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Kieryn:

(music) I'm Kieryn.

Eve:

And I'm Eve. This is Kitchen Table Cult.

Kieryn:

Where two cover full escapees talk about our experiences in the cultish underbelly of the religious right.

Eve:

Hey, Kieryn.

Kieryn:

Hi, Eve.

Eve:

How's it going?

Kieryn:

It's going, just doing open politics stuff. Hopefully we'll have protected bike lanes. We'll find out later.

Eve:

That's so fun.

Kieryn:

Yeah. I just want to not have to worry about my partner running errands. That's all. That's all I want in life right now, honestly.

Eve:

Yeah. No getting doored on the way home from the grocery store.

Kieryn:

No getting doored, no getting harassed by drivers parked in the buffered bike lane that is supposed to be adequate. Anyway, how are you?

Eve:

I'm sweaty and hot. It's really hot in this house today. But I'm fine. I don't have any big update since last time. We recorded, just doing the same thing.

Kieryn:

Yep. It's hot back summer.

Eve:

We have some exciting guests here today. I'm so happy we were able to get everyone together. This is the follow up on our conversation that we had with Garrison and Amy a couple of weeks back. We're just picking up where we left off and building off of it. Marisa, Aidan, do you want to introduce yourselves?

Marisa:

Sure. I'm Marissa Siegel. I'm the Editor in Chief of a small literary magazine called The Rumpus. I'm an American, white Jewish woman. My family is also, they're white practicing Jews. I am a non-religious Jewish woman. I wholeheartedly support Palestine. That's been coming up a lot recently. I'm excited to have this conversation.

Eve:

Yay. Do you want to tell folks a little bit about what happened when you started talking about it recently?

Marisa:

Sure. I wasn't sure if that should be part of this.

Eve:

Yeah, go for it.

Marisa:

Yes. The first thing that happened was I sent... The Rumpus has a weekly newsletter that goes out every Tuesday from me. It's a very informal letter about whatever I'm thinking about. That might be a new pair of shoes I'm buying or it might be a serious political issue. Really runs the gamut. About a month and a half ago, I think I wrote about the Israeli bombings on Palestine, the most recent round of them, or I'm not sure if it's the most recent now, but it was then.

Marisa:

I received a tremendous amount of online harassment as a response to that. The newsletter also lost about 300 subscribers, which is the first time that's ever happened, even though this is not the first time I've spoken politically. Then two weeks later, we are in a coalition with the Offing Magazine, another small literary magazine, and we are publishing a series of essays by the writer Aurielle Marie. Aurielle also wrote about the situation in Palestine, particularly also some drawing some parallels with Black Lives Matters and also picking apart some parallels.

Marisa:

Because that newsletter goes out from me, I feel it's important that I be the one to receive the feedback there. Aurielle was already doing a service by providing these essays for us. There was a whole second wave of harassment, and Aurielle is a trans writer of color, and that second wave of harassment was significantly more violent. I just think it's worth noting that because there certainly was a difference between the harassment I received and then that second round, but both were pretty violent, and came from people who professed, even in their death threats to me, how liberal they are and how I just don't understand what I'm talking about.

Marisa:

I am not a scholar on the Israel, Palestine situation. I am just a Jewish woman who grew up. I went to orthodox day school from K to five is probably relevant. I had very early education in the other side of this, but it never really sat well and I was picking it apart early. I've been having these conversations with my family and at school when I was younger, for a long time. I'm very interested to talk a little bit more about that with you guys.

Eve:

Yay.

Kieryn:

Happy to have you. Aidan, hi.

Aidan:

Hi, everyone. It's so nice to be here, and thank you for having me. Kieryn, you've been great too. Thanks for sharing that, Marisa. I am also an American Jew, white Ashkenazi. My mom is American Jewish, and my dad is Israeli Jewish. I come to this conversation, as I tried to understand my own experience and my family's experience and positioning in relationship to white supremacy and Christian supremacy in the ways in which we've both been targeted and harmed in the last 2000 years, and also the ways in which we benefit and uphold this, both here in the US and in the State of Israel, where a lot of my family currently lives and where my American family, by nature of being American are supporting and invested in.

Aidan:

I spend a lot of my time thinking about Christian Zionism, thinking about Jewish Zionism, and its connections with US imperialism, and also settler colonialism here in the US and indigenous sovereignty here in the US. I would say, I'm not an observant Jew, but I love being Jewish. I love Jewish ritual and tradition, and I come to this as a deeply, deeply self-loving Jew. It was actually, my coming to the topic of Palestine was only possible after I came to embrace my Judaism so much more deeply. Which is not always the narrative that's told about us Jews that try to stand in solidarity with Palestine.

Kieryn:

That is very true and interesting. I think I'd like to hear a little bit more about both of you all's journey into understanding, in how you came to be in solidarity with Palestine, given your backgrounds.

Marisa:

I think my answer is probably shorter only because I don't feel like I have the depth of background that Aidan has here. I would say again, that... Because I went to Yeshiva from kindergarten to fifth grade, my early education, we spent half the day learning Jewish Studies and half the day learning regular school stuff. Definitely, my school particularly, was a school on Long Island in New York, had a very pro-Zionism perspective that was wholeheartedly and enthusiastically imparted to us as children from a very young age.

Marisa:

I only remember knowing that Israel was the homeland and it belonged to us, and then starting to question that. No other viewpoint was presented to me in my early childhood, until I started asking questions. I would say, I don't want to give myself too much credit, that through early childhood, I pushed at this idea, but not in a heavily critical way, as much as a child could, and also, a child who was dealing with other child stuff.

Marisa:

Not insignificant child stuff. But by middle school, when I switch to public school, I did begin to have more access to people with diverse opinions on things, and just more access to the world in general. I think that just by watching the news... I don't know, for me, it is, I should say, not very personal I do not have Israeli family. I have friends of family who are Israeli, but it feels very removed. So, I do have that privilege.

Marisa:

To some extent, it's always felt very simple to me. I don't believe that a religious state is a great idea. I think that everyone should be allowed to live in the country of Israel. I think the founding of Israel and how it happened was problematic. But I also think that going backward over and over again, isn't necessarily productive.

Marisa:

My feeling has always been to support efforts for equality, for everyone who's living in the State of Israel. I guess, it's also important to note that I do not support the idea of a religious government, generally speaking. I think, even in America, our government is too religious. A lot of freedoms come from that actual separation, of church and states. Then certainly by the time I was in college, I was reading things, I was learning things in, global women's studies classes that I was taking, that introduced perspectives to me, and I was reading the work of writers like Ronda Geral. Now I'm thinking of more recent writers. I'm talking about more recently.

Marisa:

I listen to what people are saying. From my perspective, what's happened most recently in Israel, is really aggressive, really violent. The words I used that really bothered people, the thing that I said that provoked people was that this is apartheid, and that this is genocide. People really didn't like the use of my words, and I was attacked as a self-loathing Jew who didn't understand that Jews had experienced genocide. I want to be really clear and say that I do very much understand that, it's why I always talk about being Jewish, because I know that I am a member of a group that is often persecuted and who a lot of people hate. That is part of my identity.

Marisa:

I just don't think that the genocide of one people justifies the genocide of another, and that more violence is ever a good solution. I know that sounds pat, but also, I really don't see how continuous state-organized bombings of civilians could ever be a good thing.

Marisa:

When I wrote that newsletter, I got a lot of hate mail. I would say that since then, I've continued educating myself about this, and nothing has convinced me that I am a self-loathing Jew, who has this all

wrong. I do know that it's complicated, and that there may have been some things in the essay I didn't write, that I don't wholeheartedly align myself with. But I also firmly believe, as an editor and a publisher in publishing material that I don't always wholeheartedly agree with, as long as it's thoughtful, and well written and I don't believe it was encouraging dangerous violence.

Marisa:

I think that, while yes, it's more acceptable to say these things now, my whole life has really made me feel like no, it's not acceptable to say this ever.

Kieryn:

For sure.

Marisa:

Except in being in smaller conversations.

Eve:

The response seemed to surprise you quite a bit.

Marisa:

It did. It really did. Because The Rumpus often, I love it, but it's a little bit of an echo chamber, where everyone thinks the same way about big political issues, I should say. I would say that, to the best of my knowledge, our editorial team feels the same way that I do about this issue. But our audience definitely does not. Someone even wrote a whole article on some small blog, I would say the name but I truly do not remember. Small personal blog.

Eve:

It was a small personal blog, and who cares.

Marisa:

About how horrific The Rumpus's support of me, and these statements about apartheid, and genocide are. There's also a lot of explaining to me what those words mean. I also want to clarify that I have a master's degree, and I've been an editor for over a decade, and I knew exactly what words I was saying, and why I was saying them.

Eve:

And you're a poet.

Marisa:

Yes, I am... Right. I think at the sentence level.

Kieryn:

You know what words mean, and how to use them. Thank you.

Marisa:

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Yes.

Kieryn:

Aidan, I'm going to let you... I feel like you have a lot more background here.

Aidan:

Yeah. Well, I actually grew up with quite secular. My Israeli dad actually was always critical of the State of Israel. Maybe Zionist in the sense of the State of Israel has a right... A Jewish ethno-state has a right to exist in Palestine, but not uncritically Zionist. A lot of the reason why I come to this topic is because my Israeli family are also... Well, I'll speak to my dad. My dad has a lot of trauma growing up as an Israeli Jew, born in 1960, 12 years after the state was established and his experience growing up was thinking that the Holocaust was going to happen again, and they were going to be all killed.

Aidan:

This is the very early part of the State of Israel. That's not to say that there was not a lot of Israeli propaganda that was purposely trying to get the population to have this fear. But my dad is like, his perspective, without speaking too much for him is that he was brainwashed in this propaganda, so that he would put his life on the line at 18 years old when he joined the Israeli army, for this nation state that actually didn't care about him.

Aidan:

A lot of his friends were killed at 18, 19, 20 years old. That is still, every Israeli-

Eve:

That will suck you up.

Aidan:

And it still does. That was 40 years ago. Thinking about how the State of Israel, I personally don't believe... This is, I think, when we learned about Christian Zionism and British imperialism and US imperialism, the State of Israel was neither created primarily for Jewish safety and it still does not exist for Jewish safety. That is a narrative, that is a PR campaign-

Eve:

That's smoke and mirrors to keep us from being aware of everybody else's economic interests in it.

Aidan:

Exactly. Also, looking at how the State of Israel has treated Ethiopian Jews and Mizrahi Jews, Jews from the SWANA region, Sephardic Jews. It's clear that it's not about Jewish safety, and it also has put my family and my dad in danger, and he almost lost his life.

Aidan:

I come to this, with my personal stake as a Jew in this is, the State of Israel is actually serving purposes that are, certainly I and my people benefit from, to an extent, but that is actually what I actually think we're very much hurt by it, and that's very intersectional with the ways in which Palestinians are

targeted. Of course, Palestinians are much more impacted than I am or my family are. But there's intersectionality, too, looking at Western imperialism and the ways in which it's created this situation, and continues to uphold the situation for really the greatest benefit to Western nations, and their empire building project, and not the Jewish people, and certainly not Palestinian people. Although they don't profess to actually ever care about Palestinians. So, there's no question about the Palestinians are. Not that-

Eve:

You see the quiet part out loud there.

Aidan:

Right.

Marisa:

What you just said about your dad and propaganda, I feel like a light bulb just went off over my head. I have told this separate anecdote many times in my life where we were indoctrinated as children at my school with a horrible fear of the Holocaust. We were shown in kindergarten footage I would never show to my six year old. I used to have nightmares about the Holocaust, and it never occurred to me, which is again to point to, I'm not super educated about this. But that was part of how we were made to believe that we needed that safety, is that I did feel, until I was old enough to really grasp history and know what was going on with what... That the Holocaust could happen again, to me at any moment.

Marisa:

It did feel like life and death. Which isn't to say that, again, sometimes being Jewish, it is life and death. But it never occurred to me before that, that was a kind of propaganda.

Eve:

It's easier to control people when they're scared.

Marisa:

If you start when they're tiny children too.

Eve:

This feels very similar to us being handed missionary martyr stories over and over and over again as kids and being taught about the rapture's about to happen tomorrow, get your shit together.

Kieryn:

Yeah. Christians are so persecuted because prayer in schools, and that's obviously the slipping slope to jail.

Eve:

That means that the government's going to take your kids tomorrow.

Kieryn:

Right.

Eve:

Cool.

Aidan:

Well, I think it's interesting because when we look at US imperialism and Christian Zionism, there's this fascinating video on PragerU, which is this right-wing website of General Chuck Wald, who is a former military commander in the US Army explaining why the US funds Israel at \$3.8 billion a year, which is far more than we fund any other country.

Aidan:

He's very honest, that this has been investment that the US expects to profit off of, militarily and economically. Having the State of Israel there in Palestine, actually means that there are people who aren't Americans who are on the front lines, and against this Muslim enemy. They are shedding their blood so that Americans don't have to, they are the ones whose blood is being spilled so that American blood is not being expelled.

Aidan:

When we think about this, it's like, oh, this is not the manipulation of the Holocaust, of which my grandfather... The only reason my grandfather also was in Israel is because his family had no choice but to escape there from the Holocaust. To use that history and say that Israel is the only thing that's going to keep Jews safe, when actually, the US has invested in Jews being this frontline force for them. It's astounding.

Eve:

It's a fun making machine.

Aidan:

Yeah, exactly. Also, from a Christian Zionist perspective, the State of Israel was in part, Balfour, who wrote the Balfour Declaration, promising Jews a homeland in Palestine was an avid anti-Semite, who did not want Jews in England and had pushed for legislation earlier when he was Prime Minister of Britain, to restrict Jewish emigration to Britain and actually saw the State of Israel as a convenient solution to the Jewish question. It's these Jewish people who've never been able to be assimilated or are always a nuisance to us, put them in Palestine?

Eve:

It's this Lincoln in the State of Liberia model all over again.

Aidan:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. Right. Yes. When we see how actually anti-Semitism is a part of this machine. In addition to complete disregard for Palestinian life and rights, and just actually denial that Palestinians even exist as a people. It's like, oh, this whole thing is really... The whole notion that Israel is for Jewish safety, when actually has a lot of anti-Semitism at its foundation. It becomes clear. It's not

about Jewish safety at all, and the use of Jewish safety as a justification for all this, just serves to put Jews in greater danger.

Marisa:

It's always astounded me that American Jews are so willing to believe that America really is invested in this for Jewish safety. Because I've never particularly felt safe as a Jew in America, and I want to also clarify that I say that as a Jewish woman living in New York, which is probably like one of the... Who grew up on Long Island, surrounded by other Jewish people, and still was always aware... Once I switched to public school, sure, yeah, anti-Semitic comments have been made to me my whole life in just by friends, more pejoratively by people who are not my friends.

Marisa:

This idea that America would have Jewish people's interest close to their heart, is bewildering to me. I'm going to share one other personal anecdote that I realized I didn't touch on. I'm only going to share a little bit about this, because it's not my family. But I've been with my partner since we were in high school. So, I've known their family for a long time.

Marisa:

My mother-in-law has been at various points, a born again Christian, not always, but sometimes. When she's active with the church... That's how I learned about this Christian support for Zionism was in high school when she was handing out pamphlets supporting Israel and I was like, "Wait, what?" I got all the way to like 15 thinking that this was a Jewish people issue, Jewish people supporting the country of Israel without knowing this whole other side of it. Also, because until 13, I really only knew Jewish people, so I hadn't had the opportunity to meet Christian people as much.

Marisa:

But through that experience, yeah, I have seen also... I want to say this, I don't say a lot in my mother-in-law's defense, because she is a Trump supporter who believes a lot of things that I don't believe. But there's a good amount of brainwashing that happens on that side, too. Even though she is not someone who, from childhood, was steeped in this, she is someone who's, I'm just going to say, whose weaknesses were exploited to make her believe certain things and feel part of a group in a way that can happen with people who struggle in certain ways.

Marisa:

I remember looking at one of these pamphlets and being like... I guess the other way I knew that was The Jews for Jesus in the subway stations in New York City. It isn't really even until this last decade of my life, when I've come to know more exvangelicals, and even be close to a good amount of exvangelicals that I really learned that this was such a thing, and not a thing specific to my mother-in-law. I think it's so widespread also, because, again, she is not someone who comes from a background, more similar to you Eve, or you Kieryn, she again, raised secularly.

Eve:

My parents were too, they were raised in Berkeley. They came to it on their own. But it's interesting, I think one of the things that really is a hallmark of that not so much brainwashing, but making it easy to persuade people, like, my mom or your mother-in-law to be pro-Zionist, while they're Christian, is this

idea of possible deniability for white innocence, and wanting to believe that they're good people, this feels like a really good way to be like, look, this is like righting the wrongs of history. We can support the underdog. It just feels like doing good. It's internet activism before internet activism. It's easy to not look at it too closely.

Marisa:

It also feels like there's something very specific, at least in my experience, and particularly in the responses that I got over this last month, about white American women feeling strongly about this, because usually, when I get hate mail, it is from men, pretty exclusively, especially when it's violent. This was almost entirely white women, self-identifying themselves that way for me.

Eve:

Do you have any thoughts about why that might be?

Marisa:

It seemed to me... Again, I don't want to discount this idea that it is more acceptable to talk about these things. But it seemed to me that it felt to them acceptable to speak this way to me, because of what I was saying about Israel. Why do I think it was specifically white women... I think, also, if I were guessing, and this is really just speculation, it's an outlet for frustration to send an email to someone you don't know, and say hateful things.

Marisa:

Women generally, maybe have a little more frustration, and don't as often do that. This might have just been like an opportunity for some angry women to yell at another woman. But I also think that there's maybe something specific about who's being drawn in to this. Because even if I think personally... The ex-exvangelicals I know, who are now on the other side of the issue, not that there aren't males or genderqueer people, but it is overwhelmingly also female.

Marisa:

I wonder a little bit about the gender dynamics of that. I would also wonder if I had been me, but not, as a straight woman, if I had been a man writing that email, what kind of responses would I have gotten? Because I think it probably would have been different. I got a lot of emails about my kid, which always feels like a very specific way to harass a woman is to talk about her child and how you want to harm her child. That always feels particularly targeted.

Eve:

Aidan, do you have any thoughts in terms of why white women might be electric around this issue like that?

Aidan:

I definitely don't pretend to be an expert on this. I think maybe as a progressive or lefty publication that just might be more of the audience-

Marisa:

Yeah, that's definitely true. Good point.

Aidan:

Just women are more likely to be progressive and lefty or radical. That was my initial thought, but I definitely don't pretend to know.

Eve:

Yeah, it definitely is our audience, especially after the ousting of Stephen, during the shitty men in media lists and all that that happened at the peak of the Me Too.

Marisa:

I can share that, demographically, it's an overwhelmingly female and genderqueer audience. We do have a male audience, but it's much smaller.

Eve:

Yeah.

Kieryn:

I think it's also kind of interesting. This reminded me of the difference in people's Twitter feeds, I remember when this was more in the news a couple of weeks ago that one of my friends in the group chat was like, "Wow, it's so hard to be pro-Palestine." Me and my partner who live in Oakland, we're like, "What are you talking about?" Everyone on my feed is like, we obviously are in solidarity with Palestine, and it wasn't controversial in my local sphere, but it was for my friend in Minneapolis.

Kieryn:

We all follow lefty people, but there is a difference in the dynamic, and I think some of it may have to do with where you are, the area that they live in, in Minneapolis is very, very white. Oakland is not that white, and is much more racially and ethnically diverse.

Eve:

It's interesting, though, because I saw so many people on my Facebook feed, I don't really use Facebook, except for all my siblings are in there. So, I stalk them. But they're in the suburbs of Richmond, Virginia. A lot of people I grew up with who have become more... I would say, they would probably be moderate Democrats now. They've done a lot of deconstructing, they're maybe homeschooling their kids, but doing unschooling. Not being fundamentalist Christians at all.

Eve:

But a lot of them were posting in solidarity with Palestine, which I thought was really interesting, and that's part of what made me wonder, is this suddenly more acceptable to say, if my white suburban, middle class people there are saying that. It feels like it's less risky. Because it feels like... I have told this story in the last time we recorded but, I was 2017, running a conference that was adjacent to the DSCC Annual Convention on Martha's Vineyard.

Eve:

There were a lot of Democrat organizing people there on this meeting, and I was at the bar with some people afterward, and I said something vaguely pro-Palestine, and this guy went off on me being like,

"Your boss is Jewish, how could you say that? How could you be an anti-Semite?" I'm just like, "Hang on, what?" It just feels like a very stark difference since then?

Marisa:

I wonder if it's a difference too, between... Perhaps it is more accepted, but within the... Because most of the responses I got were from Jewish women, maybe within the Jewish community, that change isn't as significant as that outside the Jewish community, either specifically evangelical or just non-Jewish liberal community. Because it definitely... The more thoughtful... I'm going to be generous and use the word thoughtful emails I got.

Marisa:

Basically, I mean, the ones that we're not just straight up, your son should get bombed. Because something else that... Just to remind you guys, this is a personal newsletter. These are people who have read things about my life and are able to pull details about my life is why they have this information. The more thoughtful emails were very focused on what it means to be Jewish and what I didn't understand about that. I got, at least three or four emails explaining that my Yeshiva experience was probably to blame because I was taught to hate being Jewish.

Marisa:

In case any of those people are listening, I'm also going to share that I have had a generally very positive experience of being Jewish. While I am not religious, I participate in many Jewish cultural things with my larger family. I am fortunate to have a larger family who, while, they don't always agree with me on things, they're willing to engage in conversation on those things.

Marisa:

I've actually seen progress happen there a little bit over time with a few family members. But I think that there's something maybe specifically to the Jewish community where it hasn't changed as much. Part of that goes back to, again, this idea of the self-loathing Jew. If you're not pro-Zionist, you must hate yourself, because you're putting yourself in danger by not being Zionist. I guess I'm still turning over in my head, that light bulb idea from what Aidan had said, but I just really think that, yeah, we're all taught that... I'm half Ashkenazi and half Sephardic. On my father's side of the family, the Sephardic side, being chased out of countries actually started well before the Holocaust.

Marisa:

My grandmother, who has now passed away many, many decades, but her family was chased out of Spain 100 years before the Holocaust. That whole justification of the Holocaust, that's part of, I think, why for me, it also feels a little shaky, because Jews have been... There's Italy, there's Spain, there's so many countries that we've been purged from that again, I just wonder if people can have these conversations-

Eve:

Russia was doing that and Russia helped liberate.

Marisa:

Right, exactly. And America, again, America is not a place where I have felt like Jews are very welcome everywhere, by any means. That's the part that boggles my mind about people buying into this so wholeheartedly, and I wonder if there were more education, at an earlier age, or in reaching... I don't know. I don't know. I feel like, it's a lot of misinformation.

Kieryn:

Yeah. Also, I think it's really interesting-

Marisa:

I feel like a lot of these women were trying to do good, I think is what I'm saying by emailing me. They really believed that they were educating me.

Kieryn:

Right. I think it's really interesting that you mentioned everyone being like, well, you're a self-loathing Jew, because Aidan, when you were introducing yourself, and you said you came to this out of a place of self-love, I'm really curious to know what that looked like? Can you unpack that a little bit, since the self-loathing narrative is obviously wrong?

Aidan:

Yeah, totally. Well, to build on from the story I was telling earlier and how I grew up with a dad who was critical of Israel. My dad also just had a lot of critique of Judaism in general. There's this equation of Israel and Judaism, and both are dangerous, and also, his father is a Holocaust survivor. So, Judaism is something like separate yourself from Judaism, and that actually will keep us safer.

Aidan:

I grew up really loathing Judaism and Israel intertwined. When I was in college, I was working with the Tongva indigenous community in what is now Southern California. They'd introduce themselves by where they're from and they'd ask me where I'm from, and I never had an answer to that question, because I separated myself from Judaism and from Israel.

Aidan:

My mom's family in Eastern Europe, they also separated themselves from there because it was traumatic. I didn't know where I came from, and I had separated myself from Judaism and Israel my whole life. But they really sparked this question of like, where are you from? I started asking that and started learning about my family history and Jewish roots.

Aidan:

I was like, wow, there's so much here, there's so much tradition so much that exists out of sight of the State of Israel, and is separate from Zionism. Actually, when my dad instilled in me that Judaism is... I don't think that it's unconsciously, but just this idea that Judaism is dangerous, and run away, stay away from it. Actually, I was realizing there's all these things traditions and community and it's amazing, actually. As I started to dive into Jewishness and Judaism more, and loving it, I also learned my family's experience also in the State of Israel has been harmful to them, and asking why I was separated from Judaism for so long? How Zionism, one of the effects of Zionism on my family was to actually loath

Judaism and separate ourselves from our traditions and our history, because Zionism paints over all of that with a broad brush, and turns Judaism into just a nationalism.

Aidan:

I'm not sure if this is being super clear. But just coming-

Eve:

The morning you got into the actual practice in traditions of Judaism, the more you are able to disconnect from the nationalism and the underlying fascism there.

Aidan:

Exactly.

Eve:

I don't know if that's a stronger word to use for that.

Aidan:

Well, disconnect... Realize Judaism is separate from Zionism. Thank you. I think to some of what Marisa saying, and some of the people that were responding to you, it is so deeply ingrained in so many of us, so many Jews growing up here in the US, and also in Israel, that Zionism is Judaism and to be Jewish is to be a Zionist, and is to support the State of Israel no matter what.

Aidan:

This is very much a present dynamic in Jewish communities, and also a lot of Christian communities too, that Jews are equal to the State of Israel. Jews are only Jewish, so long as they are supportive of the State of Israel. As I learned more about Christian Zionism, I realized, we as Jews are supposed to accept Israel as our Savior, essentially. Otherwise, we're damned. Jewish tradition, at least in the Ashkenazi tradition, is all about questioning, and there's never one right answer to anything.

Aidan:

But with the State of Israel, it's like, this is the thing that cannot be questioned. Its existence cannot be questioned. That to me feels like yes, either we accept Israel as our Savior, literally the thing that will save us from anti-Semitism, or we are damned.

Marisa:

That's exactly how it was presented to me as a child. It's so interesting to hear you talk about your father who told you early on that Zionism does not... Or you were able to see that. I don't know, I feel like I didn't fully understand... I remember before I even really understood what any of this was, marching in the Israeli Day parade in New York City, and being like, what are we doing here?

Marisa:

The thing I used to say to my mom a lot is are you going to make me move to Israel? I don't understand. I live in America. I don't want to move to Israel. I want to be Jewish here. What's the deal, what's the

talking about returning to Israel? Every year the Passover Seder, we sing next year in Jerusalem, and I'm like, "Okay, can we just be here next year?"

Marisa:

When I was five, that felt like a really real thing, because it was in everything. The songs I learned, the rituals that were religious, but also the non-religious stuff we did at school. It was all about the State of Israel and the Jews. That equating of those two things is so real. I think that, America reinforces that because obviously, it serves its own purposes, as you all spoke to really clearly. I don't know what these American leftist liberals don't see about that. That's a little hard for me to understand, what they're not getting there, that they can see it in other things America does. But not this one thing.

Kieryn:

Yeah.

Eve:

I think it's been interesting, Aidan, you've been connecting this to indigenous issues a little bit, and I think it's really interesting how I've watched people, as they became aware of what was happening with the Dakota Access Pipeline, I felt like there was a light bulb moment that happened for a lot of people in the left, in terms of understanding indigenous issues better through the massive publicity of that situation, that suddenly gave them a metaphor for understanding the Palestinian situation much better.

Aidan:

Yeah. I think Palestinian organizers, and indigenous organizers here have long been in solidarity with each other and have made those connections really clear. The same way that again, imperialism and Zionism, how Zionism is also a part of US national identity, and how early Puritans and colonists here in the US called themselves the new Jews who this is God-given land, Turtle Island is God given land.

Aidan:

I think indigenous folks, Palestinians have been making those connections for a long time. Also black organizers and Palestinian organizers too making those connections the way that white supremacy is undergirding both of these states, the US and Israel. I agree with that. I think that over time, especially with Trump as president, it also just became... It's harder to ignore the connections Trump and Netanyahu were buddy, buddy.

Eve:

Well, another thing about Trump that was really interesting, just because everybody was so blanket critical of him... Not everybody, I mean, on the left, anything he did was heinous, and you would mine it for something that was ridiculous and mockable. What was interesting to me was that he wasn't doing a ton to change foreign policy. He was being offensive personally, and he moved the embassy to Jerusalem, and that was a big, big deal.

Eve:

But a lot of the other things that he did, were maintaining the status quo. As people were more aware of them, they became more willing to criticize them because he was the one sustaining it. Now, it's more obvious because they were looking for them.

Marisa:

Although he also had a huge supporter base in American Jews, particularly orthodox and Hasidic Jews. Even I'm just thinking of the local community, which I still have enough ties to, to know what's going on there on Island and those schools still exist. They were very pro-Trump. I have one family friend who is a very progressive-minded Orthodox Jew, although different perspective on the Palestine issue there between us. But she did not support Trump, but would still say, but at least he supports Israel.

Marisa:

It was, I think for them, that was enough, which says a lot because Trump is-

Eve:

That sounds very similar to the single issue voting Christians who are like, well, at least he's pro life.

Marisa:

Yes.

Aidan:

Although, Trump's foreign policy on Israel was very much appeasing his evangelical Christian base, who voted for him. I think 80% of evangelicals who are also something like a quarter of the entire US voting bloc.

Eve:

Yeah, please correct me if I misspoke.

Aidan:

No, no, no. Well, just to say there is a significant population of Jews that did support Trump. But actually something like 70% or something of Jews voted against him both in 2016 and 2020. Jews being something like 2% or less than 2% of the American population. His foreign policy on Israel was not specifically appeasing his Jewish voters. But that's not to also ignore that there were a significant number of Jews that did support him.

Aidan:

Definitely this progressive, except for Palestine stance is very common in Jewish communities here in the US, where you can be progressive on a lot of issues, but around Palestine, that's a no go.

Eve:

Aidan, I'm curious if you also sometimes feel like Zionism is meant to also sometimes ferment arguments between... It's divisive for Jewish people, which, in other ways serves other American projects. I feel like for America, Jews are good white Americans when we're talking about the State of Israel and we are not white Americans, when certain groups of white nationalist Americans are talking about Jewish people, if we're not talking about the state of Israel.

Eve:

I'll also share that I did get some specific harassment, and this is the first time that that's ever happened to me around the fact that I'm half Sephardic. Because... I don't really know enough to speak very smartly about this. So, Aidan, if I say something that's totally off, please correct me. But Ashkenazi Jews generally come from Eastern Europe, and are fairer skinned. Sephardic Jews, or at least my family's sort of Jews come from Spain, Greece, and are darker skinned.

Eve:

My sister looks nothing like me. She got all the Sephardic genes. Sure, she's still white presenting, but again, these lines are there, and they can use that to turn this group to their advantage when they want to. Also, make us fighting enough that we can't be that effective.

Aidan:

Yeah. I think that power often benefits when there's infighting amongst groups that are either targeted or oppressed, because it distracts from the power that be. Whereas... I see this very much in the way that very few Jews and progressive spaces left even know what Christian Zionism is. Also how, in Jewish progressive spaces, I do not see very much understanding of how US imperialism, or not much conversation about how us imperialism undergirds the State of Israel, and how these are big, powerful forces that we're not even paying attention to.

Aidan:

So long as Jews are fighting each other and not looking at larger systems of power, I think it does serve to not just reinforce the status quo, but allow those empowered to continue moving forward in their agendas, whether it's in Jewish interests or not.

Eve:

I think white capitalist [inaudible 00:52:22] really does tend to benefit from this, and there's a long history of this, in various different minority groups of playing gatekeeping, playing purity testing. When you think about the color line, and, respectability politics, and trying to pit physically disabled people against mentally disabled people.

Eve:

This has a long tradition of divide and conquer. This is something that Kiernyn and I talk a lot about in terms of the leftist organizing that we are part of or observing, where it's really easy for people to get distracted by these kinds of conversations. This is what the right is really good at not wasting time on.

Aidan:

Just to clarify too, to your point, Marisa about Ashkenazi and Sephardic. Ashkenazi Jews also, white Ashkenazi Jews have also aligned themselves, many of us have aligned ourselves with the systems of white supremacy and Christian supremacy at the expense of Sephardic Jews and at the expense of Mizrahi and Ethiopian Jews. I just want to also clarify that there's also agency and choice that, particularly lighter skin, and white Ashkenazi Jews are able... Do make the choice to align with those in power, rather than challenge the power. That's also how these systems gain strength.

Kiernyn:

Yeah. People like to align themselves with whatever it is that's benefiting them, and if they never experience that power turning on them, there is no reason to question what's going on. It's like, oh, well, obviously, America should support Israel, because the Jews... Because they're not being harmed by it, they don't bother to interrogate it.

Eve:

Marisa, this is why you see more female and queer [inaudible 00:54:47] because the system is not designed to support them and certainly are the ones who see through it and the ones who don't need to, don't need to.

Marisa:

That makes so much sense now. I don't know why I need you to say that loud to me, but yes, of course. Particularly in this... I know more about your background and some other editors can come from a similar background. I could see why if you're a woman or queer, you would be more likely to see that you need to get out of that and see what that is.

Eve:

The other element that I think drives that demographic leaving is, and I think this might have some overlap with what you all are talking about, too. The ones that leave are the ones that were the true believers, that took it as seriously as possible, and found that it was not consistent internally, and that the rules were moving targets being used against them.

Eve:

Once taking it in earnest, all the way to the end of the line and seeing the man behind the curtain, and realizing all these rules are fake and arbitrary, that's a real quick way out. I wonder too, if Aidan, your dad's experience has some of that driving it, because he saw through it, because he was up close?

Aidan:

I think that there's so many Israelis that are in the army and their friends were killed. In some ways, that reinforces their commitment to the State of Israel. It's almost a positive feedback loop that like, oh, we're being killed, therefore, we need to fight harder or more. Also, if you're conscripted in the army and you put your life on the line, and your friends are killed, I can't imagine what-

Eve:

Trauma bonds.

Aidan:

Trauma bonds, and also, what it takes to be like, that was actually for a state that doesn't care about me and that was maybe like, I shouldn't have had to do that. But that's not my experience. I feel a lot of privilege as an American Jew that I'm not conscripting in the army. But I think that, also the way in which maybe some of the left has shifted on the issue of Palestine, it's like, people are being hurt and traumatized, especially Palestinians, and people are speaking out.

Aidan:

There's truth in this narrative that, Israel is there to keep you safe, and is the only possible solution to anti-Semitism. It doesn't hold when Palestinians are paying the price for the Holocaust, and paying the price for 2,000 years of European anti-Semitism. It doesn't hold that this is actually the system that's going to keep you safe. I don't know if that really answered your question.

Eve:

No, that makes sense.

Kieryn:

When your state is doing the thing to other people that it was allegedly created to stop from happening again, that's just a huge dissonance, and it's ridiculous.

Marisa:

There's also always this turn to History. When I say history, I mean capital H, History, but it's a very specific capital H, History, when we talk about Israel, and the Bible and who Jerusalem belongs to that, in my opinion, doesn't hold when we're talking about current modern day politics. But yet, it's continually brought back to there.

Marisa:

Also, the other problem is, is that as Aidan keeps bringing up, there's this History, capital H, again, of US imperialism, that History is not talked about when we talk about Israel, but we go back 1000s of years to this other history that's super removed from any reality that truly anyone living today really is living with. Part of, I think what flabbergasts me about the adherence to this with no questioning, is this disconnect in putting together what you know, especially for progressive educated, older, leftist Jewish people, who I know, who are very forward thinking on even issues that challenge Orthodox Jewish beliefs, but not on Israel.

Marisa:

They just don't apply those same things that they apply to all these other instances, to this one thing. Because what would that mean? That would mean that, they're all in danger. Also, I think it would mean, they'd have to admit they'd been fooled for a long time. That actually the danger is bigger and different than the danger being presented.

Eve:

Yes. That's a huge vulnerability to take on.

Aidan:

It's astounding to me that Jews have bought into the idea that the State of Israel, which is deeply aligned with anti-Semitic governments around the world, and it's aligned with the same folks who had been oppressing, at least, European Jews for 2000 years. Like, now aligning with those folks is somehow going-

Kieryn:

This is supposed to work out well, how?

Aidan:

Yeah, and that Palestinians are now the greatest threat to Jews ever. They don't have a military, they don't have... The history of Palestinian anti... They want liberation and freedom from an oppressive occupation and apartheid system. That is where anti-Semitism is located and not within millions of anti-Semitic Christian Zionists. It just doesn't make... We've been fooled.

Marisa:

The refusal to use these words, these very specific words like apartheid, and genocide, because, again, almost all of what the response I got, I think especially the thoughtful ones, especially the not just death threats, were about those two words, and my choice to use them. It's okay to be critical of Israel, but it's not okay to say that.

Marisa:

That was definitely the main message. I'm critical of Israel too, but to call it apartheid, no. To call it genocide, no. This is not a concerted effort to kill a certain kind of person. I'm like, "Well, again, I know what these words mean, and I'm just looking at systems where genocide has happened before, or is happening now in other places, that's what this is. It doesn't mean that I think all Jews are guilty of committing genocide to say that, but I do feel there's this defensive, if we admit that, what responsibility do we have to own? It's like, own some responsibility, and then we can move forward from there.

Marisa:

Because owning responsibility, in my own life is where I've learned most change comes from. I think as a group too, that's often an important first step.

Eve:

Also, being willing to have a nuanced narrative about yourself and others, I may be an abuse victim, but I may also be capable of causing harm in other people's lives. It can be both.

Marisa:

Exactly.

Kieryn:

Both things can be true at the same time. It's so ridiculously mind blowing.

Eve:

Is there anything that we haven't covered that you all want to comment on, or add or bring up?

Marisa:

I feel like I wish we had a solution to offer, but I don't. Aidan, I don't know if you... Because you do more political organizing, have any thoughts? I just wish we could say something toward how we could better educate people. In my experience, it's been a lot of slow, small conversations on the very local level. I'm talking like me and my mom hashing this out over my entire life, and I'm going to be 38 this month.

Eve:

Yeah, but that's how sustainable development actually works.

Marisa:

Right. I will say, does she still support Israel? Yes. Did she support the bombings that happened recently? No. That feels like a small change, but it's a big change from when I was a child, and the line she would have taken then. She didn't support Netanyahu for a few years now, which is a big change from when I was a child. Maybe that's a hopeful thing I can share is that those conversations do matter.

Eve:

Yeah.

Aidan:

Absolutely. I think that they can't be understated how important conversations and going where we have relationships are. I think, as a Jewish person, I see Palestinian freedom movements as... I'm in solidarity with them because Palestinians should be free, period. That should be enough. But also, it's important, I think, and I've been challenged by this, what is my stake in this? I think as Jews, it's important for us to talk to each other about what our stakes are, and we all have different stakes because we come from different experiences.

Aidan:

But I understand the Movement for Palestine Liberation, they are the ones who are leading by necessity, the fight against US imperialism, and Christian supremacy and white supremacy, things that are the reason my family is even in Israel in the first place. Me being in solidarity with Palestine is actually me joining the fight against these systems that murdered so much of my family, and take my family out of Europe after living there for generations.

Aidan:

I think Jews understand their stake as their stake is in the safety of Israel. I actually think Jews need to understand that our stake is in the safety of Palestinians. In some ways, that's easy to say. Logistically, what that looks like, it's more difficult. But I think also having conversations about what does Jewish safety look like, out of the State of Israel? Because right now, so many of us are bought into the fact that our safety is only possible because of Israel.

Aidan:

As I've been trying to say, I think that our safety is deeply threatened by the State of Israel, and we're sold a lie that Israel is here to keep us safe. The last thing I'll say, is, in order to break this idea that Jewish safety is reliant on the State of Israel, we have to talk about US imperialism, we have to talk about Christian Zionism, because that makes it so clear why the State of Israel exists. Not just US imperialism, but Western imperialism, meaning British, and French, and look at why the State of Israel exists, know that it's not about Jewish safety, it's actually at the expense of Jews.

Aidan:

We didn't really get into this, but both the ways in which Jews are set up as a frontline force against a supposedly Muslim enemy, and the way in which Jews are supposed to bring about this end times prophecy, and the second coming of Jesus by being in Israel. John Hagee, who is close ally of Netanyahu,

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former Prime Minister of Israel, and leader of the largest pro-Israel lobby in the US has said that the Holocaust was God's will to get Jews to return to the land of Israel. All that to say-

Eve:

This is not new propaganda.

Marisa:

But I think it would be new for a lot of American Jews. Again, I have no idea for my teens. I came from a progressive and educated family again, except on this one issue. Even in school, when I learned about US imperialism, you don't get the whole picture of US imperialism, and that's a public school.

Eve:

They're not going to teach you how to dismantle their own system in the system.

Marisa:

Yes, exactly.

Aidan:

I didn't know Christian Zionism existed until a few years ago. I also grew up around a lot of Jews, not around a lot of Christian Zionists, at least that were outward about it. I think, there's so much that you are running this podcast, actually can teach to a lot of American Jews about, from your own personal experience. I think Jews need to hear this from you all. Because I say these things, and That John Hagee has said this about the Holocaust, that it was God's will to get Jews to return to Israel. They're like, "Really? That's ridiculous."

Marisa:

He's not new, he's getting this from William Bradford and Martin Luther. It's old as fuck.

Aidan:

It's old, it's deep, it's ingrained in American national identity. All that to say is, let's break down the systems that have set up the State of Israel, that are setting up apartheid against Palestinians, ethnic cleansing displacement of Palestinians. When we look at power, it becomes really clear what's happening, and we're going to be stuck, so long as we're still in this framework of well, but if we just talk about Israelis and Palestinians and don't talk about the larger systems of power.

Eve:

It always starts to unravel when you start asking why can't we question? That's how you dismantle a cult.

Aidan:

Yeah.

Kieryn:

Whenever I come up against something that I'm not supposed to question, I'm like, what are you hiding? What is the serving?

Eve:

Show me the money.

Kieryn:

Yeah.

Aidan:

Show me the money. If you just follow the money-

Eve:

Why can't you question and where's the fucking money. It's always right there.

Aidan:

Yeah. Follow the money and that's actually what's driving this whole thing. If Israel wasn't profitable for the US, we would not support Israel.

Kieryn:

It's totally-

Marisa:

Albeit not actually helping the evangelical Christians on the ground. It's sometimes even hurting them. Again, it's yes, it's this questioning of why am I doing this? I think I'm really interested, Aidan, in what you said for Jewish people to be questioning what is my stake in this? Because I don't even know honestly right now how I would answer that question. That's something I would need to give some thought to. Because my stake in it is moving and also shifting, I mean. It doesn't feel super personal, but in some ways, it's also very personal. It's an interesting question that I think I'm going to be asking some of my Jewish friends to talk to me about.

Eve:

Awesome. Thank you so much for joining us and for sharing your insights and educating us. We really appreciate it. If people want to find you online, and follow your work, where can they find you?

Marisa:

I'm on Twitter @marisa with one S, M-A-R-I-S-A saystweet. I'm also on the Internet atmarisasiegel.com. That will point you to all my other online places.

Aidan:

I need to be much better at social media. But my Twitter is A-I-D-A-N-O-R-O-Y, I believe. Also, my email is [inaudible 01:12:17] Would love to continue these conversations. Marisa, if you ever want to talk about what our stakes are in Palestinian liberation, I am always down for that conversation.

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Marisa:

No, this was such a great conversation. It was really lovely to be in conversation with all three of you.

Eve:

I'm so glad we made this happen.

Kieryn:

Yeah, me too. This was really helpful and informative and not surprising that the answer is white supremacy and Christian nationalism-

Marisa:

It was white supremacy all along.

Kieryn:

... and all that. It seems to be the overarching theme in our lives. But it's weird how similar messages we got to what you all got as well, with the State of Israel being this unquestionable thing that is important for the US to uphold, and you just have to... If you don't do that, you're a bad person.

Eve:

Also, just like, they're like, let's instill fear of an amorphous, undefined threat in small children so that they will comply.

Kieryn:

Textbook indoctrination right there.

Aidan:

Just like the theme of people being harmed by something, but also being agents of reproducing that harm to others sometime.

Eve:

They're all important things.

Marisa:

Well, thank you so much.

Aidan:

Thank you so much.

Kieryn:

This was so good. We will definitely do this again sometime.

Aidan:

I look forward to it.

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Marisa:

All right. You all take care.

Aidan:

You too.

Marisa:

Thank you.

Eve:

Thank you all for listening to us ramble on and joining us this time. Thank you so much to Dave the Great for making a sound good every single week.

Kieryn:

If you like the music on this podcast that is due to The Heavens. The song is Janet from their album, DiNozzo. Thank you for letting us use your music. You can support the podcast and join the Slack by going to Patreon, which is [patreon.com/kitchentablecultpod](https://patreon.com/kitchentablecultpod).

Eve:

We have a good time. There's a lot of real good animal pictures and we bitch about brains being fragile soup and other things.

Kieryn:

It's great. You should join us. If you have any questions or comments that are nice or constructive, you can email us at [kitchentablecult@gmail.com](mailto:kitchentablecult@gmail.com) or poke us on twitter [@kitchencultpod](https://twitter.com/kitchencultpod). Thanks for listening. As always, we will see you next time.

Eve:

Bye.

Kieryn:

Bye.