

The following is a conversation with Muhammad El-Kurd, a world renowned Palestinian poet, writer, journalist, and an influential voice speaking out and fighting for the Palestinian cause. He provides a very different perspective on Israel and Palestine

than my previous two episodes with Benjamin Netanyahu and Yvonne Noah Harari.

I hope his story and his words add to your understanding of this part of the world, as it did to mine. I will continue to have difficult long-form conversations such as these, always with empathy and humility, but with backbone.

And please allow me to briefly comment about criticisms I receive of who I am as an interviewer and a human being. I am not afraid to travel anywhere or challenge anyone, face to face, even if it puts my life in danger. But I'm also not afraid to be vulnerable, to truly listen, to empathize, to walk a mile on the well-worn shoes of those very different from me. It's this latter task, not the former one, that is truly the most challenging, in conversations and in life. But to me, it is the only way.

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I enjoy their stuff. Maybe you will too. This show is brought to you by Factor.

I'm ready to eat meal kit service that delivers nutritious and delicious meals straight to your door. I've been eating their stuff for quite a while now and it brings joy, diversity, and deliciousness into my life. Primarily because I eat keto and so it's not trivial to cook for very low carb meals. And Factor provides you with a bunch of different keto meals. I think I've tried herb-crossed chicken. I've tried their chorizo chili. There's just a bunch of stuff. It's high in nutritiousness, high in deliciousness. It's funny to think of life as a process of figuring out what makes you feel good in all aspects of life. And food is one of the few fundamental components that can make your life miserable. You can make your life beautiful.

I used to eat many, many meals a day, high in carbs, work out a lot. And I realized you can still work out a lot. You can still exercise and have intense physical and mental things in your life while not eating many meals at all. In fact, fasting the entirety of the day and only eating once a day. Sometimes fasting for multiple days or doing intermittent fasting where you don't need for 16 or 18 hours. It's like a magical discovery about your body that you can make. Of course others will give you advice but that advice is only a kind of catalyst to explore. You really ultimately should be listening to your own body. And for me low carb with a small number of meals a day, oftentimes just one is what makes me feel really good. Anyway, if you want to do that kind of thing and make it delicious, go to factormeals.com slash lex50 and use code lex50 to get 50% off your first box. That's factormeals.com slash lex50 and use code lex50. This show is brought to you by SimplySafe, a home security company designed to be simple and effective. That's one of the many layers of security that I use. I take security very seriously in the physical, in the cyber, and increasingly in the psychological mental space. And I suggest that everybody should do the same.

The thing that makes SimplySafe really interesting is how easy it is to get it working. To set up all the sensors, to get it working, and to keep it working. There's a cool new feature that I got that's called I think fast protect monitoring, where you have a monitoring agent that can see and speak to and deter intruders through their smart alarm indoor camera. That's a pretty cool and wild feature. If I was an intruder, maybe an accidental intruder, I'd be kind of terrified if I go through that, experience that kind of interaction. So the many layers of deterrence I think is really important to basic security. Anyway, go to SimplySafe.com slash lex to get 20% off any SimplySafe system when you sign up for fast protect monitoring. That's SimplySafe.com slash flex. This episode is brought to you by BetterHelp, spelled H-E-L-P help. Like I mentioned, security is very important. And what BetterHelp does is the psychological mental security to make sure that the foundation of your mind are strong. We all have demons. We all have trauma. We all have things we're contending with in our conscious and subconscious minds. Bringing them to the surface, reverse engineering it, traveling to the past, then traveling back into the present so you can build a good future is a really important process for being healthy. I don't know why the previous several sentences kind of sound like an Instagram motivational poster, but I mean it. It's a little too simply said, but it is true nevertheless. And I've been going through a lot in my mind through doing some of the difficult conversations I had to do and still doing the future and just trying to figure out my life. So doing a lot of introspection and soul searching and really taking my mental health increasingly seriously has been a priority for me. And if it is for you as well, I think BetterHelp is one of the easiest, most effective ways to get started. You can check them out at betterhelp.com slash lex and save on your first month. That's betterhelp.com slash lex. This show is also brought to you by Babbel, an app and website that gets you speaking in a new language within weeks. They offer multiple languages including Spanish, French, Italian, German, Russian and so on. I'm increasingly taking languages seriously. To state the obvious, they are one of the fundamental barriers in communication between the various peoples of the world. And that silly little barrier, sometimes trivially, prevent us from seeing the common humanity in us. And so for myself, I'm starting to learn more and more languages just to start to feel the music of the language. But I'm also, from a podcast interview perspective, I'm opening myself up to do interviews in other languages and to also do translation and to take translation seriously at scale. I imagine a kid growing up in a rural India or rural China or somewhere in South America. And just to be able to speak to him or her, just to show that there's hope, that we're all in this together, that there's so much beauty in this world and there's so much awesomeness that we can create together. I think that's a really, really important thing to strive for. And I think technology increasingly unlocks that. Anyway, to work on your own language skills, I suggest you try Babbel. You can get 55% off your Babbel subscription at babbel.com slash lexpod spelled B-A-B-B-E-L dot com slash lexpod rules and restrictions apply. This show is also brought to you by Haasam Academies, a company that ships delicious, high quality and healthy macadamia nuts directly to your door. I have a kitchen closet full of macadamia nut snacks that I've been slowly working my way through. And by working, I mean loving every second of it. They're really small portions, which is great for me because I'm not good at moderation. So I like when the packaging enforces moderation and it's just a diversity of deliciousness. Also, I bring it to the podcast studio and

share it with guests so they can partake in the plethora of flavors that is the Haasam Academias snacks. I'm still not sure what my favorite is actually. Like with the element drink, I'm really sure that watermelon salt is my favorite flavor. But Haasam Academias, man, there's so much good stuff. Both the whole nuts and the bars, just really, really, really, really delicious. And obviously it's super healthy for you, at least if you have the similar kind of nutritional and diet perspectives on life as I do. Go to HaasamAcademias.com slash lex to get a free box of the best seller, the Namibian sea salted macadamia nuts, plus 20% off your entire order. That's HaasamAcademias.com slash lex. This is the Lex Friedman podcast. To support it, please check out our sponsors in the description. And now, dear friends, here's Muhammad L. Card. Tell me about Sheikh Jarrah, the neighborhood in East Jerusalem where you grew up. Sheikh Jarrah is, you know, in a way, a typical neighborhood despite the absurd reality that surrounds it. It's a typical neighborhood in terms of Palestinian neighborhoods. It's one that is threatened with colonialism, with settler expansion, and with forced expulsion. And it has been that way since the early 70s. My family, like all of the other families in Sheikh Jarrah, were expelled from their homes in the Nakabe in 1948. And they were forced out by the Haganah and other Zionist parallel militaries that later formed the Israeli military. And they were driven to various cities. And my grandmother moved from city to city and she ended up in Sheikh Jarrah in 1956. Sheikh Jarrah was established as a refugee housing unit by the United Nations and by the Jordanian government, which had control over that part of Jerusalem at the time. And then people lived there harmoniously. They were all from different parts of Palestine. And, you know, they managed to rebuild their lives after the first expulsion. And then in the 70s, you had settler organizations, many of whom were registered here in New York and in the United States, claiming our houses and our lands as their own by divine decree. And because obviously because the judges are Israeli and the laws were written by Israeli settlers and the whole judiciary was established atop the rubble of our homes and villages, we had no, you know, we had no real pull in the courts. The Israeli courts would look at the Israeli documents, which we argue are falsified and fabricated. And they would take them at face value without authentication. And they refused to look at our documents. They refused to look at the documents from the Jordanian government, the documents from the UN, the documents from the Ottoman archives. So you already have this kind of asymmetry in the court that for any person with common sense would lead you to believe that this is not, in fact, a legal battle or a real estate dispute as Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs likes to frame it, but rather a very, very political battle, one that is about social engineering, one is about demographics, one that is about removing as many Palestinians as possible from occupied Jerusalem. So we did what all Palestinian families in Jerusalem do when they're faced with this kind of threat and we bought time. We pleaded and pleaded and appealed the courts and appealed the cases and we got over 50 expulsion orders in 2009, rifle-wielding settlers accompanied by police and Israeli military came over and shoved our neighbors outside of their home around 5 a.m. It's like it was the most brutal, violent thing I'd seen as a child at the time. And I didn't realize that my turn was coming. My turn was next. They threw them out in the middle of the night with sound bombs and rubber bullets and they had to live in tents on the street for many, many months and even lived

in our front yards for a few months and lived in their cars. Can you look on that process? 2009, you said 50 expulsion orders. What was happening? Between the 70s and 2009, there had been many dozens of expulsions orders against us and against many other families in the neighborhood. 28 other families in total, actually. And in 2008, 2009, the first wave of expulsions finally happened. It actually began with Kamed El-Kurd. We're not related, but we live on the same street in the same neighborhood. She was thrown out of her home. Her husband, an elderly man also named Mohammad El-Kurd, was pronounced dead on the spot. He had a stroke and died. The Israeli soldiers pulled him out of his home while he was urinating and threw him into the streets and he died. A few months later, the Ghawi and Hanun families, which are kind of not a clan, but in Palestine, you have sometimes a building that contains multiple brothers and their wives. Each have little apartments. So the Ghawi and Hanun families, about 35 people, were thrown out in the middle of the street right across from us. And then by the end of 2009, I had come home from school to find all of my furniture scattered across the length of the street. And I saw the settlers, many of whom had American accents living in our house. And their justification for this, their reasoning for this, is, you know, divine decree. This is what God wants. This is the promised land. This is so and so, as if God is some kind of real estate agent. So they took over half of our home and we continued to be in courts for the following decade. This was, I was still a child and I had broken English and I was talking to all of these diplomats and all of these journalists who would, you know, subject me to their, subject me to their, you know, racism and biases and so on and so forth. And I had to prove my humanity time and time again. And I had to, you know, do all of this, all with broken English. And we were lucky even if we got a, if we got a quote in the, in the article written about us by the Times or so on and so forth. Move forward to 2020. I was in New York City studying a master's degree, getting a master's degree. And my father calls me and he tells me, you know, we haven't yet another expulsion order. And we decided to launch a campaign.

It was quite ambitious at the time. But the whole objective of the campaign was to demystify what is happening, right? Because it's reported on in the news. It's reported on around the world as this real estate dispute as these evictions, which was not really what's happening. Evictions do not entail a foreign army in an occupied territory, forcibly removing you out of your home. So I came home from New York and we launched a campaign which turned into a global success. And I believe it was a global success because finally the images on the screen matched the rhetoric that was being said. It wasn't so confusing or complicated anymore. All of this asymmetry was pronounced and articulated in a way that any viewer, be it in Alabama, be it in New York, be it in Egypt, was able to understand the asymmetry of the judicial system and the agenda of colonialism that was taking place here. And due to immense international and diplomatic pressure from all over the world, even the United States, the Israeli Supreme Court was forced to cancel all of the eviction orders until further notice. This I consider was a small victory because obviously we are still at risk of losing our homes once they decide to do the land registry, which we can get into a little bit later if you'd like. But nonetheless, it was something that we haven't seen before. And the fact that the Supreme Court canceled all of these dozens and dozens of fast eviction orders, it set a precedent and it also proved that this was a

political battle, not a legal one. So let's just add a little more detail to the people who are not familiar with the story, with the region, with the evictions, with the courts. So first of all, shake your eyes in East Jerusalem. Maybe you can say, what is Jerusalem? Where is it located? What are we talking about in terms of regionally? And second, what kind of people that live there? So if you could talk about the Palestinian people. And we should also make clear that these evictions is literally people living in homes and their homes are taken away from them. I suppose, technically, it's legal evictions. But you're saying that there is a symmetry of power in the courts, where the legal is not so much legal, but is politically and maybe even religiously based. Yeah, I mean, the biggest, the most important context here is oftentimes, Americans think that Israel and Palestine are some kind of two neighboring countries that live next to each other and they are at war. But the fact of the matter is, Palestinian cities exist all over the country. And it's just one country. It's just one infrastructure. And Israel is literally on top of Palestine. It was established on top of our villages in the late 40s. Now, according to international law, the eastern part of Jerusalem is under occupation. So Israeli presence and jurisdiction over the area is completely illegitimate. They say the evictions are legal because the settlers write their laws. So obviously, they're going to allow settlements to expand. But according to international law, according to even US policy, Israel occupies the eastern part of Jerusalem. It's jurisdiction there is illegitimate. We shouldn't even be going to their courts in the first place, but we have no other option. We're talking, we're talking about the majority. We're talking about Jerusalem. We're talking about generations and generations and generations of people who have lived there for the longest time, who now, even though, you know, for example, me, I don't have a citizenship. I'm a resident, a mere resident. I have a blue ID card, even though my grandmother and my grandfather were born in Jerusalem, their grandparents were born in Jerusalem. Even though we've lived there for generations, but Palestinians in Jerusalem, we are not citizens. We're just mere residents. Same thing with residents of the occupied Syrian Golan. They are not citizens. They are just residents in their own hometowns. This is an important piece, but all of this gets convoluted and lost in translation. And I think I would argue it's a lot of the time it's dubious. It's malicious, the fact that these little pieces of context that frame the entire story get lost. You know, I'll talk to you about something else. Just 10 minutes, 10 minutes across from my neighborhood. There's another neighborhood called Silwan. And the people in Silwan are also threatened with expulsion, but not through evictions, but through home demolitions. And if you look at American state, American media or Israeli state media, you would read the headlines, you know, Palestinians living in homes built illegally are going to face, you know, their homes as they're going to be torn apart. What these headlines don't tell you. And even sometimes, most of the time, the substance doesn't tell you that Palestinians seldom ever get building permit applications. In fact, recently, a spokesperson for the Israeli military confirmed that was 95% of building permits applications submitted by Palestinians in East Jerusalem and the West Bank are rejected by the Israeli authorities. And to make this even more absurd, the guy, the councilman who is responsible for rejecting and accepting building permit applications, his name is Jonathan Youssef. And he's a, he's an activist in the settler movements, and he's a Jerusalem council member. And he, last week, following the expulsion of

a Sublaban family in the old city of Jerusalem, he posted to his official Facebook account, Nakba now, demanding a second Nakba, promising another Nakba. He has done so on many occasions.

He has chanted with a megaphone just a few months ago, walking down the street in my neighborhood,

chanting, we want Nakba now. This is a man who has vandalized our murals, who has screamed Islamophobic slurs. This is literally a man in the government making these decisions, right? And this is similar to, you know, Masafryat in the South Hebron Hills. For those who don't know, it's a place in the occupied West Bank where Bedouin and cave dweller Palestinians have lived for generations. They have cultivated the land. And recently they were expelled from their homes. Over a thousand people were expelled from their remote small villages. Again, if you're reading American media, they would say, it would say Palestinians living in firing zones were removed because they're living in a military zone. What these media reports will not tell you that in the 80s, the Israeli government purposefully classified many lands in the occupied West Bank,

as firing zones, as off-limit military zones, for the sole purpose of expelling the residents.

And this is not some kind of conspiracy theory. This is declassified information that was released from the Israeli State Archive that was later reported on by her audits. Also, these reports will not tell you that the judge who rules on whether these people continue to live under homes or not is himself a settler in the West Bank. And we're not even talking about, you know, a loose definition of a settler, but according to international law, this is a settler living illegally in an illegal settlement in the occupied West Bank. This is the judiciary that we deal with, which is hilarious considering how it's being reported on

in American media recently as some kind of beacon of progress and democracy that the new government is trying to undermine. So there's no representation in the courts for the Palestinian people? I mean, we have lawyers, but no, there's no, there's no, in fact, there is for Palestinians with Israeli citizenships. For example, there's over 60 laws that specifically and explicitly discriminates against them. So again, it's technically legal, the evictions and the demolitions. Yeah. So was Jim Crow was legal also, you know? When something is legal, it can also still be wrong. Absolutely. History has shown us time and time again

that legality does not necessarily mean morality. And the law, you know, is the law is a bloodbath in many ways. It has been used and abused to facilitate the most horrendous atrocities.

And in the case of the Palestinians, the law has served to facilitate and bureaucratize our ethnic cleansing. Do you think there's people, judges and just people in power in the judiciary that have hate for the Palestinian people? I mean, I'm not really, I mean, the easy, simplistic answer is yes, but I don't really care about the contents of their hearts, what I care about the policy they enact, right? The laws they write and enact are hateful, demolishing a person's home so you can have somebody from Long Island, New York, who's fleeing fraud charges. This is the case in my house, live in their front yard. That's hateful. So I don't need confirmation. This is something we see a lot actually. Palestinians and people who are pro-Palestine and just people who want to make a difference in how this cause is represented. We often run for the first opportunity to cite and Israeli being hateful. You know, the last Israeli prime minister said that he has killed many Arabs and that he has no qualms with it. Netanyahu has said a slew of racist, hateful things. Jobotinsky, the pioneer of

Zionism, Herzl, one of the pioneers of Zionism, all have said horrible, hateful things. We also cannot wait to cite a confession from a former Israeli soldier who's guilty consciousness, keeping them up at night. And we use all of these confessions or slip-ups as evidence to prove that this is a racist country that is enacting racist acts. But we don't need this because the material proof is on the ground. You see it in the policies that are enacted. You see it in how this regime has behaved for the past 75 years. I don't need confessions from the likes of Netanyahu to understand

that his heart is full of hate. So if you could return to 1948 and describe something that you've mentioned, the Nakba, which means catastrophe in Arabic, what was this event? What was this displacement and dispossession of Palestinians in 1948? Well, you know, like May 15, 1948, is commemorated every year as, you know, the anniversary of the Nakaba. But I would even argue, and I think this is like a very popular idea, is that the Nakaba did not begin or end in 1948. The 1948 was rather, you know, a crystallization of the Zionist enterprise in Palestine. And what happened was that many Zionist paramilitaries that, again, today merged and made

the Israeli army, which calls itself the Israeli Defense Forces, even though they're literally always aggressor, committed atrocities and massacres and, you know, they destroyed over 500 villages. They killed over 15,000 people. They forced a very large portion, a majority of the Palestinian population, to flee their homes. And this was, you know, the near total destruction of Palestinian society that continues on to this day. We refer to it as the ongoing Nakaba, and you see it in, in Sheikh Jarrah, you see it in Silvan, you see it in Hebron, and all of these people losing their homes. And in many cases, time and time again, you know, I grew up and my grandmother told me the stories about the Nakabe. She told me stories about her neighbors who were running away in a panic, and they had mistaken a pillow for their offspring, and they just took it with them, and they realized later that they forgot their child, and they came back for it. Many, many people who were separated from their, my grandmother herself, she lost her husband for a few months, for nine months. He was imprisoned by the Israelis. You know, she told me all of these stories, and she wasn't just reminiscing about them. She was, you know, letting me know that this is still happening, and I didn't need to grow up that old to see it happening in my own front yard, to see that expulsion happen in the same fashion. She's talked about it, but you know, now they have replaced their artillery with the judiciary. They have replaced, you know, the slashing of the pregnant women's bellies and the Dariusine massacre with laws that say, you know, you're not, you're not legally allowed to be here. We're going to kick you out of your home, and it's happening, and it has happened in broad daylight. One piece of context for the listener who doesn't, who is not familiar with the Nakabe, is the Balfour Declaration, which was a promise, quote unquote, promise made by the British to the Zionist movement in 1917, committing to the establishment, I'm quoting, I think word for word, committing to the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, as if Palestine was, you know, the British to give away. And there was this whole movement that called for colonization of Palestine, and there were different, there were different schools of thought in Zionism, you know, people like Zangvil said that this was a country without a people. And Palestinians who have existed there, who have cultivated the lands, who have, you know, had diverse cultural and religious and political practices, they were completely

erased. And other people like Jabotinsky were a lot more explicit and a lot more honest and said that we need to fight the Palestinians because they love their land much like the red Indians love their lands. And he had a paper called the iron wall colonization of Palestine must go forward. And all of these, all of these schools of thoughts were then shopping around for, you know, imperialist support for their cause. They tried, they tried to get support from the Ottoman Empire. They tried to get support from Germany. And this is in the 1800s. And then they got support from the United Kingdom. A great book to recommend is the Hundred Years War on Palestine by Rashid Khalidi. That's the, you know, traces the Zionist movement, oftentimes in the Zionist onwards. And so today what we're seeing is a continuation. And you know, people like Jabotinsky who are like profoundly and explicitly racist, who have called for genocide, who have called the Palestinians barbaric, who have said and done racist things. You know, Jabotinsky also was like the founder of the Ergun, one of the other militias that later merged to become the Israeli army, which was responsible for the Dariusine massacre, which was responsible for the bombing of the King David Hotel. This is a person who's still celebrated in Israeli society. There are still streets named after him and Netanyahu just two weeks ago, if I'm not mistaken, honored him in a public celebration. So this is Zionism. It's not even through my own words. What do you say to people that describe Israel as having historical right to the land? So if you stretch not across decades, but across centuries into the past. This kind of thing is a red herring. It's a distraction because you don't think of any state as having rights. But there is this exceptionalism to the Israeli regime where it is, it has a right to defend itself and it has a right to the land and it has a right to shoot 14 year old boys because it thought they had a knife in their pockets. A lot of the time people cite the Torah and cite religious books and sometimes Zionists will even say like read the Quran and blah blah blah. Regardless of whatever was written in these books that were written thousands and thousands of years ago, the fact of the matter is no one has a right to go on slaughtering people, removing them from their homes and then continuing to live in their homes, continuing to drink coffee on their balconies decades and decades later with no shame, with no introspection, with no reflection. That's no one has the right to do that. No one has the right to keep an entire population of people in a cage, which is what's happening to people in the West Bank who have no freedom of movement, which is what's happening in Gaza, which is blockaded through water, air and land and is deemed uninhabitable by human rights organizations like the UN. No one has the right to do that. Do you have hate in your heart for Israel? Why does that matter? As one human being to another, you're describing quite brilliantly that the contents of people's hearts don't matter as much as the policies and the contents of the courts and the laws and what actually is going on on the streets in terms of actions. But this is also a human story. Yeah. And I feel like at the core of the situation here is hate or maybe inability for some group of humans to see the humanity in another group of humans. And so it's important here to talk about the contents of hearts if we're to think about the long-term future of this. Yeah. I mean, I would be concerned actually if I didn't feel some kind of way in my heart. I would be concerned for my own dignity because the people who revolt, the people who are angry, the people who refuse to live under occupation know that they deserve better. People start revolutions not because of some kind of cultural phenomenon, not because of some kind of desire,

but because they cannot breathe, because they cannot breathe, they cannot live, they are living under excruciating circumstances. Palestinians, I don't know how many Palestinians have interacted with, but we are some of the most wonderful people. I mean, not all of us, I think some of us are insufferable, but most of us, we're very hospitable, we're very hospitable. Even in the early correspondence between the mayor of Jerusalem and Herzl, who wrote the Jewish State, the generosity through which the Palestinian mayor was talking to Herzl, who was plotting to take over his land is impressive and at the same time heart wrenching. But I personally think there is a lot of dignity in negating your oppressor, and I think it would be ridiculous today if we look back at Jim Crow, for example, and we ask the person who's lived under Jim Crow if they have hate in their heart for Jim Crow, as if that's not the absolutely logical and natural sentiment to feel.

In Rifka, you wrote,

My father told me, Anger is a luxury we cannot afford. Be composed, calm, still laugh when they ask you, smile when they talk, answer them, educate them. So let me linger on this, is there anger in there in your heart? And does it cloud your judgment? Does it cloud my judgment?

I don't think so. I think our campaign to defend our homes was particularly successful because it was honest to what was happening on the ground. Because it refused to follow the strategy that we have used in our advocacy before, where we shrink ourselves and we turn the other cheek and we try to convince American lawmakers and American diplomats and

journalists of our humanity, because we wait for their approval. I was 14 years old when I first flew to Congress to speak to Congresspeople and to speak at the European Parliament. And at the time I thought, wow, I must be such a brilliant 14-year-old for them to have me here. And looking back, I didn't know what I was talking about. I had horrendously broken English, and I didn't have any talking points. And I came to realize that the reason why we send our kids with their power points to the Hill is because of the racism and the hatred that lingers inside the hearts of American politicians who refuse to sit on the table with Palestinian adults as equals. And so we resort to sending our kids who will not threaten and who will not trigger the biases they have against Muslims and Arab people, which Palestinians, even though we're not all Muslim, are racialized as Muslim. And this is why we emphasize the deaths of women and children as though the deaths of our men does not count or does not matter. All of these things, I think the new generation of Palestinians is rebelling against. I think words like, you know, I think it's loaded. It's loaded language, anger and angry and hate and so on and so forth, because it mischaracterizes people, and it kind of delegitimizes them a little bit. You know, I think the real anger is the bulldozer, bulldozing through my house. I think the real anger is the 18-year-old soldier who refuses to see me as a human being and strip searches me every chance they get.

That's where the real anger lies. And I'm quite honestly proud of, you know, our unabashedness and our refusal to like bow our heads or bury our heads in the sand. I think that's the only way forward. So anger, whatever it is, is a fuel for action? Absolutely. And it has been throughout history. It has been. How much of this tension is religious in the practical aspects of the courts and the evictions and the demolitions? And you mentioned something divine decree.

How much underneath of it do you feel the division over religious texts and religious beliefs? You know, it's convenient to market what's happening in Palestine as a religious conflict, because it allows the listener the luxury of believing that this is an ancient,

complicated thing that stretches thousands and thousands of years ago. But the fact of the matter is the people who invented Zionism, who pioneered the Zionist movement, who called for emigration and settling into Palestine, a lot of them were atheists. A lot of them were not religious at all. And the leaders of the Israeli state today, a lot of them are atheists. And a lot of them are secular and so on and so forth. It's easy to say that this is about Muslims and Jews fighting over the land and so on and so forth. But it's not. It's about the land itself and it's about people being forced out of their homes. Benjamin Netanyahu said anti-Zionism is anti-Semitism. Of course he said that. Do you disagree? Absolutely. I disagree. What's the gap between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism? Those who are against the policies of Israel versus those who are against the Jewish people. I watched the first 20 minutes and then I couldn't do it anymore. What was interesting about Netanyahu is that he said being anti-Zionist is like saying, I'm okay with the Jews. I just don't believe the Jews have a right to form their own state. That's like saying, I'm okay with Americans. I'm just not okay with Americans having their own state. And there is so much wrong with that statement in the sense that Jewish people are a religious group. Being an American is a nationality that consists of a diversity of religions and so on and so forth. The second thing that's wrong with that statement is the whole idea that states somehow have a right to exist or whatever. It's such a distraction. You have people getting shot in the street. You have like millions and millions of people besieged. You have people losing their homes. You have people who are held in Israeli prisons without trial or charge indefinitely. But the conversations that are being held on the hill, the conversation that are being held on CNN, or does Israel have a right to exist? Or why would you negate Israel's having a right to exist? That's one. Now, of course, I just find it's ridiculous, again, that opposing a secular political movement that was explicitly colonialist, expansionist, exclusive, and racist through the words of its own authors is somehow, and also, again, opposing such a political movement that is quite young and quite recent, is somehow equivalent to opposing a religion that is thousands and thousands of years old. But it is convenient, again, for Israeli politicians to frame us who oppose Zionism, a form of racism and bigotry as anti-Semites. But I can guarantee you Benjamin Netanyahu has no problem with anti-Semitism. This is the same man who has no problem getting on stage and shaking hands with Pastor John Hagee, doing webinars with Pastor John Hagee. For those who don't know, Pastor John Hagee is the founder of Christians United for Israel, who has said on multiple occasions that Hitler was a hunter, who was sent to hunt the Jews, who said on multiple occasions that Jewish people are going to perish in hell. All of this is very viable by Google. And this is one of the Israeli regime's closest allies, right? So the Israeli regime does not have a problem with anti-Semites when it serves its interest. It has a problem. I mean, if you look at evangelicals or Christian Zionism at large, anti-Semitism lies at the heart of Christian Zionism. It's the idea that we want to drive all of the Jews outside of the United States so that Armageddon could happen or whatever the fuck. This accusation has been a muzzle. It has been used as a muzzle to silence political opposition and to stifle political advocacy for the liberation of Palestine. And a lot of the time, people get caught up in denouncing it and in justifying themselves and disclaimers and so on and so forth that you lose the point, that you're distracted from the focal point, that is, there is an ongoing colonialism happening where people every single day are killed. I cannot keep count. This morning, a kid was shot in Palestine.

We cannot, it's embarrassing even for me that I don't even know the numbers here, but this muzzle has been effective. And I think the only righteous option is to oppose these labels, these smear campaigns that target us. I myself have been labeled an anti-Semite by the ADL. And I mean, if you want to talk about that surface level, people say, wow, the ADL, Anti-Defamation League condemned you, but people do not look at the history of the Anti-Defamation League, do not look at the present of the Anti-Defamation League, the fact that they are the largest non-governmental police training department in the country where they train police in racial profiling and militarism, the fact that they have historically and continue to have engaged in surveillance on Black liberation movements, on anti-apartheid South African activists, most recently in Charlottesville when white supremacists were marching and chanting anti-Semitic shit, the ADL advised local police departments to spy on the Black organizers opposing the white supremacists. This is, again, all verifiable on the internet. Go to dropdadl.org. So the ADL does not alleviate the hate in the world as it probably is designed to do? No, it's the guys. I don't think the apartheid defense league is really our most progressive. That's what it stands for. If you can just linger on this idea of anti-Semitism, there's quite a bit of anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States, especially after 9-11. I've spoken to people about that. There's also anti-Jewish, anti-Semitism sentiment in the United States, but also throughout human history. What do you make about this kind of fact of human nature that people seem to hate Jews throughout history, especially in the 20th century, especially with Nazi Germany? What are your in general thoughts about the hatred of the Jewish people? I mean, I think it's obviously wrong. I don't know. It's this idea that even have to clarify what I think about anti-Semitism that doesn't sit right well with me. I think it's completely unfortunate and wrong that Jewish people have been persecuted across history. So one of the criticisms, I think I read the ADL making this criticism of you, is maybe you've tweeted a comparison between Israel and Hitler, and thereby diminishing the evil that is Hitler. What would you say to that?

And Mrs. Zaire talks about this a lot, the exceptionalization of Hitler. Hitler is the pluriball, I don't know, condemnable, rotten racist, horrible human being that belongs in the depths of hell. Obviously, that goes without saying, but I am allowed analogy, and I'm allowed to say whatever I want. Now I don't necessarily think that such an analogy is a good strategy to have. But at the time, the context came in 2021 when Israeli soldiers and policemen and settlers were literally burning down our neighborhood. Again, verifiable by Google. And I tweeted it, and also I remember I tweeted something, I hope every single one of them dies. And to this day, this is some kind of gotcha for me, as if I should have tweeted like, here's the apple pie for every single soldier that's throwing tear gas in my house. There is such an exceptionalism when it comes to Palestinians, we're not allowed analogy, we're not allowed expression, we're not allowed armed resistance, we're not allowed peaceful resistance, we're not allowed to boycott, because that's anti-Semitic, we're not allowed to do anything. So what are we allowed? If I can't boycott, and that's against American law and out to boycott, and if I can't pick up a rifle, because that's against the law, and if I can't even tweet my frustration out, what am I allowed to do? Maybe Netanyahu can send me a manual, he's happy with it. So you've spoken about the taking of homes, the IDF killing civilians, killing children. What about the violence going the other direction? Israeli is being killed in part by terrorist action. Well, it depends on how you define terrorism, right? Across history,

one man's freedom fighter is another man's terrorist.

I don't necessarily subscribe to the definition of terrorism. If a foreign army is in my neighborhood, which it's not supposed to be, and they're shooting life ammunition at my house, I'm allowed to do what I'm allowed to do. And again, this is yet another case of Palestinian exceptionalism, because when it comes to Ukraine, people have no problem seeing Ukrainians defending their homes, seeing Ukrainians dying for their man, seeing Ukrainians making makeshift Molotovs on Sky News. Sky News was running Molotov-making cocktails. The New York Times ran an article interviewing Ukrainian psychologists who said I'm paraphrasing, but he said hatred for all Russians is actually a healthy outlet. The New York Post ran a headline championing, quote unquote, heroic Ukrainian suicide bomber. These things we would not even dream of as Palestinians. We are told to turn the other cheek time and time again. We're told that we should continue living inside these enclaves, without access to clean water, without access to the right to movement, without access to building permits, without our natural right to expansion, without a guarantee that if we leave our house, we're not going to be shot. And we're supposed to not do anything about it. That is absurd. Any person watching this understands this completely. People understand that if somebody is attacking your home, you fight back. If somebody is attacking your family, you fight back. But again, who gets to call who a terrorist? Who gets to define terrorism? This is all about who has power. Who gets to write these laws? Who gets to write these definitions? Why is it that American actions in Iraq is not called terrorism by American politicians? You know, violence is like this mutating concept. It takes on many shapes and forms. And if it's in a uniform, if it speaks in English, if it has blonde hair, it's somehow acceptable. It's okay. We make movies about it. We sell out tickets about it. We make games about it. But without a uniform, if it has a thick accent, if it has a beard, that's condemnable. That's wrong. That's terrorism. Do you think violence is an effective method of protest and resistance in general? In general, I think it has been. But I believe in fighting on all fronts. I don't think violence alone is going to bring about change. I think there's so much to do in culture and shifting public opinion. There's so much to do in media and fighting back against media, erasure and censorship. There's so much to do diplomatically and politically. And I think I would be naive if I don't take the power imbalance into consideration. One side has makeshift weapons. And the other side is one of the most sophisticated armies in the world. So I don't know. I don't know how effective violence could be in this case. But if you look at the flip side, do you see the power of nonviolent resistance? So Martin Luther King, Gandhi, the power of turning the other cheek. He spoke negatively about turning the other cheek. So I sense that doing so has not been effective for the Palestinian people. We've turned the other cheek generation after generation. There's this Zionist trope that is used against us. They say Palestinian rejectionism. They say that we reject everything. But if you look at the history, like our leadership, the Palestinian Authority has given up inch after inch, has compromised on acre after acre, has signed deal after deal after deal after deal. And still, there is no peace. So turning the other cheek is not the most effective method in my book. What are the top obstacles to peaceful coexistence of Israelis and Palestinians? The occupation comes to mind. The shoot to kill policies come to mind. The siege comes to mind. The asymmetry of the judiciary comes to mind. The whole system needs to be dismantled. I will quote my dear friend, Rabbi Aghabarie, who's a lawyer who says, you know, the solution.

Justice comes about through recognition, return, and redistribution. There are millions of Palestinian refugees who are living in excruciating circumstances and refugee camps around the world. There are thousands of Palestinian prisoners who are held in prisons for defending their homes, hundreds of which are held without charge or trial, by the way. There are many Palestinians who get killed in broad daylight with no recourse, journalists and medics and everyday people, not just the freedom fighters. We need, again, recognition, return, and redistribution. And peace comes about when they stop killing us, when they stop keeping us in a cage. I mean, that's quite simple. Can you describe recognition, redistribution, return, and redistribution? Return, return, right of return, right? The right of return to all of the Palestinian refugees to their homes. You know, when I'm driving around Haifa and I see my grandmother's home that's now turned into a restaurant, you know, I could have, you know, I made a joke in one of my essays recently that had I had that I could have had it all, you know, beachfront views, her smug attitude, you know, she grew up by the, she grew up by the sea after she relocated to Haifa after, you know, Jerusalem. We want that. We want that. You know, they're lucky, I don't want Netanyahu's home, but I just want my home. I just want my home. We want to return. I also, there needs, you know, in like, I believe in the 1960s, the Israeli government classified 90% of all of historic Palestine as state owned land. This is all land that was owned by Palestinian farmers who have cultivated their lands for decades. You know, since the establishment of the Israeli state, there has been Jewish only towns popping up every few years and not one town, not one Palestinian town has emerged. We are even those of us who have Israeli citizenship, Israeli citizenship who live outside of the wall are encircled and cannot have their natural community growth in their towns. That needs to change. That needs to change. You mentioned the wall. Can you describe the wall? The wall is a nine meter high cement wall that was finished in 2003. And if you're American, you've probably heard the whitewash sanitized version of the name, which is the security wall. But it's a wall that literally has stolen thousands of dunams of land and has ripped apart families. My mother is a poet or was a poet at some point, and she had this poem she published in the paper called Love Behind the Wall. And it describes, you know, it's a poem, but it describes a real life situation of two families that who lived right across the street from each other, but were then separated by the wall, and they would fly balloons, you know, to see each other from each side of the wall or something like that. This, although it sounds absurd, but it's the reality for many Palestinian families whose lives were torn apart, whose livelihoods also were torn apart by the wall. Maybe this is a good opportunity to talk about the legal classifications for Palestinians. You know, Israel, much like any other colonial entity, has divided and fragmented the Palestinian people. As I said earlier, I have a blue ID, which means I'm a resident, a friend of mine who lives in Haifa, for example, two hours away from me, 150 kilometers, nothing too bad in this country, has an Israeli citizenship. He can, you know, travel, he can enter the West Bank, he can do a lot more, he's a citizen, he can vote if he wants to, not that we want to. You know, I always see my friends, or you can go to Italy without a visa because you have an Israeli citizenship, but, you know, they battle national erasure, they battle crime in their own communities because of police negligence. They, they battle land confiscation, land confiscation and have battled land confiscations in the 50s, whereas somebody with a green ID, somebody from the West Bank, cannot leave the West Bank, cannot go anywhere without a special permit,

and lives behind these walls. And even within the West Bank, the West Bank, I think hilariously, George Bush described it as Swiss cheese because of the holes, every, every few, every hundred meters, there's a new settlement or there's a new military checkpoint. So even if you live behind the wall in the West Bank with your green ID, even though you're robbed of your right to movement, you still even can't move from town to town within the West Bank without encountering settler violence or military violence while you're crossing the checkpoints and so on and so forth. And then the last category we have is people who live in Gaza. We are talking about over two million people who live in an open air prison who have no right to movement, but also have no access to clean water and no access to supplies, no access to good food, no access to good healthcare and so on and so forth who routinely get bombarded every few years. Gaza is like two hours away from my house. It feels like an absolute faraway planet because it's so isolated from the rest of the country. So imagine all of these different legal statuses fragmenting your everyday identity and creating different challenges and obstacles for you to deal with, for each group to deal with. You know, it's amazing and impressive that despite these colonial barriers, the real cement ones and the barriers in the mind, despite all of these barriers, the Palestinian people have maintained their national identity for 70 years. That is incredibly impressive and it also sends a message that as long as we have a boot on our neck, we're going to continue fighting. Violence, cracking down on refugee camps, bombarding refugee camps is only going to bring about more violence. So West Bank is a large region where a lot of Palestinian people live and then there are settlements sprinkled throughout and those settlements have walls around them with security cameras and security guards. Security guards. There's almost a million settlers in the West Bank. And so what are the different cities here if you can mention? In the West Bank. In the West Bank, Homology, Neen, Bethlehem, Habran, Jericho, Nablus. They have their own stories. They have their own histories. And it's fascinating also how interconnected they are. You know, like a friend of mine, Muna Umari, recently did a documentary report on the day that Haifa fell during the Zionist invasion. The Haganah led the Palestinian residents of Haifa down to the city center and as absurd as it sounds, those of them who stood on the right side of the street were forced into cars that took them to multiple stops that would later become multiple refugee camps, the last of which was Jenin refugee camp. And those who stood on the left side of the street were forced to board boats that took them to Lebanon to become refugee camps, refugees there. Last month, we saw the Israeli army invade Jenin in maybe the largest military invasion of Jenin since 2002. And they killed many people. They attacked medics and journalists in broad daylight on camera. They have destroyed infrastructure and it was all very painful. But I think the most compelling aspect of the raid on Jenin was what followed. Israeli soldiers at night held their megaphones and instructed hundreds of Palestinians to flee their homes. And they told them if you don't leave, if you don't have your hand up in the air, you will get shot and they were forced to leave their homes in the camp and walk to God knows where. I can guarantee you because the Nakba is not that old. I can guarantee you that some people who were marching away from their camps

were chased away from their homes in the camp. In Jenin were some of the same people who were chased away from the homes in Haifa in the first place. This perpetual exile that Palestinian people continue to live is unbearable. I mean, in my case, my grandmother was removed from her home

in Haifa in 48. And then she moved from city to city. And then in 2009, she saw half of her home taken over by Israeli soldiers. My grandmother died in 2020. And two months later, we got the next expulsion order from the Israeli court. I'm quite ashamed to admit that I was relieved that my grandmother had died because I did not want her 103 years old at the time to go through yet another

Nakba. And this is the fact for so many Palestinians regardless of where they are on the map. If I may read the description of the situation in Jenin and maybe you can comment. So this is on July 3rd, 4th, and 5th, just reading Washington Post description. So this was an Israeli military incursion to Jenin. The raid included more than 1000 soldiers backed by drone strikes making it Israel's largest such operation in the West Bank since the end of the second Palestinian uprising in 2005. The Israeli military said it dismantled hundreds of explosive cleared hundreds of weapons destroyed underground hideouts and confiscated hundreds of thousands of dollars in quote terror funds. Many of the 50 Palestinians who have attacked Israelis since the start of the year have come from Jenin camp and the surrounding area. Palestinian attacks inside Israel have killed 24 people this year. UN experts describe the Jenin operation as collective punishment in quotes for the Palestinian people amounting to egregious violations of international law. Many of the more than 150 Palestinians killed by Israelis this year have also come from these communities. Palestinian fighters say they need arms to defend themselves against the Israeli occupation and military incursions into the camp during which Palestinian civilians including children have been killed. So those are the I would say different perspectives on the many people on both sides who have been killed. Many more Palestinians. Can you comment more about the situation? I mean I think the Washington Post article is a little bit more you know careful than other media that came out recently about Jenin. I think you know I was listening to a Reuters radio show and they failed to ever mention the occupation. I don't even think this paragraph mentioned that Jenin is under occupation by the Israeli forces, by the Israeli regime. I think this is the most important piece of context that gets up secured in our media reporting is these cities, these refugee camps are under illegal occupation. The Israeli army has no business being there in the first place. That is the most, that is the departure point, that is the most important piece of context that will answer to you why these people are arming themselves. Many of which, by the way, lived through the 2002 massacre and bombardment of Jenin and grew up in that violence. The context that Palestine is under occupation that these Palestinian cities are under occupation that they have to deal with land seizures at all times that they cannot leave their towns without a special permit. All of this will give context to the violence and you know the thousands of Israeli soldiers that raided the camp that day that traumatized an entire generation. They think they will quell that generation. They think that with such bloodshed and such barbaric violence, destroying infrastructure, attacking medics, killing people left and right, they think with this kind of terror that they can quell people, tell people that they can guarantee that these kids are not going to grow up and resist, but that's the opposite of what happens. One thing about Palestinian people, they will not compromise their dignity. These people live in dire, excruciating circumstances and it is so courageous,

in my opinion, that they even think to defend themselves against one of the most lethal, one of the most sophisticated armies in the world against a nuclear state that can wipe them out in the matter of seconds. But at the end of the day, it's not even about courage, it's about survival. They don't do this because of machismo or because of heroic tendencies. It's because this is about survival. So the degree there's violence, it's about survival? Absolutely. I think if there was no occupation, there would be no violence. It's quite obvious. And again, people understand this. We saw on Twitter in the recent month all of these Israeli propagandists who had tweeted pictures of little girls with guns in Ukraine and women making bombs in Ukraine and young men carrying their rifles in Ukraine and praising them as heroes post very similar pictures of Palestinians and calling them terrorists. It's glaring, the double standard. I don't even need to linger on it. Well, the double standard is glaring, but I also think the glorification of violence is questionable. There's a balance to be struck, of course. Yeah, I mean, I don't think we should be glorifying violence at all, but I don't think we should be normalizing violence either. I think that's what it is. I'll tell you a story. I was interviewing a person whose brother was killed by the Israeli military during an Israeli raid on their village and the person was so concerned about whether I was going to report that her brother allegedly had a Molotov cocktail in his hand. And he found it absolutely insane, absolutely absurd that we can just glance over the fact that there is, again, a foreign military in tanks with rifles and snipers invading the village at 4 a.m. in the morning, shooting live ammunition at people's houses, throwing tear gas. That we can just glance over. It's normal. We could just report on it. No problem. Nobody's going to bat an eyebrow, but the fact that potentially somebody might have picked up a Molotov cocktail to throw it at this invading army is where we draw the line. It says a lot about whose violence is normalized, is accepted, institutionalized, is glorified even. You walk around Tel Aviv and you see all of the plaques plastered around the streets of the country, of the city, celebrating the battles that they had won, the massacres that they had enacted against the Palestinian people. But God forbid, God forbid Palestinians have any kind of similar sentiment. So on July 4th, during this intense period, a Palestinian rammed a car into pedestrians at a bus stop in Tel Aviv, injuring eight people before being shot dead by a passerby. Also that night, Hamas fired rockets into Israel, and then Israel responded with strikes on what it said was an underground weapon site. So just to give some context to the intense violence happening here, what do you think about Hamas firing rockets into Israel? Well, the framing makes it seem as though unprovoked Hamas is firing rockets onto Israel, regardless of what you think of Hamas, obviously, but unprovoked. But that's not the case. The provocation is the fact that they are forced to live in a cage, that they have no access to clean water, they have no access to basic rights, no access to imports, no access to anything, that they can't leave their living in a densely populated enclave that was deemed uninhabitable by the UN, that was deemed an open air prison. So the rockets, in any case, are retaliation for the siege. Let's start there. But again, this is just to prove my point, violence begets violence. Palestinian people are not violent people. We are not violent people at the core. And I think what serves this narrative is Islamophobia, is xenophobia towards Arabs, which I don't have the luxury to write laws about. By the way, I'm quite frustrated by this. I am preoccupied, and the Palestinian people are preoccupied, with the material violence

that we have to deal with on the day to day, the demolitions, the bombings, the imprisonment. That's what we're distracted with and busy with, that we can't even talk about the racism, the casual racism against the anti-Palestinian racism, be it in the media, on social media, in diplomatic circles. But all of this racism that has gone unchecked, that has not been regulated for decades, allows for these tropes to continue, in which Palestinians are promoted as barbaric terrorists. And the only way we could remedy that situation is by marketing them as these defenseless

victims. But the fact of the matter is not this simplistic. Palestinian people are human beings who should enjoy a full spectrum of humanity, which includes rage, which includes disdain, which includes happiness and joy and laughter, which includes celebration, which includes all of these things. But we're not allowed this. But we are doing exactly what any people throughout history who have been oppressed, who have been colonized, who have been occupied, have done and continue to do, as we see in Ukraine, which is celebrated by mainstream media. I'm sorry to keep reiterating this point, but at this point, I am quite exhausted by how exceptional Palestine and Palestinian resistance is when the world tells me time and time again that it doesn't have a problem with violence, it just has a problem with who does that violence.

Do you in your mind, in the way you see this region draw distinction between the people in power versus the regular people? So you mentioned the Palestinian people. Is there something you can comment on Hamas and the PLO? Do you see them as fundamentally different from the people? What does Hamas do well? Where did they fall short?

I think governments, wherever globally, Annie, are different from people. No government is a true reflection of its people. I think this is even true in the case of Arab countries that normalize with Israel. In many of the cases, they're unelected governments. I think the Palestinian authority continues to fail. I think they are subcontractors of the Israeli regime through their security coordination. And also, I'd like to use this as an opportunity to comment a little bit on the analogy thing, not to stray away from the question. But you know, the Palestinian authority two years ago killed an opposition activist named Nizar Banat. It was a horrendous crime. And I was in Ramallah with the people protesting against the Palestinian authority. And at some point, they had their batons, the Palestinian authority police, and they beat us with it. And many of the people in the crowd were likening the Palestinian authority to Zionism. I think people, this is what people do when they are confronted by a great evil. They liken it to some other great evil. And this is where the Hitler analogy came from. Again, I don't think it's like the best strategy moving forward, but I refuse to be criminalized for a little sentence.

But to linger on those in power, one of the criticisms towards Hamas and PLO, towards the Israeli government, at least the current coalition government, is that there's a lot of incentive to sort of perpetuate violence, to maintain power. There's a hunger for power and maintaining that power amongst the powerful. That's the way power works. So is there a worry you have about those in power not having the best interests of its people? So those in power, the PLO, Hamas, not being incentivized towards peace, towards justice.

You know, looking at the PA's action today, it tells you a great deal about what they're interested in and what they're not interested in. And maybe, yeah, the occupation is in their best interest. And you can infer similar things looking at Hamas. But the two, these two entities virtually have no power, even Hamas. There is the context that Hamas is permitted by international law to use armed resistance, blah, blah, blah. Does that mean Hamas is equipped to govern Gaza?

I don't think so. Does that mean that people around Palestine necessarily want to live under Hamas rule? In 2006, Hamas was democratically elected. I don't know if that's still the case today. There's a lot to be said, but neither of these entities have any real power in perpetuating. The only body that has access that can flip the switch on all of this equation is Israelis. You know, they're the ones who are keeping people in a cage. They're the ones who are wrapping the West Bank with a wall. Everything else to me is just secondary, regardless of what I think personally of any of those people. And personally, for me, the world I envision, not just Palestine, the world I envision is a world that goes beyond states, that goes beyond this framing of power, this hierarchy in which some people rule over other people. This whole idea of nation states, be it Israel or any other nation states, it's futile. It's not good. It's exclusive. I think that we can achieve a better world than that. Well, how do you do a better world? Actually, if you just linger on that, politically speaking, geopolitically, you have to have representation of the people. You have to have laws and you have to have leaders and governing bodies that enact those laws and all those kinds of things. You probably need to have militaries to protect the people. Can you not imagine a world without militaries? I can imagine it, but we're not in that world.

Yeah. I'm not saying I have all the answers or a PowerPoint in my pocket with the instructions, but I'm saying the world I'd like to live in is one that transcends borders, is one that does not necessitate militaries, that doesn't necessitate all of these prisons, all of these walls, all of these racist laws.

So you don't think violence is a fundamental part of human nature that emerges and combined with the hunger for power?

I do think both of these things are truly intrinsic to human beings, but I also do think there is a way to move beyond them. I'm not saying I have the answers. I'm tempted to say sway, but...

But you have a hope that there doesn't have to be war in the world.

Yeah, yeah. Definitely, definitely.

Well, if we look a little bit more short-term, people speak about a one-state solution, a two-state solution. What is your hope here for this part of the world? Do you see a possible future with a two-state solution, whether it's Palestine and Israel? Do you see a one-state solution where there is a diversity of different peoples, like in the United States, and they have equal rights in the courts than everywhere else?

You know, I don't think there is a geography in which a two-state solution is possible.

As we said earlier, Swiss cheese literally settlements all over the West Bank.

And I don't think it's fair. A two-state solution is fair to all of the people whose homes are still in Haifa, in Nazareth, in Yaffa, and so far. And I don't think it's fair that, like, I'm going to have to travel to another country to visit my cousin who's married in Nazareth, for example. And beyond that, it's just not possible. I do believe that whatever you want to call it, one-state, two-state, 48 states, 29 states, whatever you want to call it, refugees need to return, land needs to be given back, wealth needs to be redistributed, and a recognition of the Nakba needs to happen. That is the only way we could move forward. And you know, regarding whether this is like a possible situation for two people to live side by side, let's ask two questions.

Let's say you lived in a house with a person, your roommate, you just had a roommate who

constantly beat the shit out of you. I wonder if you'd want to continue to live with them. That's one. And let's try another scenario. Let's say you live in a house with a roommate who you just absolutely hate, absolutely oppose their existence as a people. You don't even give him, you know, a key to your apartment. Let's say now you're like equal partners in the apartment. Would you want to live with him? I don't know. We'll see. We'll see. Time will tell, but I don't think they want to live with us. Israelis are quite good, especially Israeli diplomats. They're quite good at using flowery language about peace and coexistence and so on and so forth. And they're good with making a seamstain or radical or like full of hate and so on and so forth. But the policies speak for themselves. The actions on the ground speak for themselves. And I truly, I mean, every time there's an uptick, many of them leave. And I wonder, I would like to see, I wonder what would happen in our own state solution. Well, okay. So you've spoken eloquently about the injustice of the evictions, the demolitions, the settlements. But is there, can you comment about the difficulty of the security from an Israel perspective when there is a large number of people that want to destroy it? How does Israel exist peacefully? This one state solution?

I don't know by not shooting a journalist doing her job in the Zanier refugee camp, by not killing a 14 year old standing in his front yard. This whole talk about security and security fence and the whole like propaganda of the Israeli defense forces and this whole iron wall ideology in which somehow they're always defending themselves. Even though they're, you know, Netanyahu and the Israeli government continue to talk about an existential threat about Iran being an existential threat. Even though the Israeli government is the only body that holds nuclear weapons in the region, they're the most sophisticated army in the region. And yet they continue hiding behind their fingers and talking about an existential threat and talking about how like they're insecure and so on and so forth. I came here on the bus, you know, I live in a house where everybody in the world can easily Google it and get its address. And anybody can just walk into my house. And this is just, and I'm lucky and privileged as a Palestinian journalist. There are many Palestinian journalists who lose their lives. This is like, that's real insecurity, but we don't even have time to whine about it because there's real shit going on on the ground that we're preoccupied with and reporting on all the time that we don't even have the time to talk about how limited is our institutional backing, how limited is our, you know, cyber security, how limited is our, you know, even healthcare, you know, like all of these things, we don't even have time to complain about. But they're the real life things that formulate an insecure population that Israel certainly does not suffer from. There's a tension here. It's true that the ideas of existential threats to a nation have been used to expand the military industrial complex and to limit the rights of its people. So in the United States, after 9-11, Iraq and Afghanistan were invaded under some justification of there being terror in the world, these big ideas. And in the same way, yes, Israel with the existential threat of Iran is used to expand its military might over the region and control over the region. But it also has some truth to it in terms of the threat that Israel is facing, including from Iran. If Iran were to get a nuclear weapon, do you think there's a threat from that? But who has the nukes? Right now. Yeah, but like we're talking about this like faraway monster that's like we're scared of, you know, it's like fearmongering. What do you mean, Yanni? Who has the nukes?

concerned with the teenagers in the, in the prisons. I am concerned with my house. I'm concerned with my family's house in Haifa. I'm concerned. There is a lot for me to do before I can even tend to the needs of my occupier. That is the least of my concerns. So you want the low hanging fruit, the obvious injustices to end. But still, the long term vision of existential survival of Israel, which is the concern of its government, is concern of its people. Do you see a future where Israelis have a home in the region? Sure. Just not in my front yard, you know. Which, where's the front yard? It was the backyard. There's literally, there are literally Jewish settlers. Yes. One of which from Long Island in my literal front yard. Yes. And this is the case in hundreds, if not thousands of Palestinian homes. You know, no one is saying Jewish people shouldn't exist or they shouldn't have a state of their own. If they, I mean, I think all of, like all, all religious based states are like a bad idea. All nation states are bad idea. But whatever, if that's what they want to do, that's what they want to do. But that doesn't mean that they are allowed or have a right to create and implement a system of Jewish supremacy. At my expense, that's not a crazy thing to say. That is not a controversial thing to say. You can have your state. Just don't kill anyone. Thank you. Have a good day. You know, that's not a crazy thought to have. And seek and establish a symmetry of power in the courts, which is the current source of injustice. I mean, that's when it comes to like forced expulsions in our home. But there's other, there's a myriad of other ways. Through the military? The military. I mean, the police, if you look at like how many times I should have brought the data with me, but if you look at how little times the Israeli military or police has like investigated its own people or indicted its own people. I mean, just recently, the killer who has been hailed a hero by some, some of Israeli society who killed a Palestinian man who is autistic, who lives inside the occupied old city where again, Israeli military has no business being there or jurisdiction whatsoever. He was shot and killed by an Israeli soldier who was trigger happy because again, they again, they have this like siege mentality where like any moving object is going to kill them. And he was shot and killed. And despite it being in broad daylight, despite it being well documented, despite the victim being, you know, disabled, despite all of this, he was acquitted by the Israeli court, the military, the courts, the government, they all work together, which is why it's so ironic to me that there are hundreds of thousands of people marching on the streets of Tel Aviv, you know, trying to save the progressive beacon that is the Israeli Supreme Court, when you find its fingerprints all over the injustices perpetuated against Palestinians, be it, you know, legalizing and upholding the withholding of slain Palestinian bodies who were killed by the Israeli military to be used as bargaining chips with Israeli militaries, be it making decisions to dispossess entire villages like Emel Heran, be it never once, you know, granting release to any Palestinian who was held in administrative detention without charge or trial, be it upholding the legality of the family reunification law that does not allow Palestinian couples who hold different legal statuses of reuniting and living together as families. I mean, those are just some of the few things I can think of about the Israeli Supreme Court. So they're like the real tension that exists is the lack of diversity on the Israeli political spectrum that makes

the vision for a future so limited, because those on what seems to be like the far left are defending an extremely conservative institution that is a Supreme Court, that they record as progressive when in fact it is the opposite of such. So what do we do? How can we talk? How can we have peace with people who are chanting to save the very body that is displacing us? You know, it's ridiculous. What's your vision? Let's just take it as a microcosm of Jerusalem. What's your vision for Jerusalem looks like with a peaceful coexistence of people? You know, as it looked like before the Israeli state emerged, I mean, we should be reading our history here. When you read like European and white historians, they'll tell you like Palestine was there, and many of them would say like it was even without a people, there were nobody, nobody was there, or like some of them will say we were uncivilized. But the fact of the matter is Palestine, Jerusalem particularly had a diversity of religion. Druze, Jewish people, you know, my grandmother continues to talk about while she continued until she died,

she continued to talk about her Jewish neighbors when she grew up in the old city or like when she was born in the old city and then her Jewish neighbors in Haifa. We even had one Jewish member of our family, M. Sammy, actually, who just also recently passed away. The Jews were a part of Palestine and they spoke Hebrew, a different kind of Hebrew, but they spoke Hebrew and they were, people really need to read 'The Hundred Years' War on Palestine. It's really an excellent synopsis of the history. But this whole idea that this is like some kind of war between two religions is so misleading because what's happening is a bunch of, frankly, European settlers with a certain political secular ideology came and relocated here and turned it into a religious conflict between people who have lived harmoniously together for decades before that. And, you know,

the whole idea, be it like, you know, Christian Zionism or, you know, John Hagee or like the calls for Jews to leave the United States and relocate in Israel or like, you know, recently, which we've heard about a long time ago, but recently an Israeli historian confirmed the fact that Israeli organizations were bombing Baghdad and bombing synagogues in Baghdad in Iraq to get Iraqi Jews to leave and come relocate in Israel, right? All of this is manufactured. And again, none of this is a conspiracy theory. I know it sounds absurd and, you know, anytime I like look at my life from a bird's eye view, I think what a circus. But it's real and it's verifiable, you know, called the fact checkers. You mentioned the land registry. Can you elaborate what's happening there?

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. So our small victory in the Israeli courts was that they would keep us in our homes until a land registry is completed. Basically, it means that they have to check who owned the land prior. And then they could decide if the land is ours or the land belongs to the Israeli settler organizations that are headquartered in the United States and enjoy a tax exempt status

here. And that sounds great on the surface. But then you look at Israeli law, you look at the Israeli courts, you look at ownership and you see that, oh, Israelis refuse to authenticate or take into consideration any land ownership documents from the prior of the establishment of the state. So all of us in Jerusalem who have their taboo papers, their ownership papers from the Ottoman era, that's not legit in the eyes of the Israeli court, because that existed before, like your ownership deeds existed long before Israel even existed. So we're not going to take this into consideration. So not to be cynical here, but unfortunately, the likely result of the

land registry is that they're going to say, oh, all of this land belongs to these Jewish organizations because they're not going to take any of our documents into consideration. But that means that there's going to be another campaign and there's going to be a long winded fight. And we'll see what happens. But that's the fear and there's a huge dreadful fear of a massive loss in property in Jerusalem following this land registry. For the reasons I just told you, it's the mere fact that they just refuse to look at land ownership documents. What is the process of the fighting this in the course look like if you can maybe just comment on it? I always make a joke that being in an Israeli court is playing a game of broken telephone because everybody's speaking in Hebrew and then your lawyer says something to your dad and your dad says something to your mom and your mom whispers it in your ear and then you say it to your cousin and your cousin has a completely different idea of the verdict than what the verdict is. But that's really the reality. So a lot of the fights happen in family by family? No, it's like groups. So in our case, it's like four houses, every four houses. But again, it happens in a language we do not speak. And a lot of the time our strategy is buying time and building a global campaign. We know that there is no recourse in the Israeli courts. I mean, my grandmother used to say, and this is like a popular proverb, if your enemy is the judge, to whom do you complain? So to the whom you complain is maybe the international community. Yeah, I mean, in our case, in our case, it was the international community. But in our case, also, it wasn't just the international community. It was the hundreds of thousands of people in Palestine and abroad who were marching on the streets, getting beaten and brutalized in Jerusalem. And I don't know, sometimes arrested in places like Germany and so on and so forth, who forced themselves inside the media cycle. This was what was unique about Sharia. We were able to penetrate an industry that usually ignores us and usually refuses to use any of our framing, any of our quotations. And these people that march, these people that spread the rhetoric, spread the facts, wrote articles, these people that made videos online and got arrested and many of whom are still in Israeli prisons, paying higher prices than I have ever paid. These people are the ones that truly moved the international community into action. It wouldn't have. The United States, I don't think would have said anything had it not been for the immense media pressure that was created from the immense popular pressure. There are a lot of moving parts to a global campaign. And I think it's so impressive that we were able to do this without any media backing, without any institutional backing, without any training, without any budget, nothing. You mentioned the United States. What's the role of the United States in the struggle that you've been describing? What's the positive? What's the negative? The role is perpetuating what's happening, Yanni. It's all a negative role, to be honest. With the money, with power? Yeah, it's like the 3.8 billion in military aid every year. It's the standing ovation. Israel is the largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid since World War II to date. The United States has provided Israel \$158 billion. As you said, it's providing currently \$3.8 billion every year. A lot of people raise the question of what's the interest of tax-paying American citizens in this kind of... Yeah, zero interest. Foreign aid. Zero interest. I don't think Americans, I think Americans, a lot of Americans are concerned with health care. A lot of Americans are concerned with clean water and Flint. I don't think they're concerned with funding apartheid in another country. And I think it's a disturbing phenomenon that

although public opinion in the United States is shifting, I would argue drastically about Palestine. People in Washington are yet to catch up. It was only, I think, nine congresspeople who boycotted Herzog's speech in Congress yesterday. And he received standing ovation after standing ovation after standing ovation after standing ovation. And I wonder if the everyday American is concerned that many of their politicians are Israel first politicians or politicians who care more about maintaining a relationship with the Israeli regime than they care about their own districts? You've tweeted that 49 years ago, Ghassan Qanafani, or you can maybe correct me on the pronunciation, was assassinated. You wrote, quote, his revolutionary articulations of the Palestinian plight for liberation shook the colonial regime. Yet he's not dead. His ideas remain ever timely and teachable. And you also tweeted an excerpt from his writing, between 1936 and 1939, the Palestinian revolutionary movement suffered a severe setback at the hands of three separate enemies that were to constitute together the principal threat to the nationalist movement in Palestine in all subsequent stages of its struggle. One, the local reactionary leadership to the regimes in the Arab states surrounding Palestine and three, the imperialist Zionist enemy. Can you analyze what he means by those three things? The local reactionary leadership, the regimes in the Arab states surrounding Palestine and the imperialist Zionist enemy. And also, could you comment on him as a person? Yeah, I mean, Ghassan Qanafani is a brilliant, brilliant, brilliant writer. And he was prolific. He's authored so much books. Even though he was assassinated in the 70s, but you know, he was 37 if I'm not mistaken, 35 when he was assassinated. You know, he was an inspiration to me in school. And I remember like even, even my teachers had qualms about him because he was like a secular person. But I loved Ghassan Qanafani. He's a beloved figure in the Palestinian community. And I hope to one day be able to like achieve a fraction of what he's achieved in the terms of like shaping a political consciousness for Palestinians and for people in the region. Did he classify himself as a, as a politician, as a philosopher, as an activist? Do you know? He was a writer, but he was also part of the Palestine, Palestine Liberation Front, PFLP. So he used the words to fight for freedom. Yeah, I don't think he would have, would have thought his words were divorced from other forms of struggle. But I think he recognized the importance of culture and shaping culture and shaping public opinion, both in achieving, you know, a shift in global stance and also in achieving, you know, an awakening in the Palestinian generation as well. You know, there's a very famous, famous interview of his where he's talking to a, I believe a British journalist and the British journalist is asking him, why don't you, why don't you have talks with the Israelis? And he means what do you mean talks, you mean capitulation, you mean talking that you can't have a conversation between the sword and the neck. And I think that that really summarizes the kind of, you know, values he sits for now to talk about the three things. Local reactionary leadership regimes in the Arab state surrounding Palestine and the imperialist Zionist enemy. Yeah, so in today's terms, the local reactionary leadership is the Palestinian authority, the regional regimes, we're talking about, you know, actually, you know, the normalization deals that have emerged in recent years, Abrahamic Accords have been talked about as though they're like groundbreaking new phenomenon. But many Arab countries have normalized relations with the Israeli regime. Since the birth of the state, it's not a new thing. But yes, I think he was talking

about Egypt and Jordan at the time today, we can include United Arab Emirates, we can include Bahrain, we can include Morocco. And, you know, these, again, these Abrahamic Accords, they are promoted and marketed and talked about as some kind of like religious reconciliation, which I think is the most disgusting thing ever, because they're not about religious reconciliation. They're about arms deals, and economic deals, and they're about, you know, consolidating power in the region. They're about mutual strategic interests that all of these nations have together. And some people argue that, you know, Palestine is no longer an Arab cause because Arab countries are normalizing, but most of these governments have not all actually all these governments that have normalized, most of them are monarchies, are not elected governments, and they do not represent the will of the people or the desires or the opinions of their peoples. And the proof to this is like places like Jordan and Egypt, even though they've normalized and had peace agreements with Israel for many, many, many years, Palestine and the Palestinian cause was still a talking point in the political campaigning of politicians, Jordanian Egyptian politicians, and continues to be for them to gain popularity, because that's where the hearts of the people are. And then, you know, the Zionist regime is quite explanatory, the imperial Zionist regime. I mean, what else do you call a regime that sought help from imperialist powers to depopulate an entire country and build a new one on top of it? So mostly you say the thing that Abraham Accords achieved is a is a negative thing for Palestine. So these kinds of agreements amongst the power about the between the leadership is not. Yeah, it's not positive for for the region. No, no. Obviously, they're going to be marketed as as as positive. And obviously, you know, they're they're gonna have this flowery language surrounding them. And the idiots in the room might like not in smile, but anybody with critical thinking skills can know that if people continue to be under occupation, you know, that's there's nothing positive there. And it's also there is, you know, let's linger a little bit on the mutual interests. The only way Morocco could normalize relations with the Israeli regime is so that the Israeli regime could recognize Moroccan sovereignty over the Western Sahara, which just happened actually last week in Morocco. And before that, Morocco recognized sovereign Israeli sovereignty over the West Bank. It's not like Morocco itself just has no interest in this kind of deal. You mentioned that you you hope of accomplishing some of the things that Hassan kind of funny was able to accomplish. Let me ask you a silly question, perhaps a silly question. Do you have interest in running for political office in or into leadership? I hear laughter in the room. To lead in a leadership position in Palestine? Not currently, no. Let's see if this age as well. I don't think there's a body through which I can run for anything. It's completely dysfunctional. And also, you know, I don't want to wear a suit all the time. Who would want to do that? So from which kind of pedestal or from which kind of stage do you think you can be most effective? You know, I was born and raised in Jerusalem. I speak perfect Arabic. I think my Arabic writing is much superior to my English writing, but I choose to write in English because I think there's not there's disparity and there's a chasm between what is said in Arabic on the street in Palestine and what is said here about Palestinians, both by

anti-Palestinian racists and people who are pro-Palestine and advocates for Palestine. And I believe I and a few others from my generations or many others actually from my generation are working to fill that chasm. And I also believe that literature, culture, the public sphere, changing the public opinion, changing the narrative is important to affecting policy, to affecting change, affecting material change.

You know, I'm not going to I'm not going to go read a poem in front of a in front of a checkpoint and watch it catch in flames. That's not I'm not I'm not that delusional about the power of words, but I do think that I have a responsibility and I have a privilege even to have a voice, to have some kind of platform. And if I'm not, you know, defining myself, if I'm not talking and representing myself, then other people will define me and their their definitions of the Palestinian people across the few past decades have not been kind or generous to the Palestinian people. That's one thing. The other thing is I believe in the United States as a as a front for change. I believe we have a lot more leverage here than we do back home. Again, I believe in in someone said the other day, I can't I can't remember their name, but someone said no stone unturned, I believe in fighting on all fronts. But here really, I can go I can go protest in front of the Israeli embassy without getting shot. There's a lot. There's a lot of work to be to be done here. There's a lot of people waking up. I would even argue that a reckoning is coming in the American public. And more and more

American people are concerned where their tax money is going or concerned what their politicians are invested in. More and more American people are saying not on our dime or saying not, you know, not, not, not today, not, not here. And also, there's many Palestinians in the diaspora here in the United States and Europe who benefit and could benefit from political education and in the English language because of diaspora across history, the Palestinian diaspora has been effective in the 70s and the 80s. And, you know, and I'm hoping ever since 2021, there has been a resurgence of the power and influence of the Palestinian diaspora. To ask another silly question, since you mentioned the United States, I don't know if you follow the politics in the United States, but do you have a preference of presidential candidates in the 2024 election? Or is that, do you follow where each candidate stands on the different policies?

I do. I think everybody in the world should be able to vote for American elections, actually. I do follow because of the influence. Yes. Yes.

I do. I don't have a preference whatsoever. I don't, you know, I saw Cornell West on CNN. I don't think, you know, I don't know if he's going to go far with this campaign. Cornell West is running with the Green Party and I don't think he's going to achieve much success, but I saw him on CNN berating Andrews Cooper and I enjoyed that very much. Wouldn't mind seeing that on my screen

regularly, but don't really have an opinion about, you know.

You wrote Rivka, a book of poetry. How did that come about? Maybe you can tell the story of that book coming to be. You know, I signed the book when I had a lot, a lot less visibility in the world. So when I didn't think thousands and thousands and thousands people would be reading it, I decided to include many poems, which I wrote when I was young, because it's a long, it's a long, it's a long journey, this book. It starts in Jerusalem, it goes to Atlanta, it goes back to Jerusalem, and then it ends in New York.

And Rivka is the name of my grandmother, and it's an Arabic name, a Hebrew name,

and it means to accompany someone. And I wanted to write about displacement in a way that was beyond what we read about in English. Poetry as a medium, I don't know if I have much faith in it anymore. To be honest, maybe like I'm turned off by it, and I'll revisit it again in a few years. But at the time of writing this book, poetry as a medium, it really was a source of hope and inspiration for me. So my mother was a poet, and she would, you know, her and my dad would play this game in the morning. She would read her poems to him, and he would guess which lines would be read penciled by the Israeli military censor, because she would submit her poems to the local newspaper, or Kutznus paper. And you know, the military censor has to go over it. And, you know, she would get her poems back with a bunch of words erased, and they would laugh about it. And blah, blah, blah. So poetry was very much part of my upbringing. And, you know, as a Palestinian, when you're excluded from mainstream spaces, including media and journalism, poetry tends to be a place where you can say what you want to say without repercussions. And I say that I realize that are greatest. Writer, Hassan Kenefen, he literally had his car bombed, exploded because of his writings. And, you know, recently that in Tatour, a poet, a Palestinian poet with an Israeli citizenship was imprisoned for a few months for publishing a poem on Facebook, in which he said, Resist, my people resist. So even that is not necessarily true. But anyway, it just felt like I could it's a place where I could talk and express large ideas in a simplistic way. And, you know, the best example I could give you is one of my favorite poets, Rashid Hassan, when when the Israeli authorities decided to do the land, the land law, which classified, I believe, 93% of historic Palestine is Israeli owned, forgive me. And then when when they also did the absentee property law, which allows the Israeli government to take over homes that were depopulated from the Palestinian owners, he wrote a poem called God is a refugee. It's a kind of a sarcastic, sardonic poem in which he goes, you know, God has become a refugee, sir. So confiscate even the carpet of the mosque and sell the church because it's his property and sell our orphans because their father is absent and do whatever you want. It's like, it's a sarcastic poem that was in reaction to these laws that translated to the everyday Palestinian to the farmers, to the landowners, what these bureaucratic, complicated laws meant to them, what they meant to their land, what it meant, how what what effect are these laws going to have on these people's lands. And that I think is the role of poetry that I try to to achieve. So poetry ultimately prizes the power of words. And so the medium, the power of the medium of poetry transfers nicely to any medium that celebrates words. So even, I mean, just writing novels, tweeting. Yeah, you're also working on a new book. Memoir, what's the title? What can you say about it? Memoir is bizarre because, you know, I'm so young. So it's not really my memoir, but rather the memoir, a memoir of the neighborhood, which I grew up. The title, the tentative title is a million states in one. And it's a nod to how many different realities and universes exist in this tiny one country. And it's, you know, it's, it's kind of, it's kind of a documentation of the two waves of expulsion, expulsion in 2009 and 2020 and 2021. And the kind of behind the scenes of the campaign that took place, the diplomatic and media campaign and grassroots campaign that took place to save our homes. And it's also an exploration of other communities that are threatened with, with the expulsion and other communities who are

resisting in their own way, be it in Beta and Nablus or South Herban Hills in, in Masafari Yotta or in Silwan or in the Naqab, all these communities that are dealing with different forms of expulsion. And, you know, the emphasis that I'm trying to achieve with this book is dignity. I want to write a book about, you know, my, my experiences that is like super, that is super dignified, that kind of kicks its feet up on the table and says what it wants unabashedly, because, you know, we are told not only are we going to be victimized, but we are going to be polite in our suffering. And I want to reject that completely. And I want to lean into the humor of the past few years of my life, because I think that's really what the world needs and what I need to be writing. A few questions here, but one of them is about humor. In Rivka, you wrote, my mother has always said the most tragic of disasters are those that cause laughter. What do you think she meant by that? Yeah, it's, I don't know if, I mean, it's my mom, that's my mom saying, but I don't know if it's like probably a proverb that I first heard from my mom, but it's like the most evil of atrocity is what makes you laugh. And it can be, you know, it's open for interpretation. You should be, you should be aware of one, one school of thought would say you should be a weary of the things that make you laugh, but another school of thought would say this is a commentary on like our natural reactions to tragedies, right? In like 2012, 2011, something like this, we had like a protest. And after the protests, all of the women of the neighborhood were sitting down under the the victory of our neighborhood, which they always do. And, you know, a bunch of soldiers, maybe 40 soldiers started marching down the street and everybody dispersed and hid in their homes. But my aunt was now passed away. My aunt refused to go home. She wanted to gather her teacups because she really cared about her teacups. So I was begging her to go inside and she refused, she was getting her teacups. So a soldier, a soldier, you know, grabbed me and squeezed me between his baton and an electricity pole. And it was very excruciatingly painful and traumatizing for me as a child. But it was, it's also like a funny memory in a way, despite the pain, despite the the trauma that came with it. It was, it's, there's still something funny about it. The absurdity of it. Yeah. And it's like, it's dignifying to find humor in these kinds of things. It makes you realize you are not so weak, you are not so powerless. Another thing is, you know, my same aunt who was like, super obsessed with clandestine would, you know, insist on not going to sleep before washing the dishes. And I would always tease her and say, what, you're just gonna like, you're gonna give them the house clean, like you can leave it dirty, so they have to clean it up. And these little things, although like incredibly, you know, absurd and telling of a harrowing reality that our family and many in the neighborhood we're living are also the coping mechanisms that we were using to, to deal with our everyday reality. And so much in the public framing of Palestinians, Vietnamese media and novels and diplomacy and so on and so forth, is that of the powerless victim, is that of the person who only weeps, you know, like Israeli propagandists, for example, will like show pictures on Twitter of like a house in Raze. And they'll be like, look, this house has windows, like they're talking about their BCs, but they have a nice, they have a balcony on their house. What are you talking about? Like, you know, or like they'll show a video of a supermarket in Raze and they'll be like, how come they're talking about a blockade when they have a supermarket and blah, blah, blah, as though, you know, the ceiling has been so lowered that we can't even afford joy anymore. Or, you know, a little supermarket in the neighborhood. So as a poet, as a writer, I've written a book, a poetry, but not working on a new book. What can

you say about your process of crafting words? I think people listening to this can hear that there's a poetry the way you speak in English. So somebody that cares about the craftsmanship of words in both English and Arabic, what can you say about your process?

It's a lot more neat than like this conversation. It's like I am obsessed with sentences and it takes me a long time to like finish a piece of writing. I am a perfectionist.

Do you edit a lot?

I edit all the time and I like can't move on from one sentence until it's perfect. But I will say my other retro friends here in New York do not face is how easily disrupted my writing is by other news. I'll pitch a story to my editor about something, for example, and then as I'm writing it, 20 minutes in, some kid was shot and killed by the Israeli military. So I have to say something about it. And then 30 minutes later, as I'm writing it, there's news about a home demolition in Silvan. And there is this relentless onslaught of news that prevents us and the presence of the ability to analyze, to frame, to think, to conceptualize, to write beyond the current affairs. We're stuck in the relentlessness of the occupation that a lot of the time I worry the things I'm writing are always in reaction to a crime that took place, to a bombing that took place and so on and so forth. And I think that's unfortunately true for so many Palestinian writers. So, you know, I would say isolation and like stepping away from the news is very important to do, but I don't do it. Okay, so the struggle to find the timeless message in it is an ongoing struggle for you. I mean, there is the timeless, you know, it's not even timelessness, it's timeliness. I think what you write is always timely because the occupation is ongoing. But the struggle is, you know, moving beyond the news and tackling more nuances.

Because in Arabic, I can. In Arabic, I can

philosophize. I can talk about violence and I can talk about my complicated relationship with violence or like my complicated, I can complicate and nuance and give things nuance.

But in English, people still do not believe we are under occupation, even though it is an internationally recognized fact that is broadcasted 24 seven through the world's most watched screens. So we're stuck in like a practice of providing facts and figure as in actually this happened and this person did this and according to international law and blah, blah, blah. So we're stuck in this because the basic truths about our own existence are denied that we don't even have the luxury of, you know, evolving our writing beyond it or at least evolving my writing beyond it. And this is what I'm trying to do with this notebook.

That's fascinating that in English, your brain is more inclined to go towards activism or as in Arabic, you have the luxury to be more a philosopher.

I wouldn't say activism. I would say journalism. Just making sure, you know, like disrupting the flow of the sentence to insert a statistic or insert a historical fact that should be implied and should be a household name, but it's not, you know, I can't just say the nakba. I have to say the nakba, the 1948 total near total destruction of fasting in society at the hands of Zionist militias that later formed the Israeli military that now terrorizes us today. And there's like three tier legal system, blah, blah, blah. I can't just say the nakba. I have to give all of these explanations. And that's, that's heartbreaking. And people ought to do better.

People are ought to, you know, do better. This is not,

it's not, it's not what my literature should be limited to. It's not what anybody's literature should be limited to. It's the job of, it's the job of, you know, news reporters to report the news, but a lot of the time they use loaded language, they use passive voice, they off-escape facts,

and it's on the shoulders of us, the heavy carrying.

Would you say the depressing in the United States does a good or poor job of covering Israel and Palestine? Terrible job, horrible job, horrendous job. They don't do their job, whatsoever. What are the biggest failings? Not mentioning that a town is occupied when you're reporting about an occupied town. Not mentioning that a settlement is illegal or a settler is illegally present in a Palestinian village when you're reporting on them. Only quoting Israeli officials and only quoting Israeli positions and police officers and framing your entire analysis with Israeli officials and only interviewing Palestinians when they have been brutalized and victimized physically. Yeah, those are some of the issues. There is plenty. And then like saying things, you know, like Israel will bomb a hospital in Gaza and the press will say like Hamas Run Hospital and this negative association with Hamas will remove any sympathy from the reader towards the victims of this hospital bombing. A lot of things and a lot of them are sinister. I have many friends, many journalists friends, and I've seen many journalists online speak about their experiences when talking about Palestine, the censorship that goes on into it. And you have many journalists friends, some at the New York Times, some, they used to be at the Washington Post who tell me the kinds of battles they had to do. They had to go through with their editors to let them even utter the word Palestine. And not even in like news pieces, like pieces about, let's say a Palestinian artist or a Palestinian chef or whatever. You know, there's lots of, there's a lot that happens behind the scene that is not reported on because when it comes to Palestine, the rules and the laws of journalism are bendable. You know, passive voice is king, emitting facts is acceptable, anything goes. So you personally, just psychologically, what have been the lowest points in your life, the darkest points? A recent study came out and said that 52 percent of Palestinians have depression. I would argue that the number is much, much, much higher. I think it would be absurd for someone to live under the conditions we live under and not contemplate many things, many things, not just suicide, but many, many, many things. And if, and if people were to put themselves in our shoes for just one day, they would understand where all of the rage and all the resistance is coming from. It's not an easy life. So where do you find the strength? I'm surrounded by good people and I'm, I, I'm surrounded by good people and I don't even think of it as a strength. I think of this as my obligation. It just feels like the thing I have to do. It's not, I don't need inspiration. I don't need strength. I don't need, it's, it's just my obligation. It's just, there is a great travesty taking place in the world. And I and few others have been put in a place where we're able to talk about it to a few more people. And it's just my obligation. I have to do it. What gives you hope about the future of Palestine? What gives me hope about what the future of Palestine is taking a look at history and understanding that across history, there has not been an injustice that lingered endlessly. You know, everything comes to an end. It's not necessarily, there's not necessarily like a perfect resolution for everything, but nothing, nothing continues in its, in the form that it started in, in the occupation and colonialism and Palestine and Zionism. All of these things are not at all sustainable whatsoever. So taking a look at history, you know, a lot of, a lot of what I'm saying today and what I have said in your podcast, many people would have, would be, you know, pearl clutching, hearing me say what I say. But I always try to remind myself that during Jim Crow, during slavery, during the Holocaust, during the occupation of Algeria, during any point of colonialism in the African continent,

people did not possess the moral clarity they possess today when they talk about these things. And all of these things were contested and controversial and in many, many, many cases legal. And today they are deplorable, condemnable, and people say never again, and they don't remember them. So that's what gives me hope is believing in the, you know, believing in the inevitability of justice.

What do you love most about Palestine? What are like maybe little things that you remember from your childhood, from your life there in each of Jerusalem and elsewhere, that you just brings a smile to your face?

I think just the unabashedness of Palestinians, where people who are told, and at some point were told by the large majority of the world that we should shrink ourselves, that we should be ashamed of who we are, that we are monsters, that we are terrorists, that we are blah, blah, blah. And Palestinian people don't really give a shit, you know, they're continuing to live as they do, they continue to resist, they continue to write, they continue to do all that they do, and they love that the most, and they love our ability to laugh more than anything else. One thing is that's misunderstood in American culture, about Palestinian culture, or just Western culture in general, is like martyrdom culture.

A lot of the time people will broadcast images of Palestinian women cheering when their sons have been killed by the Israeli forces and they will say, you know, these people glorify death and these people are eager to like have sex with the 70 virgins in heaven and so on and so forth, but that's not the case. The whole idea of the occupation, when they are killing our children, the whole idea is that they're trying to break our spirits. So these mothers whose hearts are broken, who are anguished, who are, you know, so in so much pain, when they are cheering, they are not celebrating, they're not cheering, they are letting the occupier know that you have not broken my spirit, I have not yet been defeated. And I think that is beautiful. It's the same thing with our prison culture, you know, Palestinians are fascinating in the sense that Palestinians go to prison and they study and they come out with degrees, they can find ways to participate in civil society, they can even smuggle, you know, sperm from prison to give a life outside of it, because they understand in their philosophy of prisons, they understand that these structures, these buildings were built to break your spirits. So what do you do? You allow it, you don't allow it to break your spirits. You're resistant, you continue to hold on to life, you continue to hold on to your love of life, you continue to hold on to your love of freedom, and you come out of prison and you're celebrated by your community.

And the prison has not broken your spirit. So all of these structures and system that is the Zionist movement has put into place, be it the shoot to kill policies or the prisons or the demolishing our homes that were meant to kill our spirits, they don't. You demolish the home in Jerusalem and the people say, don't worry, we'll build another and you demolish and we'll build another. That's what I admire most about the Palestinian people. It's this resilience.

And you know, people love to say resilience, but I think it's stubbornness. I think we're such a stubborn people and I think that's great. Well, Mohamed, thank you for being a man who exemplifies this unbreakable spirit. Thank you for the words you've written, the words you've spoken and thank you for talking today. This is an honor and this is a thank you for educating me. Thank you so much. Thanks for listening to this conversation with Mohamed El-Kurd. To support this podcast, please check out our sponsors in the description. And now let me leave you with some words from Nelson Mandela. It always seems impossible until it's done.

Thank you for listening and hope to see you next time.