

Handout One - Transcripts: Clip 1 - Clip 3

CLIP 1: Lea Tsemel: Devil's Advocate

Television Host (1999): My next guest is very controversial, no?

Lea Tsemel: So they say.

Host: Good morning, Lea Tsemel. You defend terrorists and their families. I imagined you differently, taller and tougher.

Tsemel: I left my devil's tail at home this time.

Host: You've been called that, no?

Tsemel: Yeah.

Host: "Devil" and stuff like that.

Tsemel: I've been called every name in the book.

Host: Like what?

Tsemel: "Traitor, leftist, devil's advocate..."

Host: Does it hurt you?

Tsemel: No, it can also be a compliment! I always took it as a compliment.

Host: Do you have kids?

Tsemel: Yes.

Host: How do they live with it?

Tsemel: We had some tough times, but...The Israeli public gradually promoted me from "devil's advocate" to "human rights lawyer" over the years. Today, it's honorable to be my children.

Host: And your husband?

Tsemel: He too is a leftist activist.

Host: Tell you what... I think that terrorists are no different than rapists and murderers.

Tsemel: You call them “terrorists.” The average person in the world would call them “freedom fighters.”

Host: Even those who...

Tsemel: Any Palestinian who resists the occupation. You’re asking: “Will you defend anyone?” Any Palestinian who commits an act, be it “conventional,” be it “controversial.” It makes no difference. Israelis have no right to tell the Palestinians how to struggle.

Host: It’s as if you identify with them! I can’t understand you. But that’s okay, right?

CLIP 2: Experience of 1967

Voice Over - Lea Tsemel (Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1967)

In June 1967, I was a law student. Suddenly, one morning, shells started exploding. Scary, super scary. They asked who among the students wants to volunteer. And I volunteered. I remember the war was still raging, but the Old City had been conquered. So I snuck into the Old City with another volunteer, and went to the Wailing Wall. Kids in the street yelled: “Moshe Dayan, Moshe Dayan.” It was a tiny, narrow alley. We took pictures with the soldiers. Later, I heard I was the first Israeli woman at the Wailing Wall. It was a very special moment. But all this wonder and euphoria had to do with the feeling that now there could be some “togetherness.” It was a ‘War for Peace.’ In my naïveté, I totally believed it.

It didn’t last long. As soon as the war ended, they took the volunteers to tour the Occupied Territories. On the road from Jerusalem, I saw people heading down toward Jericho. Lines of people going into exile. It reminded me of a picture I grew up with at home. It was called: “The Wandering Jew.” My mother immigrated from Europe in 1933. She later managed to bring her parents, just before the Holocaust. The rest of the family was annihilated. It’s part of our family load.

I’m from Haifa, a mixed Arab-Jewish city. I grew up in an Arab-owned house, I was born in 1945. In 1948, they fled and weren’t allowed to return. 1948, how could we have done that? What happened to those refugees? And now there are new refugees! When I went to the

Wailing Wall, it was just a narrow alley with a handful of soldiers. Soon after, they demolished the houses around the Wailing Wall. When I went back, the neighborhood was gone! I asked: "What about the people who lived here?" The kids who yelled: "Moshe Dayan" were from there! I needed answers.

In the university in those days, there was a group of "weirdos" who hung out on campus and had things to say. "Guys, they fooled us, it's all a bluff! It's not land without people for a people without a land" "There were people here!" I was very ambivalent. I said: "Matzpen and its politics aren't for me. I come from a Zionist home, like everyone else." But I was drawn to them because they had answers to my questions. And I made my choice, I joined Matzpen. From that moment on, I never looked back.

CLIP 3: Lea's 'Red Lines'

Lea Tsemel: When I ask myself about red lines, I ask it in reverse. I don't have a moral conflict with saying: "Yes," but with saying: "No." That's my contemplation, when am I allowed to say: "No?"

So I set the following "framework" for myself: I'm an Israeli occupier, no matter what I do. I "enjoy" the fruits of occupation, both bitter and sweet. And I didn't manage, despite my moral obligation as an Israeli, to change the regime and its policies. So, in that sense, if the act is intended to resist the occupation, as such, I'll take it on.

Handout Two - Transcripts: Clip 4 and 5

CLIP 4 - A Big Problem in Human Terms

Lea Tsemel: We explained to the judge that we have a big problem in human terms. If we plead guilty to two attempted murders, maybe the court will rule before his 14th birthday, and maybe he won't go to prison, but rather six years in a juvenile center. A closed facility. A center for delinquent youth.

But the judge said: "I understand the problem. I understand the conflict, the contradiction. Even if you admit to two attempted murders," said the judge, "I'll bring the kid before me. I'll ask him: 'Do you plead guilty?' And if he doesn't say: 'Yes, my intent was to murder!' I won't accept his plea. We'll go to trial."

Father But his intent wasn't to murder.

Tsemel: That's right. If he didn't intend to kill, why should we say he did? We're taking a chance. It's risky. But I believe we have to take the chance. Because his conscience, your conscience, and ours, are more important than what will come. That's what I think. And no one can guarantee what is to come.

Interviewer: The hearing just ended.

Tsemel: This case entails one of the worst conflicts in the criminal justice system. And one of the worst conflicts I've encountered in my long career. Do we take advantage of the fact that he's under age 14, and expedite legal proceedings, before he can be sent to prison? But doing so would require him to admit to two attempted murders. Even if we stand to gain something by pleading guilty to attempted murder, if he won't do it, I can't do it for him and the court won't accept a false admission.

Interviewer: But he could pay a heavy price for that position.

Tsemel: It's always heavy.

Television News Report: Today, Palestinian TV aired a clip from the interrogation of Ahmad ****, who was involved in the stabbing attack in Pisgat Zeev, in which a 13-year-old Jewish kid was stabbed. Let's watch.

Interrogator -Little liar! Why did you stab him? Why did you stab him?

Ahmad: I don't...

Interrogator: I'm asking why you stabbed him!

Ahmad: I don't know!

Interrogator: Why did you stab him?

Ahmad: I don't remember! I don't remember, I'm going mad! I don't remember, take me to a doctor!

Interrogator: Why did you stab him?

Ahmad: I don't remember!

Interrogator: Stop it! Put your hands down! Sit up straight! Why did you stab him with a knife? Hands down! Why did you stab him?

Ahmad: I can't remember, I'm losing my mind!

Interrogator: Why did you stab him?

Ahmad: I don't remember!

Interrogator: I asked you, Ahmad, why did you stab him?

Ahmad: I really don't remember. I really can't remember a thing. I see the surveillance footage and don't remember anything.

News Reporter: The 13-year-old who stabbed another 13-year-old...

Tsemel: The interrogation of a kid with a cracked skull.

CLIP 5: She Was Very Human

(Television) Israeli policy in the Occupied Territories is one of repression, dispossession and confiscation. Palestinians under occupation have no civil rights. Youth in the Occupied Territories are the most active in responding politically to current events.

Hanan Ashrawi: I know for sure that this year, the students definitely were planning on

studying. And they were saying that they kept trying to get to the university to work and they were being hampered by the military.

Tsemal: Political leaders, people with leadership potential, with the ability to influence, are regularly detained.

Ashrawi: And I was arrested, I was looking for a lawyer. And from that day on, Lea was really part of our experience of struggle at Birzeit University. During all these closures, during all these military incursions, the shootings, the arrests, and so on... It was Lea who was there all the time.

(Crowd Protesting): Open Birzeit! Open Birzeit!

Ashrawi: To us, being a prisoner is a fact of life. Every home, every family, has had at least one prisoner, if not more. Many families have had "martyrs." Many families have had people deported. Many families have had their homes destroyed. But every family can tell you: "I have prisoners in my midst. The Israelis reached into my home and extracted my son, my daughter, my husband, my brother, and took him or her away." And it was Lea who was there saying: "I will try to bring him or her back."

Ashrawi: (Interview) Lea went to court, to help our students, and I was nursing, I was breastfeeding Zeina, and Talila got hungry, so I breastfed her as well. And so now, they're milk sisters. You see, in our tradition, when two babies are fed the same mother's milk, they become sisters. And this is a very strong bond.

Tsemal: I really don't feel the gap of a Palestinian, a Jew. I don't think we ever had it between us.

Ashrawi: She was very human. She was the only one, really, who recognized us in the Greek sense of anagnorisis. You know, I recognize your humanity and what you're going through. If you are fighting against injustice, and you don't have any other tools, you adopt the tools that are available, you manufacture your own tools. Some people turn their bodies into tools. They don't have war planes or tanks, they have bodies. It doesn't mean she condoned this or she thought it was right, but she said you have to understand it in the context in which this happened. This is a very difficult and rare situation. Where you could look at the victim-cum-violent-person, and understand the motives for violence and

understand that this is a response to a greater form of violence. You are not abstract labeled "terrorists."

Handout Three - CLIP 6

Lea Tsemel: (Press Conference)

I'm sure you'd like to hear the response of the defense to the two sentences issued today in the Jerusalem District Court. Our response is: We've been defeated! Both in the case of Israa Jaabis and in the case of the minor. But our defeat, as a legal team, is nothing compared to the far-reaching and long-lasting defeat for Israeli society and its judicial system. The court ignored the fact that this is a national conflict. It attributed anti-Semitic sentiments to both defendants, which neither of them expressed at any stage. But it's convenient to think: "They only want to hurt the Jews!" Fifty years of occupation were stricken from the record, and vanished from the judges' consciousness, unfortunately.

I hope it won't vanish from the public's consciousness.

There is an occupation!

Reporter: Does national conflict permit murder?

Tsemel: And it must be responded to. And everyone does so according to their capabilities. The victims, the vanquished, the children, the women, respond in their own way. The expectation... that Palestinians can find justice in Israeli courts, may have been buried for good, I hope not. I really hope not. The path to the Supreme Court still lies ahead of us. We will appeal as soon as possible, in pursuit of justice. Thank you!

Reporter: Your name and title?

Tsemel: Lea Tsemel, losing lawyer.

That's the title.

Reporter: Lea, why appeal if you no longer believe in the courts?

Tsemel: I want to change them. I'll force them to change!