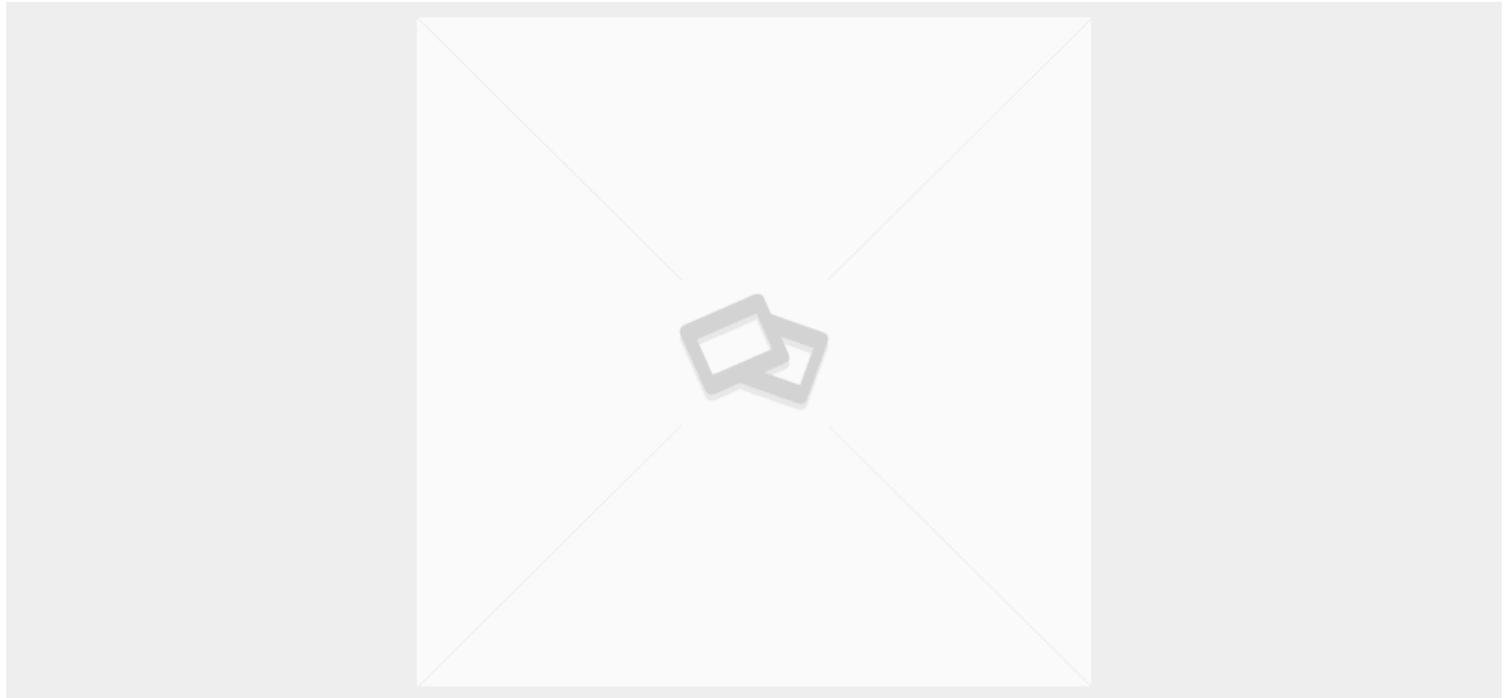


# SUSAN GALLEYMORE INTERVIEWS DAVID BOYAJIAN AND VIVIEN SANSOUR

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South Africa-born Susan Galleymore is the author of "Long Time Passing: Mothers Speak about War and Terror" and founder of "Motherspeak". She lives in the San Francisco Bay Area. She is the host of Raising Sand Radio.

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David Boyajian is a Massachusetts-based freelance writer and an activist, primarily regarding Armenian affairs.

Vivien Sansour is a Christian Palestinian poet, activist, and a theatre director. She was born in Jerusalem, Palestine, and has lived in the United States since 1996.

The following is a transcript of an interview. To listen click

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#### TRANSCRIPT:

INTERVIEWER: Welcome to another edition of Raising Sand Radio. I'm your host, Susan Galleymore, with Dave Rovics and "Who Will Tell the People" to introduce this week's show. We will talk with David Boyajian, an Armenian-American writer and activist on the latest agreements between Armenia and Turkey, and why the Armenian people feel betrayed by them. During the latter part of the show, Vivien Sansour will share her poetry and theater arts. Vivien Sansour has lived in the United States since 1996, when she departed her village, Bejala, near Bethlehem and Jerusalem. I have David Boyajian on the phone, and with me from Boston. Welcome, David, it's good to have you back on Raising Sand Radio.

BOYAJIAN: Thanks, Susan. It's always great to be on your show.

INTERVIEWER: Well, there's all sorts of interesting things going on now, and I'm going to refer our listeners to Raising Sand Radio's website, where they can find earlier shows you've done with us on Armenia and Turkey to get a deeper understanding of the region. But let's start today's show with a brief layout of the land in the Caucasus Caspian region for listeners who may not be familiar with the area and how the US has been involved there for over two decades, since the breakup of the USSR.

BOYAJIAN: Right, well, of course, the Caucasus consists of three countries, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Then just to the west of those countries is Turkey, a NATO ally, and to the right, over towards the east is the Caspian Sea, which is extremely rich in oil and gas. Georgia and Armenia themselves, if one were to look at a map, form a kind of physical wall between east and west. Now, the US, what the US and NATO have wanted to do since the breakup of the Soviet Union nearly 20

years ago, is to get into that region via Turkey and tap the oil and gas and pump it west. And the US and Europe have largely succeeded in that. They've established pipelines running from Azerbaijan through Georgia into Turkey and on to the west. By the same token, Russia has thought of the Caucasus as its traditional sphere of influence. It wants to monopolize the oil and gas in the Caspian and Caucasus region. It wants that oil and gas, if it's to flow out of that area, to be under its control, to have the pipelines go through Russia. And so that's kind of the great game that's been taking place over the last 20 years. Georgia and Armenia, as I say, form a kind of physical wall between east and west. In order for these pipelines to go from the Caspian west to Europe through Turkey, they have to pass through either Georgia or Armenia. Now, Georgia has been open - its borders have been open, so the US has been using the Republic of Georgia for these pipelines. Armenia's borders have been closed. And that's because Armenians and Azerbaijan fought a war over a disputed area of Karabagh an Armenian populated area inside Azerbaijan. And that has caused Armenia's eastern border with Azerbaijan to be closed, and Turkey, sympathizing with its Turkic cousins in Azerbaijan, has shut its border with Armenia. So Armenia's borders are blocked on the east and west, and it's unable then to be a pipeline transit route for the United States. So the US has been looking to Georgia for that role. So basically what we have is the Caucasus is - I like to call it - ground zero for the new Cold War between Russia and the United States.

INTERVIEWER: And not to mention China in there, too.

BOYAJIAN: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: So let's talk about what's new in the relations and agreements between Turkey and Armenia that's made so much news just in the last few weeks.

BOYAJIAN: Yes. Well, of course, I suppose most people know that from 1915 to 1923 Ottoman Turkey committed a genocide against its Armenian population and has since denied that that occurred. It took over - after this ethnic cleansing that it committed in 1915 - it took over Armenian historical land on what's called the Armenian Plateau, which is now part of Eastern Turkey. So this has been a grievance of Armenians ever since. Now, fast forward to 1993 when the war between Azerbaijan and Armenians broke out, actually in the late 1980s, Turkey had recognized the newly independent government of Armenia. I should mention, let me go back just a moment. Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan are all ex-Soviet republics that became independent after the breakup of the Soviet Union around 1991. In any case, this war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Turkey closed its border with Armenia in 1993 out of sympathy with Azerbaijan. So since that time, the border's been closed. Armenia has offered for the last 16 years to establish normal diplomatic relations between itself and Turkey with no preconditions. Turkey wouldn't even have to acknowledge the genocide. There would be no preconditions at all. Turkey has set a number of preconditions. Armenia has to stop pushing for genocide recognition. Armenia has to give up all land claims against Turkey, even though it hasn't put forth any formally, and Armenia must come to an agreement over the disputed area of Karabagh with the Republic of Azerbaijan. So you ask what's new now? Well, things have

changed a little bit in the last year, because as I mentioned before, Georgia is an important pipeline route from east to west for the United States and NATO. But there was a war last year between Russia and Georgia, and that cast doubt on the stability of Georgia and on the ability of Georgia to continue to host western-bound pipelines. So as I mentioned before, the other country that could be an alternative to Georgia for NATO's western pipelines is Armenia, if its borders open. So the United States has been pushing, especially since the Georgian-Russian war of last year for Turkey and Armenia to come to some sort of an agreement, and for Turkey to open the border. It's Turkey that closed the border, so it's Turkey, really, that has to open it again. And there is a sort of preliminary agreement between Armenia and Turkey now, which evidently has, and strangely enough, has the backing not only of the United States and the European Union, but Russia, too. And this agreement is called the Protocols. And it has a couple of problematic sections in there, clauses that Armenians consider generally very negative, but which it appears that Armenia is going to push ahead with. The Protocols that I mentioned between Turkey and Armenia have not been ratified yet. They've been signed by the presidents of Turkey and Armenia, but they have not been ratified by the parliaments, and for them to take effect they need to be ratified by parliament.

INTERVIEWER: And does it look as though parliament is going to do that?

BOYAJIAN: Well, on the Armenian side, the government there, the strong man, Serge Sargsian, appears to have the political apparatus in the parliament in his grasp. So the answer to your question is, yes, it looks like Armenia will ratify the Protocols. Now, on Turkey's part, it says it is going to ratify the Protocols, but it also reserves the right not to in case the Karabagh issue between Armenia and Azerbaijan is not solved, and it hasn't been solved yet. Now, if the Turkish Parliament goes ahead and ratifies these Protocols, according to the text of the agreement, Turkey would have to open its border with Armenia within two months of ratification. However, it has - as I said - Turkey has said that it will not go ahead with ratification unless an agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan is signed. So the Turkish ratification is somewhat problematic at this point.

INTERVIEWER: And how is the EU and NATO, along with the US, involved in this? And how does Armenia fit into that?

BOYAJIAN: Yes, in terms of the US and NATO, they have been trying to push into the area of the Caucasus and the Caspian in order to get at the oil and gas, and in order to bring the countries in that area - which have traditionally been under Russian influence - they've been trying to bring them under Western and European and NATO influence. And they've gone a long way in that. Basically, Georgia is definitely oriented toward NATO now, Azerbaijan not quite as much. They're under a little more Russian pressure, and they're a little bit further east. So what the United States would like to do is open the border, is have Turkey open the border with Armenia, and it would like to see the Karabagh issue solved between Armenia and Azerbaijan, because here's what that would do. That would give the United States and NATO a straight shot from west to east right into the Caspian Sea. It would go, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Azerbaijan is right on the Caspian Sea. If the borders

were to open, the United States would like to put oil and gas pipelines through there, as I say, especially now because Georgia's ability to host present and future pipelines has been called somewhat into question because of the war last year between Georgia and Russia. I should mention, though, that for its part, Russia would like to keep that region under its domination. So the real question here is, why is Russia in favor of these Protocols, which would seemingly give the United States a new opening into that region? We don't really know the answer to that. But Russia has Armenia very much under its, shall I say, quasi control. Russia owns a lot of the industry, especially the vital industry, in Armenia. It has great influence upon the political system in Armenia and also the army in Armenia. It appears that Russia thinks that because Russia supplies most of the natural gas to Turkey, that it feels that if Russia establishes a relationship between Turkey and Armenia, that somehow Russia can control that, that somehow Russia does not have to worry about Turkish penetration, not only because it has natural gas leverage over Turkey, but because Russia owns so much of Armenia's vital industry. So really, it's a game here. It's rather strange that both Russia and the United States should want the same thing in this region. But I think what they're doing is, they're each jockeying for superior position, believing that they are the ones that are going to come out on top.

INTERVIEWER: Let me take a moment and remind our listeners that we're talking with David Boyajian, who has been with us before, on the topic of Armenia and the region around the Caucasus and the Caspian. And again, those shows are available on the website, RaisingSandRadio.org. David, we have a president now who is very pro-recognizing the Armenian genocide during the election. Since then he has not done so. And we have Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State. Talk about the two of them together and how they are viewing the Protocols and the genocide.

BOYAJIAN: Well, you're right. President Obama very much promised many times to Armenian-Americans that if he got in office, he would explicitly recognize the Armenian genocide, using the word genocide. He has not done so. He's broken his promise. Hillary Clinton, the Secretary of State, was very much in favor of an Armenian genocide resolution in the US Congress when she was US Senator. However, now that she's become Secretary of State, she has not used the word genocide. So Armenian-Americans feel very much betrayed by the Obama Administration. A noted genocide expert who now works in the National Security Council for the administration, Samantha Power, - former Harvard professor - she's an expert on genocide. During the campaign, she said Obama has read her book, he knows all about the Armenian genocide, and he will definitely recognize it. Well, Obama did not recognize it and probably won't. And Samantha Power has not been heard of since she joined the administration. So that's a disappointment. Of course, Armenian-Americans aren't the only ones that are disappointed with the promises this administration made, but there is a considerable amount of disappointment there nonetheless.

INTERVIEWER: David, I've talked with folks in Turkey, and interviewed American professors working in Turkey, and I was surprised to hear some of these folks say that they thought that dealing with a

topic like the genocide should be something that happens within a country. And in fact what I've since and subsequently learned, and I'd like you to verify if this is true or not, is that there is a law in Turkey that makes it illegal to quote "insult the Turkish nation" and how that is used, and that law is used to prosecute those to speak truthfully about the genocide within Turkey. So talk a little bit if you can about the Turks themselves and how they view this.

BOYAJIAN: Increasingly, Turkish academicians, especially those working in the United States where they can speak freely, have actually been recognizing the Armenian genocide, and more Turks, even within Turkey, have been learning about the Armenian genocide. However, it is still largely illegal to bring up the subject of the Armenian genocide in Turkey. The award winning author, Orhan Pamuk, was originally indicted some years ago for bringing up this subject. Now he's being brought into court again because he said this a few years ago. I guess they're somehow reviving the case. You do run the risk of being prosecuted or being politically ostracized or worse if you bring up the subject of the Armenian genocide in Turkey. So I should mention here, I did allude to two sections of these proposed Protocols between Armenia and Turkey that were problematic. One of them involves recognizing mutual territorial integrity between Armenia and Turkey, because although Armenia itself has never formally had territorial or reparations claims against Turkey due to the genocide, those have always been in the background for the last 90 years. But what I want to mention is, these Protocols contain a provision that would establish some sort of joint historical commission between Armenia and Turkey, probably on the matter of genocide. The Protocols don't explicitly use the word genocide. They use the term "historical dimension." But it's felt that that really is an allusion to the Armenian genocide. Now, Armenians have a lot of problems with this. The International Association of Genocide Scholars has said explicitly that all of the studies by neutral parties of the 1915-1923 killings have concluded that they were definitely an act of genocide by Ottoman Turkey. So it looks like this joint commission that the Protocols would establish is a demand of Turkey to kind of throw doubt on the veracity of the Armenian genocide and make out like it's something about which we need to study more in order to determine why it happened. Now, it's a funny thing, because as you mentioned, it's not easy to even discuss the Armenian genocide in Turkey.

INTERVIEWER: Exactly.

BOYAJIAN: So one wonders, how is Turkey, which is going to be a member of this commission, going to study the Armenian genocide or the events surrounding it objectively? And I don't think it can be done, and Armenians around the world really are quite outraged that Armenia would agree to such a thing.

INTERVIEWER: And do they view the Armenian government as legitimate and honest enough to sign these documents?

BOYAJIAN: In general, no. In Armenia itself, all the opposition parties - nearly all the opposition

parties -have come out against President Sargsian's signing of them, and some have also demanded his resignation. The Armenian government, it's been struggling in the post-independent era, like most of the newly independent nations of the ex-Soviet Union. The current government got in power through ballot stuffing, censorship of the media, and keeping some candidates out of the electoral process. In general, Armenians - politically involved, active Armenians, especially in the Diaspora, but also in Armenia - do not regard this government as legitimate enough to sign these weighty Protocols. And there have been huge demonstrations around the world, Paris, Lebanon, New York, Los Angeles, and also in Armenia itself. But the current government in Armenia really has a kind of stranglehold on the country, and that's unfortunate.

INTERVIEWER: I'm going to go on to ask you why Americans should care. But before I do that, I want to mention that the LA Times just had a very interesting article by a man named Karnig Dukmajian. It's called "Why Armenians cannot 'get past' the genocide." And I'm going to actually try and draw some parallels here, if you'd give me a moment to quote him: "Suppose Israel and Germany share a common border, as Armenia and Turkey do. Suppose also that Germany has not recognized that the Holocaust took place, that Germany admits only that some Jews died in quote unquote civil unrest during World War II and that Germany claims that Jews also killed many Germans." He goes on: "Suppose West Germany did not pay 3 billion marks in reparations to Israel (which it did in the '50s and '60s) renovate deserted Jewish synagogues across Germany or establish memorial parks where concentration and extermination camps once stood. Suppose then that 16 years ago, Germany unilaterally decided to shut its common border with Israel in solidarity with a third country, with which Israel went to war, and that its stated purpose of such action was to cause Israel economic strain. And finally, suppose that after much international pressure, Germany has decided it will reopen the border, but only if Israel agrees to make several concessions, including partaking in a commission to study whether the Holocaust actually took place, and making territorial concessions in its unresolved conflict with the third country." What do you think of this? Is this a good way of summing up some of the issue?

BOYAJIAN: Oh, it's a wonderful article. I've read it. It's making the rounds of the Internet. You know, Susan, it's so wonderful that we Armenians - we feel sometimes we don't have a voice. And I know that actually we have a voice that is able to get out there more than a lot of other small national groups. So we're appreciative of that. And I'm particularly appreciative that you allowed me to come on your program to talk about these issues, because during the last several weeks, when the issues of these Protocols between Turkey and Armenia have come up, a lot of the articles that have been printed have not really asked Armenians in Armenia or elsewhere what they think. It's as if these things are taking place, and we Armenians around the world have nothing to do with them. So I was very happy to see that in the LA Times. And yes, the analogy is quite right. Turkey has not admitted to genocide. It's next door to Armenia. What is Armenia supposed to think? Well, Armenia feels endangered by Turkey, and this brings up the subject of a double standard about genocide, too. You know, Obama and Hillary Clinton, they recognize the Holocaust. Jews and Israelis have gotten

reparations for it. The parties involved in some other genocides - there have been trials - Rwanda and so forth, but for Armenians, there has been no closure to this. And I think the analogy with the Holocaust is a very damning one. And I'm just glad the LA Times printed it. But you know, we Armenians are still trying to get out there and explain what's going on.

INTERVIEWER: And then we recently saw after the bombardment of Gaza, and you and I actually did a show on this earlier, the Turkish Erdogan disagreeing publicly with an Israeli diplomat, which caused a bit of a break for a while. But those two countries are very close, too, aren't they?

BOYAJIAN: They are very close. Turkey and Israel are basically allies at the military, military intelligence, and economic levels. Now, the Islamic party, the AKP that's now in power in Turkey, has been criticizing Israel for various of its actions. It has accused Israel of genocide, and Israel actually suddenly kind of struck back against the charge of genocide, because Israel has not acknowledged the Armenian genocide. So basically Israel said to Turkey: 'you'd better watch about, you'd better be careful about accusing us of genocide because you, Turkey, committed genocide against Armenians, and we've been supporting you by not acknowledging that. So you'd better watch out, because we might retaliate against you.' Turkey, though, still does have this alliance with Israel, and, to some extent, the Islamic party in Turkey is kind of playing to the Muslim street. Yes, it criticizes Israel. On the other hand, it has a very strong relationship with Israel, and it has not done anything substantive to sever that relationship.

INTERVIEWER: I'm actually going to, at the second half of this show, as I mentioned, we're going to be talking with Vivien Sansour. I'm actually going to complicate that whole quote that I just read by asking listeners to think about Palestine and the Palestinians in terms of the Armenians, also. But before we do that, David, I want to ask you, why should Americans care about this at all? I mean, this is so far away, and Armenian-Americans have quote unquote assimilated. Why should we worry about this?

BOYAJIAN: Well, I think as Americans we should care about any place in the world where Americans have soldiers stationed. US has soldiers stationed in Georgia, training Georgian troops. The United States supplies a certain amount of weaponry to both Georgia and Azerbaijan, as does Israel, by the way. So US soldiers over there are in harm's way. The US is committing a lot of political capital and money to building these pipelines, and the US is really kind of setting itself up, or has been, in a confrontation with Russia over the area of the Caucasus, and it's mainly over oil and gas and NATO penetration. So Americans need to know where else we're involved. We're not just involved in Iraq. We're not just involved in Afghanistan. No, we have soldiers, not necessarily combat troops, but we have soldiers and military advisors in the Caucasus, and there is this big clash taking place between Russia and the United States, a kind of new Cold War. So any place where the United States is committing its resources, I think we Americans need to know about and be concerned about.

INTERVIEWER: And I really appreciate you taking the time, David, to lay this out for us, because

again, I think this doesn't really get around - this news, this information doesn't appear too much in the mainstream media. So we're really happy to bring it to our listeners, and you're a huge part of that.

BOYAJIAN: Thank you. Thank you very much, Susan. I might also add, there's another reason that we should be concerned about US involvement in that area, and that's because of human rights and morality. Virtually all the countries in that region of the world, Turkey, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, have very serious human rights deficiencies, and yet America is very much involved there, and it's not involved for human rights reasons. It's involved for oil and gas and military reasons, and that's wrong.

INTERVIEWER: And that's the same thing, really, that we're seeing in Iraq. We just saw Vice President Biden there urging the Iraqis to accept a smaller amount of payment for the oil. And the same in Afghanistan. All of this pipeline really hinges upon the situation in Afghanistan being pacified somewhat, doesn't it?

BOYAJIAN: Well, yes, absolutely. One of the reasons, and I don't think it's the only one - certainly the Taliban, 9/11, and Al Qaeda have to do with why the United States went into Afghanistan - but even before 9/11, the United States was trying to put natural gas pipelines from Turkmenistan, which is just to the north of Afghanistan, down through Afghanistan, through Pakistan. So I believe that oil and gas are one of the reasons why the United States is currently in Afghanistan and may not leave for a long time. So I think Americans really have to know more about this oil and gas angle.

INTERVIEWER: David, I want to thank you for being with us. And how can listeners get in touch with you? Can they get in touch with you? Can they find your writings?

BOYAJIAN: They can find my writings if they go to Armeniapedia.org and search for my name, David Boyajian. They will see my writings there, and I would recommend another site, too. It's called NoPlaceForDenial.com. That has to do with how the Anti-Defamation League has denied the Armenian genocide and works with Turkey to stop the passage of genocide resolutions in the US Congress. I'd recommend both of those to people.

INTERVIEWER: Thanks, David.

BOYAJIAN: Thanks so much, Susan. I'm very grateful.

INTERVIEWER: That was Armenian-American writer and activist David Boyajian, whose other interviews you can find on our website, RaisingSandRadio.org. We also have transcripts of our earlier shows on Armenia, thanks to David Boyajian, and you can download them from the website. Susan Galleymore, host of Raising Sand Radio on KZSU, FM 90.1 at Stanford University. You can contact me at [Susan@RaisingSandRadio.org](mailto:Susan@RaisingSandRadio.org). If you're interested in attending the annual gathering at the Gates of Fort Benning, Georgia, to call for the shutdown of the School of the Americas, go to [www.soaw.org](http://www.soaw.org), that's School of the Americas Watch dot org, to find out how to do that. This year's

event will be held just before Thanksgiving, and just two weeks ago we aired a presentation by Lisa Sullivan, who has been involved with the School of the Americas Watch for some time, and it's a very interesting and informative interview. You should certainly know more about School of the Americas, and Lisa Sullivan goes into detail.

INTERVIEWER: It's my great pleasure to welcome Vivien Sansour. Welcome, Vivien.

SANSOUR: Thank you, thank you, Susan.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I first met you in Los Angeles when you were actually part of a book event that I was doing for my own book, and you were such a wonderful addition because you shared some of your poetry. And you were originally born in Bethlehem in Palestine and came to the United States in 1996. And we're going to hear some of your poetry today. But first I'm going to ask you to tell our listeners a little bit about your life in Bethlehem before you came to the United States.

SANSOUR: Well, I was actually born in Jerusalem, but I grew up in the Bethlehem district in a small town called Bejala, which is pretty much Bethlehem, especially these days, with Bethlehem being completely surrounded by the Israeli apartheid wall. Bethlehem and the surrounding little towns have all become kind of one giant open air prison camp. And it's people building on top of each other. But my life there was a combination of basically living a life full, very much full of life, actually. Because I grew up in the small town, and it's mostly a farming community. So I grew up basically playing in the fields, working with my grandmother in the fields, and it was really exciting, except for when it wasn't. For example, when we would have curfews, which were very, very terrifying, and all kinds of limitations to your imagination as a child of what you want to be, because you knew that you would grow older, and there was no way for you to pursue your dreams. For example, I wanted to study theater, actually, and the only theater school was in Jerusalem at the time, and actually, I think until now, and I couldn't get a permit to go to Jerusalem. And so it was easier for me to find a way to get out of the country, to come to the US, rather than to go to Jerusalem, which is where I was born. And so that's how I basically came here.

INTERVIEWER: And then you have followed your dream, haven't you? You do theater these days. You're a performance artist and a poet.

SANSOUR: Yeah, I do, I do, not as, I got really caught up, because when you are born and raised under occupation, politics is kind of not a choice. It's imposed on you. And so particularly when I came to the United States, and I was really shocked at how little people knew about us and about our experience. I got really involved in politics, and I ended up actually studying political science, and later I did my masters in international studies. But I always had a focus, I always had a side gig of some kind of theater activity, mostly community theater. And when I moved to LA, I met, who is now my partner, Hector Aristizabal and we started an organization called ImaginAction, where we focus on theater of the oppressed. And so the purpose of the theater we do is purely on creating alternatives to violence and to working with communities to find solutions to very difficult problems.

And so one of the things we did last year, for example, is we actually took 14 artists, including ourselves, to Palestine, and with a project called the Olive Tree Circus, and people can find it on YouTube. And we worked with the farmers in Palestine who cannot access their olive groves. And we walked with them using giant puppetry and walking on stilts and music. We walked with the farmers through their olive groves because, as you know, most farmers cannot access their olive groves because of the apartheid wall and Israeli settler activities.

INTERVIEWER: Vivien, I want to interrupt for one second and say, actually, I'm hoping that Hector will do an interview with us, too, because he also works, I'm assuming now that you do, with the School of the Americas Watch, which is coming up, and we're going to be doing a show on that.

SANSOUR: Oh, yeah. We actually go every year, and this year we are going again. And we work with a group of puppetistas about creating a street show called the Return To Life, which as you know at the School of the Americas there is the vigil where we remember the dead, but then we decided a few years ago that we have to come back to life after we remember the dead. So we designed this street show with a few other people. And they come from all over the place. And actually, this is where the Olive Tree Circus idea was born.

INTERVIEWER: That's great.

SANSOUR: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Nice circle of events there.

SANSOUR: Yes, yes. And actually now Hector just left Afghanistan where he was doing theater of the oppressed there, and I'm sure your audience and yourself would be very interested in his experience.

INTERVIEWER: We will, in fact. Thank you for letting me know that. In fact, I went to Iraq with a woman named Kayhan Irani - we've done a show with her, and she works with a theater of the oppressed in New York. So the using the arts, using theater, and those talents is a really wonderful way to reach an audience that might not otherwise hear the message that you have to share.

SANSOUR: Right. And for us to discover, I mean, we don't go in communities and tell people what to do. We work together with communities to discover what it is that we want in terms of challenging what's happening, or whether it is just discovering what are really the problems in our community.

INTERVIEWER: And I actually just quote unquote friended you on Facebook without really realizing that it was you. But I friended the Al Hara Theater in Bejala.

SANSOUR: Oh, great.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, talk a little bit about that.

SANSOUR: Al Hara Theater is a community theater in Bejala, and actually I am a founding member.

We originally started years ago under a theater called the In/Out Theater. But then it was 2005, I believe, or 2004 that we basically reformed, and we became called Al Hara Theater. And Hara means the neighborhood. And we basically do a lot of workshops with people in the West Bank. There's a big focus on the young generation, because the young generation finds little outlet for their creative energy. And so we work with them, and we try to basically find what it is that they want to talk about. What are the issues they're facing? And the youth themselves, with the help of theater, create their own plays and stories. And then they tour with them all over the West Bank, and actually all over Europe recently. So it's very exciting. And it's very much a community theater. It's not the most professional piece of work. It's really designed to help people express themselves.

INTERVIEWER: Vivien, before we go on and have you read, share a poem, would you give the websites for ImaginAction?

SANSOUR: Sure. Our website is [www.imaginationaction.org](http://www.imaginationaction.org) Contact us through the website.

INTERVIEWER: And then the Al Hara Theater, as I say, is on Facebook. What's the best way for people to become fans of that?

SANSOUR: They can just find them on Facebook, Al Hara on Facebook.

INTERVIEWER: OK, great. Would you share one of your poems with us?

SANSOUR: Sure. You know, I have several thoughts, but you've expressed that you'd like a specific one, so I'm going --

INTERVIEWER: Actually tell the story of that before you do it.

SANSOUR: It was a letter from an Israeli soldier to his mother. And this poem was inspired during the really horrible attacks that happened in Gaza, oh my God, almost a year ago now. And the attack on Gaza has stopped, but it was in the midst of the shelling, and I was in a conversation with an Israeli woman who told me that her son is in a tank going to, into Gaza. It wasn't her son. It was her friend's son. And so I was really shaken by that, to be that close, kind of. And so I tried in some way to understand what happens to somebody who decides to do that.

INTERVIEWER: And this is actually the poem that you shared the first time that I ever heard you do a poem, was this poem, and you shared it at the LA event, as I mentioned earlier.

SANSOUR: It's called A Letter From An Israeli Soldier To His Mother: "Moving into Gaza, no fighters here. A loud question bursts in my chest. What am I doing here? They say I must fulfill my duties to protect my people. My people are at a shopping mall consuming, consuming the new opium of the masses. No fighters here. I am panicked. I have never seen their faces before, Palestinians, those creatures behind the wall. I have never seen their faces before. What do I do here? The little girl paralyzed, stuck to the ground like a wounded rabbit. I looked at her. I just killed your mother, your father and your brother's son. What am I doing here? I wonder as I celebrate our triumph in the Gaza

Strip, her eyes haunt me, the little girl. I don't know her name. Better not to. It would be worse if I did. I must celebrate. I must celebrate. My commander is here. He says, God of your hard work, whom Almud assures me, we will protect each one of you from such allegations, war crimes nonsense. No war crimes here. No war crimes here, just a polite request. Lady with the ten children, we have come into your home. Choose which five of your children you want to give as a gift to Israel. You don't want to choose? We will choose for you. I chose two, and Yosi chose the other three. We shot them dead in front of her eyes. No war crimes here. Good job. We are proud of you. And the question keeps trying to pass through the checkpoints of my mind, the security walls of my heart that shot a child. What am I doing here? We are only defending ourselves. These children grow up to be suicide bombers. I am just following orders. No war crimes here. And the lingering question, what did I just do there? What am I doing here? The sound of a woman crying, a moving limb from under the rubble, and a dead human body made dinner for dogs, white phosphorous and nerve gas. No war crimes here. I am just protecting my people from Arabs who eat with their hands. No war crimes here, mother. I just killed a woman, and her child won't stop crying."

INTERVIEWER: Thank you.

SANSOUR: Thank you.

INTERVIEWER: We have, with the Goldstone Report just coming out recently, there's a lot more scrutiny about what's going on over there, and yet at the same time, there's a lot of push back on the Gladstone Report, isn't there?

SANSOUR: Yes, unfortunately. With Obama pressuring Mahmoud Abbas, and Mahmoud Abbas being a puppet for the American and Israel governments. It's very sad, because all the work that the Palestinians and Palestine have been doing, all the activists across the country here and everywhere have been doing, has been undermined by these pressures. And it's very unfortunate. So it's more reason for us to keep our working to make the truth be heard.

INTERVIEWER: To bring it out, yeah. Do you have another poem you'd like to share?

SANSOUR: Sure I have. Do you want a softer one?

INTERVIEWER: No, it's up to you. I want you to choose the one that's closest to your heart with the conversation that we're having.

SANSOUR: With the conversation we're having, I want to highlight something that a lot of times gets a little dismissed, or not dismissed, because it's not talked about. And that is, other than the physical attack that has happened to my people, I feel that for me, very, very painful attacks have been on my identity and who we are, particularly like I just shared in the beginning of this conversation, I grew up with a very strong connection to the land. And that is slowly really going away in Palestine, particularly because as the wall has been built, as Israel has confiscated most agricultural land, we have, our culture that is very much based in agriculture has been disappearing, and that is very, very

painful for me. And another painful aspect is that a lot of our culture and our cultural symbols are being also stolen, such as our food. And now it's served in different restaurants as Israeli food. And for me, that's very painful. So I, actually, I've never read this poem before, but I really want to read it. It's a short poem, and it happens, it was inspired when I was at a gathering, and this woman offered me Israeli food, and she said, ah, we've got this delicious food. And it's from the Israeli store. And I looked, and it was all Palestinian food. So this poem is called, This Is Not Israeli Food: "This is not Israeli food. Do not insult my grandmother's hand that dried the eggplant seeds and planted them just for the babaganush. These seeds are for making mashi. Those are for making intempel. She knew every strand of eggplant, spent the day in the kitchen with my mother roasting them until they reached the perfect tenderness. Then they peeled them with their hard working fingers. I couldn't tell the difference as she was peeling between her wrinkled skin and the skin of the vegetable, wrinkles, years of working this land. Don't tell me this is Israeli food. Babaganush, the name you stole, has other sisters. Intempel for when we add the pennyay. You serve me Israeli food, my food, with an Israeli label. A stone got stuck in my stomach. I couldn't fully swallow. My silence when you said it hurt me more than your words. This is not Israeli food. I decided not to touch the hummus laying on the table. I will not taste intempel, AKA babaganush, not until you respected its ancestors. But I ate some olives, one olive at a time. They are my olives. You can call them Israeli food, but I know which trees they came from, and they know the smell of my hands that dig them from the earth into buckets to be washed, to be salted, to be pressed, to be pickled. I ate one olive at a time to honor their sister trees, a million of them that were forced out of their soil, Israeli food. In the last four years alone, Israel has uprooted one million olive trees. I will leave you with that thought as you tell me this is Israeli food."

INTERVIEWER: The other piece about the indigenous Palestinians is that they actually know how to work with the land that they have been on for so long, and they're able to coax water where the Israelis have not been able to do that, since they are really foreigners to that land. They don't feel the world. They don't feel the earth in the same way. And so I understand that a lot of Palestinians have been recently, not a lot, but Palestinians are being hired to teach the Israelis how to actually work the land. Have you heard that?

SANSOUR: I haven't heard about that, but I wouldn't be surprised. I mean, one thing that, again, also is very painful, aside than the human crime, is the environmental crime that the Israeli government has been committing. Particularly like, for example, the Jordan River has been derailed, basically, to irrigate the desert. I mean, bananas are not supposed to grow in the desert, and Israel has been celebrated in the world of agribusiness as, you know, the hero of agribusiness, which as we know now it's not a sustainable way to live. But also like when we took the Olive Tree Circus, and we were walking with the farmers through the land. I mean, the farmers know exactly every stone, every plant, what it does, whether they can eat it or not. And you know, we have to walk through these terraces. And some of these terraces are ancient. I mean, some terraces where I come from are some of the oldest in the world, and they're used to preserve the soil and the earth and all of that.

My grandmother would be building terraces with my grandfather preserve the soil. Anyway, and so these bulldozers come, and they just take down these ancient terraces and destroy the land. But the settlers also that come, they come in, and they build these concrete homes on top of this really nice land. And they don't know the plants. They don't know anything. And they really destroy the soil. And so that is a tragedy, not just for the impact on the farmer and his family. It's a major tragedy because of what we're doing to the earth. And that's really, I view, I don't if you've heard or noticed, but there's a lot of research also about how the Dead Sea has shrunk completely. I remember when we used to be able to go to the Dead Sea. It used to be this sea. I mean, it's a sea. It was huge. Now it's like a little oasis. It's very, very pathetic looking and very sad, not to mention that people who grew up around the Dead Sea, the Palestinians, are not allowed to go to the Dead Sea. And I actually would like to take this opportunity to mention to people a great campaign that Code Pink has been launching against Ahava, which means love, ironically, and it's a cosmetic, Israeli cosmetic company, and its facilities are based on Palestinian land. And they make cosmetics from the Dead Sea, and they sell them. And it's really, if people want to be active and boycott something very simple, I mean, you see them, particularly in California everywhere in malls. They have these booths. They're trying to sell you Israeli cosmetics from the Dead Sea. Don't buy them. I mean, the facilities are on confiscated land. It goes through supporting apartheid regime, and you just don't want to be part of that. And it's a simple thing of boycotting a lotion.

INTERVIEWER: Thanks Vivien. And I want to remind our listeners that we're talking with Vivien Sansour. You can go to [ImaginAction.org](http://ImaginAction.org) to learn more and to find out more about the theater that ImaginAction does. Also, go to Facebook and look for Al Hara Theater, and you can become a fan. Vivien, it's been wonderful to have you. Do you have a final little poem that you could share?

SANSOUR: You know, this poem actually doesn't have a lot to do with Palestine. Well, it does a little bit, but I like it because it's short, and it's for the California listeners. It should also be relevant. And also it connects basically all the human struggles together. It's called A Cup of Coffee: "The day begins with revolution, when you put your arms around me, and you insist. Today we will conquer the world with our bodies. Today we will make a cup of coffee that will declare our pregnant, dark, thick coffee, rooting in our veins, telling the story of a man selling flowers in the California heat, cherries, flowers, flowers, sliced mangos and santa quitos. He really hates standing in the sun, hates begging for you to buy his field coconuts. He hates piercing straws into it so you can drink its juice. But life has it that we sit in our cars with our A/Cs blasting, and we buy his flowers, charity. I go home feeling better about myself. I liberated him from another half an hour in the street. I gave him the five bucks to eat. And then in the morning, I say, the revolution begins with our cup of coffee. I will not drink Starbucks, but I will drive my car to the Peet's rally. I will boycott Israeli products, but I will pay my taxes. And it takes me some time to realize the seeds of my first garden have not sprouted, and the soil is not yet clean. Pesticides run in the rivers of my body, heading straight to my heart, a blocked artery, a failed surgery, and a revolution not in the making. The man is still selling sliced mangos, standing in the sun. He is strip searched by Los Angeles police, lest he forget he is illegal."

INTERVIEWER: That was Vivien Sansour, poet, theater director and activist. You can contact Vivien through [ImaginAction.org](http://ImaginAction.org); I-M-A-G-I-N-A-C-T-I-O-N dot org. And that's our show for this week. As usual, all views expressed are those of the host and guests and not KZSU or Stanford University. You can find all our archived shows at [RaisingSandRadio.org](http://RaisingSandRadio.org) and download any of them. Tune in again next week. We air and are streamed from 2:00 to 3:00 pm Pacific time, or you can download any of our shows later, as I say, at [RaisingSandRadio.org](http://RaisingSandRadio.org).

