father's house. You can see the sky scrapers of Tel Aviv. Because as you know, it's not a very long distance, it's what 40 miles? Not even.

So I remember once we were watching TV and at the time we had no satellites at the time you had only Israeli TV or Jordanian TV. And the Israeli person speaker on TV says, "Oh my God, there's a scud coming." She puts on her mask and the TV goes off. And everybody in the whole town went instead to this hill because all the lights then of the coast are shut down. There's no light. And everybody was watching. You could see a scud coming out from the sky. You could really see it. And then a patriot going the other side. They met or not. And everybody would say, "Wow." And you never saw an explosion because if you remember Israel completely forbid any information about the scuds, where they went. We never knew how much damage they created. It never killed anybody. And we, from that hill looking at the coast, we never saw an explosion to tell, "Yeah he hit something," you know. But it's that surrealism that you could not relate to it. But, so that was an important moment.

But I was again, as I told you in '94 I got married. I went with my husband, our honeymoon was in the West Bank. And that was just also a year after Oslo, just a year after Arafat came. That was moment

of incredible hope. You can't imagine how much hope there was. Everybody was flooding into the West Bank and Gaza. Palestinians from the Gulf, Palestinians from the US. Everybody wanted to create new projects, build new buildings, you know build ministries. And I really wanted to be in that moment. And we traveled all around. There was no problem, no checkpoints. I took my husband everywhere.

We went to Haifa, Nazareth, Akko. We went to Gaza. It was an open space. It was before Baruch Goldstein did his massacre [in Hebron]. Actually no, actually it was after Goldstein's and after the first suicide bomber in Afula [next to an Egged bus in Afula, Israel, April 6, 1994]. But still people were hopeful that the situation could be under control. And I continued coming, going every year. Then, in 1998 I worked there for a whole year in Ramallah. And still people could travel around because of the checkpoints at the time in 1998, they were not fully fledged terminals. They were just moveable checkpoints, so you had them in certain key areas in Jerusalem.

And I crossed, I remember taking all my friends, who came to visit me from Europe, around. I traveled everywhere and never an Israeli soldier stopped me at the checkpoints. So, it was relatively easy to get there. The security measures came after a major suicide bomb or before any major feast, Israeli Jewish feast, Israel would close the borders so nobody could go out. But on other days you could.

AR: So how did that feel to you? How did this feel to be in a time of great hopefulness and watching it get tighter and tighter?

LF: Painful. Painful, very painful. I said to you I was also there during the second Intifada because I was doing my field work for my thesis. And I did my field work on Palestinian workers who work in Israeli settlements. So that was an incredibly eye-opening experience and it was really there where I realized that the only solution is the one state solution, because when you see the settlements, how pervasive they are, and also see how the settlements rely on Palestinian workers. The owner of the construction project was an Israeli, the contractor is a Palestinian who hires Palestinian workers from his own town. And the settlements are being built on the land taken from the same Palestinian town. So you say it's completely enclaved like that, and it becomes like an apartheid. And once it becomes an apartheid, the only way out is a one state solution or it remains apartheid. So in 2000 I was there when the Intifada erupted, the Second Intifada erupted.

AR: What was that like?

LF: It was a moment of hope at the beginning. A moment of hope at the beginning because again it was Palestinian affirming to the world and to the leadership that we don't take any crap. We want a state, we want our independence. But also, that Oslo gave us fragmented land and more settlements and compromise our ability to have a state, so the only way how we can get something is to resist. I was there when it started, it was totally peaceful; civilian in the sense that you had civilians going to these checkpoints, throwing stones, and Israel retaliating with bullets.

And if you remember, the first two months of Intifada, a total of 88 Palestinians were killed. And no Israeli killed, yeah, the first six weeks. And no Palestinian shot. It's only after two months that the decision by the leadership was to fire back and also because I remember being at a checkpoint at these demonstrations, people asking the policeman, "What on earth are you doing?" "What are you doing with your guns? What are they for? Can you see that they are shooting at us and you aren't doing anything about it?" The Palestinian Authority's legitimacy was being put into question. Because the second Intifada was as much against Israel as it was against Arafat and Oslo and what Oslo brought.

So the Intifada becomes militarized in the sense that you have one or more suicide bombers, especially after the election of Sharon. Don't forget that's really the turning point because basically the Israelis were sending a message to the Palestinians, "We elected the most violent man who was behind Sabra and Shatila [massacres in Beirut] among others." So the Palestinians responded, "OK, you're putting Sharon as your president, we're going to show you that your security man is the least capable of providing you with the security." Which is true because a number of suicide bombers shouted up after the election of Sharon, as well as Israeli retaliation. But you become in a zero sum game, which smashes a resistance movement.

And I think what was very dangerous about the Second Intifada, how Israel dealt with it was the targeted assassination, because there was a new Palestinian leadership emerging and Israel killed it before it took the rein of power. Nobody was questioning Arafat or questioning the legitimacy of the PLO but aware

that the struggle needs to change pattern or form. And the fact that Israel killed all these guys that were not very well known is an indication that they wanted to eradicate the possibility of a new leadership.

And also if you saw also with Hamas, what they [Israelis] did, eliminated people like Sheikh Yassin, or Rantisi, who were people more on the compromise side. And also they [Israel] wanted to get rid Arafat although Arafat by then was over. So I kept going all these years and seeing all this and was something, for example, struck me was in 2002 when Israel bombarded Ramallah, remember, and all Palestinian towns and smashed all the ministries and demolished all the security buildings and all of that. And Arafat was in the Muquata'ah [in Ramallah], the fact in prison with Israeli soldiers around him. And life in Ramallah went on as normal. People were just driving beside the Muquata'ah. And this poor guy he was in prison. But there was not this personality cult.

I went into Ramallah in May, which was one month and a half after the Israeli invasion in 2002 when they demolished lots of building, and people were rebuilding the buildings. People were rebuilding the buildings. And that was incredible, we're going to keep at it, we're not giving up. We're just, this is our land, this is our right. The real blow was the wall, the wall and then the checkpoints that became terminals. When you see the checkpoint at Bethlehem, when you see the checkpoint at Kalandia, I mean these are terminals. They're not to be removed. They're here to stay. That's what really killed people because, they can't move anymore.

In 2009 I decided to take my cousins' kids who are under 16 to go and see the sea, to see the Riviera. That was a most moving experience. And we sneaked eight kids in a car. What happened, my husband whose German and me, we look quite foreigner. I made sure I wore a mini. So in Birzeit I had a long dress and as soon as I got in the car and the kids are behind me, I wore my short sleeve shirt. So at the checkpoint nobody would question us. And we brought the kids to the sea. I cannot tell you, I cannot tell you their faces, the kids. It's the first time they see the sea. My daughter is four, so she had a cousin her age, and there were four others who were between ten and twelve. They just couldn't believe their eyes that they saw the sea, just 45 minutes away from their house, it really saddened me that it is so difficult to just see the close by sea...

I grew up always talking about Palestine as '48 land and West Bank, where the term Israel did not come into that, me growing up. Because remember I grew up as this is the "Zionist entity." And those kids, as soon as we passed the checkpoint in which they are hiding in the car because they cannot see, you know, they told me, "Did we cross Israel? Where's Israel? Is this Israel?" "this is really Palestine, where's Israel?". They were trying to understand. It's not much different from over there, but it is different. The 12 year old boy asked me "Is it true that Tel Aviv has the tallest building in the whole world? Please show us Tel Aviv and the tallest building before we go to the sea."

So they wanted to see Tel Aviv, how do Israeli behave apart from being soldiers. And that was incredible for them to see was that people are normal, people in Tel Aviv. And every now and then you saw a soldier with his machine gun walking between them. And then we took them to the sea, and we were sitting beside an Israeli and the boy was asking me, "Are these Arabs or they Israelis? He looks Arab but does he look Jew." And I said, "How do you distinguish a Jew from a Muslim?"

. Do you see what I mean? My cousin, the father of the 12 years old boy, saw the sea when he small. I went with my cousin to the sea when I was 14, when I was twelve, when I was 18. OK. Now my cousin hasn't been to the sea for the last 20 years and hasn't been to Jerusalem for the past ten years. And for the kids, it was an incredible eye opening for them. Like we were at the sea by 4:00. Like, I had to get them. They were willing to sleep in the water. The sun sets and I said, "Come on, we have to get out, we can't stay here." We were in Jaffa, in the area around Jaffa, so we went to play in the park there. They were... As you know there are Israeli Arabs as well as Israeli Israelis, Jews, and the kids, how they related to that. You go out and play, kids are kids, they play, but then they saw somebody with a kippah, so the boy was like, "I'm not going to play with him. What is he doing here?" I said, "He lives here, you cannot just say no." But I think for them, that was very eye-opening and we remain with it, "OK, next day, are you going to take us again? Are you going to take us again?" But it was painful. It was beautiful. For me and my husband, we just felt that we did an amazing thing, it's a small thing but it's amazingly important, but also very sad. They had the right to see the sea. It's only an hour away, it's 45 minutes away from our house.

And how will these kids make peace if they don't know each other? You understand, that's what I worry about. I worry these have their horizon cut for them, and that's the most dangerous thing, as well as the Israelis on the other side. It's a question of how the Israelis of today need to act to break these walls, to

humanize the Palestinian again. To face the reality there, not deny the reality of the state. Especially today, nobody anymore questions Israel's right to exist. They don't like it, but nobody questions it. But people, the Palestinians, want to live. And they have a right to live a decent life. And what they're living is not a decent life. They're living in a big prison.

AR: I have a couple more questions. When was the first time you met a Jew who wasn't an Israeli?

LF: Good question. You see, it's only the US that I was confronted with a Jew who is not Israeli, that this is a important question, to be Jewish for many people without necessary being Israeli or also Israeli... It's only the United States that fusses about Jewish American and Arab American and Muslim American and Chinese American, French American. Because I met many Jews in Europe but never did they come to me and introduce themselves as a Jew. Your religion was a private matter. Just as I said to you, I didn't grow up saying I'm a Muslim. My identity is as a Palestinian, and I care about being a Palestinian, I am an Arab. And Arab is a Muslim and a Jew and a Christian. Just as an American is a Muslim and a Jew and a Christian. Just as an Italian is a Muslim and a Jew and a Christian. So in Europe most of the great activists for Palestine happened to be of Jewish background, but they never introduced themselves as Jews. I knew later that they were Jews. And many of them were not practicing Jews because they came from left party traditions.

It's in the US, when I came to the US, that it was, especially Boston, that I was confronted with this, everybody, every second person is a Jew.

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

LF: We knew about the Nazi Holocaust, we were raised with it. We were not raised, we always knew that the Holocaust happened, but we were raised that it did happen but it's the problem of the European that killed Jews. It's not the Palestinian who killed the Jews, so why should the Palestinian pay for the injustice that the European inflicted on the Jews? So it wasn't that, we never grew up with a denial of the Holocaust. We knew it happened. What was always a debate is how big it was. Was it five million versus six million; was it only them that, they died, or was it the Russians that died, also the Gypsies that died? So, but the fact that it happened, the fact that there was burning of Jews alive, I never grew up denying that. But it was not center stage in my life, unlike my husband for example. My husband at six years old was shown a film about the Holocaust which marked him for whole of his life, you know. No, this was not my experience

AR: Was it part of history?

LF: When we studied history... Did we study it in the Arab/Israeli conflict? Actually, you know what, now that you tell me, our history in school stopped in 1945. Yeah. We didn't study after that, which also to emphasize Arab nationalism. And not to get into the problem of many things, not just Israel and Palestine, but also politics and the nature of the state and... You know I was growing up in Dubai. And Dubai is a part of a state that got created in 1971. In 1945 it did not even exist.

AR: And where do you consider home?

LF: Home. You know I'm 42 and exile was a very painful process for me. I carried my exile. I've always looked for home. I've always been homesick. And home has always been to me the Arab world, OK. In other words, speaking my language, being with my people. Palestine was home. But at the same time, I struggled, how could it be my home if I did not grow up in it? But because I did not grow up in a fixed place... Palestine has been the most welcoming and the most meaningful place to me. But I'll tell you, when I went to Palestine in 1998 and it was a hard time because I went, before I went, I had a very hard time. I went there and Palestine helped me find myself, allowed me to rewrite my story. I was living before in France and felt very home sick in Paris where my husband was working. My agreement between my husband and I was, we're going to go to Palestine, build a country. That was home in my head or I wanted it to be home.

But in '98 while I was working in Palestine, my husband got this proposal to come and work at MIT. And he said to me, "Let's try it, it might be good." And I said, "I don't know America." I never thought if you'd have asked me in 1995 would I come to the states, I would have said, no way. This is the

bastion of imperialism. I was not interested. Europe made sense, but America? So when he had the offer I said to him, "Well, America is the country of immigrants for the two immigrants we really are. Maybe it will work out for us." And he said to me at the time, he said, "Look, we'll go for a couple of years and then we'll go home." And I look at him and I said, "Home, where would that be? If I go to Boston, this time I'll make it my home. It will not be another house."

So the challenge for me was when I left Palestine in 1998, where I felt very good, how would I turn Boston into a home? And I dealt with Boston in a very different way than the way that I dealt with my situation in London or in Paris, because in both cases, in Paris and in London, I was transient there. I was there on a mission. I came there to learn knowledge to go back home, build a state, go back home and be in Palestine. So, when I came to Boston, I worked very hard to turn it into a home, and it wasn't easy. But now I've been ten years and it's hard for me to admit it, but what mostly made me feel home is my birth of my daughter. Because you know why, because with her I speak Arabic every day. So she really helped me. Arabic no longer became a language I speak over the phone with my father, it became a daily. And also I got a very good job. I work on the Middle East. I teach Arab/Israeli conflict. I work at U Mass. It's been an incredibly welcoming place. They accepted me for who I am. I did not have to defend myself or excuse myself that I'm Palestinian which at other universities I had to. I was taken for who I am. And I am working on Palestine, I'm connected with Palestine. And I felt Boston, Cambridge gives you the possibility to live your community.

I created a family as I call it. I created a family which are all friends of mine who are Palestinians, who are either married to an American or are Palestinian Americans and their kids are also with my daughter. My husband now fell in love with Palestine. He's the one who wanted us to go on sabbatical there. We went there on sabbatical. So Palestine became now part of my daily life. And I think that now that Palestine, I was able to incorporate Palestine in Boston and Cambridge, I feel somehow that home is here, OK. And I think, but it has been hard work. I don't think I could have done that without psychoanalysis. I believe in psychoanalysis. I paid my dues in tears and exile and pain. And I suppose the language remains a very important thing, so long as I speak Arabic and so long as I can travel. I am always afraid that one day Israelis will not let me in. That's my fear that one day they will not let me in and that will happen to me.

But I also understand that my story is a different story from my father's. But I still carry with me, Palestine. And what Palestine means to me, it means exile as much as home. It means hope as much as a prison. And it means resilience and determination. It means olive trees. It means those beautiful undulated hills. It means, yeah, resilience and modesty and determination, rights, justice. It means right. There is something, you can't just take somebody else's land and there's at the same time, you cannot reverse history. That's really what my story. Palestine today is not the Palestine of 20 years ago or the, 60 years ago. And the only way forward is to live together. But to live together, everybody has to do his share.

And I believe sometimes Israelis want too much of the Palestinians to do their share, to come forward. I think the Israelis need to see themselves in the mirror. The way that Ilan Pappé [Israeli historian] did or Ella Shohat [Professor of Cultural Studies at New York University, defines herself as an Arab-Jew] did, or you yourself do, or other people do. But more and more Israelis need to do it. Because the only way forward is to live together. Now can we live together, we'll have to see how we can translate this human right, which I believe, into a political project. And we're working against the tide because the Israeli establishment is not interested really in a one state solution. The Palestinians are, if you dig deeper. Because I am adopting now the one state project and I am working on it and the last time I was in Palestine I've digged more, and Palestinians say, "How do you think about the one state solution? Israelis will never accept it." And I say, "Of course Israel will never accept it. That's not the point. The point though today is how far the one state solution can give us what we want."

And as the stumbling block in the one state solution on the Palestinian side is a necessity to face the Jewish question. But what I've finally realized is that more and more people are willing to face it. Nobody anymore today tells you, even Hamas, that the Israelis need to go back from where they came. No. The question is, "How can we live with them?" And so far, the first reflex is, they don't want to live with us. This is why they should be over there and we should be over here. But the more that over here is impossible, the question becomes, how do we live with them? But this is where I believe that there is much work to be done on the Israeli side. It's the Israeli now stuck, not the Palestinian.

AR: And how do you share this with your daughter?

LF: My poor daughter, I made her go a little bit with the difficult experience. We talk about Palestine. We talk about Tali who is our Jewish friend. We went and saw Tali in Tel Aviv. We went to the sea with her cousin, with her, and she saw how her cousins could not go like her because she has a passport, an American passport that allows her to go, but they cannot. She realized that she has something that they don't have. What for her is very confusing is the soldiers, because she kept calling the soldiers Israelis and at the same time couldn't understand why there are also soldiers in the West Bank. So we kept saying, well, they're not Israelis, they're soldiers, and soldiers are bad no matter where they are.

But it's also very, I mean, what do you want that they see, the kids would be walking and she would say, "What is this, why is the soldier there?" What am I going to say? Just wants to check that the papers are OK? We'd be walking and she'd be looking up, and she tells me, "Mama is this a settlement?" Because she sees the barbed wire. I say, "Yes, it's a settlement, but why don't you look at the birds over there, look at the trees." But she is seeing it as well all around her. So Palestine for her, what it means is her grandparents, also the big house of her grandparents, the people. And we are trying to bring in, like we talk about Hanukkah and for example, she said to me, "Do we celebrate Hanukkah?" "No," we say, "We don't celebrate Hanukkah." And, "Why?" I said, "Because we're not Jews, but Jews celebrate it. It's a holiday. We have something else called Eid."

So she's understanding that people celebrate different things. And given that she lives in Cambridge she already knows. She keeps saying, "Mama, people are just different." I said, "Thank you, people are just different. We can all live together." So she has that notion and you know she see around her. In her school, she sees all different nationalities and religions. But we will see how it will go... I mean we're trying, I grew up... It's the soldiers. For a kid, the soldiers are always scary. And I also have to admit, I did not protect her enough from it. Maybe I did not want, because I wanted her to have the experience the way I had it because I still believe that she was much more protected than me, you know, because she was with me and with her father. We were not in a war the way I was in a war. I did not understand her fear of the policeman. She was for a very long time, very scared of the policemen. Actually her school helped, tried to tell her that the policemen are good people, but for a whole year she kept telling me, "There are good Israelis and there are bad Israelis." And I said, "Yes, just the way there are good Palestinians and bad Palestinians, and good policemen and bad policemen."

But it's hard. I'm hoping through friends, that could happen a little bit more. You see when you're passing through checkpoints, how are you going to explain to them what, why she can go and her cousin cannot go. How can I explain that to her? And why does her cousin have to hide but she has to appear because if the Israeli soldier sees that she looks white, he will let her go whereas her cousin who is darker, he will suspect. You understand. We don't need to go into that. It's just like that, why we don't know.

AR: So anything else you want to say before we stop?

LF: I think we said plenty.