

Interview with Maha Shuayb

2013

TAPE 1

Nicola Pratt: Okay. I will begin by asking you, when were you born and where were you born?

Maha Shuayb: When?

NP: Yeah.

MS: I was born in 1979 in Beirut, in the middle of the civil war.

NP: Okay, and what did your parents do? What did your mother and father do?

MS: My mother, basically, was a house wife. She used to take care of us. With the other three brothers and sisters, and my dad, at that time he had given up on politics, once the civil war started... and then he started a business of decoration and that sort of thing.

NP: You say he was in politics, was he actually a member of parliament or...

MS: Ah, no. He was a member of a party. He was very active, he had a position, and it was part on the Pan-Arab movement, and once the frictions started between parties, and parties started to split, he then left because there were attempts for assassination repeating, he didn't like the atmosphere. They were trying to kill each other so... He left and he went abroad and he started his business abroad.

NP: Okay, and what did you study?

MS: Sociology and then education.

NP: In Beirut?

MS: Sociology, I studied it in Beirut, at the Lebanese University, and then I went to England to continue my other education.

NP: What were your earlier memories of events outside of your home, of politics?

MS: I think... okay, when I was 6 months old, I don't remember any of that, but then we left Lebanon and went to Saudi Arabia, because by mistake they put a bomb in our house, so we were saved miraculously, and then the second day we went to Saudi Arabia, so we went for five years. So... after... originally I'm from the south of Lebanon. So. After the Israelis withdrew from the south, the civil war was obviously at its peak in Beirut, so my parents decided to bring us back to Lebanon because of

education. Because the education system is not that good in Saudi Arabia and the schools are better in Lebanon, so we came back. I think the first memory, we used to fantasize about Lebanon, so I used to hear from my mom, it snows in Lebanon, and also of, you know, the best memories they have about the country. So we... I remember arriving to the airport, and I was six years old, my mum was shocked the first thing we went out of the airport, there was a boy maybe my age, he was selling flowers and I was like, why is he selling flowers? And then my mum bought from him, and then we went in the car and we were shocked to see how the streets are, you know, basically, it's a war zone, people are all armed and checkpoints, you know, it's a warzone with like those barriers, and then we see some white rocks and we imagined it was snow, and we tried to hold on to what our parents told us Lebanon looked like, it was June, obviously, there was no snow, but this is my first... and we didn't understand also, so... this is.... I guess this is the first awareness of what is happening in Lebanon.

NP: Do you remember the point where you began to understand what was happening?

MS: I think my first, my first political memory probably, is when I was nine or ten when they assassinated the newly elected president of Lebanon Michel Aoun. Before that, literally when you come into a warzone you think its normal... we used to play, I don't know if you know it, its like chess but its called Dema. It's like chess, it's a board game, and we used for a ... it had different... I don't know what you call them, buttons or whatever, we used to use the bullets of the gun and then they are all the same ones, unless you have a Dema which is a special stone that allows you to go and move everywhere you like, then we used to use a bigger kind of bullets, and now, there was... when I think about it....

NP: They were used bullets?

MS: Used Bullets, they were so in abundance on the street, you just go down on the street and you can pick them up and if you loose one you can easily replace it, that's how I mean it was common the guns and the ammunition was. And I think now, its not normal, how did our parents even allow us to use them as stones for our game. But I really didn't understand exactly what was going on. So, no, I don't think I really understood, okay, why they wanted to assassinate him, and why they are assassinating... of course, your parents will give you their point of view. And there are national parties, and some sectarian Christian parties, and there is a Syrian regime taking advantage of the whole situation, that's part of the interpretation that you get, so yeah, this is... I think, my first political awareness except that, also the other ideas that we thought everyone was a... Ha! Where was... I was thinking actually, the other thing my memory is that there were almost all bad, like our experience with all the [inaudible: 06:58]... we've got to run to buy almost all of them so in the end, this is I'm telling you about the 80s towards the end of the civil war, where all the militias were seen as really bad, like similar to what we were talking about yesterday and Syria. So, this is our thing, that everyone was saying that the state should come back, that's why I probably thought about a lot the incident

with the assassination of the president, I, I identify with it as kind of my first political memory or awareness. Maybe because we were looking when the state is coming back, yeah.

NP: and did you notice a difference after Taif... is your memory afterwards that things got better.

MS: Yes, I remember asking my dad, there was a scouts being established in my school. And I asked my dad, okay, can we go now? Because we were not able to travel before, to Beirut, to other places, Biblos and... and I remember there was a school trip and we were able to go, which before we weren't able at all. My parents didn't send us. So, that's probably it, and then, I remember that my aunt who used to live in East Beirut, was able to come visit us, with her children who we never met before. So, she was able to come to us, before, she used to go to Cyprus and catch the boat to visit us. So now, I remember, one day just coming to our door and I haven't seen my cousins... I was 11 at the time, you know, I used to know them, that they are my cousins, and their names, but never seen them, and that's how, I mean, bit by bit, we were able to move.

NP: this was... I mean, unlike... for lots of teenagers, this would be a period of change and self discovery, but at the same time you were being reunited with your family and your country, to be able to travel and...

MS: yeah, yes, this is I think was the most significant thing, but you know, you don't think about that at the time, I mean, now I am trying to think but... I mean really at the time, you don't think of your life in a political... you know, the effect of politics on your life... as a child you don't think of it this way, but then in the south we had a very different experience. After the civil war, we started to experience an escalation in the Israeli aggression, so during the civil war I don't remember a lot about Israelis bombing us etc. But after 1990, you start seeing more of the resistance doing operation etc. And the Israelis bombing us, so then I started thinking about it. At school we used to... before, like there was one year, now I remember, there was one year, towards the end of the civil war and then you had the Amal, Hizbullah clashes in the south, and in our school, because our school was occupied by Amal, so they had to... we were thinking will the school open or not, or do we have to move to another school, and then they opened a school for us and they building, so our class room was in the kitchen, so I used to have the sink behind us, it was really very exciting as a child, something very unusual from the classroom. So that was funny, then we studied half of the academic year I think, then we moved into our school after Amal left it. But after that, then we started hearing about the Israelis shot at a school, or the school bus got bombed, it was that things were changing, and then it wasn't about Hizbullah, Amal or the civil war, but it was about the Israelis and The Hizbullah.

NP: and as a teenager, were you involved in any public activities? You mentioned the scouts.

MS: Yeah, which was very brief. Well I wouldn't be your typical teenager, because when I was 14, I had my accident, and life changed completely after that. I became... either which meant that you don't go out, simply. You don't have access to school; you don't have access to social life, anything, so you sit... I studied from home all my time, until university.

NP: Can I ask what was the accident?

MS: It was, yeah... it was a car accident, we were coming back home with my brother and cousin and they both were killed in the accident, and I remember it so... that's that. So, I wouldn't say I had a normal teenage, because all my teenage friends sitting at home, I didn't used to go out. Maybe once in six months, It was very... yeah, very different to what a teenager do.

NP: How did you cope?

MS: Badly! No, at the beginning, you have denial. You think that things will change and this is temporary, So I used to **[inaudible: 13:00]** ... I spent lots of hours like then, then also I didn't want this to effect my education so I had a very strict program for myself to study, you know, studying alone with no teacher. So I had to have really extreme self discipline, so my day was full of studying and exercising and reading for pleasure, you know it was... and then my awareness about social injustice started, that's why my Phd was entitled "care and education", because I felt betrayed, why would the schools not allow me to go? Because suddenly I was registered in a private school to be considered very enlightened school, but it wasn't enlightened enough to allow the admission of someone from other region. So, yeah, that was felt injustice.

NP: When you went to university, this must have been a huge change for you, because...

SM: In England, but in Lebanon, I didn't go to university, I also studied at home, and my sociology was not by choice. It was the only course you can study it from home. It happened that I liked it. When I was 14, 13, before the accident, my brother who was killed in the accident, he was studying at the Lebanese American University and some of the elective courses that they had to do was sociology, I remember looking and thinking Wow, who thought of this? This subject is so good, this sounds amazing. And then I didn't decide to do sociology until it became my best friend. So sometimes, I feel its funny how you are destined to do things.

NP: So when did you graduate from...

MS: in 2000.

NP: And what made you decide to continue your studies?

MS: Abroad... I think I would have committed suicide if I didn't go abroad, the idea had been on my mind for the last two years, you know, living at home and all it was awful. So surprisingly, I studied psychology, counseling. I think I was trying unconsciously deal with my trauma. And I decided because I thought it's the only way to do that. And I wanted to do something, I finished sociology, at the Lebanese American University, and I felt completely, I haven't learned anything, no new skills, and if I were sitting at home, and I love reading, I probably would have read more books than I had on my courses. And I wouldn't have to waste the time to memorize them word-by-word. So, I felt that the BA experience was a waste of time, total waste of time, and then no skill at all. So... and I wanted to be able to have a career and work and have an income. My parents, yes, they come from a good background, but also, I never... I mean, we are born to work not to.. I mean, you have to have a career; you have to be specialized with something. So the expectations were very high, although after the accident, and here I seem to think, as a woman with disability... I mean, I never felt these things before. But you are defined, you change in definition. It changes completely, if I was a man with disabilities I probably wouldn't have to fight all the things I had to fight for as a woman with a disability. And suddenly, I was a girl who had all the opportunities in the world, I could do anything, suddenly, it was shocking, I remember, my friends were bringing for me, these silly stories, I don't know if you have them, like Abeer, and some romantic stupid stories, and then my father is a very emotional father and very caring and wanted to shelter me, never challenging me, my mom is the one who challenges a lot, my dad said, you know, don't push yourself, just be comfortable, etc. but my mum was the one who was like no, life should not change one millimeter from before to after. So, she pushed me a lot to continue.

But the emphasis was always on career, and not the social and personal, so also your quality as a woman, your stability... I mean, you are Asexual, you don't have a woman's identity. I remember wanting.. I was 15 or 16, and I wanted to cut my hair, and my mother was like, why do you care? And I think no, you should have an identity, I mean even my parents were very conscious about the importance of education but they... social and personal side is less important. And it would be less important even as an abled body woman, because of the priorities. Anyway, I had to go through that journey myself, so I went abroad to study and to... I went to England for six months for medication. Then I realized I can go out I can go to school, you know, I have many opportunities to have a better life. So, since I came back I was trying, since I came back to Lebanon, I wanted to go back to England. I wasn't able to do that in my BA because of lack of funding, and then I got a scholarship for Masters. And that meant that my whole life changed. I mean, I feel Lebanon didn't give me really much, as a child, teenager, nothing, zero. I remember at the university, my dad told them, why don't you... there was a ground floor, where they have the [inaudible: 19:42] ... in the sociology floor, which was the second floor. He said look, why don't you swap them, and they said, no, too much hassle for one person. Okay, he said why don't we fit some rails for the stairs so she can climb and go up. They said no, one person is not worth it. This was a sociologist, you think they should have a bit of a kick inside, but they didn't. Next is the funny bit, what annoyed me is after I finished, for my exams my brother had to carry me all the way up and down

between [inaudible: 20:15]... what annoyed me is that after I finished, they swapped them around, I thought how could... they were socially so unaware, completely unaware, that they don't give a damn, so I went to England and studied counseling, and then it was a whole... I never came back for 12 hours... 12 years, sorry. And I think for the first 8 hours I didn't even look back, I didn't... I was different from Lebanon, yes, coz I was like, I need to really gain power, I am completely powerless and helpless person, and now its time to invest in myself. So I never looked back for 8 years. I used to come for 12 days, 20 days, and then go back. I did my phd on Lebanon obviously, but I realized that living in Lebanon.. I mean, its going to be very tough.

NP: and how is your experience in England?

MS: The first thing it was so nice to have a teacher. Because you get so exhausted in the end, having to do all the effort yourself. And you don't have any mentoring or any guidance, so you just go in all directions, so that was amazing, I remember my other friends used to complain about the system being very... you are left on your own, I said, what? What your left on your own? You have tutoring, you meet the teachers, you have lecture, this was like, it was an amazing experience. And I had a great, great time. And the course I was studying made me reflect a lot on... I was clinically depressed a lot at that time, so it helped me a lot, I wish I had studied social [inaudible: 22:10] at the time, because that time I didn't learn about it. It was only in the Phd that I started to be exposed to these theories, the thing that is interesting in Lebanon that you study sociology but you don't study about justice or social justice and equality, I don't remember these terms were ever mentioned. If I had properly the social awareness and personal awareness of my rights it would have... also the expectations, I remember when I went to England, I was always compromising when I even didn't have to. Because you are... I was always feeling I was the problem and not the system, now I have to adapt to another system, it has to change. In England it changed. But I remember when I went to Cambridge, so I applied because there were full scholarships for Phd, so I thought ok, you know. Instead of having to... I got a place and another one but then I have to work part time in order to cover half of the fees, so that scholarship said, the scholarship scheme, is that if you go to Cambridge or Oxford you get a full scholarship, if you go to another university you get half a scholarship. So, I thought, you know what, let me go to Cambridge, let me try to apply to Cambridge and oxford, so I send my application, and the funny bit is that I remember when I did my... before I left Lebanon for my Masters, my dad was sitting on the back, and said yes, and he learned that I have a scholarship and I'm going to England, and said you never know, you might even go to Cambridge, and I said no me? Of course not. And then when I was looking for application, I thought, Imagine if this happens actually, and I would get my position, you know, my place in Cambridge, so I sent the, and it worked out. So then I was going to Cambridge, and they were looking at the facilities, application so they chose a college for me that was more modern called New Hall, and I don't have a problem mentioning it because it was a journey with them as well, they changed and I changed, so I went there, and the lady whose responsible for the student admission, waits for me on the train, before they are giving me the place, I wanted to see if the place is suitable,

they came and told me Maha, you have to come and visit us to see if we have the facilities, and the first thing they do is take me to a special accommodation outside the college, which is a special house for students with sever disability, and I thought, what? In Lebanon, my parents never accepted to send me to one of these places, so why would I do that in England, I didn't come to be excluded in a special house, so that time my expectations were changing, and the lady told me later on, we became very good friends, she told me once I saw you in the train I knew this is not the place for you, and they already had the facilities, they didn't have to change a one tiny thing. But their perception of what a disabled or a paraplegic person can do, also similar to the one we had in Lebanon, that they can't live alone and then they [inaudible: 25:35], and I think by the second year they had another student who was also a wheel chair user, although they had the facilities, they had also to change the awareness of what it is. And in England they were just beginning to have this, what is now a common practice, a disability officer, I remember when I went to New Castle, that's where I did my masters, first masters, it was.. it was the first year where they had a disability officer, and I remember the disability officer asked me to write a letter because they were kind of trying, still trying it out. And the positions were only for one year. And I thought, I remember, this is crazy, you have to be here, you made my life completely different, very supportive, I mean, I think every university, every school should have a disability officer, so I had to write a letter, to make sure that the university is not closed the center a year after the try. I think now they are very big, when I visited them five years later, and they were expanding, they had many officers, so this was beginning, something new in England, still. Because they were still in the... I think disability moved a lot and progressed a lot in England. When I first came in 2000, not all, very few buses were accessible, now, they are fully accessible. So they also had a journey, we went through this journey with every university I went to. And I went to Oxford for my fellowship, see this is the awareness that I didn't have in Lebanon. The fellows accommodation was not accessible. It was built in the same time as the student accommodation. There was an accessible room, in the student accommodation, but not in the fellows. It tells you how still the perception... the chances of having a fellow who is also a chair user are very limited but maybe a student will be hired. See if how you start to unravel the... so, I knew. What was the question again? Sorry.

NP: Yeah, your experience in England?

SM: Yah. So I think they also had a journey with me, every place I went to. Like in oxford they had to modify the department of Middle Eastern studies, they had to put the ram, adapt things. So, because everyone, I don't think disability is an issue that is sorted yet. Still there is something they are working on. But the difference between England and Lebanon is that you have the laws and people abide and respect the law, also you have the attitude that it's your right. Here, its they are doing you a favor, in Lebanon, every time has to be a modification; they are doing you a favor. I know it's not a favor, it's a right, so this is the difference. But the most important thing is that I had to change, and adopt this view that it's my right, and they are not doing me a favor. Because it makes it more forceful in asking, and your expectations are higher. Now, convincing my parents of that took a while, because

they were still in the school of thought that they are doing us a favor and we have to be grateful, but it later on changed, and I think the most important, and difficult one, is as a woman, your rights as a woman with a disability, my parents didn't have issue with your rights for education, or a job, that's fine. But to try to be a woman who has relationships, that for them was, we had to go for a very difficult journey on that front. So this is I think the most difficult. I remember my mom the first time I wanted to wear a dress, I think I was 29, I have never worn a dress in my whole life, I was married before, even on my wedding day, I didn't wear a dress. I didn't put a dress on. Which shows you how rigid my understanding of my body as woman, what you can or you cant do as a woman who is a wheel chair user, So, I remember when I was 30, I don't even think.. maybe 29, just around 30, so, a friend of mine, who is a very strong Egyptian... she is one of my best friends, so she gave me a present for my birthday, two dresses and said, I have never seen you in a dress, why don't you ever wear a dress, and I resisted, and I think I returned one of them, and kept one. So I remember coming to Lebanon, and we had a ball in Cambridge, and I had been in Oxford, and I have been in the walls of Cambridge, but I wore a trouser, imagine. But then we went together and shopped for a dress, then we had a wedding so we came to Lebanon, to see my parents and had a wedding there, and I wanted to put on a dress, and my mum said, no, no, trouser is more comfortable, a dress for you, don't work. And I told her, but mum I think its time now to just accept things and we have to enjoy life as a normal person, and I remember her, she stood back and she was a bit surprised and this was a journey... I was married 23 or 24 years old. I despite him. And then I divorced 28, and that was my decision, and something that my parents, particularly my mum... my god, she couldn't accept that fact. I mean, they wouldn't expect you to get married, and you want a divorce and you will never find another guy who would accept your condition, and all of this imagine someone brainwashing you all the time. So I told her no, I'm not afraid, Im not saying... this guy has many wonderful aspects to him, but this is not the person for me. And I think I might even for the wrong reasons, so it was a big issue, I don't think our relationship... they were always down, they felt I am pushing the boundaries too much. And they would keep, oh my god, the things that I've heard sometimes, I cant imagine, they never imagined like I could have other relationships, like you are one of... one and only opportunity and I say, no, you don't know how... I mean, my life, and you don't know my relationships with my friends or the people I meet, its not like your thing, its not the way you think, they could not see the world in some one else eyes.

NP: was your first husband Lebanese?

MS: this is another interesting thing, not... he was, no, his mum was British, and he was Libyan.

NP: He was...

MS: Libyan

NP: Libyan, ok.

MS: so this is the funny bit, so I remember being at a conference and I was engaged at the time.

NP: Yu met him in England.

MS: we met In England, we met in England in demonstrations and... he was... this issue was never... like, we never thought about it, or was never an issue for him. So he had a completely different perspective, just the same as I have now with my current husband. But the funny bit is that I remember, coming to a conference, and I was only 24, 23, I was just engaged...

TAPE 2

MS:... And I gave a presentation, and I was wearing an engagement ring, and then only... it's a schools conference for teachers, and the funny part is that, and I knew one, she came to me, she was a very amazing woman, she started the first inclusion, school inclusion because her brother is visually impaired and she saw how much he suffers. She is a school principal and when she started first inclusion, it's the first inclusion ever in Lebanon, [inaudible: 00:37]... she is one of the key leaders, I think this woman is a leader in her field, she had to... some teacher just gave up the job, and didn't accept the idea of inclusion, and she had to change so much of the general opinion, and now she has students who are non muslims come just because they have inclusion in this school, its an amazing school and when we talk about inclusion we are not only talking about mobility special needs, you know, learning, language, for those who come from abroad, and don't speak Arabic at all, she had programs to support them and their parents, orphans, and amazing system, for her, the concept of inclusion was very wide. So I remember at the conference, when she came to me and she is like, everyone is asking me if your husband id British or not, they think he is probably not Arab. See the perception, I told her actually, he is. My ex-husband he is fluent in Arabic, and that it shows you how the mind set is, like an Arab person is not.. you know accept this, so yeah.

NP: You said you met your husband, your ex... sorry, your ex-husband in demonstrations, so what were those demonstrations?

MS: Those were during the Palestinian invasions, the intifada, I think the second intifada, and also, there was Iraq, there were so many things going on at that time, so we used to go to them together.

NP: Were you involved in a group or was it more individual?

MS: No, individual at the university you know, we are all very enthusiastic, and for me when I went to England, that's it, its time for me to be active. So, I was joining everything, I was a kind of a junkie activist, depending also.. I just had so much energy, frozen for seven years, but that's it, I really wanted to participate in many things.

NP: So what were you involved in?

MS: I was involved in the.. I was elected to... they call it middle room, so I was student representative for the graduate students in my college, I worked for a group for counseling students, because I did counseling, so we were counseling a group of anorexia, established a school for teaching Arabic for students who are non Arabic. So, yeah. What else did I do? I remember I used to... I think I used to be active all day long and used to write my thesis in the evening, after ten at night I would start working. I took lots of elective courses because I wanted to learn about new things, so it was nice to have this opportunity, so its like dry land finally getting some water. I was really so motivated. Yeah. So this is the kind of activities, what else did I... extra curricular activities, etc.

NP: Being in England after 2001, and particularly after 2005, did you feel at all conscious being an Arab? Was that a part of your identity? Is it something you thought about?

MS: Of course, absolutely, I feel... it's also a very shocking feeling. It's so funny, like being an Arab in the news. I remember sitting with an Egyptian friend, and we were talking about identity and that there was a reason why we went and saw a lecture, and it was on identity in the Arab world. And they had surveyed the Arab world, and it turned out that the Egyptians are the nation that believes the most, they identify with themselves as Egyptians and then as Muslims and then as Arabs. And I told her, interesting, the civil war in Lebanon happened because of that, because a group of Lebanese kept thinking they are Lebanese and another one thought they are Arabs, and you think you are ok... its like suddenly, maybe like other group were not... like my parents were who really believed in Pan-Arab, and I thought, well maybe its not a big deal, after all, maybe those identities can coexist peacefully, but it was shocking also the definition of what is an Arab. And I think after a while in living abroad, you have less of the Identity issue, I lived 12 years in England, and I feel a part of me is British, specially after coming to Lebanon after spending 12 years, everyone said Maha, you are way too British. Like the first thing that would happen, when someone comes, I server them coffee, in Lebanon its an insult its like you want them to go quickly, my friend said to me ok, we are going to stay here for a while, why are you serving us coffee now, so, I think I was very aware of it but then I think it changed my perspective also, changed. I think in the Arab world we are way too focused on the Arab issue and the Palestinian issue and what's that, it's a justice issue. And why are we so focused on Palestine, and not other... we don't kick a fuss about issues that are happening around the world. We only focus on one issue. And I think the only way to get it.. I think is to widen the angel of the struggle, yes its Palestine because... not because we are Arab. But because it's a human rights issue, and that's why we should campaign for all human life issues including disability, including women's rights, including ect. But I feel that we are only taking this, because its probably the easiest one to agree on, and the enemy is really an external one not one of us. So its easier to fight for or to attack or to attach yourself to it, but we have many who fight for Palestine but don't believe in women's rights, don't believe in disability, they don't believe in equality, some people say, why have

compulsory education? Egypt just went down hell because Abdel Nasir introduced compulsory education, and they are crazy about the Palestinian issue. So, I think my understanding of Identity was really widened a lot when I was abroad. I don't believe any more in Arabic Nationalism like my parents do. Particularly, my dad. I think it's a bit racist to think this way. Yes, we have common things, but this shouldn't be our obsession I think, I think we have to find other causes. I think it was the cause that helped them get power, or empowered. But I think there are other things that can empower us.

NP: You talked a lot about human rights, and womens rights, do you see these... did you find these in relations to the UN instruments, the UN charters, or do you have your own framework of thinking about it?

MS: That's a very good question. Coz I worked on human rights, and I worked on citizenship education, I think, I think on the starting points they are overlapping, I think human rights are really address most of the things that we talk about. If there is a little bit of controversy regarding culture, and form of the human rights, when culture clashes with human rights, you know, what can you do etc. But I think, I personally having worked on each of the articles, because if you don't know the charter or the human... because the articles, I think, yeah, they overlap, but we, as an individual I like to enjoy. Yeah, absolutely. And I think this could change, because take for instance the issues regarding disability, even this is changing... the definition of... and I think the basics are ok but we just have to work on the interpretation of some of the issues and the terms etc. and I think there is a continuous progress in the way we thing about some of the issue of the human rights, what did I say, disability, child, etc, family. Maybe those things, concepts that maybe what our definition might change a bit, but I think the particular articles are ok. I don't see that there is a major shortage in them. It's the interpretation, and they allow you to have a scope for the interpretation, and I think this disability movement, I think they are working on what is... should there be something called disability, in itself? So... but the funny bit, is that I was also always, for some reason, I don't know why, I was anti feminism.

NP: Anti-communism?

MS: Feminism?

NP: Oh, feminism

MS: I think what the fuss? Why don't women go on with their lives and do... I mean, enough, because in my parent's house, my dad was very empowering, never felt that there is a difference, but now reflecting back, I think there are differences. But in the things that really mattered to us my dad was very supportive, I didn't see... so I didn't see that's a big issue. But once you start to live your life, and reflect on it, you see how subtle... where my awareness grew, in the beginning I thought, if you put an effort, and things like, that's it, you will get it. But then you know there are

structures, obstacles, and there are assumptions and cultures and values, that even as a woman it unconsciously affects me.

NP: Did you become aware of these structural obstacles as a woman when you were in England or this is something you became aware of since you returned to Lebanon?

MS: I think the fact that I was aware of the most is the **[inaudible: 12:21]** ... and I think its because of the accident that I have but.. and then when you see other women you start to become aware of others, now I didn't have the same issues as the others had, lets say in terms of education and movement, traveling., then when you see divorced women, what price they have. And then you see, for me we didn't have... I mean, it was personal; it's the personal rights, why do you marry me? Career? I was very apologetic about it when I was married first time, I was very apologetic about why do I feel that I want to do a career, you know what I mean, why cant I feel like other women, and get on with life, but for me it was a big issue. But I was apologetic about it, not maybe publically, but inside. So it was that, it was mainly personal, how I saw my role. And my priorities, and when there was tension, I wasn't as assertive as I am now. I was brought up as a non-assertive person. So, its these things, its basically within me, rather than someone did something to me. It was how I was interpreting my life and...

NP: and when did you decide to return to Beirut/ Lebanon?

MS: at, okay. See, its destiny here again interfering, it wasn't at all a conscious decision, so I was working after I finished my Phd, and I was working in a research institute in England, and had a permanent job and an okay salary, and at that tie I had just come through the divorce, and, so I was living alone in Slough, not a very nice place to live in, I thought okay, I would give it a chance but I interrupted it couple of times, then I was working and not knowing what exactly I want to do afterwards. I thought okay, I will try to publish my thesis, I was working on publishing it. Its on Lebanon, and its on **[inaudible: 14:49]** education. And I probably was through it addressing the injustices I had in the educational system. I think that's why, I wanted to pursue, a Phd in education and not in psychology but education as my masters wise, I felt like yes I can counsel a thousand in ten years, but if I do education I can reach more, you know, you think you are going to change the world when you are in your twenty, so I did education and I was working in that research institute, then I got an offer for a fellowship in Oxford, so I moved to... I was living in Oxford when I was offered, so I came back to Oxford, and took a sabbatical year, and it was the Lebanese center for Lebanese arts, and I had presented in one of their conferences, and they liked my work and they wanted me to do research on education in Lebanon, they felt its an important area. So I said, you know what, okay, Ill takes sabbatical year, and I will try it, so we both go back to Lebanon, so the first time I came back. It was a difficult time to come back, I was just recently divorced and not on good terms with my family, specially my mum, she thought it was a dumb decision to make. So, it was very tense, my sister lives... she was in England, with her husband, and then came back, at AUB, so I stayed with her, and I did my research, and that was on, civic and political engagement of people in Lebanon, school, I was

looking t how schools are addressing the issues of social cohesion, what does the term mean> again, this is indirectly I am talking about inclusion, the inclusion on all senses. I think with the concept, they zoom in. and the term of civic participation is too politicized, so at that time, I tried the concept of social cohesion, how schools are working on social cohesion? And how it is reflecting on young people's awareness, activism, and future prospects of activism, what would they, how would they like to participate? So, I came and did this research and I also did a research on Palestinians, so I felt it was a time, during the seven years I was in Lebanon, sitting in isolation, all the time I felt I want to do something to Lebanon, so I maybe felt it's the time to pay back, to really invest what I have learned in Lebanon, so the nine month fellowship turned into five years, now its my fifth year at the center, and I left my other job. So, I was coming back and forth. Stayed 3 months, 2 months, then go back to England where I had a place, and then I would stay for 6 months and then... so back and forth. Until... only in last year July, I think the place just sucked me in. I was... I never felt at home, I mean I used to hate Lebanon, really, inside; I had a very tensed relationship with it. Because I felt it's the most discriminatory place you can find, so, a bit by bit I was coming back. And then the 2 months turned to 3 and 4, until 2011, I had a flat in England, and I hardly stayed there, and last time I went was July 2012. And I felt, that's it, there is no place for me in England, its not the place for me now. That place is actually Lebanon, I mean, there is so much going on. There is so much to do. And if you try you can get something. Sao I started doing research and getting more and more projects being asked to do research and consultancy so then I decided you know what, this center in Oxford is the wrong place to be, so I moved the center here and I proposed to the board and they said ok. And now we have a center of 6 people working, We used to have one fellowship, I was a fellow, so we started to grow and now we are in Lebanon we make also research in equality, social cohesion, history. So, and we focus on two things, academic research and advocacy, I think in [inaudible: 19:39] you can't do research without advocacy. Because the mind set is not to take the research into reform. But put it in similar library to this and hope that someone would read it. I think you have to be double active, so that's what we did, we took our research and you must have meetings with the ministry, and try to connect.. try to establish connections with NGO sector. And that's what we did through the student association. We worked a bit on the history education and it was extremely politicized, and then I realized you know the change is not going to come from the policy makers, but the public felt there approach was exactly like policy makers. We need to find one version of history to agree on, and this is crazy. Its anti education, so we did bit by bit... more activities, then we found a group of people who are enthusiastic, you have to also see how there ideas change, we did meetings, we used to meet once a month, we talk about education, history, and its amazing, I think it's the most powerful was of changing something, [inaudible: 20:55] probably one percent impact, creating space where people have ownership of it, these teachers come from the south and different places, we don't pay them anything, poor people, they pay from their own pockets we donated two [inaudible: 21:13], some is a designer, did the logo for us, all... from their own pocket and time, and we did last June an event to teach the civil war in Lebanon, which is a taboo, our history books reach us to 45, after independence, and everything after that is a black hole. So, we are still in the beginning, so I hope, this is

the most fulfilling thing I have ever been involved in. and we are a group of people, its not one person, so, yeah. So we do bit by bit and then last year I decided that it, I left my flat, shipped things that I want and I rented a flat here, and it was difficult, because before, my parents used to tell me you have to come here, what's keeping you alone in England, and I was living alone, I didn't have any family members, I have friends, a lot, and then I think, no, coming back to Lebanon.. Socially, mobility, its just hard, but after... by that time, that was it, I felt I was ready. Never thought I would do such a step. For me, it was a bit scary place, but here I wake up in the morning very excited. When I went back to Oxford, it's a bubble, I mean, people... it's really a bubble. I didn't like what motivates people there, being seduced with a promotion, but it's the same here from people... Arabs I mean, I felt there is so much to be valued, so much... especially in education.

NP: you said that in your 20s, everybody wants to change the world, now, how do you feel about changing the world?

SM: maybe not the world, my supervisor used to tell me, that a phd is not going to change the world, but after the phd, there is a lot of time to do everything to do many things. I mean I don't think it's the whole world, but I think there is a huge scope of change in the world. And seeing the incidents in the Arab world, I think this is the best way to do change. And many people tell you, stop, don't be optimistic, its not going to happen, nothing will happen, but on the contrary, what I am saying even from my resolution, individuals can make a difference, and organizations can make a difference, no, I think there is a scope. Maybe not the whole world, I mean in Lebanon there are so many things, if you really put your mind into a cause, I think its an area that can really... just personally I think in Lebanon, just walking down the street it changes the perspective. Going to a hairdresser changes the perspective. On a simple daily life.

NP: In what sense?

MS: in the sense, in particular for me and my condition, it changes a lot of the perspective, but simple, and then you have the other things that you do, conscious advocacy. No, you can. For instance, I would give you an example, the research I did when I started doing my fellowship, when we did advocacy with the ministry, then they invited me to be a member of the committee that will draw the planning, we would plan the **[inaudible: 25:03]** on citizenship education, so I was really able to put most of the recommendation from my research and other peoples research in the new strategy... then we were able to bid for it and now we got it, and what happens with politicians and civil servants after that is another story but, I think if one really tried, maybe not a 100%, but you can, I think there are lots of... I don't believe in this sit back and give up, I think it's a waste of life. So, no, I do things that, there is so much attention.

NP: so your objective is to bring about reform in Lebanon on the social level only or you want also the political?

MS: No, I don't know, personally, I don't like politics, I don't understand the language or the mindset of those people, now, what do you define as politics? I think, I'll give you an example, we were doing this research on this curriculum, the Palestinians were never ever asked they have to learn [inaudible: 26:17] they were never asked. What do you think should go on the [inaudible: 26:22]. And our research we do it for the ministry, we said we want to go and ask the people what they want in description, so we ask them and we think these are very big things. So I put the request that we want to go and ask Palestinians living [inaudible: 26:39], what do they want their citizenship to declare. That very subject is very oppressive to the Palestinians, citizenship education; they are banned and prohibited from any civic or political participation. So they feel... like, are you really coming to piss me off? Because you teach me activism and you know I am not allowed to be active, so we thought like the ministry probably will kick a fuss about it, and they didn't. They said it's ok, go and consult them. So maybe they didn't read the application properly, but when we called the UNRWA, head of UNRWA and we said we are coming here because we are doing reform on education in Lebanon and we want to consult the Palestinian students, children, and he said what? Are you sure? Are you sure that the general director really knows about this? And I said, yes, we have the letter and his signature, and he couldn't believe that we could be allowed to consult them. So I think there are some subtle changes that you can, I mean, it doesn't have to be a throwing of the government. Now, we try different... I think with the history, its apolitical stage in away, if we were in a position one day where we can change how history is taught, its an extremely political issue, [inaudible: 28:12], is a very political issue. In that sense, what we include in citizenship its extremely politicized. So in some ways I think we have to contribute into politics, because we work on sociology and politics of education, we work on equity and equality in education, so it is political in many ways, now we are working on refugees, we are doing a conference and research on this which is a very political and social and a human issue, so I think everything is mixed together, yes we are not tackling political regimes, but our role is to make people ask about the role, this is what we are doing with the syndicate, and my hope is that in this interview when I ask this leader about reform, to make him think about educational reform, and this is what happened with when we interviewed the guy, the head of the second [inaudible: 29:10], I said also, ok, tell me what would the steps be if you wanted to work on educational reform. I don't think he... he really, I mean if you follow the recording, he was thinking it, now; he now began to think of that. I mean this is our role, to make people think about things they haven't thought about before. Bring a different outlook, so I don't know I think it all mix, social, political, its all mixed. And we do different things even from drop caps on the streets we are doing a raising awareness campaign, we realize that people don't know what they are for, like my friend told me, whose studied... a doctor, he told me always thought, how sweet of them to make the drop caps, the car part, you can open the car door and not hit the pavement. And another one said its for bicycles or for motorcycles to go on the pavement, which they always do, but they never thought this actually for mutual users, or moms without dads with trollies, push chairs, etc. So, and this is another thing, among... sorry, educated people... and this is where I think... sometimes we have a narrow understanding of social justice, and finally I have had it, if I never been in my circumstances, but for

example, you go to you go to [inaudible: 30:42] in Lebanon and they are inaccessible, I think, I was once invited to a conference called... on inclusion, social inclusion, and the venue was inaccessible. So I went to the organizer and I said, the title of the conference is this, but how can I enter? And he said, sorry, we didn't think about it, see how they... even their understanding of social justice is, either for the Palestinian cause or it's for women, and women don't take into account the domestic violence of mainly women, but you know, this sort of schizophrenia is so common in NGOs and I am sure we are also probably overlooking one particular disadvantaged group or two or more. But this is the other issue, the definition of social justice in Lebanon, its quiet narrow; it depends on your perspective. And even take disability NGOs they discriminate against able-bodied people. I mean, its, I don't know what to call it but something... I remember a friend of mine, she has a disability NGO, and she tells me, Maha, don't trust those able-bodied people who want to help us, I mean, if you don't have disability you will never be aware of it. I said, what? So you see how everyone is his kind of bubble and don't want to interact. Anyway, I went in a different tangent, but that's why I think if you work on social reform and social justice, things are really intertwined. So that's why I think what we are doing, we are touching many others. Without being too... this is the advantage of research, its not brave, you can always claim, you always have the backing of this is what my interviews and research... this is what have been said, its not me saying it. So it gives you this neutral standing that allows you to do things, so, yeah, this is why I like it, being a researcher.

NP: do you think that there is social movements, or groups that you can link to... you mentioned before we started the recording, you talking about syndicates and leagues, say a bit more about that.

MS: The syndicate, when you asking how we can contribute to the problem? I think you are asking the question of syndicate. What are you doing in terms of educational reform, because as I told you, there was this big strike that lasted for a month...

TAPE 3

MS: ... And they anyhow, stopped schools, and official. I mean, if you want to do a paper, you cant; everyone was on strike for one month, which really paralyzed the whole country. And I think here is what allowed... there was criticism on two things, first of all, people said, why are the teachers striking? The quality of education is so poor, and they want more money, of course not. And the others said why did they unite with the other schools? Like its civil servants syndicates and it paralyzed the whole country. But I think it was a very powerful thing what they did, I mean, unlike the university, the league of the university lecturers, who went alone, and got a huge pay off which obviously they deserved, but I would also pose the question of equality of education in public university and I have tried it myself, and I think it is an utter waste of time in some courses, others are better. It depends, sometimes in the same degree it's different whether it was in Beirut or the south or the north, so you can't generalize. But, that poses two questions, first the role of social movements uniting and putting real pressure on governments, and that's why the governments said yes,

we will give you all a pay raise, while the university teachers went alone and they got the payment alone for themselves, at the moment all the syndicates that went on strike in may, they haven't got anything yet. So when I introduce some of the teachers, they said, they did a mistake, they should have went alone, we could have got the money. But because they went all over the country, across all sectors, it made our case more difficult, how will the government pay the money? The syndicate made a very good move, focused all of their discourse on corruption, and they said you can pay us some money, if you fight the corruption. So the location of the demonstrations were carefully chosen, like Zaitounay bay, which there is a big corruption case there, and other places, other departments, and so they were talking about reform, and an attempt to get their rights, but what we wanted to research is the questions that other people were saying. Is it really fair to pay these people more, when the quality of education is really poor and families are suffering from their own pockets to send their kids to private schools, I mean, I interviewed parents in Akaw, and they rely on the income from apples and peaches and they have bed income, they can't send their kids to private school, and they have to send their kids to private schools, because I interviewed them and they told me, we know if we send our children to public schools that's it, their fate is doomed like you know, one of them sent her daughter, she kept her son in the private school and sent her daughter, and her daughter suffered until now, she brought her back to private school, so, they basically deprive themselves from the basics to pay the tuition fees, so it's a very valid question to ask about the quality of education in public schools. Now, when I interviewed them, my instinct is that they tell you, yes. But when you provoke them, what is your discourse on reform, you feel that there is not much. They talked a lot about reform in the 70s, when there was limited access to education. So all the time they were striking for demanding more schools, more teachers, more training, now the thing that they push for is recruitment of teachers, and there is a lot of corruption in this. So they push for open competition, and this is good, because that's quality. But other than that most of their discourse, having analyzed their videos, TV interviews, and what they write in the newspapers, about corruption and sectarianism, so they see the role, very political. And I think its fine, its good for syndicates to play that role but also as education syndicates they should also focus on the quality. And they should fight more for that, because that image at the moment, is... its all about better pay. That's why the ministry tells you, oh im not going to invite them because they will say, you are asking me to do more for the same little money, no we will not. And yes, I understand their frustration but at the same time, it gives the message of the policy makers that they are not interested, and I think honestly that the policy makers are not really interested in anyone's view but their view. Or the views of civil servants who have ties with political parties, where they put them in very senior positions to be able to make those decisions, so...

NP: are there any other constituencies who are calling for reform, political and social?

MS: NGOs, In Lebanon, I think its primarily NGOs and syndicates, this is why in the beginning we thought lets research NGOs, but then said, no, lets research

syndicates, and then see how they... the NGOs are very active, and this is the thing, in Lebanon, at the moment the NGOs or the syndicates are asking, and not all syndicates of course, some syndicates, so you have the labor union, I mean, its hijacked by politicians, so these I think are the only ones... some of them are able to do this, like with the environment, there was initiatives by NGOs to begin unions to.. for instance, when there is a new government, in their speech, the governments speech, what we call confidence speech, I don't know what... I mean you have a speech, so that the parliament gives you confidence, and after that you also have to say what you want to do. So what the NGOs are doing, they are trying to access the new government, to make sure their demands are in that speech, or in the... I don't know what we call it in Arabic or in English, so it's that kind of... we don't have a president, yeah, I don't know what it's called. So, this is good, I think it is a very good for the NGOs to do and if they manage to get, like now with women's movements in terms of the citizenship, and the violence, we have a new decree that says that discriminates violence against women. Its also sexist, because it was only regarding women, so women actually objected to this and they said, no, it shouldn't be only women, it should be violence, that's it. Physical abuse basically, so there are movements, for issues of nationality, like im married, and my husband is not Lebanese, so I can't give my daughter my nationality, and as a result she can't have any political... she cant be a civil servant, she can't be a politician, she can't be many things, she needs a residency every 3 years, so, there are many demands the NGOs are really working on. And they are succeeding in something. And at last, when we thought there will be parliamentary election, the NGOs nominated 50 new... 50 candidates, and this is good. This is the first time that NGOs do something like this.

NP: and.. I was thinking... these new demands for reform, when do you say they started? Do you know approximately what year these demands began to emerge?

MS: probably, I am the worst person to ask this, because I was in and out of the country. I only saw it emerge quickly in 2009. So I can't... but I think, prior to 2005, I think the NGO... we always had such NGO activities, but in the last 12 years, because I am more aware of this now, and I wasn't before, but I think its unfair of me to give an estimation, because I don't want to be unfair to what happened before. I think there was... a big peace movement, also before the civil war, which helped put end to the civil war. And you have the disability NGOs for a long time, women's NGOs, but I think they became more active... I personally was more aware of them in the last 7,8 years, and you have many new NGOs, like lesbian and gay society NGOs which was... I mean when I was in Lebanon before 2000, I was 15 at that time, I remember they did a talk show on homosexuality, I didn't know what the term meant, and I asked my dad, dad, what is homosexuality? I knew a little bit, but I didn't know the term, and my dad was a bit embarrassed. How can he explain it to me? And people had to be covered, because it is illegal if they catch you, and find you, not catch you, well for them, its catch you in an indecent position or whatever the article is. Now you have open societies that are for homosexual people, and I think this is also new development. And then also, you begin to see the news change, like I don't know if you know LBC, they also wanted to push more for social responsibility so they do campaigns about, parking or cars or driving or throwing

things, its called "Shaief halak" [you are condescending]. And you know standing in a cue, so a lot... its part of their social responsibility campaign. And I think its good, its good to have it.

NP: LBC is a private channel?

MS: Yeah, it's a private channel. So this is...you start seeing more programs addressing these sort of things, corruption is another problem. But I think we always had some programs like this, but to have campaigns, I think face book had a lot with this. So you take a picture and post it on Facebook, like a picture of something, like what's wrong.

NP: like what's wrong.

MS: yeah, you know like about driving, or for instance, there is something called "Marsad", which is the...

NP: Monitor!

MS: Monitor, yes, or things that are like also anti.. if you are parked in the wrong... something like this, and also you have things about violence against women, and physical abuse, so this is also helping. There was a very interesting campaign about men and their temper. Like psychosocial support for women... men under stress. Because this is also way of tackling the physical abuse and verbal abuse against women, so there are some creative campaigns by NGOs. Environment campaigns like, its considered a very good campaign if you bring, I don't know how many of these... and they make a chair, wheel chairs. And people who like don't know about disability movement or anything like that, they will gather for environment, they will gather these bottles, and are giving them to our [inaudible: 12:22]. There is this, you know, kind of social awareness, its getting bigger like this, I think.

NP: and do you think that... have the revolutions in Egypt, Syria, Yemen, I know now in Syria, we tend to talk about it as a more negative, as a problem, as a crisis, but initially, back in 2011, you know, even in Jordan, in Morocco, there were movements calling for reform. Did that spirit, spell over into Lebanon?

MS: Yeah, there was this movement, called "la lil taefieh" [no for sectarianism], against sectarianism in Lebanon, and they did big gatherings, and they did one of the largest demonstrations it was like 20 thousand or 30 thousand, but then it just went... and we were all hoping that it would do something, but I think also, like, (No for sectarianism) is probably just part of the problem, I don't think its only the problem, I think it's a facade that some people use for issues related to corruption, its not sectarian really related. You know, I not saying that sectarianism in not an issue, it is a real issue. But unfortunately.... Maybe the problem wasn't very clear, maybe it was too ambitious.

NP: did it have concrete demands?

MS: it had some but I didn't see much, at that time I was in and out a lot, I didn't spend much time in Lebanon. But people said also, you know, that the leadership was not strong enough, or divided, and...

NP: do you know who the leadership was?

MS: I can get you the names, but I can't remember.

NP: were they affiliated with other organizations?

MS: mainly NGO activists. And they made it very clear to all parties that they are not allowed to come and join the demonstrations, like Amal movement wanted to join, the socialist party wanted to join in, and those are sectarian parties so... and I think this is what effected in the end, because, they say, no we are not sectarian, but then they join the demonstration but they are the lords of sectarianism. So this effected it, and I don't think personally it would work out this way, I don't think talking to sectarians you would abolish the system, I think this is just one part of the movement, which is that everyone should have the right, without this sectarian quota.

NP: When we speak about sectarianism, in the Lebanese context, do you just mean the sectarianism of the political system?

MS: Yeah, its mainly that I think, I mean we would have to see... but personally, I...

NP: Tell me about the sectarianism on a social level.

MS: this one is a difficult one. They did campaigns on this, like "Muhajabeh", [veiled], like a woman coming against traffic and in the wrong direction, like a veil woman coming against... like, its biased. But I think the main thing is the political regime, and how it trickles down to economic corruption, etc. I think, yes it's a very big factor but its not... I mean, you can have the same horrible system, without sectarianism, you can have it with parties, just what's happening now.. now, now we have 14 and 8, they are not sectarian, as parties they probably are, a percent would be a sectarian group, but they all agree on the same thing, they are all interested in reform. So, this is why I personally don't think the sectarian.. its not a sectarian issue only... so I don't know, they felt that when they wanted to think of reform, similar to the one in the Arab world, they did sectarian... no to sectarian... maybe that was the reaction, I think our awareness will mature a little bit or I completely have a wrong perspective. And I don't see its only that I think we can be biased and discriminate against people who are from our sect, I think this is the issue. I've been to sectarian schools; I studied actually how social cohesion in sectarian schools, faith schools, secular schools, and public schools, to see if they have a different... what is their definition of social cohesion. And it really doesn't depend on the sect, but your standing, you starting point, its more about your definition of social justice actually, do you want to go against the mainstream or you want to go with the main stream?

In the school, the priority would be to pass official exams, and that's how you make more money, or you really want to make a change, so to what extent you are willing to go against the main stream? That's why personally I don't see it defined this way. I think its more complicated than sect. But other than those movements I think, its mainly NGOs who are doing most of the hard work. And you have many, you had a few politicians join the new governments who work in the NGO, like the ministry of internal affairs, the previous one, you had the ones for economy or... yeah. Sahdi el Nahas, so you have people who were actually reformists who joined the government and then some of them left, because they clashed with their political party for against reform, so they didn't want to do reform and he wanted to do reform and he resigned, so, yeah. That's why I think its far ore complicated than sectarianism.

NP: your optimistic about the future? Or determined?

MS: I think when there is a will there is a way, it might be very slow, and I think we are also on a learning journey ourselves, advocates for reform, we are learning. I have been a way from Lebanon for some time, so I am learning as well, I think even NGOs will learn and reflect and the politicians so... but I think we need to keep engaged, otherwise there is no hope. I mean parties in Lebanon are not going thee anymore, no body wants to join, and they like to join NGOs more. Even students I surveyed, were more interested in joining NGOs rather than parties. I think for people that's it, they are fed up with parties. So I think there is a scope, and there is an awareness being built. And I think from my personal experience, it is the awareness that is the most important thing, bless you.

NP: Sorry!

MS: Yes, so I think there is a scope. It could be slow, but it maybe less pricy in terms of human cost, like then if we go to something like Syria. And it probably will have greater ownership of its... through the... you know, if it is civil rather than military.

NP: Do you think Syria scared people here in Lebanon?

MS: Yeah, people were divided, have you noticed, no one have moved since then in the Arab world. Yes, I think they are very scared. Suddenly those who were supporting the Egyptian revolution, or think it's a part of an imperialist colonialist movement, or attempt with a new face. And they became anti revolutionists generally, although they are aware of the general revolutions... I mean, we were sitting in this café and the owners consider themselves reformists are split. Those who think it is a colonial project, and other think no, its actually individuals who are really trying and are sincere about the reform. So, I think it did scare people, ad probably, its both, I mean, it's a small world, why not. There are people who were interested n the reform, and others want to take care of their business, I mean, their own interests, so, we will see. But I think in Lebanon, its interesting, you don't see movements except the syndicates, I think that's the only big one that happened in Lebanon, and its all reform, so its similar to the demands, so maybe freedom is not one of the demands because we have more flexibility in that sense, but the reform is

being the priority. The first time the syndicates became so... they were challenging political parties, because they all belong to political parties, but they are challenging, so that's why I think they could have a really have a very strong impact, and if they lobby around... because the NGOs all went with them on the streets, so they were popular with a good sector other than "Al Kanaba" party, which is... they usually don't go but even... I think they were very smart the syndicates, when the parents started to complain about their kids being at home, then they went and did meetings with the parents. Telling them okay, we will strike for one month, but then we will teach them for another month, so I think with good planning and good leadership at the end, no one was complaining too much about it, and the government gave up. They promised them things on paper, but they haven't given them. and now the syndicates are reflecting. When you come on the 29 we will hear more about this debate, so I think.... This is interesting, now the patterns are changed, before, from an NGO lead movement (No to Sectarianism) to the syndicate's movements, we will see what will come up next.

NP: it feels like things are moving?

MS: I don't know, maybe I am optimistic, maybe I have Pollyanna syndrome, I don't know. But I think there is, I think Lebanon is a vibrant society, maybe because I am in Hamra, and at the same time things are moving to the worse in places like Tripoli and the south, I think there is a lot of movement in Lebanon, whether its good or bad. You have [inaudible: 24:16], explosions and Bahri, and there are serious issues as well, because I think the problem is the way we are clustered. The other day I went to a neighborhood, and the neighborhood had... in Lebanon they could be parallel to each other but you know... you can go everywhere, like we go to [inaudible: 24:40]. And its completely different story, but you feel that there also are people who are in very closed communities, I mean, Hamra, is a very closed community in essence. We maybe feel things are changing in here, but I don't know, Aisha Bakar, I don't feel things are changing there, or Taree Jdeedeh, they are changing to the worst, in the worst direction. And maybe to my parents in the south, they don't feel there is a big change, other than the big conspiracy that is being designed by the west on Syria and as a result on us, because Israel can invade at any moment... etc. And some actually think it is moving to the worse, and this is the... probably both things, big things are happening politically and internationally, and then you have the local NGOs, trying to work with the current situation, and the current realities, so, this is part of the mosaic, they zoom out and they zoom in. but still, its important, I mean, I think for NGOs still to pursue issues, like the ones they are pursuing even if they feel they are trivial issues compared to the big issues. For example, with the refugees, you have some NGOs moving, but you don't see a big movement, say like, why do we have so many people begging on the streets, no one is... I mean, you see the articles in the newspapers, disgusting articles, very... discrimination I mean...

NP: against the refugees?

MS: against the refugees, people feeling threatened

NP: against the Syrian refugees, or any refugee.

MS: yeah, hello... sorry.

NP: Don't apologize.

MS: what were we saying?

NP: I think the international versus the local.

MS: I think still both have to continue working, yeah, the refugees.

NP: Oh, yes. The refugees.

MS: this is a big issue, and not enough being invested, and this is the other issue about equality and social... human rights, I mean I remember, in my college... now its changing, but at the beginning of the revolution in **[inaudible: 27:09]** they rounded up the Syrians, one person... the Syrians because... they kidnapped lot of the persons going to Saida Zainab, so they rounded up the students and threatened them, if anything happens, he rounded up I should say, **[inaudible: 27:26]**, but now, last year, my dad calls me and says they are gathering donations to support the Syrian families in our village. Which is a village that is anti revolution, so they began to see more, the human side of it, and now the villagers are supporting the students in the school, and paying for the stationary etc. and now the principal in the school, hew has more than 80% in the school are Syrians. And the Lebanese are leaving the school because of that, so it is a big crisis, and not enough is being invested in terms of the social awareness, that these are the rights of those people and how they are treated, etc. There are clashes and competition which is normal in any huge.. I mean there is a huge number in Lebanon its not a small number. And I think there has to be more awareness of the suffering of these... that's why we are doing something on education, and some NGOs are being active with this, the thing is NGOs have a big role to play in social awareness of the prices and the plight of these people. Imagine, we have Syrians coming to Lebanon, if you have someone, lets say, 12 years old, they put him in grade one or two because they don't know English, it's a language problem its not... his capabilities are not great too, its capable like any 12 year old, but just has a language issue, just like when the Lebanese went to France, during the civil war or any other country they didn't put them in grade one to learn French in the... after... they just gave them extra language courses, so there are many big issues, I mean in the media, I think its negative media, like people complaining, voices being concerned, you see some people who are... some of my colleagues are writing against this in terms of economy actually, because most of our taxes are on consumptions, so we have more people drinking coffee because we have to many people here, so as a result, the taxes are earning more money, as a government, so, it is not a negative thing. Specially that we don't give them any health benefits or anything, we just give them education. Which Lebanon is really not hiring more teachers, because in its public sector, we don't have the capacity, sorry, I mean in

some schools they have 30 students and there are 50 members of staff, in primary education particularly. So we have the capacity to really take many refugees and some early as yesterday, you know some schools are doing double shifts, the majority, 90% of schools, haven't even covered their capacity, so it is not going to cost us a lot in that sense. It will cost us in the two shifts, but it is dangerous if we don't talk about the [inaudible: 30:58]. The other day I heard that the ministry of education wants to have split classrooms for Syrians and Lebanese, this is a crisis, this would be very dangerous, you have almost half of the population will be Syrian, and if you make them grow parallel rather than together this will be really alarming. So I think this is a big challenge that NGOs and activists have to respond to... I don't know now what's happening and we will see how it will develop. I think its becoming better, I am doing work on this, and the NGOs are beginning to realize that it is something that is going to last longer. Last year they were telling me their problems, saying oh, they will stay few months and then they will go back, now the quota is completely different. These people are here to stay for a long time, we need to talk about integration, we need to talk about building the capacity, and in Lebanon, we have many discriminatory cases, discriminatory goals, you are not even allowed to join vocational education, so we will have unskilled generation. Anybody with a great skill, can't join Lebanese schools, because in grade seven you start to learn math and science and English or French and if you don't have the language, and you will not be able to learn so we stop it. So this is whats happening, and most of those who are above grade seven, are either dropping out, so we have a whole generation, or they go and join schools that are teaching the Syrian curriculum, private schools. And then they have t go to Syria to be able to do an exam there, because these are not accredited in Lebanon, so they cant go to university in Lebanon, I mean, it's a big mess. I think this is a big price that you need to explore. And we will see how... now, they realize that it's going to last, okay, so as a result, what can you do. We will see. We are doing a conference on this to try to push policy makers to change rules an regulations to accreditation, grade allocation, curriculum modification. One teacher told me when we were doing research, in grade one you have to draw the Lebanese flag, and half of them are Syrians, and they insisted, imagine how they... they insisted on drawing the Syrian flag. But I have to teach them the Lebanese flag, what can I do? And what I liked about the kids is that they insisted on drawing their countries flag and not the Lebanese one, so, it's a big....

TAPE 4

MS:... issue for everyone I think, in the country, and the government have not responded.

NP: I feel like I asked you lots of questions, is there something I didn't ask that you think is important? Something about your life, tat I haven't touched or hadn't had the opportunity to talk about.

MS: No, I think you made me think about things, you made me zoom out, and reflect on things, see, even the interviews are a learning experience, so, no I think we have covered, I think we have covered almost everything, I think it just made me more

aware of how... of the process of things, its really a process and ever changing, I mean the whole movement of NGOs and reform and it is changing and developing, we are learning a lot, activists and governments, I think they are learning as much as we are. Sometimes we see them as independent and its not like... they are also learning to respond to those challenges, so now, I think it's a big journey, it's a long journey, and we will see what comes out of it, we will see about women, and what there role will be, and how things will develop, I think there are still many topics as women, and women's rights, that we haven't yet spoken about in many senses, I think not all women are aware also of many issues, like if you ask my mum about women's rights, and I see her rights are being violated, almost daily, but sometimes it is better not to talk about them, or to think about them. that's what we... I have never asked her these questions because I was afraid if I opened this Pandora's box, it might really get depressed about these things, so, I think we covered almost everything, I mean it is a very big topic... follow women in history, which is the focus, this is so important, we didn't announce it in textbooks, gender textbooks and UNISCO that something on these textbooks, and women in textbooks, gender issues, that's a very important, women should be invited into history, and to write history, making history, even having historical understanding. Usually women are absent from historical analysis, awareness. Its usually men who make all the events, So I think this is a very important, I mean, ten years from now, when we look back at it will really it will make a very interesting thing to look at. Yeah, I think that's what I would like to add.

NP: Thank you very much, Maha.

MS: Thank you.