

# **EXHIBIT 6**

# STEVEN SALAITA /// LANGUAGES OF COLONIALISM AND RESISTANCE IN PALESTINE



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Episode 148

This conversation between [Shivangi Mariam Raj](#) and [Steven Salaita](#) reflects over Palestine by examining how settler colonial logics are coded within language — ranging from the limits of human rights framework to conditional solidarities, from visual grammars of sanitized victimhood to academic censorship, and more. We also discuss the defiant vocabulary of resistance, as embodied by Palestinian armed rebels, prisoners, and scholars.

Steven Salaita is a Palestinian scholar and public speaker based in the U.S. He has previously taught at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater and Virginia Tech. He is the author of several books, including “Anti-Arab Racism in the USA: Where it Comes From and What it Means for Politics Today” (Pluto Press, 2006), “Holy Land in Transit: Colonialism and the Quest for Canaan” (Syracuse University Press, 2006), “Arab American Literary Fictions, Cultures, and Politics” (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), “The Uncultured Wars: Arabs, Muslims and the Poverty of Liberal Thought – New Essays” (Zed Books, 2008), “Modern Arab American Fiction: A Reader’s Guide” (Syracuse University Press, 2011), “Israel’s Dead Soul” (Temple University Press, 2011), “Uncivil Rites: Palestine and the Limits of Academic Freedom” (Haymarket Books, 2015), “Inter/Nationalism: Decolonizing Native America and Palestine” (University of Minnesota Press, 2016), and “We Could Be Free: Palestine in the Revolutionary Imagination” (Haymarket Books, 2019), among others.

**EPISODE TRANSCRIPT ///**

**Shivangi Mariam Raj:** Hello and salem, I'm Shivangi Mariam Raj for this episode of The Funambulist podcast. I'm honored and delighted to have with me a special guest, whose writings many of us are familiar with and seek inspiration from. I'm joined by Steven Salaita, who is a Palestinian scholar and public speaker based in the US. He has previously taught at University of Wisconsin Whitewater and Virginia Tech. Stephen is the author of several books, including "Anti-Arab Racism in the USA," "The Holy Land in Transit," "The Uncultured Wars," "Israel's Dead Soul," and others. Our conversation today will attempt to reflect over the Palestinian struggle for liberation by analyzing how language is used as a weapon for colonization. We will talk about the limits of human rights framework, conditional solidarities, sanitized victimhood, and more. Hello, Steven, thank you so much for being here today.

**Steven Salaita:** Hello, thank you for having me.

**SMR:** I will dive right into visual language first. With the Israeli attacks against Palestinians in May last year, all our social media streams were saturated with photographs that pulled us in with their disturbing degrees of intensity. And these photographs were either a portrait of a gutted Palestinian house, wailing wives or terrified mothers, or the signaled hope—as was the case with the photograph of two children in Gaza, if you remember, who had rescued a fish from the rubble. And what struck me the most was the absence of photographs of Palestinian resistance: of men who were fighting the occupation forces. What informs this absence?

**SS:** That's a really good question and a really sharp observation you've made about the nature of the photographs, and you know what things get circulated. And so with social media there's you know, there's an implicit politics behind the kinds of choices that people make, especially the influencers who put the photographs up and ensure that they receive a wide circulation. In general, the absence of photographs of Palestinian resistance is pretty deeply informed by an absence of serious conversation around Palestinian resistance in general, in Western spaces or spaces of the Global North, whatever you want to call it. And so the content of the photographs reflects, at least in this case, the strictures of the discourse, and what even on the left will be considered an acceptable politics. And we don't discuss Palestinian resistance, very specifically, in the West, even in the western left that it's a taboo topic, in part because I think that people are scared for their careers, they're scared of getting in trouble. But also, they don't engage Palestinian resistance in a concrete way, the way that we might see certainly in Palestine, but in other areas of the Arab and the broader Islamic world, the Palestinian

resistance is something that kind of puts you in a space of disrepute in the West, particularly online. And so a lot of people tend to want to avoid it. And also there's, you know, an element of latent Islamophobia—sometimes it's explicit—that that informs a reluctance to share images of the resistance sometimes you see you know, the, the green headbands and armbands, right with the Quranic script on it, and people don't want to think of Palestine as rooted in this kind of imagery, rooted in in this set of hopes. And in this kind of vision for the future. They kind of want to sanitize it according to what they want Palestinian resistance to look like, right, a kind of liberal democracy framework or rights framework, that accounts for a lot of it. And also, I think there's a simple matter of algorithm on social media that images of the resistance are much less likely to circulate and have a higher likelihood of being censored.

**SMR:** And it makes me wonder if these photographs also direct the viewer to accept some Palestinians as being human, being innocent, unsuspecting victims, while relegating others to the category of 'stubborn savage,' a dangerous jihadi who must be eliminated, who can never be moaned?

**SS:** Probably, I don't know to what degree it happens unconsciously, or versus whether it happens explicitly. But in terms of outcome, I think it's exactly as you describe that they want to create a context and a narrative of Palestine that is suitable to the Western eye and for the Palestinians to become human, that's always been a struggle, I'm going to speak specifically of the United States where I was born and raised. So the effort to force Palestinians into the category of human has always required a certain amount of whitewashing, and even then, it's been a tremendously difficult struggle, and it continues to be a struggle. So once you have spaces in the American left, where it's assumed, let's say that Palestinians are, in fact human, well, then we have to question, we have to grapple with the question of well, in your mind, what kind of human are they and what kind of human do you want them to be? And it's that latter question, I think that gets us into some of the troubles that you point to, you know, that binary between, you know, the innocent, unsuspecting victim and the stubborn savage or the dangerous jihadi, that there's, I think, a moral component to the American gaze that wants the Palestinian to exist in a kind of pivotal state in a in a state of perpetual innocence. And this takes away of course, from the agency of Palestinian resistance, and it again, puts us into this framework where the American audience is sort of inventing the identity or even the category of the Palestinian according to the needs and desires of the American audience, rather than trying to grapple with or you know, certainly not to comprehend what it, how it is that the Palestinian might exist in his or her own context. And that context, the Palestinian context is a lot more complicated and sometimes a lot sloppier and sometimes a lot less friendly to, you know, to the American audience saying a lot of people want are willing to recognize.

**SMR:** This reminds me of the statement released by Amnesty International, which not only soft soaps the liberal sentiment by referring to Israeli war crimes and a mammoth structure of settler colonialism with the term apartheid, but also defines the entire Palestinian resistance, using the rhetoric of human rights and international law. What are the implications of such a coding, particularly from the perspective of global solidarity for Palestine?

**SS:** That's a really fantastic and interesting question. And I'm chuckling because as soon as I heard the term Amnesty International, a bunch of alarm bells went off in my head, and I'm starting to worry that I'm going to start ranting and raving for you know, for the next little while, you're gonna have a lot of very strong feelings about the Amnesty International report. And, you know, for the benefit of our listeners, you know, for if for some reason, they didn't hear about it, Amnesty put out a report, what was it about two weeks ago, I think, somewhere around there recently, within the past month, you know, accusing Israel of practicing apartheid. And, of course, this, you know, this, this brought tons of demonstration from Israel supporters from liberal Zionists, and a huge debate ensued, as it always does. Let me start by saying, and this happened before my time, but you know, back about, you know, 50 years ago, when there was an effort in the UN to designate Zionism as a form of racism. And this is something that that happened again, about 20 years ago, the Durban conference in South Africa, I can't remember the year exactly. Well, that was a debate that led to a similar sort of outcry from Israel supporters on both the left and the right. But I would argue that the Zionism racism debate is more meaningful than the question of whether Israel is an apartheid or not, I think the question of Israel's racial composition and the racialization inherent to Zionist ideology and practice, really get at some of the fundamental problems of Israeli colonization, in a sharper way than discussion of apartheid does. That apartheid also harkens us to, you know, to the South African context as well.

Anyway I guess what I'm trying to say is that, whereas the debates at an international level over whether Zionism constitutes racism, I think we were dealing at the very least with a serious question, and I don't feel that way, with the Amnesty International report. I was, I didn't complain about it online, I didn't think that it was necessarily a useful thing to do, or maybe even the time to do it. Because, you know, the report, I guess you could say, hypothetically, is pushing opinion away from Israel and in favor of the Palestinians. I don't know if you can empirically measure that or not but that was my rationale. It might have been a poor rationale, but it was just a discourse I didn't feel like jumping into and one of the reasons that I didn't want to jump into is because I didn't think that there was too much at stake. But you okay, what, okay, we're gonna call Israel an apartheid state or not, and what changes with that acknowledgement in our fundamental understanding of the situation of Palestinians? What does that tell us about Palestinian

culture and society and resistance? What does that tell us about the Palestinian future? It really doesn't tell us much at all. So we end up with a lot of semantic squabbles that exist, as you say, in a framework of human rights and international law.

And I want to talk just for a second, as you've asked me to, about maybe some of the problems or limitations with that framework or with that approach or point of view, whatever you want to call it. The Human Rights Framework, which Amnesty International embodies, is limited in lots of ways. It does not really cohere to the nature and to the qualities of Palestinian resistance as it exists in Palestine and in surrounding countries. But let's look at it solely in a Western framework. Human rights do not, especially as the Amnesty report made clear, it doesn't address questions of class, right. And class is a cardinal aspect of settler colonization, which of course, Zionism is a form of. It doesn't address most importantly, the national question. And for Palestine and Palestinians, the national question is that the very center of our political identity and when I say national question, again, for the benefit of our listeners, many of whom probably know about the national question much better than I do, it's, you know, kind of a concept that comes out of it starts with Marx, but it really gained steam in decolonial literature in theory with Frantz Fanon, and he was discussing the national question largely in the context of Algeria. But the national question for Palestinians is the question it's a question of the future. It's a question of decolonization. It's a question of restoring what has been taken from us and thinking through the possibilities of having not only political rights restored, but having an economic destiny restored in the context of the restoration of an actual nation, right, the Palestinian nation. The nation was colonized, its population was dispersed. And so the national question becomes sort of the central issue in terms of how Palestinian society can survive, and it could survive by creating its own economy by creating its own foreign policy, by first and foremost, expunging the colonizer and creating a political context in which Palestinians are free to make their own decisions and control their own destiny. So that's the that's the national question, you know, in part, for Palestine. And so human rights will not address class and it will not address the national question. It also doesn't address questions of religion, and it doesn't really address questions of, of civic society. What the human rights question your framework does do is it sort of slaps the wrist of the colonizer in ways that the colonizer is well structured to withstand, alright.

So the embassy report comes out, people hem and haw for a few days, then they forget about it. And the new cycle moves on to the next issue, and what has happened to Israel, nothing. It continues doing what it's always done, which is to steal from Palestinians, which is to kill Palestinians, which is to appropriate land from Palestinians, so forth and so on. It's building settlements—it's settling people from the Ukraine right now as we speak. So nothing changed. I'm not putting it on amnesty or any other rights

organization to liberate Palestine. But for people who are interested or serious about liberating Palestine, then we have to think beyond these frameworks that might satisfy your middle of the road Western progressive. And I would also point out that that Amnesty International made it very clear that it was not making a judgment or moral judgment, or a moral evaluation about the composition of Israel's occupation. It was just stating a fact. It had no policy advice, nothing. And so well, that's what a human rights framework is going to get you, you know, the idea that that, you know, you should take your boot off the Palestinians' neck, maybe, right, and maybe, you know, restore some rights to this population that has long been oppressed.

Well, okay, well, we have to do a lot more, we have to think a lot harder. And we have to think a lot more intensely about what the what the possibilities of liberation are in context of the national question in the context of class, in context of the racial paradigms that Zionism has imposed on Jews and Palestinians in that strip of land between the river and the sea. We also have to recognize that so called 48 Palestinians, the Palestinians citizens of Israel, the ones inside the green line are also subject to you know what Amnesty deemed apartheid. But the report was focused on the so-called occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. All of these—I'm rambling, and I apologize. And I thank your readers, your listeners, for their patience and listening to me. I guess if I could sum it up as quickly as possible, I would say that human rights are important. Human rights, maybe with an enforcement mechanism, have the ability to make people's lives a little bit easier. But human rights don't really lead us to the question of liberation. And maybe some of the more difficult questions that an emphasis on liberation would raise—an emphasis on liberation would require.

**SMR:** And what about the traditional leftist ecosystem, which is often seen hailing these kinds of tokens, from NGOs, social media influencers or their favorite electoral candidates. Does such a narrative allow them to dictate to Palestinians, to indigenous peoples, and to black people, what resistance should sound and behave like?

**SS:** They do... it's a serious problem. And I'm trying to think of it outside of the context of social media, but when you talk about a traditional leftist ecosystem, I would kind of define it now not only as sort of the formations that exist on Twitter, and Facebook and Instagram and whatever, but also the kind of media that we have available to us among the you know, the self-identified left. You know, in North America and Western Europe, and North America, leftism is really dominated by, you know, Democratic Socialist media or social democratic media is, as I call it, soc dem media. And in those contexts, electoralism holds a ton of sway. I've been a detractor of electoralism for a long time, and it never fails to get me in a lot of trouble with people, you know. If you reject both the logic and the practice of electoralism you are really in for you know, a lot of

browbeating from so called Marxists or, you know, socialists or whatever and in the United States, it's sacrosanct to the American imagination, and import because it's tied into the very philosophical foundation of US exceptionalism, which of course, is tied into the tradition of us settler colonization, which is ongoing today. Though, I don't think that—and here, I'm not trying to sound as flippant as I'm going to sound—but I don't think that a lot of people in the North American left are really equipped with the language and the theory and the framework to understand a lot of the demands that Palestinians and indigenous peoples and black people are making. It sounds very foreign to them. When, for example, and here, I'm getting into the territory that has gotten me into so much trouble before with the Social Democratic cadre that that dominates online media. You have somebody like Jamal Bowman, okay. There was a huge debate recently about Jamal. He's a congressman in southern New York and his district includes, you know, parts of northern Manhattan and the Bronx and Westchester County. So it's an urban and suburban district, the diverse district, you know, he's a, he's a, he's a DSA guy. He's a member of that organization, the biggest so-called leftist organization in the United States. It's really, really sort of exploded with Bernie Sanders' candidacy in 2015. Well, Bowman, you know, he broke the BDS the boycott, divestment, sanctions picket line, he visited Israel, he did a bunch of J streets. He did all kinds of stuff that any serious anti-Zionist would find unacceptable. And there was this huge debate about whether to expel him from the DSA or not, and he ended up not getting expelled, but I didn't have any real opinion on whether he should get expelled from the DSA or not, because that's not of interest to me.

I'm not a member of the organization and frankly, I don't really care who they expel or who they don't expel. That's really none of my business. And I don't think that, although there are a lot of people doing really fantastic work, struggling really hard, people who I admire, and I'm deeply proud to consider friends and comrades, I don't know that it's not a waste of time trying to get organizations, you know, essentially liberal organizations like the DSA to rid itself of the Zionism that has been there from the beginning. So having said all of that, what I kept seeing again, in the debates is this idea that the Palestinians who refuse to accommodate the logic of electoralism, were barbaric, Savage, immature wreckers. And this is common stuff. Anytime a Palestinian or an anti-Zionist in general says, no, we cannot accommodate Zionism for the logic of somebody's political career in the United States, or for the logic of tenure, or for the logic of anything that benefits somebody other than Palestinians. And then you immediately get sort of cast out into this, this role of, you know, the screaming barbarian crawling around on your belly, full up of your own purity. And it's extraordinarily frustrating. Because if you go to certainly if you go to Palestine, if you go to the various places of the Global South, you don't have this problem. Because a lot of the people there, especially the people, you know, who are educated politically, I don't



mean educated, formerly, just educated politically, who have spent time on the street and know how shit works. They understand that your opposition to the oppressor to the colonizer has to be absolute. You don't go around making accommodations to it, because they're going to take that accommodation and they're going to flay you with it. They're going to take that accommodation and use it as a stick. And they're going to continue to beat you over the head with it that your opposition to oppression has to be firm. You don't go around making compromises with your own life with your own ability to live with your own future. You don't do those sorts of things. So the logic among so much of the NGO, social media influencer leftist ecosystem is that we need to seek people who will then grant power to us. And it's never worked that way. And it's always bothered me that they call you know, people of my ilk, people who refuse to sort of play that game, unrealistic. Because thinking that you can seek people in the US Congress, right, and then get something out of them, what you need is the most unrealistic position of all, there's not an iota of evidence that that position has ever helped a single Palestinian anywhere in the world, right. That you cannot point to anything in US electoralism, that has provided the Palestinian people with a single bit of material profit, nothing. And so what I would encourage people to do—and the same thing is true, by the way, sorry, with black liberation, the same thing is true with indigenous liberation in the Western Hemisphere, and globally too... That people are stuck on the idea of America redeeming itself and becoming what it is actually promised to be without recognition that that the polity itself came into existence based on the dispossession and based on the enslavement of these populations. People need to switch around the, you know, the, their, you know, the, the foundation, I guess of their logic and start thinking about issues in terms of what it means for the people that we're purporting to represent sticking with Palestinians, when the NGO tells us, you know, "go vote for Bernie Sanders," you know, he's going to take care of it for you, or, you know, are the leftist influencers, the only, I'm gonna repeat the only people that this approach has ever benefited are the social media influencers and the NGOs and the weak ass political parties themselves. It has never done anything for Palestinians, for black people, for Native Americans or any other community that lives under the oppressor's boot. In the end, we need to look at an issue from the point of view of the oppressed, and then work our logic outward from that. And what I see too often in these media environments you bring up is a desire to force the colonized are to force the oppressed into a paradigm, into a politic that accounts for their sorry condition to begin with.

**SMR:** Steven, your response takes me to your essay, 'Architectures of Delusion', where you talk about the courageous defiance of Mahmoud Abdullah Ardah, Mohammad Qassem Ardah, Zakaria Zubeidi, Yaqoub Mahmoud Qadri, Ayham Nayef Qamamji, and Monadel Yaqoub Nafeat in reclaiming their freedom from the Gilboa prison. I was specifically drawn towards your articulation of law and lawlessness in the context of

Zionism's fragile psyche, parts of which you hinted at just now. Would you like to elaborate on that?

**SS:** I would be happy to and, you know, be, you know, blessings be upon the prisoners you mentioned. They suffered tremendously for the greater part of their lives, and they've given so many people around the world inspiration, and it was just heartbreaking to, you know, to see them end up back in prison to stop a horrible, horrible thing. Well, they I'm trying to think of a way to do honor to, with my words to the courageous people who have, you know, who have resisted and have been put into prison or otherwise punished, because of the resistance because of their bravery because of their unwillingness to lie down and let the occupier do what the occupier wants. I think that with the Palestinian there's almost a sense that suffering is their lot in life, and that a lot of the audience in in the West is content for the Palestinian to kind of exist in this symbology of suffering. You know, the sad Palestinian on hunger strike, or the sad Palestinian being arrested or the sad Palestinian sitting in prison. And I would really like to see more effort made to show the Palestinian in conditions of joy and in conditions of freedom. This is not that the boundaries of life aren't dictated by the occupier.

When the men escaped from the you know, the brutal Gilboa prison, they sort of showed us a kind of, it was the perfect, I think it was the perfect symbolization of what the national struggle looks like for Palestinians. That the occupier cannot build a structure that will forever enclose the native, that you're never going to build a prison like that I'm gonna sit in in quietly and accept as natural or as eternal. And so a lot of it when you see though, you saw the hole in the ground, right, the famous tiny hole that the prisoners climbed out of, and there were a lot of pictures of befuddled, you know, Israeli policemen and soldiers sort of staring at the hole thinking what the hell like what just happened and it was a remarkable moment, because that hole was something of a, you know, an intervention into a landscape, into an ecosystem, and it wasn't supposed to be there. And that's how I've always thought of that prison break as something that disrupts the colonizer sense of time and place that interrupts the colonizers sense of order. And I love the way that the prisoners ended up sort of turning the landscape onto its head, that they were literally underground, and they crawled out of the ground, like plants like living beings and they managed to, you know, sort of escape disappear into the night, almost as if they were never there to begin with. And it really produces so many wonderful opportunities, not only for us to, to admire their courage and their ingenuity and their defiance, but also to try to apply that courage and ingenuity and defiance on to our political analysis and try to think about what Palestine means in these conditions of resistance to think about what Palestine means in light of what these prisoners accomplished, rather than thinking about it in terms of you know what it

means for the logic of the, you know, the Western left ecosystem or the, you know, the NGO environment that they, in a sense, they gave us a gift and gave us an opportunity also, to change the landscape, to make interventions to dig holes in the normal barriers and also in a way to, you know, to abscond into the night and then try to put ourselves together in a different world in a different environment.

**SMR:** I'm trying to think how this is contrasted with the dominant grammar of photographs of Palestinian prisoners. And I am thinking specifically about Ghadanfar Abu Atwan and Hisham Abu Hawwash among hundreds of others whose emaciated bodies, distressed loved ones and faint blackouts demanding the release... they keep on flooding our social media streams. What do these photographs do to the agency of these men? Do they erase their contribution to the vocabulary of resistance? Because being a prisoner is clearly not their primary identity.

**SS:** It's a complicated question because at the most practical level, the hunger strikers I guess, need the view of the camera to connect with an audience and to get a message across at the same time the hunger striker is not only giving up sustenance with the hunger strikers is giving up a deeply held privacy. And so it's a doubly horrible situation for him. I'm pretty uncomfortable looking at the images of emaciated hunger strikers I, you know, I guess some people might call it sharing those pictures and videos a necessary evil, but it's not a process that I prefer to partake in. So I don't share those images. I don't like looking at those images either. And they bother me on a profound level, because there's something there's just something deeply intimate and private about hunger, about a lack of nourishment. And it's something that touches us on a level that's really hard to describe almost on a primal parental level that you want people to be fed. But you also have to understand why they're not eating. I don't think that to the degree that people are going to share those images, they should share them passively. In other words, the images don't stand on their own. And if you've ever listened to an interview with any of those hunger strikers, they don't want them to be shared on their own. They want their act to be understood in context of the national question. They're doing it for national liberation, not for personal gratification. Obviously, they're not doing it for personal gratification. And so we shouldn't treat them as subjected individuals, we should treat them as people who are sacrificing, sacrificing in extremely difficult ways, for the good of the nation itself or for the good of the national struggle, you know, for their fellow prisoners, for their, you know, fellow Palestinians or oppressed people all over the world who are willing to emaciate themselves for something so simple but deeply important as freedom.

What also strikes me about those images is that it feels to me almost, I want to think of the right word, it feels to me almost unethical to consume those photos and videos. It

just does, because their subjects are being consumed already. They're being consumed from the inside, their organs are being eaten by their own bodies, they're being reduced to the flesh in a very explicit way. And so I they've already given up too much of themselves to be made available for the consumption of outsiders. And I really think that that's something that audiences ought to think about when those pictures get passed around. Invoke their names, invoke their names with honor and invoke their names with gratitude, and tell their stories, tell their stories loudly, but also tell their stories in context of why they're willing to do such a difficult thing to themselves, why they're willing to be consumed for a better future for a better outcome, why they're willing to, I guess, go into the void for the sake of the nation. Again, this is part of the national question. And so I don't think there's anything wrong with praising their courage and praising their fortitude, those are absolutely remarkable things. But we can't lose sight of the fact that these are not images for our detached consumption, that in undertaking a hunger strike, the strikers are asking us to do something, right, to produce something sustainable, precisely from what they're depriving their own bodies of. And then I think that that's what the focus needs to be, that we need to that we need to act on our own energy in ways that they've made themselves unavailable to do because otherwise, they're doing it for nothing. They're doing it for nothing. And so I don't want us to look at them as you know, sort of detached, floating signifiers of suffering, I want us to look at them as warriors, who are inspiring us to do what we are capable of doing. And from the prison, they feel like that that's what they're most capable of doing. For those of us on the other side of the prison wall, particularly for those of us in the West, there are all kinds of different options available to us. And it seems like an insult, you know, to the subjects of those circulating images, if we don't do as much as we can, to make sure that this sort of thing becomes unnecessary.

**SMR:** I have also come across conversations which refuse to extend solidarity to Palestine because they call it a Muslim question. And in a similar way in Kashmir's fight for self-determination has also mostly been ignored by the world and dismissed and mocked by Indian leftists because it, too, you know, bears the weight of the Muslim question. So, so, referring to another essay of yours, is Palestine a Muslim question? And what are the consequences of discourses which unequivocally answer no to this question?

**SS:** Yeah, this is I, I could go on, go on for hours, you know, on the question of whether Palestine is a Muslim question. So I wrote about it, I don't know, a few months ago, six months ago, maybe a year ago, I really made a lot of people mad. And I'm not saying that with pride, I'm sensing that with the recognition that I don't want to make them mad all over again because, you know, within our own communities, you know, we have a lot of, of heavy disagreement around certain things and just to provide some context,

I'm you know, I'm not practicing but I'm of Christian background, so I'm not Muslim, and I wasn't raised Muslim, I don't practice Islam. But I do believe that Palestine, just like Kashmir, is a Muslim question or a Muslim issue, if you will. And I really am baffled. why that's such a controversial thing to say, you kind of touched on it, you know, in your, you know, in your question and your framing remarks that it certainly has to do with what's normally called, I guess, Islamophobia. That's a word kind of with its own problems, but you know, there's definitely a reticence to engage with Islam with people who practice the religion or even with people who simply identify with the religion, but let's think of it this way. The demographic questions, you know, the, the demographic studies aren't foolproof, you know, so there's a lot of variation, but more or less, Palestine was historically, you know, about 75 to 78% Muslim. You know, on the eve of Zionism, it was probably about 20% Christian, then you had a Druze population. You know, you had a small population of Jewish Palestinians, Samaritans, there's a high community and was always, it was largely Muslim with a lot of religious minorities with the biggest of those religious minorities being Christians who, of course, have had a long presence in Palestine since the time of Christ.

Well, when you're dealing with a nation or a national community that is at the very least 75% of one religion, then their religion is always central to the national question, whether you want it to be or not, and a lot of Palestinian leftists will make a declaration Palestine is not a Muslim issue; Palestine is an issue of colonization and freedom. And I agree with that. Well, the second part of it anyway. But what these kinds of declarations, in my opinion, foreclose on the possibility maybe of a broader and more inclusive analysis, it shuts down our ideas. What they should say is "I want Palestine to be a secular question of national liberation." But for the great majority of Palestinians themselves it's not. It's a religious question, in addition to a political question. And so this, this sometimes has the element and then sometimes it happens tacitly, or sometimes it happens without the speaker's desire at all, you get the sense that it's people either wanting to appease a western audience with sort of a what they would consider a sanitized version of Palestinian society or Palestinian public opinion, or it's a matter of imposing an idea onto Palestine of what you want Palestinians to be, rather than what they actually are. Now, in Palestine itself I don't know what all of the surveys say, the surveys are unreliable. But of course, there are secularists there, you know, there's the PFLP, which is a secular Marxist Leninist group. You know, the Palestinian Authority has plenty of Christian influence in it, then you also have Hamas and Islamic Jihad and other... And the, you know, you can't go around saying that Hamas is really doesn't represent Palestinians. Well, maybe not all of them, but it represents a significant portion of Palestinians.

And so to me, you know, what people are doing and making these pronouncements about what Palestine is and Palestine isn't, is really deferring very serious questions about national liberation that Palestinians are going to have to confront and answer. They're going to have to answer questions about the condition of civil society in a liberated Palestine, what is the state going to look like, right? What is it going to look like for its religious minorities? What is it going to look like for its atheists? What is it going to look like for its Muslim majority population? And that population is overwhelmingly Muslim at this point. What is it going to look like for the Jews who become part of presumable one state solution? And when we can't, you know, I guess we can keep deferring those questions while Palestine is in a state of occupation and oppression, but sooner or later, we're not gonna confront those questions, and you can't just wave off, you know, the question of religion, the question of Islam. And I think you're doing a disservice to Palestinians and to the national struggle by trying to pretend that Islam is not a serious motivating force for the Palestinian desire to be free and liberated access to Al-Aqsa is an enormous issue in Palestinian society, and among Muslims across the entire world. That's an enormous issue.

And that's the other thing. I know a lot of people want to remove the question of Islam from the question of Palestine, because they are trying to keep out non-Palestinian or maybe even non-Arab Muslims from the discussion, but I think that they belong in the discussion, I do. We've been burned, you know, Palestinians have been burned by a clack of collaborationist, you know, you know, MLI, people, you know, the, you know, the kind, you know, Iranians and Turks and then South Asians and a few Arabs as well, you know, who are going around normalizing with Israel and building nice little careers in the West. So I understand that, but I don't think it's fair to say, to, you know, to Senegalese Muslim, well, you know, you're not Palestinian, Palestine means nothing to you. Well, clearly, Palestine does mean something to him or to her. You know, I think you cannot say to a Kashmiri Palestine means nothing to you, you know, not only are they identifying with Palestine from a religious context, but from a political one as well. It is important to people in Kashmir, it is important to people in Indonesia and in Palestine, or wherever, in Somalia, wherever it is that as a Muslim majority population. And so certainly, we can, and we should welcome people into these national spaces, because these national spaces are not hermetic, these national spaces exist in the framework of interaction with other national spaces and other national questions, you know, and Palestine is always going to be international in that way. I don't know if that makes any sense. I'm kind of ranting and rambling.

But I guess I've always been, even as somebody who is not Muslim, or somebody who doesn't really practice religion, I've always been deeply uncomfortable with the idea that we need to withhold the idea of the nation from religious practitioners and one for

religious practitioners that nation, both as a body and an idea is deeply hugely important, as well it should be, as I said, in my essay, I wish more non Palestinian Muslims would get involved with the Palestinian cause. Right? I think that a lot of them are too quiet about it. Right? That, you know, how can you say it wasn't a beautiful, amazing thing, when, in the late 1970s, when Muhammad Ali, a black American, right, marched in support of Palestinian freedom. That's a beautiful, you know, so what are you saying that Muhammad Ali shouldn't have been saying anything? Because he's not Palestinian? That's absurd. Right. And so but let me also say that and national question is, like a million questions all rolled up in one. So where I can say without hesitation that Palestine absolutely is a Muslim issue or Muslim question? No. So let's say that Palestine is a black question. Right. As long as there has been black resistance in the United States, there's been support for Palestine or at least since the onset of Zionism, right, that, that I would say the question of Palestine has been hugely important to the black radical consciousness or the black political consciousness. So I would say that Palestine is a black issue, also, not to mention the fact that the that a lot of Palestinians identify along that color line, I would say the Palestine is also a Christian question, right? I would say that Palestine is a socialist and a communist question. Also, it can be all of those things at once the nation contains multitudes and we have to find a way to let everybody who feels invested in that nation have their say that you can't make the nation or the national question something hermetic and exclusive because that's never gonna work. Palestine has never been hermetic or exclusive.

And I know this is probably gonna follow up on this, so let me just say, sort of in anticipation, the question of Kashmir, you know, and I feel like I've been delinquent, you know, way more than I should in thinking about and discussing that question. It's something that I identify with profoundly. I've been blessed and honored to know a lot of wonderful Kashmiri colleagues and friends and they've enriched my life and unspeakable ways, I hope that you know, that I've managed to enrich their lives as well, but we, you know, to foreclose support for Kashmir, or Palestine or, you know, any other colonized nation, because you're displeased with what you imagined to be the ethnic or religious characteristics of that nation. I think it verges on unethical, or at the very least, I find it severely distasteful, but in the end, under communism, socialism, any other ism you want, we have to accept people as they are, we can't, as advocates of solidarity demand that everybody conform to our sensibilities before we extend hand to friendship. That that strikes me as a very poor way of doing activism and organizing.

**SMR:** Since we are on the topic of language, what about academic censorship and charges of antisemitism, which are heaped upon Palestinian scholars and professors for transgressing a certain rule of expression? And you too have been targeted by the Zionists, so how do you fight with or within language?

**SS:** I'm, you know, with your permission, I'm going to keep it brief and to the point. How do I and other Palestinian academics continue to fight with our entire chest, without compromise, without apology? You will be called a purist, you'll be called an anti Semite, you'll be called, you know, crude, you'll be called uncivil. But I cannot emphasize this enough, I have so many deficits of knowledge. But the one thing that I do know and that I'm competent to speak about is that you never make concessions to the oppressor. If you're going to get punished, and you might, if you piss off Zionists, it's always a possibility, right, then stare the oppressor in the face, and take whatever punishment is coming. Don't concede, don't start apologizing, if you're going to do it, do it right, do not take up the cause of an oppressed people, and then back away from it, it's much better never to take up the cause at all, it's deeply important to stay in principled solidarity with the people on whose behalf you purport to speak. The Palestinians aren't backing down, nor should we, and I know that that sounds mechanical and all of that, you know, un-nuanced, whatever. But that would be the—whatever wisdom I have, that would be the wisdom that I impart: do not make concessions to the oppressor, because it's never going to be enough, and they will never stop until you are in a state of destitution. And that's me speaking from experience, both as somebody who has suffered the wrath of, you know, angry Zionists and as somebody who has observed it happen over and over again.

**SMR:** It is difficult to pause this conversation right now but thank you so much Steven for being here with me today, I'm touched.

**SS:** I am as well thank you so much for having me.