

KUNHARDT **FILM** / FOUNDATION

MALIKA SAADA SAAR INTERVIEW
MAKERS: WOMEN WHO MAKE AMERICA
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

Malika Saada Saar
Human Rights Lawyer
6/16/2011
Interviewed by Nina Alvarez
Total Running Time: 42 minutes and 1 second

START TC: 00:00:00:00

ON SCREEN TEXT:

The following video contains mentions of sexual assault and self-harm.
Viewer discretion is advised.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Makers: Women Who Make America
Kunhardt Film Foundation

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Malika Saada Saar
Human Rights Lawyer

Malika Saada Saar
Human Rights Lawyer
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NINA ALVAREZ:

So, what was your childhood like? What was going on for you growing up?
Where did you grow up and what was your family like?

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MALIKA SAADA SAAR:

I was raised by my mother and grandmother, so we were three generations in a very small row home. And it was an experience of understanding what it meant to be female, all the time. I watched my mother come out of a broken marriage trying to reclaim herself, be reclaimed on the shoulders of her mother, and I watched these two women try to take broken pieces of their lives and create something whole for me, and sacrifice so much in order for there to be wholeness that I had.

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So they sacrificed in order to put me through a private school from 7th grade to 12th grade. My mother decided to start college when she was in her 30s. I was a 6th grader and she was starting her first year of college, and we would go to the library together. And she would also hold down a job. And so I think I came to understand the fragility of women's lives watching my mother and grandmother, and I came to also understand the sacredness of being female because of how deeply they sacrificed for me and how deeply they loved each other and loved me.

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NINA ALVAREZ:

How did that sacrifice- as a kid, how did it manifest itself for you? How did you know that this was tough?

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MALIKA SAADA SAAR:

It was in the creases in my mother's face. It was in the constant struggle in my grandmother's voice. It was in the everyday reality of what our lives were. And part of the struggle was that there was an insistence, a constant insistence, that my life be a good life, that my life be a departure from what they had lost and from what they were denied.

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So I think that that was a daily language in our home, that they did not have. They did not have access to the kind of education and dreams that they wanted me to have.

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NINA ALVAREZ:

Now I'm gonna fast forward a little bit to when you were a teenager and kind of, defining your view of the world, and you make the decision to leave Philly for the summer. Tell me about that.

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MALIKA SAADA SAAR:

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Well, I watched a little too much *Nightline* when I was a kid—probably not a good thing. I had seen Mitch Snyder on television on *Nightline*, and I was moved at how he had a language of moral imagination and responsibility. And during the 80s, that wasn't a language that you heard much of, and yet, he articulated that. He articulated what is our moral obligation to those who are without housing, to those who are without income and stability.

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And so I was very fascinated by that in my own home, because of the struggles that were happening with my mother and grandmother. Home was not a quiet or safe place to be, and so I thought that I was supposed to do a—It's called Junior Statesman of America in DC, and I showed up for the first couple of days, and then I shot over to the second ND shelter that was being led by Mitch Snyder.

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And I wanted to learn what he was really doing, and I did. I mean, he was a lovely man who allowed me to come to the shelter, expected me to clean the showers and the bathrooms, and serve. And then we had space to talk about why was he doing the work that he was doing, and his own notion of moral responsibility. And that resonated very deeply. I had different ideas than Mitch did about how you help people.

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I wasn't a radical, and I wasn't about to drop out of high school and become an anarchist, which is how he described himself. But I did want to hold and

honor this notion he had of our interconnectedness as people, and our sense of responsibility to each other as a larger family.

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NINA ALVAREZ:

What did you take away from that, that kind of informed your next steps?

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MALIKA SAADA SAAR:

Well, I was always moved by Mitch's courage. I mean, he did really outlandish things like, he put himself in front of the Capitol with a statue of Jesus and Mother Mary, and the line, "And still no room at the inn." And he sat in front of the Capitol and slept in front of that statute, until Congress passed the most major piece of legislation for homelessness.

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I was always amazed by his courage to do outlandish things to bring attention to those who are otherwise invisible. And I also learned from him, in terms of how he recognized that national politics is also local politics, and how true that is in DC. And so, folks who are here in DC in the backyard of the Congress, who are homeless and suffering, he brought into the halls of congress. And I took that as a lesson in the way that the Rebecca Project for Human Rights started its work.

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So when we were underfunded and didn't have a national scope in terms of the number of people involved in our work- when we were just DC, there were mother survivors who had survived violence and addiction here in DC, who had been suffering in the shadow of the Capitol here in DC, and we brought them to the Hill to give voice to their stories and to their experiences.

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And that really came out of working with Mitch, and seeing how the power of being in DC is that you exist in this unique intersection of the national and the local, and how important it is to make sure that the Hill is responsive to those who are in the city of the Capitol. That the Hill is not just a hill within DC that is disconnected to the rest of DC, but that there is this wonderful nexus between national policy making and the very real lives of local folk in DC who are living out the implications of national policy.

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NINA ALVAREZ:

When you left DC and you went on back to- you finished high school and you went to college, you started to work out in the Bay Area. You were working as a teacher, and then you decided to come back. Why?

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MALIKA SAADA SAAR:

Well, for a couple of reasons. At the time, affirmative action fights were happening in California, and I was very uncomfortable with how those fights

were playing out. The campuses were very polarized places. And I was clear that I wanted to return to higher education. I had spent these wonderful four years as a grassroots organizer, working for mothers and families who were both homeless and marginally housed, and I knew that I needed a law degree.

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That as a woman of color, to do the type of social justice work that I believed in, to do transformational work, that I would be more effective with a law degree, that I would be more credible with a law degree. And I also wanted to learn the language of the law. I was curious to know, how does the language of the law help us towards being able to give people the human rights that they innately have and deserve to be recognized for.

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So I knew I wanted to return to school. I knew I wanted to get a law degree for that knowledge and credibility. And I missed the East Coast. I had recognized that my sense of time was connected to the seasons and there are no seasons in the Bay Area. So I felt like I had lost my sense of memory and time. And I think it also came back to my mother and grandmother. I had lost my mother, and then my grandmother, between the ages of 20 and 21, and went out to the Bay Area to escape memory, right?

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And then missed memory, missed the idea that I could be on a street corner and remember holding my mother's hand at that street corner. And so, I wanted to come back East for memory, for the reconnection to memory of my mother and grandmother. And I guess when I look back on it, in many ways,

that was a reconnection to that strength that they gave me. That I knew that this next chapter of getting a law degree and doing human rights work required confidence in myself and strength, and having the connection to their memory was that touchstone for me.

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NINA ALVAREZ:

You had committed yourself to working with mothers and families. Why focus on that particular group?

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MALIKA SAADA SAAR:

Well, I think when I lost my mother and then my grandmother, I think I began to really do the work as a motherless daughter. And as a motherless daughter, when I went to the shelters in California, and when I walked the streets and met homeless folks, my first question was, "Well, where are the women? Where are the mothers?" Because the shelters were only for the men, most of the folks on the street in visible view were men.

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And so, I think as a motherless daughter, my first question was, where are the women? And I started to try to answer that question, and what I found was that there were few, if any, shelter beds for women. There were even less than, for mothers with children. And that there were all of these mothers with children who were afraid to be in the shelters, who couldn't get into the

shelters, and were living in abandoned vehicles, in very fragile dangerous housing situations where they were with relatives who didn't necessarily want them there.

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And they were in those situations because they were trying to be good mothers to their children, and were afraid that if they were around shelters, that would be dangerous, and were afraid of how- to be on the streets with their children.

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NINA ALVAREZ:

What did you think the law needed to do, to function for their cause?

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MALIKA SAADA SAAR:

So I had one catalyzing experience, which was I was trying to work with mothers who were elders in a housing project. And at the time, there was something called the one strike law, where if there was suspicion, not proof but suspicion, that you were involved in any kind of drug dealing or helping someone who was using drugs, that you could be kicked out of public housing.

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And I wanted to be able to help these elder mothers, and I sat down with folks from the housing authority and they brought their lawyers, and the

lawyers were speaking a language that I could not speak. And it was clear to me that they knew that, and that they were using our ignorance of the legal language to coerce and exploit and place in a vulnerable position, these families.

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And so I wanted to be able to do justice in representing these elders, and being able to sit down with the lawyers and adequately be able to speak to the lawyers in a way that was knowledgeable, and correctly defended and protected the elders who were putting this trust in me.

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NINA ALVAREZ:

Did you do exactly what you wanted to do? Did something happen here that kind of, set you down the path that led you to the Rebecca Project?

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MALIKA SAADA SAAR:

I did exactly what I wanted to do. I think because I had four years to do the work in the community, I was very clear about how I wanted to use my law degree, and I was very clear about who I wanted to mentor me through law school so that I would remain adhering to the reasons of why I went to law school. So, I chose Georgetown Law because of Peter Edelman. I had known of him through my reading of Bobby Kennedy, and I saw him as an example of how to use the law for the purposes of justice and transformation.

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And so I came to Georgetown Law, knocked on his office door, and in fact, was mentored by him throughout my three years at the law school—and until now. And he has been a staunch friend and supporter to the work that we have done through the Rebecca Project—and a friend. And I think that was so important to have a mentor help me through, reminding me why I came to law school. I was very clear in law school that I was not going to do the law review.

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I was very clear that I was going to really focus on classes that would help me in my envisioning of how to use the law. I was also clear that I needed something to sustain me while I was in law school, financially and spiritually. And so, I set up what was really the seed of the Rebecca Project for Human Rights. It was a written and spoken word workshop called “Crossing the River.” And it was an opportunity for me to go to southeast DC, which is the disconnected marginalized community of DC, and I did a written and spoken word workshop with mothers who were in treatment for crack cocaine throughout the three years of my law school.

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And it was a wonderful way of grounding me and reminding me of who I went to law school for and why I went to law school. And also those mothers believed in me, and reminded me of how important it was for me to finish law school, and to hold my head high throughout the experience of being in those very difficult classes, and in insisting that I do law school differently. They

were really my- they were my back up. And I don't think I would have made it to the other side of law school if it were not for the mothers of that project.

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NINA ALVAREZ:

Was there something that inspired that? A particular person, a particular experience that inspired you to move on?

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MALIKA SAADA SAAR:

A couple of things. One is that- what law school taught me was that human rights was the language of our future, that there had been a certain irrelevance and calcification around civil rights language, but there was a new space and a new envisioning that was possible around human rights language. And yet, what was interesting to me was that we only use this language internationally. And so I started to ask the question of, why don't we talk about human rights within a US based context?

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And the lives of the mothers from "Crossing the River: were very much part of that questioning in terms of bearing witness to how they had struggled, how they had been hurt, denigrated, denied, and thinking about their lives within the human rights context. And I was so inspired by "Crossing the River," and there was one person who was a real inspiration to me, a woman by the name of Rebecca Rice.

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So when I started “Crossing the River,” I really believed in the transformational effect of the written and spoken word, but all I could do was poetry and even that was questionable. And so, I knew I needed to join with someone who was more of a creative force. If I was really going to talk about creativity as a way that we rethink and rebuild and heal, that I needed someone who was more creative. And I had been encouraged to meet this woman by the name of Rebecca Rice, and she really was this amazing creative force.

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She was a poet, an actress, a writer, she was everything, in terms of this beautiful, creative imaging. And so, she really helped me develop “Crossing the River,” and there was one particular experience where I knew I was in the presence of greatness where Rebecca had all of these mothers, who were in treatment for crack cocaine addiction, form a circle. And all of these mothers had experienced some form of physical and or sexual violence, and their addiction was connected to that violence, right?

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They use in order to forget the trauma of the violence done to them. And so, she brought the women together in the circle and she told them to sing, and not to stop the song. And they would go and they would sing and they would end the song and immediately begin another song, so there was never a break in the song and different songs were being sung. And what happened was that it started to trigger some of the mothers.

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And some of the mothers started to go to those places of where their demons lived, of where the violence is known and remembered. And one mother, in addition to shaking—which many of them were doing—one mother actually vomited. And Rebecca held that circle and kept them singing through all of that. So, the woman vomited and they kept singing. She kept singing. They cleaned her up, but she kept singing.

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And it was this amazing moment of really bearing witness to something that was beyond us, to this ability to hold each other in song, even when we go to those worst places of our injury and our hurt. And it was this moment of unbelievable sisterhood, of really seeing women hold each other and love each other in those places that we are broken. And I think only song and only Rebecca could have held that space the way she did.

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And from that moment on, I knew that I was in the presence of greatness. Unfortunately when I made the decision to get a Ford Fellowship to turn “Crossing the River” into a larger human rights project, Rebecca was diagnosed with cancer. And she was diagnosed with cancer in the very feminine parts of her being. She had ovarian cancer and it had spread across her body. And so, it was clear to me that we had to honor what she gave us.

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And so, we lost Rebecca, and I, that year, was able to take the fellowship and turn us into the Rebecca Project for Human Rights. And so, we take her name

as a way of honoring what she gave us, and the kind of spirit that she shows us. And that idea that in those broken places, there is always the chance for healing. And the way that women and girls can stand up for one another and heal one another.

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NINA ALVAREZ:

And what was the mission? What did your proposal to the Ford Foundation say was the mission of the Rebecca Project?

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MALIKA SAADA SAAR:

So, at first, we were just going to look at the human rights issues of mothers suffering with addiction and access to care, and look at how, unfortunately within the US, mothers who are struggling with violence and issues of addiction don't have the same points of access to care as men. So most treatment in the US for addiction is set up for single adult men. And so if you are a woman, especially a mother, you are turned away from treatment programs because they will not accept children.

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And so we were going to really focus on that initially—and we did, and then that issue grew. And it grew into issues around mothers behind bars, because more mothers were behind bars than in appropriate treatment. And so, we started looking at the lack of alternative sentencing for mothers behind bars.

And then we started to look at conditions of confinement for mothers behind bars, and the ugly reality of how mothers were being shackled during labor and childbirth.

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And from there, it came to the issue, also, of children, and the issues of mother-child separation. How children are separated from their mothers when their mothers are incarcerated, how children are usually taken away from their mothers around issues of addiction, and how do we recreate policy to honor the mother child relationship, but do it in the context of safety for both the mother and child, and health and healing for both the mother and child.

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And then something very powerful happened in the life of the organization, which is that we have this national network, now, of mother advocates, and all these mothers come out of situations where they have survived violence, as well as addiction and incarceration. And now, they are leaders in their communities standing up for other mothers who still struggle. One of these mothers, here in DC—hero to us, right?

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She was suffering from crack cocaine addiction. She went into a treatment program for families, achieved sobriety, stabilized her family, and the proof of her success was that her eldest daughter was not only in the place of finishing college, but going on to a masters degree in early education. And then that girl was killed by her boyfriend.

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And so, here that girl's mother, who had been killed- it was a situation where the mother did everything right. She achieved sobriety, she stabilized her family, but she could not protect her daughter from violence. And it made us step back and really look at how violence was a fault line in every policy area that we were working on. Whether it was addiction, whether it was incarceration, whether it was around child welfare reform, that all of these women and mothers shared a narrative of violence.

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All of them had been victims of violence, and that determined their addiction, that determined the lack of good mothering that they were able to do with their children, that determined the fragility of their lives, because they had survived and not necessarily healed from violence. And so we recognized that we had to start dealing with the violence in women's lives.

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And then the second realization was that if we were going to start with the issue of violence in women's lives, that we had to recognize that for most of those women, the violence occurred when they were girls. And so that if we were really going to deal with gendered violence in the US, we had to talk about girls' lives. Because too often, that is the point at which the violence begins.

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And really, when the girl first has the imprints of her womanhood is when she is most vulnerable to sexual violence, especially. And that is when the

Rebecca Project for Human Rights really shifted and changed and broadened itself as a human rights organization for women and girls, with a focus on gender violence.

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NINA ALVAREZ:

Why was it important to kind of, reframe what most of us would call women's rights under that terminology?

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MALIKA SAADA SAAR:

Well, part of it is my criticism of the women's rights movement in the US is really a movement that now feels only about abortion, that that's when we talk about women's rights is in the context of abortion. So part of it was a desire to have a different and broader and more nuanced expansive revisioning of how we talk about women's rights, and to raise up the reality of how much violence is a part of our lives as women and girls in the US.

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We talk about one in four girls, by the time she reaches 18, as experiencing some form of violence, that is unacceptable. When we talk about girls in the US being more likely to be raped between the ages of 14 and 18 than in other years of our lives as women and girls, it is unacceptable. And I think that because we are a country in which we have these unbelievable demonstrations of success for women, right?

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We almost elected a woman president, the number of women who are in higher education, the number of women CEOs, the number of women lawmakers and scientists and doctors, and yet, there is this other reality that is just as true, of violence playing a critical central role in our lives as women and girls regardless of racial, educational, economic background. I have had the experience recently of trying to talk about this more because I think it's taboo.

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And to really talk to women in professional settings about how violence has distorted and denigrated our lives, and talking about the issue of girls especially- I can't tell you how many conversations I've had with women who are in the highest places of success and mobility, who break down and cry around this issue of their own experience of violence. There is a way that this is the silenced central part of our lives as women that is not given enough voice.

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And now, I think so many of us who are mothers to girls and are aware of how vulnerable our girls are, regardless of the schools we send them to, regardless of the ways that we love them, we look at this hyper-sexualization that's happening in the US of girls. Where we have an industry around tweens who buy thongs, right, or high heels for four year olds or- I have a seven year old and I have to work hard to find a cute outfit for her that does not sexualize her.

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And so I think that there is this way in which, yes, there are all of these undeniable places of evidence of our success as women in the US and opportunities for girls in the US, and at the same time, there is a centrality of violence that is still part of the narrative of being a woman or girl in America, and there is too much silence around it, and it is too hidden. And I think part of the work, and why it's so important to talk about it in a human rights way, is to give voice to that.

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NINA ALVAREZ:

How did you become aware of the problem among girls that makes them subject to being sold?

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MALIKA SAADA SAAR:

So, we really first started focusing on the issue of girls behind bars, and we went to a number of detention centers for girls across the US, and did focus groups with girls who had been incarcerated. And what kept coming up was that these girls had been bought and sold for sex at some point. So, some of them were actually put behind bars for being bought and sold, and others were bought and sold and were put behind bars for other reasons that were still related to being trafficked.

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And we did not know that this was playing out until we did the focus groups. I was aware of trafficking, I was aware of some of the work that was being done in the US, but it was not until we actually went into these detention centers and talked to girls who had been incarcerated that I recognized that there is a pipeline here.

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And with boys, we talk about the cradle to prison pipeline, right? But for girls, there was this cradle to sexual violence to prison pipeline, that I was not able to map out until we spoke directly to the girls. And that's when we recognized that, yes, we needed to talk about girls behind bars, and yes, we needed to talk about the conditions of their confinement and how miserable their confinement is, and we had to raise up the issue of the cradle to sexual violence to prison pipeline, where so many of our girls were ensnared.

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And through that, not only talk about it just within a criminal justice lens, but really broaden it out into a conversation around human rights and trafficking within the US.

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NINA ALVAREZ:

Give me an example of how we, as a society, are also complicit in perpetuating this problem?

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MALIKA SAADA SAAR:

Well, I think that part of it is we are complicit around the issue of protecting the silences of sexual violence done to girls. So I think there is first the larger reality that the girls who are being trafficked are just at the razor's edge of the overall issues of sexual exploitation and violence that girls endure. So when we talk about one in four girls will be subject to some form of violence that is connected to the girl who is trafficked.

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The girl who is trafficked though, is in a situation where she doesn't have the supports, the buffers, the protection that other girls who are hurt by sexual violence might have. So we know that sexual violence against girls is, without question, pervasive, but for the girl who has been hurt who comes from a community where there are good schools, the good schools and good teachers help to buffer her from spiraling down.

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When a girl is hurt by sexual violence where there is a strong family, that strong family helps to protect her and brings a therapist to her to help her work out the issues of being hurt. But when there is a girl who has endured sexual violence and is in a fragile community where she has already been broken, she is so vulnerable to the traffickers. She doesn't have someone to protect or love her, and these traffickers appear as the only individual in her life to claim her.

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And as a larger society, we don't see her, we don't claim her. And so even though she is under the control of this trafficker, even though she is online being bought and sold, or even though she is being put behind bars for being trafficked, we as a society refuse to see her and claim her, and that is the place of our complicity. The place of our complicity is that while we see girls in Thailand in Cambodia who are bought and sold, and we see them as victims and girls and children, we don't see that 13 year old girl from New York City who is being bought and sold as a girl, as a child, and that's what needs to shift.

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NINA ALVAREZ:

Most people just think of them as child prostitutes.

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MALIKA SAADA SAAR:

Mhm. It's much easier to frame these girls as bad girls making bad decisions. Because if we frame them as bad girls making bad decisions, then we don't have to look at the issue of sexual violence as an issue with girls in the US. We don't have to think about the ugliness that children are being bought and sold—American children are being bought and sold—within the US. If we don't see these individuals as victims of child rape, then it is a much easier reality to endure.

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When we start looking at the fact that most individuals who purchase these girls are White middle class men who are married, that is a painful reality. That is a very painful reality that it is our fathers, our husbands, our brothers, who are purchasing these young girls. If we talk about the girls instead as bad girls making bad choices, then we don't have to look at the reality of our fathers, our brothers, our sons, being the ones who purchase girls. And we don't have to look at how we excuse the men in suits in their criminal acts, right? I mean-

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NINA ALVAREZ:
They have needs.

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MALIKA SAADA SAAR:
They have needs, right? So, there is a certain comfort zone around allowing men in suits to make the choices that they do. So when men in suits buy girls for their pleasure because they have needs, if we see that, if we accept that narrative, then we don't have to go any further and look at who these girls are. If we start looking at the fact that these girls are girls who often are survivors of incest in their homes, if we look at the reality of how these girls are runaways, are thrown away, if we look at how broken and hurt these girls are, and that they are the ones who are being purchased as property,-

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-that is a much, much harder reality that forces us to look into our own lives, our own families, our own communities. It's much easier to externalize the issue of trafficking as international, and it's much easier to talk about these girls as bad girls making bad decisions. When we shift it into a language of victims, that is a language that forces us to look at the issue of sexual violence in all of our girls, and forces us to look at the issue of why are we putting these girls behind bars and creating a culture of impunity for the men in suits.

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NINA ALVAREZ:

Well, and also there's just this notion that, "It won't be my girl. It won't be my kid that falls into that trap."

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MALIKA SAADA SAAR:

That's right. That's right, and I think that that's why it's so critical not to disconnect these girls from other girls, right? So the issue of how girls between the ages of 14 and 18 are more likely to be raped during that age range than older girls, right, and women, and the connection between that statistic and the statistic of one in four girls being subject to some form of violence by the time she turns 18, and what is happening to these girls who are being trafficked.

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It's so important to raise up the issue of sexual violence into that larger conversation, than to disconnect the girls who are being bought and sold as Other. Because they are not Other. Because the same culture that promotes the hyper-sexualization of girls, the same culture that promotes thongs for tweens and high heels for 4 year olds, is a culture that normalizes buying and purchasing very young girls.

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NINA ALVAREZ:

What do you in general think about the notion of prostitution—not children?

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MALIKA SAADA SAAR:

What is critical to me is that the issue always be framed within a human rights context. I think that when it comes to a child being prostituted, that that is without question, unequivocally, a human rights violation. That a child who is placed in that situation, regardless of how, is understood as a victim of a human rights violation, and that we, as women and mothers, be able to support that and make that clear.

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I think that what's important about the overall issue of prostitution that must be interrogated is our comfort zone. So when Lawrence Taylor used that term, "prostitution is as old as the Bible," I think that's what he said, it's something- What is it- "It's the oldest profession in the world," right? "Oldest

profession in the world, goes back to the Bible.” Well, so too did slavery.
Right?

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Slavery is an old, ancient... situation that is as old as the Bible. And yet, we have come to a place of interrogating any comfort zone around slavery. And I think we have to be in that place around prostitution. That no matter what, we interrogate our comfort zone with it.

00:38:09:00

NINA ALVAREZ:

It’s interesting that you brought up the idea that there’s a generational difference more than anything. That women of your generation—our women—and then you come down this- You get married, right? Was that like, always in the plan for you?

00:38:31:00

MALIKA SAADA SAAR:

I do think, because I felt like I lost my family, that it was really important to create family. And so it was always important to me. And I’m an only child so I think I also wanted a little tribe, which is what I got. I have three children. And I do think that mothering has made me a better advocate. I do this work with a mother’s heart now, and I think that in doing the work with a mother’s heart, it makes me a better advocate, it makes me very adherent to the work,

and it makes me very open in my commitment both to the mothers and to the girls.

00:39:16:00

I don't think I would be nearly as effective if I were not a mother. And also, mothering has taught me my warrior spirit. I mean, I birthed my children naturally and I surprised myself in the physical strength of being able to do that. It made me recognize how women's bodies are built as warrior bodies. And it made me- mothering always makes me aware of my weaknesses and my ability to push myself against those weaknesses and find those other parts of me.

00:39:54:00

And so, I'm very thankful to be able to also have the role of lawyer, of executive director, and mother, and in the way that I do the work, and in the importance of the work, have really braided together both those roles.

00:40:12:00

NINA ALVAREZ:

What's the most meaningful, useful piece of advice you'd ever received?

00:40:16:00

MALIKA SAADA SAAR:

It's funny... I remember at my college graduation that the line, "To whom much is given, much is required." I don't know if it's the most useful, but it's

one that I've held onto for a very long time. I think it's words of wisdom that have anchored me.

00:40:37:00

NINA ALVAREZ:

You feel pretty lucky, it sounds like to me. You feel like, this was not supposed to be your destiny or something. Because you did have... an incredible education.

00:40:52:00

MALIKA SAADA SAAR:

Yeah, yeah. I had an incredible education, and I was very aware of what was sacrificed for me to have that, so I do feel that much was given to me, without question. And I also think that- My mother used to say another thing to me which is, "I wasn't able to give you the best but I've given you the second best." And I have always held onto those words in terms of that, you always try, right?

00:41:25:00

That that whole idea- like that kind of mother dedication, that you always try to make it best, and that has always been a place of comfort to me. That it is about the kind of love's labor that matters so much and always manifests, no matter what the work. Whether the work is raising children or the work is fighting for a better world, that love's labor always manifests.

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END TC: 00:42:01:00