

Rana Abu Fraiha:

Each generation is actually fixing something from the older generation, so I feel like much more important for me than the political issues is to understand how can I feel shame and be okay with it? How can I meet fear and not really let it control me?

Announcer:

You're listening to The Hum.

Taylah Harris-Mungo:

We're joined here today by Rana Abu Fraiha, a Bedouin Palestinian documentary filmmaker from Israel and also the director of *In Her Footsteps*, which is a beautiful and intimate documentary that takes a look at family, duality, identity, and contradictions for a Bedouin Palestinian family living in Israel. We're also joined by Guy Ben-Aharon, a theater director who splits his time between the US and Israel while also being the founder of *The Jar*, which is a nonprofit arts organization based in Boston that was founded to create experiences where audiences connect with art, positivity, and community.

Gilad Cohen:

This is not one of your lunches together. This is just a one-hour sort of thing. We're not doing a six-hour thing, which is a great segue. Taylah, I'm going to throw it over to you.

Taylah Harris-Mungo:

Thank you for joining us. This is amazing. First question, Guy. You're a theater director who lives in Boston, and, Rana, you're a brilliant filmmaker, and thank you so much for sharing your film with us. What is a six-hour lunch, and how did you guys become such great friends? Was it at one of these lunches?

Guy Ben-Aharon:

Rana and I became friends through another friend who connected us, and I got to see her movie. I saw it with my best friend from high school, and we were both bawling. We were so taken by how incredibly sensitive it is and so deeply intimate. I felt like, "Ooh, I know this person." She was coming to Boston for a screening, and we had drinks or dinner. That was the beginning. But I always say that, with her, you can't make plans for the rest of your day. If she and I will get together at 2:00, I don't make plans for anything else to happen, and when I do, I'm always like, "Why did I make plans? I would just rather sit here and stay here forever."

Rana Abu Fraiha:

My father used to say, "There's five regular minutes and five Bedouin minutes," so-

Gilad Cohen:

We have another interview coming up right after you guys, and what I'm hearing is we should be canceling it right now.

Guy Ben-Aharon:

Schedule it for next week.

Rana Abu Fraiha:

When you find somebody that you can experience the creating ideas and talking about different ideas in a very intense environment and reality, maybe this is something about our five, six-hour talks. Because it's so crazy here in Israel, Palestine, and I feel like all over the world in the last almost two years, but, also, this period of crazy and amazing time is allowing us to really enter a deeper way of thinking, of looking in the world, of talking, of inventing ideas. So I feel maybe this is something that we do together, but this is something I love to do with many, many people, and I find myself also ... Since the movie went out already three and a half years ago, I find specific people that I can chat in this type of way, it doesn't matter, really, if they're people that make art or they study in the academy or they are very, in terms of society, in the lower educational parts of the society, but if we can exchange ideas and learn from each other. So time is not very important.

Taylah Harris-Mungo:

I resonate a lot with that. When those connections are right, you can live in it forever. Both of you grew up in Israel and I imagine had vastly different lived experiences. So, Rana, I want to start with you. You're a Bedouin and Palestinian and grew up in Omer, a town in Southern Israel with a largely Ashkenazi Jewish population. Can you guide us through how this impacted your life at home, and was there ever a feeling of dual identity going on for you? What was that like?

Rana Abu Fraiha:

Yes, especially when I was growing up. It was scary, sometimes frustrating. But now I look back and I really love my life story and I feel like it enriches me. Before I talk about society, I think it started inside my house, my home, my family because my father and my mother are not really from the same exact society. We say the Arab society here in Israel, but we have many, many groups inside, and they are not all the same. So my mother came from kind of an upper class than my father is. My father is a Bedouin. The Bedouin society is considered also inside the Arab society here in Israel. They're considered very uneducated, barbaric, of course, from the Israeli Jewish eye but also inside the Arab society. So I grew up with two type of societies inside of my family, and the gap between them and the tension, we could feel it all the time, but also the choice to live together, to live with all these differences and gaps and different way of looking at life. So I guess this is one part.

When you're a child, you don't think and phrase things with this intellectual way that we do it right now. You just mimic, and you understand stuff. It's not as if I told myself, "Okay, my mom is from this society, my father is from this society," but you understand maybe what side is better in term of society terms. The same thing that happened inside the house also happened outside when I think about the Ashkenazi Jews that were my surroundings. I grew up in kind of a fantasy, that I felt like, on a theoretical level, I grew up in a society that want to accept the other and to live together, coexistence, and many liberal and lefties.

As I grew up, I understood that many of these ideas just stays in the theory and not really in practical and in reality, and I understood that although I felt accepted, I understood that sometimes you don't really ... Especially when you're a child, you don't need somebody to tell you you're supposed to speak Hebrew, for example, or you don't supposed to speak Arabic. You just understand the feeling of your environment and you understand that there is no place for an Arabic in this area, or not only the language, also the culture and the ... I think maybe the most painful thing that happens when we talk about racism or oppression is the racist that you actually raise inside yourself.

I had many years that I was very ashamed of my Bedouin identity, my whole Arab identity but especially Bedouin because they are the ultimate other. So I was ashamed, and I was in a big denial. I didn't want to speak the language. I didn't want to have the cultural events. I didn't want to really get close to my family. As you get older and older, you understand that it was all ... I can't really blame only the society, but I think we grow up to understand all the clues inside the sentence and not really the words that people say to you, and this is what we need to also heal. If we want to heal the society, we need, first and foremost, to look inside and to heal the stuff that we are dealing with inside.

Gilad Cohen:

So many profound things there, Rana, to touch upon, and I'm curious for you, Guy, you grew up in a bit of a different situation. I mean, you grew up in Herzliya. We were joking, on the other side of the train tracks in Herzliya as an Ashkenazi Jew but mostly growing up around a Yemenite and Persian community. I know you left Israel, I believe, when you were nine years old and moved to the US. But I'm curious, as a young person growing up, how do you remember connecting maybe to the Palestinian community around you or even this idea of Palestinians generally?

Guy Ben-Aharon:

When you're eight years old, your sense of political theory, probably not the same as we have now. I grew up in a home that was very, I would say, involved politically. My parents were there at the beginning of Peace Now, at Shalom Achshav. They were very unpopular for protesting against the massacre at Sabra and Shatila in '82. I grew up in a home that spoke about politics since I remember, and I'm the youngest of three. My siblings are 10 and five years older, so I always had to hear a conversation that was probably more meant for older people than for me. With that, my parents were very intentional in choosing the neighborhood they chose to live in, a very working class neighborhood, a neighborhood that was super diverse in terms of who lived on our street, their backgrounds, their educational background, their economic status, and a very different thing happened when we moved in Boston to the most PhDs per capita in the US. It was a complete cognitive dissonance from the neighborhood I grew up with. My parents were some of the only people with a bachelor's degree.

To your question about relationships with Palestinians, first of all, Palestinian wasn't really a word that was used often where I grew up in. Palestinian was on the other side. Those living in Israel were called Israeli Arabs, and until today, I would say most Jews tend to call ... People who may define themselves as Palestinians, they would like for them to define themselves as Arab Israelis, typical in the sense of you go eat hummus somewhere where there's Arab. We went to Tira a lot every month to buy illegal CDs, much cheaper jeans and cheaper clothes, so it was that. I also grew up during a time when there were buses exploding, and it was a fear of having family in Jerusalem. Whatever you grow up with, it's your normal. You don't know anything else. I have the unique experience of anyone who's an immigrant that you suddenly move into an entirely different context and go, "Oh, there's this whole other normal, all these different types of normals."

I know that everybody looked at my family as the people who read Haaretz. It's the left-wing but mainstream media, whereas everybody else in the neighborhood would read Maariv or Yedioth Ahronoth. So my parents were quite different from everyone else in our neighborhood. I was laughing. I told somebody that I recently went to vote in the last elections, and I went to vote in my elementary school, which I hadn't been in since I was in third grade, and I ran into my kindergarten teacher there and I ran into my nanny's husband, who was like family. They went to vote, and they voted for the entirely other side of the rainbow. So I grew up in a neighborhood where ... Netanyahu, as we're speaking today, is leaving the prime ministership seat, and he became prime minister when we were

kids. My best friend growing up grew up in a [inaudible 00:11:14] house. Whenever he would see his grandmother, he would say, "Bibi Amalek, Bibi is king," and he'd get 50 shekel.

All of that to say my parents spoke a lot about politics around the table, they went to a lot of protests. We went to protests as kids, not only around Peace Now but also protesting for educational rights around our neighborhood. But there wasn't a sense of everyday life and everyday friendships. But it was an immigrant neighborhood of different kinds. We had the Russians come in. In '91, my neighborhood suddenly got an influx of folks from the Soviet Union. A little bit later, two years later, a lot of Ethiopian Jews suddenly came to the neighborhood. So it was just a constant mix, very telling that within all of that diversity, Palestinians were not a part of that.

Gilad Cohen:

All of this brings up so many memories, I mean, first, the fact that Bibi is leaving today. It's like as long as I've been alive, there's been two truths: Bibi has been in power in Israel, and the Queen of England has been old. To know that Bibi is leaving today, I personally am rejoicing. I was also born in Israel, and I moved to Canada at a very young age. Rana, listening to you talk about this dual identity, it's something I struggled with as well, not quite Israel enough, not quite Canadian enough, and at the same time having to go through this ongoing and sometimes, at least for me, painful process of really having to unlearn some of the things that I was raised to believe.

For example, and this is a little bit different from you, Guy, I grew up with a very different lived experience from my parents, but this idea of the way that the conference with Israelis and Palestinians was framed, the narrative was very simple. My whole family, they're military. I think they're a bit more conservative. But there was this idea of good guys on one side, defending themselves from the bad guys, and, sadly, I not only believed this very, what I considered to be, binary way of looking at this complicated situation, but I also defended it, and it wasn't until I got older and I began to meet Palestinians and educate myself that I slowly began to unlearn much of what I grew up thinking was true.

So, Rana, in watching your film and in listening to both of you speak about growing up, I want to explore this idea of unlearning with each of you, this idea of unlearning this thing you thought was the truth, and what that process was like.

Rana Abu Fraiha:

I think the stuff that's actually going through my head is maybe unlearning as going back home or remembering who we really are, who I really am, in that sense of unlearn what the society taught me about myself. In this journey, all my life, I feel, but I'm talking about the last few years, I really embraced my Arab Bedouin identity, and I wanted to explore it more. At the same time, I had a lot of anger and a lot of disappointment from my childhood society, which was the Israeli Jewish society, mostly lefties. When I look back, I feel like I had to teach myself to accept, first and foremost, all the identities and the diversity inside of me. Maybe we have to go through those steps of also anger and disappointment and frustration, but then, if I want society to accept all the diversity and not to be afraid from it, I need to, first of all, do it inside myself.

For example, Ashkenazi identity, I know I have it inside also. You can't really grow up and be 20 years in some town and not be affected, or, really, also, it's contagious, all your surroundings, and in a good term also, not really only in a bad way. So I feel like here in Israel we are still in the stage that, at the most, we're afraid from this diversity, but I feel like all this last year, two years, there is something very big that happens, great shift that I feel like all humanity actually is doing courageously. Part of it, I hope, will be to accept this diversity and sometimes also the duality, also, of good and bad. We talked about Bibi. I don't really know if Bibi, quote-unquote, as a symbol is really leaving here because it's not

only Bibi. Many politicians, many parties doing the exact same thing, maybe in different words towards different audiences, but the same thing of celebrating the division, using fear in order to control people, getting people to hate each other and fight with each other.

So I feel like here in Israel, and maybe also all over the world, but here specifically, we can see it in almost every party. I don't know if the spirit of Bibi is really leaving the institution, but it, again, comes back to us. Even in the spiritual way of observing things, what is the role of Bibi in each of our lives? How can we really embrace the duality, the division, sometimes the fear also, or maybe also the ego ... How can we embrace it and accept it and not really only go against it? It's time for us to understand that we can embrace this diversity and also, again, duality, good and bad, and, first of all, inside each one of us, and then we can do it to our closest family and friends and beyond.

Gilad Cohen:

I want to take something you said, Rana, and explore it just a little bit deeper with Guy for a moment. You mentioned this idea of this fear of diversity, and, Guy, we've connected a number of times speaking about Israel and Palestine. We've called it Trauma Land. I'm not even going to take credit. That's your term, Trauma Land. I'm curious for you, under this context of Trauma Land, where do you think this fear of diversity comes from? Is it rooted in this idea of a Trauma Land?

Guy Ben-Aharon:

I want to say that there is deep fear of diversity and, on the surface level, there is deep embrace of diversity. Israel celebrates that it's the home of Jews from everywhere, which is the making of the Israeli salad, as many annoying older people will tell you. So unique, the Israeli salad, which is a complete invention. There wasn't such thing as a Palestinian salad ever before. It was an Israeli one, and it happened when Ethiopians came here and Moroccans came here and Persians and Romanians. It's a contradiction. There's the duality of the truths there. There's the beautiful diversity that exists here and is celebrated whenever you pick up a plate of food. If you think of what I grew up eating, I ate schnitzel, which is from Vienna, with couscous, which is Moroccan. Like, what? Where is this existing together?

When you speak of fear of diversity, I think when you come from so much trauma, there is the fear of seeing somebody else's trauma, like me, third-generation Holocaust survivors, you'll look at Moroccans and go, "What the hell are you complaining about? Our people went through the Holocaust. Did your people go through gas chambers?" Although I say it with tone of irony and laughter, truly, our people went through gas chambers, and their people went through crazy trauma. There's this trauma competition, and I remember ... I have a good friend who's Palestinian from Akka, from Acre, in the north. She used to say that on the Holocaust Memorial Day ... In Israel, there's a siren. It's kind of an amazing thing when you divorce it of its political implications, but there is a siren to commemorate this loss of six million people. She said, "As a Palestinian, I never knew what to do," and she said, "I would run to the bathroom because I didn't know what to do. Do I stay silent? Do I stay in the room? It's not my thing. It's totally imposed on my experience." I laughed and I said, "I totally get you."

On the other hand, our whole thing here is if we're going to imagine a free place where we're all free, we got to recognize each other's traumas, and as I recognize your Nakba, recognize my family in concentration camps and the fact that my mother grew up with only parents. She had no uncles and aunts or grandparents because they were all killed. I think the fear of diversity is ... I don't know if it's the fear of diversity because that sounds like ... You can't say to somebody, "Ooh, diversity," and they go, "Ooh, sounds terrible." I think it's the fact that there's all these people in power at work who, as Rana said, they're just trying ... They're working very hard to keep you separated and tell you that your stories are very different from one another and tell you that your needs are very different from one another.

I think that's the unlearning most people who have trauma have to do. It's, "Because I come from trauma, I got to take care of my own people, I got to take care of myself," as opposed to, "Everybody comes from trauma, everybody's got to take care of each other." People are so extremely fearful coming from whatever trauma they come from to embrace somebody else's hurt and sadness, especially when it's intertwined, especially when it's inflicted on to one another, be it Jews who don't want to recognize the trauma that was inflicted upon Palestinians with the creation of the state of Israel, the Jewish state, be it Palestinians who don't recognize the fact that our peoples have been persecuted for 2000 years. Wherever we were, people were killing us. We need a foundation of a place that might be safe.

I think a lot of the unlearning, for me at least, really, in this last go-round, in my last nine months, I would say, combined nine months of living in Israel again, which I haven't lived in since I was nine, is unlearning all the roadblocks that people put in your mind, all the roadblocks to imagination. I think that's big on learning for me. It's like, "Wait a minute. I'm an imaginative person. I'm a creative person. You can create a new reality." When Rana and I sit for six hours together, capitalism will continue, racism will continue, horrible things will continue, but, for us, for a little six hours, we're going to create this new reality of those things kind of going away. It's trauma that creates a lack of imagination.

When speaking with second-generation Holocaust survivors, the old slogan of the left, which is not even that widely accepted here anymore, "Two states, two peoples. Two states, two people." It's endless. They play it like a tape recorder. You look at them, you go, "Why? Why two states for two peoples," as if, also, there's only two peoples, right? Palestinians are all one type, Israeli Jews are the other type. There's a lack of imagination that we can be happier, more joyful, more fruitful together because that's what you learn, we should be separate. It's as if we're a cancer in each other's bodies. We must be extricated from one another to be healthy again.

Somebody actually texted me, I remember, during a night of the rocket fires about three weeks ago. Texted with someone in the media because I needed to find out something about a village that was put under military control. This guy and I were getting into it, and he goes, "The separateness will create a much better together," and I think of how illogical that sentence is, that we've arrived to a place where we learn that separate is a better together. For me, that's where the fear of trauma comes in, that Trauma Land comes through most when people tune into their fear and think that it's going to be better separate as opposed to tune into their loving selves, to the fact that they know someone. They know their vegetable store owner, they know whoever, whoever they know or don't know, the imagination of the other person in us is the living together. Rana, you can always add something about the trauma. We always talk about trauma together.

Rana Abu Fraiha:

We can always talk about trauma. Very important this time in history, I think, to talk about trauma. I said it to Guy many times in our talks. I feel like we are walking inside our traumas, personal traumas and collective traumas, in the past year or two years now. I believe it's because we need to see, to recognize it, and to finally deal with it, accept it, and move forward. But we are in it right now, and it's very tough. Every time trauma of the collective is going up the surface, which we see here in Israel, for example, the three, four weeks ago that we had this semi-war, it brings back all our traumas that we had before. We are kind of forced to deal with it again. But, at the same time, I feel like every time we see or we recognize, again, a trauma of the collective, immediately, it touches our personal traumas. It creates a situation where we have a traumatic responses.

It's so difficult if somebody's not really in therapy, any type of therapy, or in a journey of dealing with his own traumas. It's very hard to communicate when you have many people who talk with these

trauma responses. So I feel like it's very important to understand the trauma of the collective but even more important to understand ... Everybody should understand and see and recognize his own or her own personal trauma. One thing that is very strong that trauma creates is the sense of victimhood, which actually is very important when the trauma is happening because ... I don't know if important but legitimate. But after a few years, after 20 years, after 30 years, you're not really a victim anymore of the same trauma. It's just something that your body actually kept. And how do we communicate when so many groups here, not only the Arabs and the Jews, many groups inside those big groups, actually see themselves as victims?

This is time that actually screaming out to facing trauma and to therapy and maybe have leaderships that puts this therapy and dealing, again, with love and compassion at the top priority, and I feel like we don't really see it yet here in the institutions in Israel, but maybe we can see it naturally in the top of the pyramid, but on the [foreign language 00:25:59].

Guy Ben-Aharon:

On the actual land.

Rana Abu Fraiha:

Yeah, on reality or maybe from the people. We've been so programmed for so long during the media and politicians, and this is something that with myself I'm trying to unlearn this and to go back home and understand who I am. I know that I am connected, for example, through definitions of Arab, Palestinian, Bedouin, but I no longer identify with it as if it's my only identity. It's very important for me to understand that I can observe everything, I can understand that everything is an experience that I'm here to maybe talk about or tell about to people, and we can understand how to go inside those traumas together. So, yeah, you took me there, Guy.

Guy Ben-Aharon:

Rana, do you mean ... When you say observe or absorb?

Rana Abu Fraiha:

Observe. [foreign language 00:26:55].

Guy Ben-Aharon:

No, I mean, when you say it, the observe/absorb both works. I heard you, and I was like, "Oh, yeah," because as you said, "Of course, I'm part Ashkenazi by now." You absorb all these things from where you grow up as you observe them, and it's so one-dimensional to go, "This is who I am. This is my identities." I think in a North American context, I'll just say this, it's far more boxed up. Everybody wants to announce, "This is my" ... It's like, "Oh my God. Can we have a moment? How are you? Who are you? Your name, what do you like to eat?" Of course, it's institutionalized. When I moved to the US, I was in fourth grade, I barely spoke any English, I had to take a test, and you had to put in your ethnicity. I was so confused. I remember going home, and I remember actually in the class I put in Asian, and my teacher was like, "Asian? Guy, you're not Asian." I was like, "I am Asian. Israel is in Asia." He was like, "No, no, no, you're white," and I was like, "No, I'm Asian." He just left me alone because he knew better not to argue with me.

Yeah, I mean, it's so screwed up, and as tests have gotten even more, now there's Vietnamese-American, Korean-American. Soon, it'll be Hanoi-American. And, of course, all of this stems from the fact that capital-A American in the US does not hold the truth of anybody else who's

hyphenated. But I think the reinforcing of these boxes, that's not very imaginative either, and I know when I was founding The Jar, the organization where I work, with these six other co-founders, we were like, "No boxes, there's to be no announcing of boxes at The Jar," and the freedom that comes from that ... Because when I say I'm Jewish-American, then it's like, "Oh, Jewish-American. That must mean you are ba-ba-ba-ba-ba-ba-ba-ba-ba-ba." I'm like, "How do you know? I don't like bagels."

Rana Abu Fraiha:

I feel like it's important for many people, those definitions, for example, Palestinian. It's something that here in Israel 10, 20 years ago maybe people were afraid to talk about it. Even now, in academies, students are afraid to say, "I'm Palestinian." At the same time, I feel like that it becomes very dangerous, our total identification with those words and definitions. I feel like it's important to understand them but, at the same time, to understand that we are all actually experiencing and feeling the same things. We experience fear and we experience joy and we experience many, many emotion the same way in our human body. All of the stories are very important because people in power actually take those stories and separate us and create those crazy stuff that we see in society, but, again, I feel like we need to remember all the time how much we are similar and not really separated.

Taylah Harris-Mungo:

Thank you so much for taking us through that. There's so much there to think about and a lot that is really globally relevant. I'm wondering, Rana, in your film, there's a point in the film that really struck me. It's a clip of an older video, older home video, with three little girls singing. Through that section, you find out that they're singing the song called Land of Israel. The camera zooms in on the littlest one, and the line being sung is, "Who built it? All of us together." I'm wondering, in the context of everything that is going on in Israel right now, what message does that line send to Arab-Israelis? Who is the us in watching that scene or that home video? It's a family video. Does anything come up for you?

Rana Abu Fraiha:

Wow. Thank you for this question. I have so many stuff to say. I don't know if I phrase it correctly because I've had so many confrontations, I think, with this scene or archive. Maybe I will talk about it with this lens that we use in this talk of maybe collective trauma and personal trauma because, for me, when I understood I'm going to create a movie ... Because I didn't know, I didn't know I'm going to be a director and to have cinema as such a big part of my life. But I had this urge to deal with the situation inside my house and my surroundings. I had to understand many, many stuff and the camera helped me to do it. So when I understood I'm going to make a movie and when I watched all the archives at the same time, I guess, it was three or four days only, the archives that my father had filmed, it was very overwhelming for me.

I had a lot of anger because I felt like, "Okay, you knew," my parents, "you knew that age, that it's going to be so complicated. You saw your daughters coming back home from kindergarten and singing Zionist songs." So from the Palestinian eye, this can raise anger. It can be frustrating. It can be something that it's very hard to watch, Palestinian young children singing Zionist songs. But if I look at the personal trauma or maybe the personal traits that I can see in this scene, we are very young, me and my sisters. We don't really understand what we're singing about. It's just something that we learned in kindergarten. If I don't really even look at the context of Palestine and Israel and I look on my mother in this scene, she's laughing, and, at the same time, she's putting her hands on the face, which is something that we might do when we feel ashamed, when we feel like we don't understand the situation, we don't really know how to react to the situation.

For children, even if, again, we don't really know how to talk about it at young age, we understand that if the situation is very difficult to bear, we might feel ashamed and maybe if we feel ashamed, we will mimic our parents and we laugh. I can talk about all this movie in this type of lens, not really in the political context but the emotional and the stuff we actually inherit from our parents that are much more powerful than the ideology and the theory. Maybe when I worked on the movie, I talked a lot about the political issues, but now I feel like, when I look at the movie, I see much more of the emotional and the way my parents actually react to many of their own traumas and the changing of the reality in our house, in our home. Each generation is actually fixing something from the older generation, so I feel like much more important for me than the political issues is to understand how can I feel shame and be okay with it? How can I meet fear and not really let it control me?

Gilad Cohen:

So, guy, I want to go back to you for a moment, and the reason why is there's a lot of things that are stirring up inside of me just listening to Rana talk about this idea of listening to criticism and sometimes dealing with shame. You're a very outspoken Palestinian human rights advocate. You've been very open about your opinions and on major platforms like NPR. I'm coming at this question myself as an Israeli who's also very pro-Palestinian and generally human human rights. It creates a lot of tension for me in my life when I speak to those things, especially within my Jewish community. So I'm curious for you, as an Israeli-American Jew, does that present tension to you in your life, and if so, how does that manifest itself? Because it is connected in many ways to criticism and shame, like Rana was saying.

Guy Ben-Aharon:

You know, I kind of want to shed this idea of pro-Palestinian or pro-Israeli. I don't like these terms. I'm not pro-Palestinian because I don't like their flag just as much as I don't like the Israeli flag. I don't like flags. I totally hear the question, but I also just want to recognize the issue with the question, which is pro-this. I'm pro-people. I like people. When a lot of people keep laughing, they're saying, "Guy, you've become so extreme," I'm like, "I'm so extremely for humans." I joke back to them, and then they laugh. But, of course, you have to show them how ridiculous they're being. "Oh my God, so pro-this." Like, "What are you talking about?" I just like the idea that everybody shit, eat, have sex, and sleep well. I think these are four things we all want to do and do them well. That's what I'm pro.

Joking aside, of course, lots of tensions, as you and I have talked about a lot, tensions in the most immediate circle, our families, our loved ones and friends. Creating this new reality of togetherness is very threatening to people on a very basic level. So when I have dinner parties and they're very lots of different types of people, it can be seen as threatening to some and uncomfortable some, and especially at such a tense moment. There's a heavy price to pay for being someone who's imaginative in the world because the world and the powers that be want to squash that so that you can keep the status quo going, and I want to make sure that the underlying and most important thing to hear is that it's the people in power. I don't believe anyone wakes up and goes, "Boy, I really hate these types of people." It's a psychotic person. Most people don't wake up like that. We live under this notion that we live in a democracy and everybody's got choices. That's also hilarious.

I have a good friend, Joshua Sobel, who's a playwright. He says this wonderful thing. He says, "Democracy is this invention the queen and kind had that they'd go to the people and every four years they'd ask, 'What color do you think we should wear to the ball?'" So the idea that people identify as they vote Bibi and they don't vote Bibi, they vote Bennett. I don't give a shit what you vote for. I mean, I do. It tells me something, a little bit, or if you don't vote at all, that also tells you something because it tells you about a choice. But it doesn't tell you about what kind of interaction we can have or the

potential of what kind of friendship we can have. I say this from a place that's very raw. I can't say that I've lost friends completely due to my outspokenness, but they have disappeared. It's not that there was somebody standing outside my door saying, "I really can't stand you anymore." They just don't call anymore. They never call. They never write.

The majority of them are Jewish friends, and then I have my Palestinian friends. I have this one friend, she asked me, she goes, "Why do you care so much?" It was very funny to me. We were having dinner, and she goes, "You know, you could have a much nicer life if you stopped talking on the radio and if you stopped meeting me for dinner," and all these things. I said to her, "It would be a very boring life. I wouldn't learn anything. I wouldn't be observing and absorbing new things." And, yeah, there's a price to pay within family. I mean, it's not like I come from people who are on the completely other side, as you might say. But even within this, there's a real tension in, I would say, mostly the imaginative sphere, not on the practical level.

To me, the thing that gets to me is the fact that on a very practical level, my mother is incredible. She really creates a new reality. She's someone who, in her 60s, began to learn Arabic. She's someone who drives Palestinians between checkpoints at hospitals and has built friendships with Palestinians that way and gone to villages in Palestine that most people who are her friends who she grew up with look at her like she grew 17 heads. So there's a very active part that's living a new reality and creating a new reality, and the tension comes from me usually in the theoretical, which I should just get over myself. But she doesn't say the same things I do, whatever that might be, that I believe in a one state ... I don't believe in states in general, so here's my coming out. I imagine living together. Because of her trauma, she's the daughter of two Holocaust survivors, it is not easy to get over that, to just go, "Oh, it'll be fine," when your lived experience tells you it isn't.

It's not even a lived experience. I will call it a past experience. In the lived experience, she's actually someone who lives and creates a new reality. I mean, I kept laughing. I was sending in our family WhatsApp group ... There was a protest against police brutality in Umm-al Fahm, which is a Palestinian village within defacto Israel. There's all these pictures of 10,000 people, and my other stands out in this wonderful purple Uniqlo, and she's as Ashkenazi as they come. So I want to say that, of course, it creates tension. I would love to tell you that I'm very good at letting go of reminding myself that it's not all these sides, it's people in power versus everybody who's becoming separate. And it's very sad. I don't want to paint it in a glossy, wonderful picture. It's very sad. It's very disheartening. And the duality is, on the other side of it, you find yourself constantly in jokes.

I was speaking to a friend who he's Jewish, he's gay, he's second-generation Holocaust survivor, and he married a Palestinian man who is 30 years his junior, and he went to meet his mother-in-law for the first time in Bethlehem, and he said, "I'm in this joke. Three Palestinian in hijabs and David Katz are walking into a restaurant." There's also the joy of living in the absurd and saying, "Let me choose joy," and reminding people of that. When I talk to people who find themselves angry at me for being outspoken, I always remind them, "I'm not doing this because I'm a pain in the ... I'm a pain in the ass for other reasons. But I'm not doing this to be a pain in your ass. I'm doing this to remind you that it can be joyful, that when you gather around a dinner table, it can be joyful, that when you create a new reality, it's a joyful one." It's very strange to live in this world of thinking some people don't want to be in this joy. They're too hurt, they're too fearful, and you have to pay the price when you choose joy.

Taylah Harris-Mungo:

It was mentioned that trauma creates a lack of imagination. If we step out of that for a moment and dig into our imaginations, being able to influence the society and the land that you both are living on right

now, let's assume that the goal is to create peaceful coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians and Jews and Arabs in general. What does that look like for each of you?

Rana Abu Fraiha:

I can maybe say what I believe in and I think we are going towards, freedom, choice, togetherness, much, much better daily life than we have right now. To do it, we need to, again, deal with a lot of trauma and we need to deal, first of all, personally, and then we can actually deal collectively with the traumas. I thought about this in the last few weeks, that maybe we need to reclaim the term self-centered and we need to make it much more exciting and naturally egoistic. Because, for me, I feel like it's so important to have this dialogue inside yourself. Here in Israel, when we have these, quote-unquote, war times, the intensity is so big, and everybody's starting to fight inside the families, in groups of friends. So, for example, you have a fight with somebody. For me, it's very helpful, if you can't do it in the same moment, at least afterwards you can observe and ask yourself what actually was the trigger, what was my trauma response here, what am I afraid of?

I feel like as more as we can observe ourselves and take responsibility on our responses, something greater and better will actually come across. Although I can talk a lot about self-treatment and trauma, but I feel like this last year and a half was very, very difficult for me, and it took me to my own dark night of the soul of my own traumas. But, also, it gave me an opportunity to really dig in and look deeper to my pain, my suffering, my traumas. Every time I do something that actually is, quote-unquote, self-centered or self-care, I feel immediately the effect on the people around me. I feel like we can really live it. We can do it, and it's even hopeful and even easier than we thought because if everybody can do something with himself, herself, it's not that big, the society change. We can do it at home. We can do it with ourselves. We can do it with the people around us.

Then we can change also what you said before about prices we pay. I used to say a lot to myself that I paid prices if I say my truths but if I choose what I want. Really recently, I kind of changed it again. I did a reprogramming to myself, and I felt like maybe if we choose, if I choose something, I don't really pay a price. If somebody is blocking me from getting somewhere or blocking the friendship, for example, I can't really take responsibility on somebody else's actions or reactions. But if I choose something, I'm glad I chose it, and I don't really pay a price. I live my truth.

Gilad Cohen:

I could listen to you both speak all day, by the way. I feel like I'm in the six-hour lunch. I feel like I should order some bubbly water and get some falafel and skhug and pita and all the Israeli salad that you keep talking about, this imaginary Israeli salad.

Guy Ben-Aharon:

I'll just say that if I get the keys to this place, I'm going to give them to Rana. If I get the keys to the kingdom, you can take them. This is all my secret plot to work with Rana so, that way, I can give her the keys and we can run something together.

Gilad Cohen:

The thought of you running it together sounds wonderful in my mind because, honestly, this is one of those interviews where, and I truly mean this, I could've gone for five hours. I want to say, first of all, I'm really proud that we were able to talk about Israel and Palestine and barely involve politics. It's a really refreshing way to tackle this conversation. I want to thank you both so much for your time. I hope in some version of this world you both get the keys to this car and continue to both use your platforms and

the arts to reimagine a more equitable world where human beings, free of labels, can live together in love and peace. So thank you so much, both, for your time today.

Thank you, everyone, for tuning in. My name is Gilad Cohen, and I'm one of your co-hosts here on The Hum.

Taylah Harris-Mungo:

And I'm Taylah Harris-Mungo, your other co-host.

Gilad Cohen:

Our producers are Alex Castellani and Rachel Lewis.

Taylah Harris-Mungo:

The Hum is an initiative of JAYU, a charity committed to sharing human rights stories through the arts.

Gilad Cohen:

Help support JAYU and our year-round initiatives like this podcast, our annual human rights film festival, our monthly events, and our iAM program and initiative that provides free arts and social justice mentorship to hundreds of equity-seeking youth each year. You can make a tax-receiptable donation at jayu.ca/donate.